

THOMAS HARDY TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

The greatest representative of the late Victorian literature, Thomas Hardy, was among the novelists who marked the transition to XXth century English and American fiction. He wrote many novels such as: "Far from the Madding Crowd", "Jude the Obscure", "The Mayor of Casterbridge", etc.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles is regarded as Hardy's tragic masterpiece. It is the story of innocence, of Man and Nature, of history and its relation to the present, concentrated on the fate of a simple young girl.

Summary of the novel:

Tess Durbeyfield is the daughter of a poor farmer, whose life is troubled by a minister who once told him he was a descendant of the ancient noble and rich family of the D'Urberville. In order to acquire favorable relationships he sends his daughter as a maid to the house of a family who bears the surname D'Urberville with doubtful right to it. Seduced by Alec, the heir of the family, Tess gives birth to an illegitimate child who dies in infancy, after an improvised midnight baptism of its mother. Some time later, while working as a dairy-maid on a large farm, Tess becomes engaged to Angel Clare, a clergyman's son. But Tess is pressed by her fault, and on their wedding night confesses to him her affair with Alec. Angel, who thought of himself as being free of prejudices, proves to be their slave. He abandons Tess going to seek his fortune somewhere in Brasil. Misfortunes and hardships come upon her and her family. An accident throws her once more in the path of Alec and she accepts to continue her relationship with him. Returning from Brasil, Angel finds her in this situation. Maddened by this second wrong Alec had done to her, Tess murders him to liberate herself. After a brief period of concealment with Angel Clare, Tess is arrested at Stonehenge, trialed and hanged.

The conflict of the novel: the Blind Destiny, the conflict between Man and Nature.

- According to Hardy, man and woman are condemned to live in a world that is ruled by universal pitiless laws, predetermined by Nature itself. Fatal chance is an invisible force in all the relationships of human being, there is the Blind Destiny, the sin which is to revenge some day, the merciless laws ignored by the characters who, ultimately, will be crushed by them. Man does not accept these rules and becomes a desperate fighter. Hence, the tragic fight between man's aspirations and his possibilities. The fragment presenting Tess and Angel at Stonehenge is symbolic for the whole novel and for Hardy's philosophy.

Tess is an elementary nature, with powerful instincts, capable of violent passions and infinite devotion. Throughout the novel she is presented as passive, obedient and submissive to the laws of nature, of society and of her own temperament. She shows a complete acceptance of whatever comes upon her, understanding destiny as a law of Universe. That is why she faces Destiny with dignity, resignation and grace. She knows that she had disrupted the equilibrium in Universe, the code of laws and she accepts her fate, feeling that order has been re-established.

The scenery - Stonehenge As soon as they arrive in the presence of Stonehenge the realistic level sinks into insignificance. Their stepping into myth is announced by some classical symbol motifs: their state of ignorance is suggested by their "groping" around. Gradually, they become acquainted - through their senses: hearing, touching - with the place which they define as "a temple of the winds", and the author defines it as "the pavilion of the night". The ancient, timeless character impresses by its firmness. The way architecture influenced Hardy in depicting the "pagan temple" can easily be seen. "Feeling sideways they encountered another tower - like pillar, as square as the first, beyond it another and another. The place was all doors and pillars, some connected above by continuous architraves." The setting is perfect" a concrete place with mysterious meaning, the remnant of a very old civilization that worshipped nature bringing human sacrifices and thus suggesting the insignificance of man in the face of Nature. It becomes the

place of her punishment and the shrine of sacrifice and forgiveness. Tess seems caught between the sky and the earth - looking like an innocent victim sacrificed to the gods on an altar.

The chromatic element plays a major part in the creation of the dramatic atmosphere. The images connected with darkness, light and wind have a definite position in the picture. Time gradually passes from mere chronology - midday, afternoon, 8 o'clock - to duration and symbolic time: night march, midnight, the night wind. Nature is concordant with Tess's state of mind: dark, with an impress of reserve, taciturnity and hesitation, cold as the stones. The coming of light is the coming of death. The figures of the soldiers appear at the first break of dawn. On the other hand, Nature seems to anticipate the events that are to come: "Presently the night wind died out, and the quivering little pools in the cup like hollows of the stones lay still." The dialogue is reduced to the minimum, the emphasis lying on the description of the scenery. We notice metaphors, chromatic epithets, visual images, gradation - from night towards dawn, alongside with the gradation of the torments within Tess's heart from despair to resignation. In the end, Stonehenge is in full light, marking the heroine's serenity and peace of mind.

The novel may be considered both a psychologic one (because it draws a few years in the evolution of the heroine) and a social novel at the same time (it is described the condition of peasantry as well as the contrast between the latter's life and aristocracy), and perhaps even a love story (the story of unhappy love tormented by the absurdities of life).

Haunted by fatalism and determinism, Hardy is a tragic writer and illustrates his unique humanitarian attitude towards the dramatic struggle between man and evil.