

Tess, A Person Always on the Move in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

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Abstract

One of the Hardy's most searching preoccupations is walking, travelling, journeying, in fact, movement of all kinds. Somewhere at the heart of his vision is a profound sense of what may be called the mystery of motion. Tess of the d'Urbervilles in actual instance is a moving tale about its characters, which are always on the move. The beginning of the novel opens with a man John Durbyfield walking down a road, and it is his daughter, Tess Durbyfield who is always on the pedestal of movement from one place to another, from town to town and from man to man. Tess is ineffably gentle and is by nature a sympathetic being and the sight of suffering or misery deeply moves her. Tess is a pure woman by heart and is ignorant about the insecurity of women in the domineering men's world. She has to move from her low experience about the men folk to seek all the lessons of life in the male domineering society. So this paper explores the inexperience of Tess about the men and the movement of her in the society within the constraints of time.

Key Words: Landscape, walking, Travelling, Men and Society.

Introduction

Tess of the d'Urbervilles is a thriving tale which is full of passion and innocence of little Tess, who from the beginning of the novel towards the end underwent many hardships in her life. Tess is a pure woman by heart; she doesn't know anything about the insecurity of woman in the male dominated world. Tess from time to time led by many incidents, which shows to be harmful for her throughout *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. As *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* opens with a man, John Durbyfield, walking down a road and it is his daughter we will see walking throughout the book. Phase the Second of the novel opens, once again simply with an un-explained scene of labored walking:

The basket was heavy and the bundle was large,
but she lugged them along like a person who did
not find her especial burden in material things.
Occasionally she stopped to rest in a mechanical
way by some gate or post; and then giving the
baggage another hitch upon her full round arm,
went steadily on again (90).

Such passages carry the meaning of the novel, even down to the material burdens which weigh down that plump, vulnerable flush; the meaning is both mute and unmistakable. At the start of the Phase the Third, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* again, Tess moves by leaving her home for the second time and at first the journey seems easy and comfortable but soon she gets out and walks, and her journey again leads her into portents of the life ahead of her as in the novel Hardy marks it as:

The journey over the intervening uplands and
lowlands of Egdon, when she reached them,
was a more troublesome walk than she had anticipated, the distance being actually but a few miles. It was two hours owing to sundry turnings, ere she found herself on a summit commanding the long sought for Vale (118).

Always Tess has to move, usually to harsher and more punishing territories, and always Hardy makes sure we visualize her. After Angel has banished her as a bride, we see Tess as a forlorn woman only with a basket and a bunch in her own portage. Later she walks to Emminster Vicarage on her futile journey to see Angel's parents. She starts off briskly but by the end she is weary, and there are omens by the way. For example, from on hill she looks down at endless fields which are numerous as that of from the height as the meshes of a net. And again she passes a stone cross, which stands silent and uninhabited and mark the site of marvel or a massacre. At the end of this journey there is nobody at home and there follows the incident of Tess losing her walking boots, another physical reminder that the walking gets harder and harder for life as in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* Hardy's marked it as:

Her journey back was rather a meander than
a march. It had no sprightliness, no purpose;
only a tendency. Along the tedious length of
Benville Lane she began to grow tired, and she
leant upon gates and paused by mile stones (320).

The only relief in Tess's walking is that as it also gets nearer to darkness. Thus when she is summoned back to her family, she plunged into the frosty shadows for fifteen miles under the guidance of stars. And later during this walk from another hill she glanced from the height into abyss of muddled shade which revealed itself of Vale on the other side of her birth-hood. She is indeed returning home, just as Oedipus was returning home on all his journeying. Perhaps the ultimate reduction of Tess, the distillation of her fate, is to be seen when she runs after Angel having murdered Alec. Angel turns round as, "The tape-like surface of the road diminished in his rear as far as he could see, and as he gazed a moving spot intruded on the white vacuity of its perspective" (405). This seen has been anticipated by Hardy in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* when Tess was working at Flintcomb-Ash as:

The whole field was in color a desolate drab;
it was a complexion without features as if a
face, from chin to brow, should be only an
expanse of skin. The sky wore, in another
color, the same likeness; a white vacuity of
countenance with the lineaments gone. So
these two upper and nether visages confron-
ted each other all day long...without anything
standing between them but the two girls crawl-
ing over the surface of the former like flies (303).

In both the cases we see Tess as a moving spot on a white vacuity. And this extreme pictorial reduction seems to be right at the heart of Hardy's vision. The feeling of the constant attrition, and final obliteration, of the human shape permeates his work. Tess's instinct is placidity, she recoils from rapid movements. Yet at crucial times she finds herself in men's carriages or men's machines. She has to drive her father's cart to market and Prince the horse is killed. Alec forces her into his carriage and he drives it recklessly at great speed, the least

indiscretion of motion troubled her and Alec at this point is disturbing and shaking up blood which will only be stilled in death. Angel, by contrast, takes Tess to the wedding in a carriage which manages to suggest something brutal, punitive, and funeral all at once. All these man-made conveyances, together with the ominous train, and that tyrant, the threshing-machine, seem to threaten Tess. And yet, she is bound to be involved in travelling, and dangerous motion, because she has no home. As these Durbyfields are the extinct family and they live nowhere, same is the case with Tess, she became a homeless wanderer, goes here and there in search of shelter but don't find any place as a living bud on the earth but seldom finds death. Tess throughout the course of novel was dependent on others, first on their parents then on Alec and his family, then on Angel Clare, but finds no solace from any of them. Tess does not live anywhere, the one home she finds, Angel turns out of. That is the reason she bounds to Alec. He provides her place but not the home, takes her to Sandbourne, a place of detached mansions, the very reverse of the community. It is no place at all for Tess, a cottage girl. But we have seen her uprooted, forced to the roads, ejected from houses, knocking on doors which remain closed to her. Her stay at Sandbourne remains a drugged interlude. Tess has been so disturbed by irregularities of motion, so pulled in different directions, that she really is already sick, split, half dead. Hardy was very interested in this sort of split person, and we can see that Tess is subjected to too many pressures and torments ever to achieve a wholeness of being. Hence in a number of many ways, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is an immense work of subjectivity. Hardy's distinctive perceptions of the world around him encourage the reader more and more till he lastly arrives at a new level of trepidation of life. In another way, the author's eye of imagination only deepens the look of the reader's eye of the strength.

Conclusion

Tess of the d'Urbervilles is generally regarded as Hardy's masterpiece, and certainly it is his most ambitious tragic novel. It is a story of innocence and sophistication, of man and nature, and of history and its relation to the present, concentrated on the fate of a simple country girl whose parents' chance discovery of their descent from a once noble line sends her to seek the assistance of a degenerate supposed relative to whom she surrenders before parting from him in disgust. Tess is no paragon of chastity overborne by force or cunning, but a girl simple, sensuous and passionate who has never been able to come to terms with the world as she finds it and whose strong intelligence keeps her aware of the fact. She has her baby which

eventually dies and she goes to work as a dairy-maid in an environment of agricultural richness and peace in which she finds at last a satisfying rhythm of life. Her courtship by Angel Clare, her final acceptance of him are described by Hardy with considerable awkwardness, Angel's horror at learning the truth at last, his desertation of Tess, and at last her discovery of Alec's deceive and her murder of Alec in the end, all this is forced with along with a certain grim relish. Tess's move from one occurrence to another, from one situation to other, one incident to other, from low experience to high, from one event to another gives her the lesson of life but not the solace, so from the outset of the novel she moves in a circle of life which has its centre point, that is the tragical death of Tess.

References:

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