
**THE MAYOR AND TESS: MOUNTING WILL, DISMOUNTING FATE
ELEMENTS OF FATE IN MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE AND
TESS OF D'URBERVILLES**

Surabhi*

Critics are mainly agreed that Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Tess of D'Urbervilles* are based on the tragic pattern. Moreover, they are also agreed with the fact what makes these two novels fact what makes these two novels tragedy. In other words, fate is the only element, skillfully handled and employed by Hardy, to govern the lives of the central characters, Henchard and Tess in these two novels. Ted R. Spivey relates Hardy's novels neither to the strivings of modernity nor to the folk, but to certain specifically literary trends in the 19th century. "Tragedy for Hardy is the defeat of the romantic hero's desire to reach a higher spiritual state. Hardy's tragic figures are romantic heroes in the line of Manfred, Faust, Prometheus and Heathcliff" (188). Therefore, the present, paper attempts to explore Hardy's two novels in a different perspective where his characters are seen being driven by their own will and passion but eventually defeated by their own fate to catastrophe.

It has been seen that fate in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Tess* appears in a different form, sometimes as a natural force and other times as an inner weakness of the hero. *The Mayor* (1886), freed from disabling humanistic biases of his age, exploits a level of the mind. "Hardy, receiving a body of beliefs about man and fate, he exploits a wisdom that makes possible the achievement of tragedy in the heroically sense of a Sophocles or a Shakespeare" (151). Michael Henchard, the hero, arrives at the fair at Weydon- Priors, steeps himself in the alcoholic brews of the firmity-woman and in a drunken moment, sells his wife to a sailor for five guineas. Henchard takes his futility from the wealth. The novel opens with:

The born on the upland side of the borough was generated by farmers who lived in an eastern purview called Durnover (*The Mayor*, 30).

*Asth. Prof., KITM, Kurukshetra

The opening of the novel establishes a situation which seems to offer hope for Herchard's success following the brief prefatory account of his economic and moral nucleus and his will to make a start in a new direction" (The Mayor, 115). He is shown continuously to grasping the power. Hardy uses both action and authorial comments to shift reader's impression of Henchard's moral structure in a curve which parallels his economic rise and fall against Farfrae. His will keeps moving to serve what seems to be larger moral order in the world. He himself comes to feel some intelligent power 'bent on punishing him." (The Mayor, 271) against his will. The authenticity of a moral intelligence beyond man's power to control is verified in the heroic imagination of Henchard himself. Henchard's career stands out as a testimony for the familiar and hard beliefs that the wise and the good shall prosper and wicked and rash shall fall against their mounting will. Hardy clearly intends to leave no doubt about his rise and fall. "On the day almost at that time- he passed the ridge of prosperity and honour and began to descend rapidly on the other side" (The Mayor, 311). Therefore, Henchard's terrible retrogression obeys a law as distinct and irrefutable in its logic as to suggest an origin more supernatural, which is called fate, than natural. Paterson recounts, "Reduced to the humble trade with which he began, discarding the shabby genteel suit of cloth and the rusty silk hat which had the emblem of his illegitimate power, taking again to the drink he had twenty years before his repudiated, leaving exactly as he had entered it, revisiting Waydon-Priors. The scene of the original crime and dying at last, broken in body and spirit, on the barren wastes of Edgon Heath, Henchard travels with every stage of his decline and fall the road by which he had come, embraces with every step the past he had denied..." (161). Despite all the impossibilities, Hardy's genius asserted itself in the making of a Michael Henchard as a man of strong will. Having suffered odds and vicissitudes, he moves closer to Aristotle's definition of a tragic hero. Henchard undergoes rebuffs that appear in excess of what his original crime demands, and his punishment appears more than what a basically descent man deserves.

I can go alone as I deserve an outcast and a vagabond. But my punishment is not greater than I hear (The Mayor, 325).

In this way, the preceding argument establishes that the novel, portrays a battle between man's will and the nature because man can never be sure of himself like the Greek hero.

Like that of *The Mayor* Hardy has been successful in portraying Tess as a girl who fights with her circumstances but gets defeated by the fate in *Tess of D'urberville*. Douglas Brown says,

“Here is not merely the tragedy of a heroic girl, but the tragedy of a proud community baffled and defeated by a process beyond its understanding control”. (90).

What makes this novel a tragic story is not the involvement of Tess's fine spirit in a degrading story of reduction and revenge. Rather, it is the meaningfulness of life considered as the story of a victim of her will and a scapegoat. J.R. Brooks places the story as, "the surface story of Tess narrates the events that defeat her struggle for the personal happiness. But the poetic under-pattern reveals the resolute purpose of the victim of circumstances and the doomed or sanctified being a more archetypal direction to her life hostile to personal claims" (439). In considering Tess as a victim of her own will and circumstances, the following pattern needs to be considered: (1) The society in which Tess suffers and die is sick with evil: it worships the false idol of chastity and is committed to a set of attitudes toward the fallen woman and toward sexuality in general which are unnatural and harmful in extreme (2). Tess's sufferings, which arise in and are caused by this social context, are at the very centre of attention, and the novel is to a great extent is simply the story of her sufferings (3) These are no villains, no really evil characters –Alec ones Angel, who between them destroy Tess, are merely mediators of attitudes, habits and values present in their society. (4) Tess’s suffering produces a good – if not the immediate regeneration of the society, at least the regeneration of Angel Clare, who spoke and acted for the conventions of society and who is said to be sample product of the last five and twenty years" (Tess, 235). Tess is so devastated between Alec and Angel in terms of mind and spirit that Angel, returning too late to find her installed in the lodging house as Alec's mistress, realizes that his original Tess had spiritually ceased to recognizing the body before him as Tess the body before him as Tess allowing it to drift, like a corpse upon the current in a direction dissociated from its living will" (Tess,484).

Though the novel is essentially the tragedy of characters who are the victims of fate or scapegoat but this does not mean that the central figure is merely weak and helpless. On the contrary, though Tess's circumstances make her a victim, her nature is courageous and heroic. Mechael Millgate evaluates, “Tess may essential a the victim and we from an early stage feel that she is doomed, if only because of what myths, ballads and melodramas have taught us to anticipate as the life pattern of the reduced country maiden" (279).

It can be stated that Tess's sufferings are strongly emphasized in the novel. Nearly half of the novel is devoted to describing the instances of rejection, ostracism, misfortune and hard times

related to her sin. Tess is made to “be a scapegoat by her fate because she alone suffers for what many other girls have gotten away with through compromise or secrecy. One's hopes at the end of the novel are focused upon the possibility that society, at large, will follow Angel's example in accord with Hardy's general philosophy of evolutionary meliorism. Like the traditional scapegoat, Tess is neither guilty nor innocent. "She is a purely typically or random victim of the circumstances her will framed around her", remarks Northrop Frye. (41).

To sum up, it may be said that one has not a word to say against the concept of will and force working behind the aspirations of The Mayor of Casterbrige and Tess of D'Urbervilles in the respective stories. The Mayor's rise and fall suggests that if one is an idealist, trying to exert his will in an antagonistic or indifferent world, then this action creates a Promethean conflict. And if one is realist and does not attempt to change himself, his chances of destruction one minimized. In the same way, the character of Tess, up to her last downfall with some curious exceptions, is consistent enough. Tess is the epitome of pure minded girl in whom lie the noblest possibilities of womanhood to carry out her will. But both of the characters seem to be wronged by their fate.

REFERENCES:

1. Brooks, J.R. Thomas Hardy: Poetic Structure (London : Elek, 1971)
2. Brown, Douglas. Thomas Hardy (London: Longman Green Company, 1967)
3. Frye, Northrop. Anatomy of Criticism (London: Princeton, 1957)
4. Hardy, Thomas. Tess of D'Urbervilles. Ed. Dale Skilton (London: Penguin, 1973)
5. Hardy, Thomas. The Mayor of Casterbridge. Ed. Dale Crammer (London: Oxford University Press, 2004)
6. Millgate, Michael. Thomas Hardy: His Career as A Novelist (London: Macmillan, 1971)
7. Spivey, Ted R. "Thomas Hardy's Tragic Heroes". Nineteenth Century Fiction, IX (1954)