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The Innate Nature of Man as Portrayed by Thomas Hardy in *Tess of the D'Ubervilles*

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The mystery of evil is a positive challenge to humanity. The world is a wrestling ground for good and evil. Man is confronted with evil in its varied forms physical, moral, social, natural, spiritual etc. We understand that man is naturally depraved and evils are the outcome of his depraved nature. Sufferings have their source in man's wickedness. But what is so mysterious is why there should be so much unnecessary and unreasonable misery in the world. The uneven distribution of fortune and misfortune among God's creatures, the prosperity of the wicked, the misery of the virtuous, the sufferings of the righteous for no fault of their own, the success and happiness of the cruel tyrants – all these point out a state of affairs that becomes enigmatic and puzzling for us. In The Bible during the meeting between Jesus and a blind man, the problem of evil was brought to the attention of Jesus. The question that was posed before Jesus by his disciples was not why there was evil in general but rather why there was a fellow creature suffering blindness from birth. This is what remains unresolved. As for the existentialists, man is condemned to be free and the problem of evil is part and parcel of the problem of freedom or of moral choice. And finally there is a theological view that evil is not a negative but a positive concept. It is regarded as a chastening and purifying agent, a detergent of the human soul. However, evil continuous to be viewed differently by different people but the mystery of evil abides.

Tess of The D'urbervilles (1891) is by far the most powerful novel of Thomas Hardy. The characters are presented in such a way as to be true to nature. Hardy illustrates his conviction that

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there is no providence guiding men and women but there is a malign fate which draws them out of the right way into the wrong way. Tess, first seduced by Alec, becomes later engaged to Angel. Angel loves her. Angel is an idealist. Horrified at her confession, he deserts her. Due to misfortune, Tess meets again Alec and accepts his protection. Angel returns from Brazil, repentant of his harshness towards Tess. Tess now murders Alec to liberate herself. After a brief period of concealment with Angel Clare in the New Forest, Tess is arrested, tried and hanged. Thus pure woman paid her debt to the social code. Tess is a tragic realism.

The novel highly reflects what Hardy has visualized in England during his childhood days. He was upset over the degradation of culture that was extremely essential to keep up women's chastity and purity. It is a bold attempt by Hardy to show what the people of those days thought and felt. Hardy mostly deals with the people of the rural middle class and has greatly differentiated the upper class and their treacherous behaviour that they undertake to keep up their social status in the society. Tess is from a family of faded past glory where John Durbeyfield's noble lineage bestows on him an illusion and he acquires false pride and takes to drinking. His idleness and leisure loving nature make him lead an imaginative aristocratic life. The effect of drinking is also well portrayed by giving a picture of Tess' irresponsible parents forcing her to undertake the responsibility of her parents.

Tess' dreams get shattered on the death of the horse Prince and feeling responsible, she takes up a job at the D'Urberville household. Alec D'Urberville tries to attract her at every moment and plunges her into despair by allowing her to carry the stigma of loss of self-respect throughout her life. The confusion and ambivalence in her mind thrust her to trust him even though she hates him. Hardy proclaims that Alec's glamour attracts the innocent Tess where she

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fails to feel the danger skulking in men. Hardy's men are portrayed as evil and they wreck the lives of female protagonists

Tess innocently does not hold divergent opinions on Alec and she abandons the plan of going home and she underestimates the awaiting danger that her dreamy mind fails to take notice of. He throws lot of appreciation on Tess and it is obvious when he pushes strawberry forcefully into her mouth. He flatters her in every way and he closely resembles Troy, when he associates his interest with sensuality and not love. Though she is unyielding to his wish the Chase Scene clearly tells us how Hardy has portrayed Tess as a victim of her own impulses. Tess' pride makes her go away from the ecstasy group when she propounds great laughter and the jealousy in the team makes her indignant and ashamed. She no longer minds the loneliness of the way and the lateness of the hour; her one object is to get away from the whole crew as soon as possible. She accepts Alec's invitation with "fear and indignation" and considering a "triumph over them… she abandoned herself to her impulse …The pair were speeding away into the distant gray by the time that the contentious revellers became aware of what had happened" (hence forth Tess of the D'Ubervilles will be quoted as TD 79).

The event has been such, like the other important matters like execution of Tess and the birth of Sorrow. The transformation of Tess into "a maiden no more" is not an end but just a beginning. Tess being uneducated and an epitome of innocence, feels guilty of her weakness, failing to avert an ambivalent situation with a man who is both attractive and repellent to her. Tess is an intelligent girl to understand the situation of the problem that she is facing now. She realizes that the 'physical' self has played an important role rather than that of the mind or soul in 'The Chase Scene' and hence she does not like to stay at Trantridge poultry farm or to marry

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Alec. She is angry that her innocence has been used as a weapon to destroy her virginity. She questions her mother

> Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn't you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o' leaning in that way, and you did not help me! (TD 98)

She hates herself for not knowing the dangers in the world. Her innocence becomes her weakness. When she is assaulted on her weakness her Pride overshadows in accepting the essence in reality of life. She knows well that she would get a stable sophisticated life but she firmly takes the decision to face the consequences and she rejects the proposal of marriage. She tells Alec, "If I had gone for love o' you, if I had ever sincerely loved you, if I loved you still, I should not so loathe and hate myself for my weakness as I do now! My eyes were dazed by you for a little and that was all" (91). Tess wants to be independent and does not wish to serve a person who made her a victim of what she was lagging in. It is her decision to come back home and face a weird situation that the society does not approve of. The whispers she hears around her disables her to go to church. She looks into herself as a "figure of guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence" (TD 101). The guilt overcomes her confidence and she makes herself unhappy and miserable (TD 108). She boldly decides to face the convention bound Victorian society when she bears a child without getting married. Tess could have thought about the offence against the society on bearing a fatherless child. But she stays calm unmindful of the profound views of the society and it is clearly obvious in baptising her own child when the child is rejected. A sense of regeneration happens and she tries to get over her memories of the past and she has:

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> changed from simple girl to complex woman. Symbols of reflectiveness passed into her face, and a note of tragedy at times into her voice her soul [was] that of a woman whom the turbulent experiences of the last year or two had quite failed to demoralize… To escape the past and all that appertained thereto was to annihilate it. (TD 116)

Hardy has confirmed Tess to be the woman of that modern age who does not sit and cry for the past but like a Phoenix, she rejuvenates her energy and goes to another stage. Hardy has rightly pointed out that "Once victim always victim" (TD 381). She meets Angel whom she sees as an angel who is inversely proportional to that of Alec an embodiment of evil to her.

Her relationship with Angel at the Talbothays seems to be a turnover in her life after the narrowing experiences in her past. The decency of Angel in respecting the moral values in life encourages her to have more interest in him. Hardy has brought out the sequence of love between Angel and Tess in a very delicate manner that no expectation lies between them. All what they want is true love. Sexuality once again plays its part when Angel views Tess as a "dazzlingly fair dairymaid" (TD 154) in the Talbothays. To Richard Carpenter "Tess is more vitally alive; specifically she is more female, more sexual, more passionate. In combination with her innocence her gentleness and her worshipful loyalty, this sexuality makes her indeed a memorable character" (TD 129). Angel Clare is moved by the beauty of Tess and he says "What a fresh and a virginal daughter of nature that milkmaid is! He said to himself" (142). Angel's persistence overcomes her sorrow and it shakes her firm decision of not getting married to anyone. Though she loves him she rejects his proposal but Angel is positive because of the assurance that he read in her eyes. Tess not only considers Angel as an intelligent but as a man of virtues. She wins interest in Angel's eyes and she feels. " There was hardly a touch of

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earth in her love for Angel ... he was all that goodness could be ... she saw something immortal before her" (TD 221).

She likes to be a dazzling figure for Angel but she curbs herself due to her incidents of the past. She tries to tell her past to Angel but she fails. She does not realize the complicating nature of Angel. R.G. Cox quotes the idea of Pall Mall Gazette and William Watson about Angel's typical and extra ordinary nature as complex and perplexing character. Also Ellen Lew Sprechman comments that Angel "is a young man of uncertain philosophies" (93). Right from the beginning and till her wedding night she remains in a world of confusion whether to confess her past or not. Her innocence prompts her to tell what has happened to her in the past. It is her freedom to tell for she likes to live a life free from the tortures of mind and soul because for Tess, it is just a story that is no longer present. It is a mere narration of events belonging permanently to the past. To Angel, the story is not present in its substance, but its effect, would destroy the Tess he loved.

During initial meetings with Tess, Angel's attraction is more spiritual than brutal. He does not think her in terms of flesh and his love for her is more "etheral". Later he is obsessed with her and is "burdened inwardly by a waxing fervour of passion" (172). His infatuation makes him more irresistible and cannot wait for "his heart had outrun his judgement" (TD 176). His craving for her flesh over powers him and his impulses are out of his control. Without considering her status and driven by a heavy haul of impulse he finds logical reasons to possess her. He is a disciplined man of the society but he becomes an assertive person in carrying out his idea and forces Tess to plunge to his desire not giving a chance to explain her status. Angel confesses the impact that she has created on him, "I can't read, or play, I want to know ... that you will some day be mine" (TD 203). He thinks her to be an unpossessed woman an epitome of purity and an

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untainted woman. That Tess' fatal confession shows up Angel's inability to accept the "hymen absent" girl is a hard truth. Hardy once again points out the war between the flesh and spirit that torments Angel Clare and Summner makes it more clear that "he needs her to be the embodiment of the purity which he feels he has lost" (137) .He loves the innocent flawless nature in her but he could not accept the fact that she has been a tainted one. Angel avoids Tess on the fear that threatens his masculinity of having sexual comparison with his rival Alec. He formulates himself to be a cruel and stubborn man and is no longer bound with the passion of love. It is a matter of "getting known" that Angel is worried of. His genuine love remains the same but he could not give away his cultural self. Besieged by guilt of unworthiness on her wedding day her confrontation has paved way for her own tragedy. It cannot be erased nor can be repaired. She is doomed once again of her weakness. Tess at the altar of marriage wants to be punished. The choice of marriage has a profound implication for the self. He fails to see the spiritual form of Tess. He considers that purity of spirit emerges from the physical nature .The marriage vows are broken and Tess readily accepts and submits to Angel's decision for she considers him to be her judge who punishes her for her unworthiness in body and soul. She accepts that her impurity in her physical body does not allow her to be his dear wife

She decides to stay at Flintcomb –Ash. She is basically a girl of illusion and dream putting happiness and sorrow to an extreme. Here at Flint comb –Ash she has to rely on hard work. Her self- sacrifice that she does for the sake of her family and Angel makes her a woman of selfless attitude. She loses faith in herself and in the nature around her. She undergoes great hardship. Simon Gatrell *in Thomas Hardy and the Proper Study of Mankind* observes

> the many tensions in her character that lead her to the gallows. The most obvious of those between humility and pride, and between innocence and sensuality but Hardy also

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> makes it clear that there is also a conflict within Tess between acquired conventional belief and instinctive independence of mind. (99)

The harshness of the weather and the infertile field depicts the hard life that Tess is experiencing. She undertakes all the hardships for she optimistically holds on the view that she would be united with Angel one day. Alec tries to overcome her thoughts by persuading her by tricks and lies to come with him. He tries to hypnotise her and tells her to leave her husband forever. Tess who assumes the role of a caretaker for her family fights against the system of the conventional society. The incidents during her motherhood have affected her gravely that she submits herself to Alec for the second time when she feels that she has been treated by Angel in a harsh manner. Yet she could not give away the dreams that she has treasured in her minds to happen in future. Tess values her physical body for Angel and she submits to Alec for the sake of her family. She destroys her dreams and it is she who has taken the decision against her will. Angel's love for Tess is felt when he reads Tess letters and his self –love is shattered and he goes immediately to meet her. The return of Angel and her inability to accept being a "fugitive in a dream" (TD 434) forces her to murder Alec. She could not think of losing Angel again. The murder clearly illustrates of the waiting opportunity to avenge Alec. Tess' failure in looking into the past to make a better future is the prime flaw in her. Tess' failures are caused by her own failings. A s said by Christy Paulina.J in the essay "*Jude the Obscure*- Unfulfilled Aims in the view of an Existentialist" it evident that like Hardy's Jude in Jude the Obscure Tess is also a victim to her impulses (962). Her submissive nature and indecisiveness is her primal flaw. Her passivity during the seduction and her submission to Angel in punishing herself defines her flaw. It is her selfless attitude and the decision of giving punishment to herself is the cause of her

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misery. The destructive character of the protagonists arises from within and not from the outside.

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