

Fate and Nature and the Creation of Tragic Sense in Some of Hardy's Novels

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The indifference and hostility of Fate and Nature are the characteristic common in Hardy's novels; inevitable suffering overwhelms the life of the character in Hardy's novels. In his novels Fate and Nature rule the world of his novels. The hero's desire for happiness collapses into terrible misery. Such an atmosphere makes Hardy's novels of close relation to tragedies in the Greek sense. This means that Hardy's novels can be considered the successors to the tragedies of the Greek, of Shakespeare and Marlowe before him. There are indications in the novels themselves that Hardy was attempting, in novel form, to present tragedies in the old model of Greek drama⁽¹⁾.

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It can be said of **The Return of the Native, Tess of the D'Urbervilles and The Mayor of Casterbridge** that they conform to Aristotles's definition of tragedies which is found in chapter six of his **Poetics**. He difined tragedy as:

The imitation of an action that is serious, has magnitude, and is complete in itself in laguage with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the various of the work; in a dramatic not in narrative form; with incidents arousing our pity and fear⁽²⁾

Some people might feel discomfort to find novels compared to tragic play because they are written in narrative form. But the (term) tragedy, as defined in **The Oxford Companion to English Literature**, is applied not only to plays but to 'other literary works of a serious or sorrowful character with a fatal or disastrous conclusion'⁽³⁾. This feature is found in Hardy's novels, we find that Tess, Eustacia and Henchard suffering as the plot develops to reach its disastrous end. In fact, there are some forced characterstics common between Hardy's novels and the Greek or Shakespearean tragedies. Before discussing these common points, there are some other points worth mentioning which explain the claim that Hardy's novels, are tragedies like those found in Greek drama or the Elizabethan drama.

The performance of Hardy's novels on stage as tragic plays proves that they are close to tragedies . This means that their appeal is dramatic and makes them close to drama. Hardy's novels **The Woodlanders, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, The Mayor of Casterbridge, The Return of the Native, Far From the Madding Crowd** and **Desperate Remedies** all were performed on stage as plays. They were transformed to dramatic form and presented as tragedies.

This means that they are suitable for dramatic adaptation. **The Mayor of Casterbridge** was performed on stage in Weymouth on 20 September 1926 and Hardy accepted the invitation to attend the performance, **The Return of the Native** was performed in 1920 which Miss Gertrude Bugler, the daughter of south-street Dorchester, appeared as Eustacia join the Christmas Mummers. In 1924, Hardy resurrected his own dramatic version of **Tess of the D'Urbervilles**, that he made in the 1890, to the Hardy players. This version was rehearsed by the players after Florence's return from her operation in October and Gertrude Bugler was to play Tess. The first night of performance took place in Dorchester on 26 November and continued to four nights followed by two performances at the Pavilion Theatre, Weymouth⁽⁴⁾.

It is worth mentioning here that Hardy belongs to the Victorian age during which the novel was more popular than drama. In addition to this, the Victorian literature found its most typical and widely acknowledged voices among its novelists ⁽⁵⁾.

Generally speaking, literary forms develop their greatest abundance when the nations that produce them are witnessing a period of heightened vitality. The drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries reflected the vitality of England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. The reign of Queen Victoria became the great period of the novel in Britain as a result of the changes brought by industrial revolution⁽⁶⁾. Magazine serial publication which appeared during the 1840s, and extended to our own day, increased the popularity of novel at that time. It was adorned by great names such as Meredith, Hardy and Henry James. Actually Hardy was interested in the serial publication and his novels appeared in this way⁽⁷⁾. During the time before the appearance of Hardy's novels and when he started writing, the English drama was in decline, there were few remarkable playwrights at that time. The English theatre contributed nothing memorable to English literature, except for the works of Goldsmith and Sheridan-'candle flames in great darkness-until Shaw began the theatre of ideas during the 1890s, most remarkably **Major Barbara**. This

decline was the result of social changes of society and the rise of the middle class who refused to remain away from the theatre for a long time. They were making a displace to the fashionable audiences of the theatre. Moreover, the decline of drama was hastened by the changes the theatre itself witnessed which were of two types: changes in the design of the theatre and in the methods and conditions of acting. The style of the Elizabethan theatre disappeared (a stage surrounded by audience and open to sky) and a new style began, the theatre a means of illusion since it was divorced from the real life outside the building of the theatre. On the other hand, the novels of Dickens and Hardy were not away from the problems of the people's daily life. Thus, Hardy presented his tragedies in novel form since it was most popular and acceptable than drama by most people, not only the high class. In other words, Hardy presented tragedies that suited the realities of life at his time. The English novel as a whole is averse to tragedy until near the end of the nineteenth century except for Emily Bronte's **Wuthering Heights** and the novels of Thomas Hardy⁽⁸⁾.

Talking of Hardy, Lord David Cecil says that 'Hardy's real talent was much more like that of the Elizabethan dramatists and playwrights than it was like that of his great contemporaries'⁽⁹⁾. This encourages us to say that the appeal of Hardy's novel is dramatic. Beside his wide

knowledg of Greek tragedies, which was of great impression on him and his philosophical knowledge, Hardy assumed that the Wessex countryside was the dwelling place of the spirit of tragedy and that the histories of certain people who lived there had a strong family resemblance to those ancient and legendary characters⁽¹⁰⁾. Generally, Hardy's novels conform to Aristotle's definition of tragedy. But Hardy himself gave his own definition of tragedy which was near in its general concept to that of Aristotle's. He had transformed Aristotle's definition to make it suitable for the present-day realities of his time. He put his definition after completing **The Mayor of Casterbridge** :

It may be put there in brief. A tragedy exhibits a state of things in the life of an individual which unavoidably causes some natural aim or desire of his to end in catastrophe when carried out⁽¹¹⁾.

According to this definition, Henchard, Eustacia, Tess and Clym and several other characters in Hardy's novels are of tragic stature since they are frustrated by their desire. Different philosophical concepts have appeared in the tragic literature of the different ages. The concept of fate has appeared as the caused factor in Greek tragedies.

Fate resembles Hardy's 'Crass Casualty' which acts upon the characters so that their intentions are frustrated by the turn of events.

Aristotle stated the elements of tragedy in the Poetics as plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle and melody. The most important element in a tragedy for Aristotle is the plot then comes the character. So the concentration is going to be on these two elements in the analysis since they are the most important elements in the construction of tragedy.

In the Greek tragedies the three unities-unity of action, of time and of place are maintained⁽¹²⁾. Unity of action is present in Hardy's novels, each has one story, with no subplots or interpolated stories. Moreover, the incidents which construct the plot must be related to one another like a living organism that removing a part affects the whole story⁽¹³⁾. One incident is the result of the previous one and leads to the following. This is what we find in **Tess of the D'Urbervilles**, **The Mayor of Casterbridge** and **The Return of the Native**. Hardy carefully constructed his plots moving from beginning to middle then reaching the end through a series of coincidences. The events gradually develop one leads to the other to reach the final catastrophe. The incidents of chance that occur pervasively in Hardy's novels make

them closer to tragedy 'as they occur unexpectedly in a cause and effect device. This makes them marvelous since they are well designed'⁽¹⁴⁾.

In **The Return of the Native**, there is an attempt to limit time and place. The action is limited (in books first to sixth) to a year and day. Thus, there is a gesture towards unity of time. Unity of place is maintained in this novel, we do not move off Egdon Heath at all. Even when Thomas and Eustacia, later, go to get married, we feel that they have gone out of picture. Thomasin is married in Wildeve's parish church, but we never be there, Eustacia is married at the nearest church which is, also, out of our ken⁽¹⁵⁾. In **The Mayor of Casterbridge** the action is limited mostly to Casterbridge. Even the events that take place with Henchard and Locetta in Jersy are reported to the reader by Locetta or Henchard. When Susan leaves with Newson, we never be with her till her return to Casterbridge. Later we are told that she immigrated to Canada with the sailor. Concerning time in this novel, after the auction of the wife, the action moves on twenty years introducing Susan and her daughter as they enter Casterbridge. In this novel we feel that there is also gesture towards unity of time. In **Tess of the D'Urbervilles** though the action is not limited to one single place,

the setting is limited to Tess's rare movement starting from Marlott to Stonehenge where she is arrested by the police.

In his discussion of the structure of tragedy, Aristotle considered the point of recognition as the essence to the tragedy. That is some measure of ignorance is followed by realization or what Aristotle considered the point of recognition as the essence to tragedy. That is some measure of ignorance is followed by realization or what Aristotle called antagonist. For Aristotle, when this recognition forms a turning point the tragedy is complex and the ideal tragedy is complex as he himself asserted. This means that a character or more is ignorant of some vital important matter or of the true identity, of one of the character or his own⁽¹⁶⁾. Hamlet's fault was that he could not make up his mind to act. He started to offer excuses for his behaviour. Then, he discovered that there is no real reason behind his hesitation and it was because of his cowardice. Though the recognition scenes in Hardy are not as great as those found in Greek or Shakespearean tragedies the element of discovery is just as ever. The revelation of Henchard's wife-sale by the firmity woman reveals to the people of Casterbridge the real identity of Henchard and makes him realize the seriousness of his mistake. And what emphasizes his wrong doing and deepens his sadness when Elizabeth-Jane leaves him to marry Farfrae. After this

sense Henchard recognizes his responsibility of his unhappy life because it arouses his parental feelings towards Elizabeth-Jane. He discovers that he can not live without her.

Although he lives with Eustacia in one house, Clym Yeobright does not recognize her real identity only after the death of his mother when he is told that she has been returning from his house not going there. He is shocked hearing the reason of Mrs. Yeobright's death:

"Cast off my son". No by my best life, dear mother it is not so! But by your son's. Your son's-May all murderesses get the torment they deserve!⁽¹⁷⁾.

Tess's confession to Angel of her relation with Alec D'Urberville reveals to him her true identity of which Angel is completely ignorant. Tess herself after this undergoes antagonist and discovers how a simple woman she has been.

Am I to believe this? From your manner I am to take it as true O you can not be out of your mind! Yet you are not my wife my Tess nothing in you warrants such a supposition as that⁽¹⁸⁾.

Maxwell Anderson states in his essay that the leading character must make a discovery, which in turn must affect him emotionally and alter his direction in the story⁽¹⁹⁾. Maxwell, here, speaks of tragic plays

not narrative but it can be applied to Hardy's novels also. These scenes are of profound emotional effect on the characters and they change the direction of these characters in the story. Henchard, after remaining alone when Elizabeth-Jane leaves him, alienates himself from his community and died alone like a neglected bird.

The discovery scene must be put near the end of the story as indicated by Maxwell Anderson. In a three-act play it should be put near the end of act two. In a five-act play it is supposed to be found near the end of act three, though it can be delayed⁽²⁰⁾. The structure of **Tess of the D'Urbervilles** resembles the five-act play divided into scenes. The discovery scene in this novel is put near the end of "Phase Three". **The Return of the Native** is divided into six books and the discovery scene is found near the end of the fourth book. **The Mayor of Casterbridge** is not divided into books or phases, yet the discovery scene is put near the end of the story. The hero who discovers his fault is not supposed to be a perfect man, he must have done what Aristotle calls the tragic flaw. So that he can change his direction in the story. Here, lies the essence of tragedy which is the spiritual awakening of the tragic hero.

Aristotle, in his **Poetics**, refers to the tragic flaw as Hamarita which is the wrong-doing the character commits. This flaw leads the character to his final destruction. That is, at the end of a tragedy we meet a defeated person. Shakespeare's Macbeth is ruined by his ambition, Othello by jealousy. In his discussion of Hamartia, Aristotle states that it is always rooted in ignorance and man is responsible for the ignorance which misleads him⁽²¹⁾. Thus, in Aristotle's doctrine, the hero's fall is the result of some error of his own which reinforces the malignity of fate. The hero must have an error besides the malignant circumstance to suggest tragic thrill as it is stated by W. Hamilton, he gives Henchard as an instance with Hamlet and Oedipus. There must be something in the hero that ironically combines with circumstance even his good qualities contribute in performing tragic issues⁽²²⁾. Henchard in **The Mayor of Casterbridge** is a good instance for this, we have seen how his honesty has contributed with his other qualities, to his fall. Henchard's is the wife-selling action which has been the source for all of his later problems. Eustacia's flaw in **The Return of the Native** is her wrong decision of her unsuccessful marriage with Clym Yeobright. Tess's flaw in **Tess of the D'Urbervilles** lies in the matter that she is ready to assume guilt where the blame is not really hers and capable of wishing that she had not

been born. This is clear in the scene of her confession to Angel Clare. Tess forgives, mostly ignores Angel's admitted guilt, it does not change her view of him at all⁽²³⁾. So, Tess's misfortune as Henchard and Eustacia, is brought upon her not by voice but some hamarita or some error. Hardy's characters commit mistakes one after the other which reinforces their misfortune. Henchard asks both Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae, at separate times to leave him. After they go, he starts to wish to restore the relationships especially with Elizabeth-Jane⁽²⁴⁾. And of course it is too late for him.

In Hardy's novels, the domination of the central character is the influence of the Greek tragedy, the nature of whose protagonist determining, the nature of the drama since character comes after plot in its importance for tragedy⁽²⁵⁾. Henchard, Tess, Eustacia and Clym dominate the story in the novels. Henchard, the chief character in **The Mayor of Casterbridge**, is a tragic hero on Shakespearean scale, and critics see a likeness between him and King Lear. John Paterson is one of these critics. It is indicated in his essay on the novel that its traditional basis can be inferred from the fabulous quality of the first scene in which Henchard sells his wife while he is drunk. This episode has its counterpart in Shakespeare's **King Lear**, in the first scene we see the betrayal of Cordellia by her father, the king. In both scenes a

moral order or scheme is violated which in turn forms the drama of the protagonist's damnation. Henchard, like Lear, is forced, during his suffering and sorrow for losing everything to realize the actuality of the moral order he has easily violated. The significance of this episode is indicated in its dramatic isolation by putting twenty years between this episode and the following actions. The effect of such device is to 'dramaize the causal relation between Henchard's crime and Punishment'⁽²⁶⁾. In this way we find the following events as related to Henchard to the end of the novel where we meet him dying alone, the lights all the time are on Henchard. There is also a kind of recall in Henchard's character to Othello. His violence, physical strength, general impulse, superstitions are more similar to Othello; Farfrae resembles Cassio in being Henchard's successful rival both in business and love. Hardy might possibly be under the influence of Othello's tragedy since he attended the performance of the tragedy by Strolling players during the first months of writing the novel. The play influenced him more than he realized⁽²⁷⁾. Tess, also, is the central character in **Tess of the D'Urhervilles** and all the events mostly go on around her from the beginning to the end where she is hanged. The tragic resignation of Desdemona to her death and her great devotion to her husband are somewhat in parallel to Tess's story. Tess

has devoted herself greatly to Angel Clare. In **The Return of the Native** the events are mostly divided between Clym and Eustacia who both are of tragic stature. These characters are blinded by the obsessive nature of their desires. So, they are crushed at the end.

Talking of the central character, Aristotle specifies that 'the change in the hero's fortune must not be from misery to happiness, but on the contrary from happiness to misery'. The sad destinies of Henchard, Tess and Eustacia are clear echoes of this point. It is indicated that **The Mayor of Casterbridge** is the story of the rise and fall of 'a man of character'⁽²⁸⁾. This explains that Henchard's fortune is a change from happiness or settlement to misery throughout the novel. In chapter five, Henchard is introduced as a man of high position and authority (as a Mayor) and obviously enjoying his time. Forty chapter later, we meet him in a completely different state with no power or any authority, a man dying alone in poverty and as an outcast. Tess, at the beginning of the novel, is seen dancing happily but at the end we see her hanged and 'justice was done'. The same point can be applied to Eustacia in **The Return of the Native**. For her, at the beginning, things are settled as she is living, a love story with Wildeve. Later, in Book Four and after suffering because of the unsuccessful marriage with Clym, she dies with Wildeve. The story ends with their tragic death⁽²⁹⁾.

There is one single point concerning the central character in Hardy's novels that makes them a bit different from tragedies. On one hand, the central characters in the ancient tragedies are people of high position, Lear is a king, Hamlet is a prince. They are made high class people so that their fall be more dramatic and effective on the part of the audience. Besides these tragedies were used to be performed in front of kings and the high class people. As a result playwrights presented characters that satisfy their audience. On the other hand, Hardy's characters are not necessarily kings and queens or princes, they are simple people mostly from the rural society. This emphasis on the common man Hardy's novels is related to the development of realism. Tess is a simple peasant girl. Henchard, although has been a mayor at the beginning, is a simple hay-trusser, longing for power and position, Henchard, like Dr. Faustus, loses everything at the end. Paterson states this point that Henchard, like Dr. Faustus, Lear and Othello, forfeits his own humanity to the 'arrogating powers and prerogatives that belong to gods'. Then he returns, gradually, to the point which he has started from. This is indicated by his brutal loneliness a way from his community⁽³⁰⁾. Even Eustacia and Clym are not of a high position and power in their community.

The purpose of tragedy, as Aristotle states, is affirmed to achieve the Catharsis of the emotions of pity and fear⁽³¹⁾. It should make us believe that we are witnessing, or reading is real and it could happen to us. Thus, the emotions of pity and fear we feel towards the tragic character are the released emotions which accompany the peculiar pleasure (Catharsis), the aim of any tragedy⁽³²⁾. this means that the effect of these emotions is not to be felt as unattractive, They should have positively beneficial effect on us. In addition to that, this process prepares us to deal with problems happening in our life by witnessing their occurrence in the lives of other people. In Hardy's novels, we pity Tess, Henchard and Eustacia for their catastrophes and fear them at the same time because they are people like ourselves and what occurs to them could happen to us also. The author embodies his emotion in the action and when we share it, it becomes our own. So, the indulgence of such feelings is pleasant⁽³³⁾. The conflict of wills can be the basis of tragic action, yet we witness in Hardy's tragedies that the paralysis of will is what accompanies the characters throughout the novels. Sometimes the will is achieved leading to a disastrous end and this is what arouses our pity. We pity the characters for their 'noble endurance of pain' which penetrates the heart and it is worth having in a tragedy. Tess, Henchard, Clym and even Eustacia show a great endurance of

pain. Their suffering makes us pity them when they are crushed at the end⁽³⁴⁾.

The inherently fatalistic temperament of Hardy's Wessex country people gives the novels a clear tragic sense. For these people, as for the Greek and Elizabethan, there is a sense of doom reinforced by the Calvinist doctrine of predestination⁽³⁵⁾. There is also the primitive country fatalism in the novels. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, it is indicated by the existence of the 'conjurors' mentioned in chapter 21. A conjuror predicts what the future time will bring to man. This indicates fatalism since it predicts that man's own actions can not change the course of events, he is only obliged to conform to the dictates of fate.

Actually, for Hardy the conception of tragedy rests on his thought that 'the best tragedy-highest tragedy in short is that of the worthy encompassed by the inevitable'⁽³⁶⁾. Throughout the novel Hardy invokes several decrete to make Tess's fate seem, on one hand, inevitable. So, he depends in this on science particularly heredity, which was part of the scientific development at his time⁽³⁷⁾. There is an emphasis on the heroine's ancestry throughout the novel. Her inability to confess to Angel before her wedding day, her inability even to claim

her own rights from him and her dropping asleep at critical moments as we have seen in the Chase scene with Alic, all represent the passivity of a 'spent family energies'. Angel makes this point of heredity clear in his conversation with Tess.

*I can not help associating your decline as a family with
this other fact of your want of firmness. Decrepit
families imply decrepit wills, decrepit conduct⁽³⁸⁾.*

This emphasis on Tess's place at the ending part of a long family line is to create a tragic situation for Tess. It also suggests that Tess has a fateful blood that of the d'Urbervilles and makes clear the inevitableness of her- fate⁽³⁹⁾. Mrs. Durbyfield possesses a copy of a book. ***The complete Fortune Teller*** and she believes what it is mentioned in this book Tess also shows such a belief as she confronts her cruel fate in the shape of Alec, d'Urberville:

*Now punish me! She said, turning up her eyes to him with
The elpless defiance of the sparrow's gaze before its
Captor twists its neck. 'whip me, crush me... I shall cry
Out once victim, always victim that's the law⁽⁴⁰⁾.*

The word 'law' here gives a tragic dimension to the novel (the protagonist's sufferings must go on remorselessly till his death). The reality that Hardy's characters confront is simply the way things are where 'the achievement never matches the aspiration and the intention is never fulfilled since the world is ruled by the impersonal power of fate'⁽⁴¹⁾ In *the Mayor of Casterbridge*, Henchard believes that a supreme power is controlling man's action and Hardy comments on this that it is a superstitious view:

Henchard, like all his kind, was superstitious and he couldn't help thinking that the concatenation of events this evening had produced was the scheme of some sinister intelligence bent on punishing⁽⁴²⁾.

Henchard's going to consult the weather-prophet proves his belief of a power beyond man's control ruling the world. Such superstitious views and scenes make the atmosphere of the novels closer to the ancient tragic plays. So, he comes to recognize that a justice beyond his control is at work to punish him. This feeling becomes clearer in the words with which he leaves Casterbridge 'I-Cain-go alone as I deserve an outcast and a vagabond'. It appears also in the heroic self-condemnation of his will written before his death in which there is a recall to King Lear:

*That Elizabeth-Jane Farfrae be not told of my death, or
 made to grieve on a count of me.
 & that I be not bury'd in consecrated ground.
 & that no sexton be asked to toll the bell.
 & that nobody is wished to see my dead body. & that no
 murners walk behind me at my funeral.
 & that no flours be planted on my grave.
 & that no man remember me.
 To this I put my name⁽⁴³⁾*

Michael Henchard

As an outcome, we can say that Hardy's novels, within the scope of tragedy, embody an explanation of Hardy's philosophy of life. He makes the drama in which his characters play their own parts as a symbol of humanity at war with the universe⁽⁴⁴⁾ In fact, Hardy's reading of Greek tragedies together with his philosophical knowledge has made him produce a number of great novels to English literature. He makes the reader sympathize with man since he is presented as a pitiful victim of Nature and fate.

Notes

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27. Robert Gittings, p. 40.
28. Lance St. John Butler, *Thomas Hardy*, p. 59.
29. Dominic Hyland, *Thomas Hardy: The Mayor of Casterbridge* (London: publishes Ltd. 1970) p.:0.
30. John Paterson, p. 314.
31. To please the reader is to entertain him, which, in it's older sense means that the events reach the heart of human concerns.
32. Dominic Hyland, p. 84.
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34. A doctrine that God has decreed everything that comes to pass .
35. As quoted by Leon Waldoﬀ.
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ملخص

القدر والطبيعة وخلق الإحساس التراجيدي في بعض من روايات توماس هاردي(*)

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وهدي محمد صالح

يمكن القول بأن اللامبالاة والعداوة للقدر والطبيعة هما من أبرز سمات روايات توماس هاردي حيث تكتنف هاتين الصفتين وتلازم شخوص هاردي الروائية. ونلاحظ في روايات هاردي كيف أن مفهومي القدر والطبيعة يحكمان عالم شخوص هاردي الروائية. وغالبا ما تتشنت سعادة هذه الشخصيات وتتهار أمام تحديات القدر والطبيعة. وهذا يجعل من روايات هاردي أشبه بالمسرحيات المأساوية الإغريقية ويمكن وصف روايات هاردي بأنها امتداد للمسرحيات الإغريقية المأساوية وكذلك مسرحيات شكسبير وقبله مارلو. وهنالك إشارات واضحة بأن هاردي كان يحاول، وباستخدام الشكل الروائي، أن يحاكي وأن يقدم روايات شبيهة بالمآسي الإغريقية من حيث الشكل والمضمون.

(*) البحث مستل من أطروحة الماجستير الموسومة (مفهومي القدر والطبيعة في بعض من روايات توماس هاردي) للطالبة هدي محمد صالح وبإشرافي.

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