

Extended Essay- English A1

Research Question: To what extent is the novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles by Thomas Hardy affected by the Victorian Era.

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ABSTRACT:

This extended essay attempts to analyze the novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles that is Thomas Hardy's work. The research question is: "To what extent is the novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles by Thomas Hardy affected by the Victorian Era." The first section is the introduction part, Section Two includes the character analysis and social life in the novel along with the effects of the Victorian Era, reflection of religion, the role of woman and Section Three is the conclusion.

The rationale behind the choice of this topic is my interest in the Victorian Era that formed after reading Jane Eyre and my curiosity about how the Victorian Era reflected was on the Tess of the d'Urbervilles.

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INTRODUCTION:

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), who was a Victorian poet and novelist, lived in England. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is one of his prose works that falls under the category of “novels of environment and character”. As a late nineteenth century novel, it includes the traces of the Victorian Era. Victorian Era is the period that the concept of women is scrutinized, religion has effects on social life and progress occurs in science and industry with the Industrial Revolution, which form the foci points of this extended essay.

According to Patricia Stubbs, “It is when he (Hardy) shows men and women shaped or bound in their relationships by external events, by class or environment that Hardy is at his most compelling. He is then showing us what it means to live in a particular time in a particular kind of society.” (Stubbs)

All in all, my aim in this extended essay is to analyze *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* by taking the effects of Victorian Era on this novel into consideration.

BODY:

Character Analysis:

While analyzing a novel, analysis of characters is an essential point. Protagonists, antagonists, heroes and heroines, their relationship with each other, their world views and their actions are important in the construction of the novel as they are important in the novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles. Tess of the d'Urbervilles is one of Thomas Hardy's prose works and it contains the peculiarities of the Victorian Era, the era that it was written in. So, investigating the reflections of the Victorian Era on the characters, Teresa(Tess) Durbeyfield, Angel Clare, Alec Stoke-d'Urbervilles and some other characters, is vital for their analysis.

Tess Durbeyfield is the protagonist in the novel who is 16 at the beginning and 23 at the end of the novel. She is an ordinary country girl who is very beautiful and attractive. Tess's mother, Joan Durbeyfield tries to take advantage of her beauty and she forces Tess to go to Mrs. D'Urbervilles and claim kin. As Tess accidentally has had Prince, the horse, killed, she thinks that she owes her family, so she accepts her mother's offer even though she considers this act immoral. Before her mother's offer, Durbeyfield family learns that they are "the lineal representative of the ancient and knightly family of the d'Urbervilles." The man who delivers this message to Tess's father John Durbeyfield, calls him as "Sir John" for the first time.

These incidents give many clues about the Victorian Era. Firstly, people value nobility and behave according to the status of that person as that man calls drunken country man as "Sir John" after learning the fact about him. Secondly, for a woman, beauty is more important than inner qualities as it is stated in the dialogue between Joan and John Durbeyfield.

What is her trump card? Her d'Urberville blood, you mean?

"No, stupid; her face –as 'twas mine." (Hardy 61)

In addition to this, Victorian women especially living in urban areas, have low level of education or they totally lack education. Joan Durbeyfield has not got education and Tess has passed the Sixth Standard in the "National School under a London-trained Mistress" but lack university education. As Joan Durbeyfield states, her trump card is her face and her beauty; but not her inner qualities and education.

Tess goes to Trantridge, to the Slopes to claim kin with her mothers force even though Joan does not a hundred percent know that they are their actual kin. In fact, this is not vital for Joan as wealth and money are what she really seeks for. All in all, economic realities of the Victorian England make money more important than the inner qualities and nobility.

Tess is also uneducated and inexperienced in the ways of the world. Alec Stoke-d'Urbervilles rapes Tess and as a result, Tess gets pregnant; but Alec leaves her and all the burden is left to Tess. She is the one who takes care of the baby, Sorrow and again she is the one who buries Sorrow. Tess's anger and frustration can be felt by the dialogue between Tess and her mother.

How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house... Why did't you warn me?...you didn't help me! (Hardy104)

In the Victorian society, inequality between men and women, men and children, noble class and working class, rich and poor is apparently observed. There are frictions between many poles as stated likewise:

.....*the friction between classes, between money and labor,.....* (Charles Frederick Harrold xviii)

Tess as a woman, even though she has not got any guilt, has to suffer, in other words, she suffers from crimes that are not her own. She can not live the life she deserves. Even, there is nobody to treat her to get out of her depression.

“If insanity is a disease requiring medical treatment,” insisted John Charles Bucknill, editor of the Asylum Journal of Mental Science, in 1857, “ladies cannot legally or properly undertake the treatment...” (Showalter 318)

On the other hand, Alec who is responsible for all the incidents, does not suffer and as usual for the Victorian Era, “the Woman Pays”. Tess represents the stereotypical Victorian girl-woman in Tess of the d’Urbervilles.

Furthermore, Tess reflects the features of a heroine. She is an ordinary country girl and does not affect politics or win major battles; but only lives in her own world and tries to deal with her fate. She endures Angel’s decision, she takes care of her family and what is more, she baptizes her infant all of which makes her a heroine. Her advising Angel to marry Izz or Marian or Retty proves her unselfishness, her thinking on a solution that will not degrade her husband’s name shows her self-sacrifice and her waiting for Angel reflects her patience and

loyalty that indicate her noble inner character. Her love and affection towards her family makes her go to the Slopes, accept Alec's offer and give up waiting for Angel.

These incidents make her name even more meaningful as St. Teresa of Avila is also a martyr whose aim of a higher reality cost her all of her life. "Justice" was done... with Tess." his phrase reminds the readers of Prometheus who steals fire from the gods for the benefit of men and makes human life improved; but punished by eternal agony sent by the gods. Tess 's situation reminds the readers of this myth.

Alec Stoke-d'Urbervilles is the antagonist of the novel. His family's original name is Stoke; but when his father makes a fortune, they adopt a local name to be accepted more easily. It can be understood that having wealth and noble name are important in the Victorian society. Alec has dualities in his personality. He has a noble name; but he doesn't act like a noble and wealthy person and he is wealthy; but he uses his wealth and status irresponsibly. 24-year-old Alec, lives in the Slopes and he is the master of his estate. He abuses Tess's intentions of working for his mum, Mrs. D'Urbervilles who is blind and have lots of birds. Alec nurtures Tess with strawberries, which is not suitable for the Victorian morals. Also, he deceives Tess and uses her naivety, after that he rapes her which is inappropriate for the society rules. What is more, he has not got any intentions of marrying her. Hardy's attempts of creating such an incident in the novel requires courage as Victorian Era is conservative; but Hardy tries to give a message through this relationship and its consequences which is: men use women for their pleasures and when they are done, they leave women without undergoing the consequences while women suffer from the isolation, the gossips, the lack of acceptance and the economic conditions when she can not find a job. Tess indicates her feelings and thoughts about Alec as such:

You and those like you , take your fill of pleasure on earth by making the life of such as me bitter... (Hardy 394)

Also, elite class and rich people may not undergo the consequences while poor and working class undergo as Victorian society is dominated by an elite class.

Alec lacks inner nobility that prevents him from being a better person. Mr. Reverend Clare, the father of Angel Clare, tries to regain immoral, ill-willed people by tutoring them and leading them to the St. Paul's teachings. He also converts Alec d'Urbervilles and Alec becomes a street minister which is a step to be purified. However, when Alec sees Tess, he renounces his faith and he accuses Tess of tempting him and making him deviated from the ministry as he states:

You have been the cause of my backslidings. (Hardy 422)

All of those make Alec one of the reasons and responsible of the agony of Tess and the degradation of the morals of the society. Tess ends his life by stabbing him on the heart which symbolizes that Alec hurt her emotions and turned topsy-turvy her life.

Angel Clare is another main character in Tess of the d'Urbervilles. He is the youngest son of Mr. Reverend Clare and Mrs. Clare. His two brothers, Felix and Cuthbert graduate from prestigious universities and become clerks while Angel chooses not to go to college and do farming. That is why he goes to Talbothays to learn the details of farm work. Clare family belongs to the noble class; so his family disagrees with his wish of becoming a farmer. Hardy tries to give the Victorian Era society's point of view for social status. His family chooses a

bride for Angel named Mercy Chant who is a lady and is great at Antinomianism and Bible-classes; but Angel refuses to marry her as he needs a wife who can help him on the farm.

Angel does not give importance to social status and family names. His love for Tess who is a milkmaid proves this.

O no! He can't stomach old families (Hardy 164)

The thing that he hates is the “aristocratic principal of blood” as the quotation proves; but he thinks that it is “ought to show respect to the spiritual ones of the wise”.

Angel Clare is a gentleman. He offers Tess to tutor her in any field she wants, he carries Izz, Marian, Retty and Tess on their way to church over a swollen creek. Even though he is superior to most of the people around him culturally and socially, he treats them with good will. He wants to work for the honor and glory of men.

However, Angel has weaknesses and faults. When he learns the story of Tess, he does not accept her, though he had an affair with an older woman before. Hardy makes the society pay attention to the fact that though the crimes are equal, punishments are not. Angel can escape from his guilt; but Tess suffers from what she involuntarily did. Society's moral values differ for men and women which is an injustice. Angel says:

...the women I have been loving is not you. (Hardy 293)

However, Tess is not the one who has changed; it is Angel's perception for her that has changed. It is obvious that Angel is inflexible, as a matter of fact that he decides to leave Tess and go to Brazil. He decides too quickly without rationality; as a result, he asks Izz to

accompany him to Brazil. He criticizes the strict rules of religion; but he punishes Tess even more strictly.

Hardy's choice of using the name "Angel" for Angel character can not be a coincidence.

Before facing up with the realities of the life, Angel was like an Angel who came to the Earth who did not know the Earth; but after experiencing the difficulties of life in Brazil, he decides to come back to Tess. Angel is the angel of Tess's life as he loves her and protects her even after her murdering Alec.

Izz Huett, Marian and Retty Priddle are the three milkmaids. They are the friends of Tess and they are all in love with Angel. Even though Angel chooses Tess to marry, they go on loving Tess.

I want to hate 'ee; but I cannot! (Hardy 254)

Later, three of the women become devastated:

Retty Priddle hev tried to drown herself. (Hardy 282)

Marian; she's been found dead drunk... (Hardy 283)

The term 'New woman' coined in 1894... emerged in the physical exercise, smoked and drank openly.(Mitchell 539)

... Portraits of the New Woman were created by serious novelists like ... Thomas Hardy.
(Mitchell 540)

Especially, Marian suits the "New Woman" as she drinks openly.

Joan Durbeyfield who drinks and has independent attitudes can remind us the “New Woman”. However, she is one of the conventionalists that she wants her daughter to marry a wealthy man and obey him. She sits at home and looks after her children. Tess’s father is a peddler in Marlott. He does not like working and he is drunk. When they learn about their ancestors, they try to profit from this fact. All in all, her family has the features of the Victorian Era society by their giving importance to wealth and nobility.

Reverend Clare is the father, Mrs. Clare is the mother and Reverend Felix and Reverend Cuthbert are the brothers of Angel. Mr. Clare is an Evangelical clergyman in Emminster and he converts people, one of whom is Alec d’Urbervilles and Mrs. Clare gives too much importance to social class that is why in the first place she does not want to accept a milkmaid as a bride. Angel’s brothers are non-evangelical, well-educated young men. Angel thinks that his brothers are dogmatists and they think that Angel is losing intellectual grasp. Hardy describes Felix and Cuthbert as follows:

Neither saw the difference between local truth and universal truth...their clerical and academic hearing was quite a different thing from that the outer world was thinking. (Hardy 205)

Social Life:

Economics, politics, business life, education, industry, class system are some of the elements that shape the social life. Analysis of the social life in the Victorian Era can help us to understand Tess of the d’Urbervilles more deeply.

The Industrial Revolution accelerating in the mid 1880’s, changes the lives of the English people as increasing mechanization causes a decrease in wages and unemployment.

Industrialization becomes the reason of the gap between home and work place. Together with the industrialization, women also started working in factories, in mines, in fields. Tess's working in Talbothays and in Flintcomb Ash (in Flintcomb Ash, working conditions are too harsh for women) can be the reflections of the reality. Working class suffer from the poor conditions.

The gap between the rich and the poor, upper and lower classes grows by making the class distinction even more visible. By 1845 Disraeli says in his novel "Sybil" that:

"There are two nations...rich and the poor." (Charles Frederick Harrold xxvi)

Class system can be considered as follows: The top class including the aristocracy, the Church, the clergy and noble people; the middle class that is made up of factory owners, bankers, lawyers, businessman, etc. who are not privileged and the lower class that is divided into the working class or the laborers and the poor forming about eighty five percent of the population endure most of the taxes. Inequality can be seen between the classes in the ways of the right to vote, to have education and in some other civil rights. There are some reforms performed in this period, one of which was the Third Reform Bill that passed in 1884 conferring the franchise on the agricultural laborer. Also, by the Education Act of 1870, State education was provided even though it was not for free.

Life becomes crueler to the poor working people when there is community oppression. The scene of Tess's family's eviction after her father's death supports this reality. Even though

they do not have enough money and nowhere to stay, the family is evicted because of some of the “values” of the people:

“The father, and even the mother, had got drunk...eldest daughter ha made queer unions.By some means the village had to be kept pure.” (Hardy 450)

All in all, some social norms of the Victorian community limits people’s right to live properly.

Religion’s reflection on the novel:

Religion is one of the elements that regulate the society. The concept of religion is another concept that is in the center of the Tess of the d’Urbervilles.

Hardy’s giving importance to religion is the consequence of his wish to reflect the dogma and beliefs of the Church and the people. The concept of the dogma is operated in the scene of baptism. Tess baptizes Sorrow and then, she asks the vicar if it is the same for Sorrow as if the vicar has baptized him and he confirms her. (Hardy 121) However, when Tess demands for a Christian burial for Sorrow, the vicar says that it is another matter. Tess says that she will not come to the Church any more and she herself buries him in the darkness. The name of the infant’s being Sorrow cannot be a coincidence as Hardy criticizes the harsh attitude of the Church. Hardy criticizes the Church’s “inadequacy of meeting new intellectual challenges” (Hardy 273) as proved by some speech of a religious man.

“Leave me my ancestors in Paradise and I will allow you yours Zoological Gardens.”

(Charles Frederick Harrold Ivi)

In the novel, there are examples of both a good and a bad believer. Tess and Reverend Clare are the good believers. Reverend Clare who is a part of evangelical movement, practices his preaching. As evangelicalism gives importance to the belief in the Bible and the conversion for the evil ones, it is true that Reverend Clare is a true believer. However Alec, who is converted by Reverend Clare, is a sinner and he can easily be tempted. He symbolizes the devil as he rapes Tess in the Chase and rhetorically makes Tess(Eve) and Angel(Adam) chased from Eden.

Traces of pagan culture that are assimilated into Christianity can be caught in the novel. The May Dance supports this assimilation. In addition, Tess and Angel stay in the Stonehenge which is a temple used for the worship of sun and sacrifice of human. Tess’s stay in the Stonehenge foreshadows her execution which comes soon.

Sunday schools are one of the places of education in the Victorian society. They have both secular and religious education; but the secular education declines in the last half of the 19th century. Tess’s siblings follow the classes of Sunday schools as well. The decline in the secular functions supports that society is mostly ruled by religion which limits many of the entertainments like dancing and card-playing. As a result, society becomes introvert and stays under oppression.

Women:

Women regulate the society in the Victorian Era. Women and men have completely different virtues and duties in the society. The duties are regulated under the moral values of evangelicalism. For women;

The virtues they admired- purity, honor, gentle and selfless accommodation to the needs of others were given moral intensity...” (Mitchell 863)

Biological differences form the working conditions of women as they are less strong, more fragile and more emotional than men. By the Industrial Revolution, men go to work in factories while women are expected to take care of the children and do the housework. Women are the defenders of the society’s moral values. Ideal woman is a “good companion for her husband, a loving educator of her children and a competent manager of her household” (Mitchell 864) As a result, women cannot widely and actively take place in politics, business and religion.

Victorian society considers that women are emotional and weak. So, men oppress women and inequality emerges in terms of voting, having property, rights forms. Men like Alec take advantages of women like Tess without undergoing the consequences. Alec uses his power over Tess and uses her. Tess’s weaknesses about her family’s poor conditions are Alec’s trump cards when he wants to use her. In Tess’s workplace, in Flintcomb Ash, her boss abuses her, forces her to work under poor conditions (Hardy 427), threatens her by saying that he will not give her money if she does not work in the way he wants. On the other hand, overgeneralization about men is wrong; because Angel tries not to hurt her feelings and use her weaknesses even when carrying her and other milkmaids. Also, Mr. Crick, the boss of

Tess in Talbothays, treats her and others in a caring way and tells them stories. Hardy gives this opposition between Talbothays and Flintcomb Ash also by their landscapes as Talbothays is situated on green and fertile hills, while the other has (as the meaning of its name supports) dull atmosphere.

Women may not always protect themselves and men can take its benefits. Alec rapes Tess and leaves her. The entire burden like its shame, its responsibility is left to her.

Hardy uses the analogy of birds to show the despair and loneliness of Tess. However as Tess states, birds have someone to end their pain while Tess has nobody. The birds locked up in the Slopes, Alec's mansion, can be a foreshadowing of Alec's control over Tess's life.

With his choice of the chapter names, Hardy in a way lists the events that occur in a woman's life. Woman starts their life as a maiden, someone either good or evil makes her be a maiden no more, then young woman goes into a rally, there occurs consequences, woman pays, she coincides with converted people or she becomes converted and finally, fulfillment is done.

There are some laws passed to regulate the lives of women parallel to the improvement of women's situation in the novel. In 1839, the Custody of Infants Act gives mothers the chance to access their children and custody of them less than seven years which is raised to sixteen in 1878. The Matrimonial Causes Act in 1857 gives women the right to divorce if they prove that there is incest, cruelty or desertion. In 1883, with the Married Women's Property Act, all married women have the right to have their own property. (Mitchell 477-478)

CONCLUSION:

Thomas Hardy as a novelist and poet born and grown in Victorian Era, his novels and poems also initiated and were formed in this period. Examining the Tess of the d'Urbervilles, through the virtues of the Victorian Era, one can reach the deeper understanding of the novel. Without considering the progression, transformation and the development of the age, the plot of the Tess of the d'Urbervilles will stand in front of the meaning of it. It becomes an ordinary love and agony novel which has a female character born into a poor family, accidentally kills the horse, goes to the Slopes to claim kin, being raped by an evil character, bores Sorrow and soon buries him, has problems with the Church, has a lover who is like an angel with no virtue of mercy, then loses her father, her house, goes working in the times she leaves home, involuntarily accepts the devils offers, coincides Angel, stabs the devil in the heart, in the end dies.

If one does not think on the novel in deep, these are the only events taking place in the novel. However, when we think on the novel in a deeper sense and do research on the Victorian Era, we can conclude that the novel is not a script of a soup-opera written in 1880's; but a novel reflecting the women, the religion, the ethics, the social life and economics of the England going through the Victorian Era. All in all, the novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles is a novel that cannot be considered separately from the time period which it was produced in as it has the traces of the Victorian Era.

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