A STUDY OF RELENTLESS SEARCH OF UTOPIA IN THOMAS HARDY'S TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES USING JACQUES DERRIDA'S THEORY OF DECONSTRUCTION.

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Abstract

This paper aims to read Thomas Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles in the light of Jacques Derrida's Theory of Deconstruction, Darwinian Theory of Evolution in his book on the Origin of Species and each character's search of Utopia in the entire novel. All the major characters have been taken in the novel as well as some of the minor characters also to study the novel in a better in a detailed manner.

Keywords: Deconstruction, Utopian,

Introduction

To Deconstruct is to bring one literary text to a new light and by "bring the text to a new light", changing the entire meaning of one particular text or separating it from its actual meaning. It just means, looking at one particular text from a certain 'novel' view point that is different from how others previously viewed it. Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented by Thomas Hardy was written in three volumes in 1891. The novel is divided in seven Phases, each concerning to Tess's life. One may also regard this novel to be a Bildungsroman Novel as it entirely involves Tess's growth from an innocent young damsel to a murderer at the end. Even the names of the Phases of the novel are suggestive of the novel's Bildungsroman type. This tragic novel, of Tess's plight in search of an 'utopia' all her life, draws its light on man's helplessness in front of Almighty's plans as the author ends the novel by quoting,

"Justice" was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess. And the d'Urbervilles knights and dames slept on in their tombs unknowing. (Hardy,584)

Other than that, one common speculation also surrounds around how helpless women were around men in the Victorian Era. The class discrimination and the end of aristocracy in those times also add to some of the features of the novel.

Relentless Search of Utopia:

All the character in the novel are in some way or the other in search of an unknown utopia. Thomas More's Utopian definition stating it to be,

"An imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect."

Perhaps it was one of the characteristics of the Victorian Era itself. The Romanticism had come to a halt and the contemporary age was all about practicality and industrialization. The villages were no longer needed, aristocracy had died and social status meant nothing as class status was now trending. Everything seemed monetized in this era. A perfect example of the end of aristocracy is when Tess visits Mrs. D'Urbervilles for the first time and expects to see an on mansion or a villa but instead, she comes across a new, fashionable house.

Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species in 1859 had brought about an entire revolution where people started to question the very existence of God. Agnosticism was on a rise and the age old belief of the Original Sin to be our beginning as a mankind had died. This might've brought about a sense of dislocation, a rather religious one, into the minds of people. This may be the reason why almost all the characters of the novel are in search of some place, somewhere to go, somewhere to be, somewhere, that did not exist.

1. Tess

Tess, the very protagonist of the text has all her life revolving around the perfect place to be. She was a learned woman, better than her other friends with whom she went to the May Day festivities. She wanted to be a school teacher. That was her very first choice of a perfect place. But since her parents insisted and perhaps also because the family horse she rid on one night on the way while taking their load of the beehives to the market, which was their only source of income, died, she had to go and claim kin to their supposed ancestral family of the D'Urbervilles.

At the D'Urberville house, she was lured by the idea of Alec, the son of Mrs. D'Urberville flirting with her. He was handsome and rich. It might seem that she liked the idea of settling in the house but she refrained from that thought as much as she could. Later she did climb the carriage that Alec drove to avoid the brawl at the street. This may seem more like her own decision to have travelled with Alec at late hours of the night. The rape was an eventual result of the same.

The way Tess raised her son, whom she named Sorrow was in itself a choice. Motherhood had become the next big destination for Tess. Even though the society criticized

it, Tess did not despise being a young unmarried mother at all. Tess was the Hero of her own story and the victim of the society. She baptized her own baby when he died and no church granted burial of a fatherless child.

Tess's hunt for a Utopia reflects how she changed places. First she was at Tantridge at her parent's house, later she moved to the D'Urberville Mansion to claim kin in order to help her family and also to help her own self in anything. She moved back to Tantridge to her family when she was pregnant with the child. After the death of the child, she moved to Talbothays Dairy. It seems as if she just kept running from what fate had in store for her. She did not want to face the grave realities of life but to see what she herself had planned, which was not working great for her.

She moved to Talbothays Dairy to run away from her lingering past. Sexual intercourse outside marriage and even to bear a child after it was a taboo for the Victorians, and that was clearly evident in the actions of Tess. Tess knew what society around her was and that was all the guilt she had. It mostly seems that Tess was the driver of her own cart and she knew she deserved a better life. Marian, Izz Huett, and Retty Priddle, who were Tess's friends at the Talbothays Dairy, were madly in love with Angel Clare which Tess was aware of but still she chose to marry Angel Clare instead of her guilt of the past because she knew she was worthy of every happiness in the world.

But Tess's guilty conscience betrayed her and Angel left her eventually. The relentless journey further continued and had now taken Tess to a farm called Flintcomb-Ash. Here she met Alec and later they also married after a few negotiations. This marriage seemed more like a compromise for Tess for a better life that she had always wanted. But when she saw Angel come back searching for her, she was again lured by the fact that she could have a better life with Angel than with all the riches of Alec. Even though she asked Angel to leave at first but she did not hesitate before killing Alec in order to live her dream that she now visualized with Angel. This also reflects that Tess was not as innocent as she may seem and she was rather tentative in her decisions that led her to her ultimate fate. She knew what was coming for her and when she saw the police, she was ready for her execution. The life that came down to her path was the life she chose. Even though Tess could earn and fiends for her own self, she seemed to be desperately wanting of a partner.

2. John Durbeyfield and Joan Durbeyfield

John and Joan were both from a humble background. The Victorian era and the Class status got to them and they couldn't resist the temptation to have a life of noble kin when they found out about their roots touching with the D'Urbervilles. They did not hesitate to get Tess hurriedly claim kin from their supposed relatives. They were even ready to marry her off to the flirtatious D'Urberville son, not caring the least bit about the fragility of their daughter. John's obsession with it got to his head when Tess returned with a fatherless child and all he

could think of was how bad it would look in the society as they now belonged to the D'Urbervilles. None of it yielded the Durbeyfields anything but descent like the name of the D'urbervilles itself in the society. After the death of John they were thrown out of the society they lived in and so the entire family decided to go and live in Kingsbere. They end up leaving in a churchyard called D'Urberville Aisle which resembles nothing but the tombs of the ancient D'Urbervilles, meaning nothing but death of the aristocracy. So, their search for a good life and a good class status ended in futility.

3. Alec Stoke-d'Urberville

Alec's name itself seems to be wanting of a social class, which was no longer relevant in his contemporary times. He and his family had enough money to buy the name "D'Urberville" as their initial last name wouldn't make much impact. The Stoke-d'Urbervilles were a well to do family and stood quite high in the class status in the Victorian Era but they seemed to want more by altogether buying another name. Alec's entire existence seemed to be nothing but a dull. He was rich but his soul was empty. After raping Tess, he kept wandering in the search of something and found it in religion. But that too was short-lived and fake. When he saw Tess, he accused her of making him distracted from his God. But the fact was, it was the entire way of the society he had been living in that distracted him. He seemed to be disturbed by the entire Darwinian theory of evolution. That is what made him clutch to God even more than he needed and left him in no time. He blamed Tess for his dilemma. He was nothing but an actual product of the Victorian society.

4. Angel Clare

Angel Clare was a proper product of 19th century who adapted well to the agnosticism of the Victorian Era. He did not conform to the ways of his family and chose to become a farmer instead of a Parson. He declined his family education in the Cambridge University to take up a job never even done in his family. He was so easy going that when he discussed his sexual encounters with a 40 year old woman at London; Tess thought it alright to discuss her own complex past with him. But as he was the true son of the 19th century, he did what the rest of the society did, he abandoned her.

At Brazil, where Angel went to work, he fell sick and felt the need of a woman in his life. This is when he came back for Tess again. Angel too seems to be relentlessly searching for something concrete in his life. He wants something above from the reality but when he feels that what he has found is not how he wanted it to be, he escapes. This can be seen in the case of both, his sexual partner at London and Tess.

Angel is the only one left alive at the end of the novel and even the ending suggests that he is still going on with his endless search. When Tess is being executed at the end of the novel, Angel stand outside the jail with Lisa Lu, Tess's sister, which is suggestive of a possible union of the two.

5. Izz, Marian and Retty

These three are minor characters of the novel but they also resemble to the search of Utopia. All three of them are madly in love with Angel. The idea of getting married and being settled is consistent in their lives. When they find out that Angel is not in love with either one of them but with Tess, one of them commits suicide and one of them resorts to alcoholism. This is suggestive of their lower class in the strata of the society and how they feel that they will never ever find another man like Angel ever. They also feel that now that Tess has married Angel, who belongs to the higher class of the society, she has settled well and that they will never be like her.

CONCLUSION:

To conclude, Victorian Society had been separated from its connection with God. Even though there had been people who were a little less religious, the entire belief of the society was shaken. It was as if their father had been taken away from them. People had lost their belief system and it seemed to them as if the very base of their existence had been snatched away from them. All this had affected the minds of the people a lot and had raised a lot of complications and dilemmas in the minds of the people. I personally feel that Hardy himself might've suffered from the same disbelief which has been closely described in this book. The farm that Tess moves to after being separated from Angel has a lot of machines and the people there were also rude. All this is suggestive of a very big fall of humanity.

Mankind had lost its touch with humanity with the advent of machine. Even the talks of the people at Talbothays Farm, who were kind but the stories they say are suggestive of a decline of humankind from a human touch. A person as bad as Alec was also affected by all this so much so that he had to take a shelter in religion in order to mend himself for a while.

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