

A Study of Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*: *A Pure Woman*

Taeko Oku

Introduction

Thomas Hardy lived from 1840 to 1928. The novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* was published in 1891. The nineteenth century is called the century of science or the age of the second Industrial Revolution. Many scientists and engineers invented various new machines. They made life somewhat easier for a few people at that time.¹⁾

On the other hand, the rapid development of capitalism and the great progress of the Industrial Revolution generated a lot of social problems. Many landowners and handicraftsmen lost their properties and jobs, and were compelled to be day laborers. They, however, had no social welfare system.²⁾ Women had few opportunities to earn money. In case of primary workers in families, some of them unavoidably sacrificed their innocent daughters to live as prostitutes or rich men's mistresses. What was worse, society was entrenched in Victorian Values, the double standard morality, which required women's chastity but permitted men's adultery.³⁾

People could not help doubting this new mechanical culture and tended to question life under the modern civilization. The Women's Movement initiated by the Langhan Place Group(1850s-60s) rose and fought for women's employment, education, and

changes in the law to ameliorate the position of women in society.⁴⁾ Among them, Josephine Butler(1828-1906) accused Victorian Values of a double standard morality, which divided women into wives and prostitutes, and attacked the Contagious Diseases Act(1864), which led many innocent young women to become prostitutes. Therefore, she worked to abolish that law and helped force Parliament to do so in 1886. Between 1880-1914, the social purity movement gained prominence in England, espousing the cause of protecting women and children from dangerous people.⁵⁾

There was another movement in the academic field. *The Theory of Evolution* known as *The Origins of Species* (Darwin,1858) says that new species are produced by natural selection. Human beings are no exception. The ancestors of human beings were a kind of ape. That idea was a great shock to churches as well as common people, also a shock to most scientists as well, and led to confusion of ideas among them.⁶⁾

A lot of idealists and philosophers tried to analyze or reorganize the society and the universe. Around 1840, three basic theories of modern philosophy were introduced: Empiricism, Existentialism, and Marxism.⁷⁾ Empiricism(Auguste Comte, 1798-1857) is the belief that people should rely on practical experience and experiments, rather than on theories, as a basis for knowledge.⁸⁾ Existentialism(Sören

Kierkegaard, 1813-55) is a philosophical belief which stresses the importance of human experience, emphasizes individual existence, freedom, and choice, and says that everyone is responsible for the results of their own actions.⁹⁾ Marxism is a socio-political philosophy based on the writings of Karl Marx(1818-83), which stresses the importance of struggle between different social classes,¹⁰⁾ the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to gain equal rights and treatment for all classes.¹⁰⁾

These thoughts influenced many diverse writers in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Empiricism in literature was called Naturalism and perhaps its most famous practitioner was the novelist, Emile Zola(1840-1902).¹¹⁾ Zola believed that composing a novel was like performing a laboratory experiment, that is, you had only to supply your characters with a specific environment and heredity, and then watch their automatic reactions. Hippolyte Taine (1828-93), a famous literary critic in France, said that virtue and vice were as much the products of automatic processes as alkalis and acids. Then he attempted to account for masterpieces by studying the geographical and climatic conditions of the countries in which they had been produced.¹²⁾ Another idea was the thought of Arthur Schopenhauer(1778-1860), a philosopher who was influenced by the philosophy of Upanishad. Upanishad is a doctrine which deepened the religion of Brahman and it had a great influence on the modern philosophers, such as Friedrich Nietzsche(1844-1900) in Germany.¹³⁾

Hardy joined the Savile Club and became a well-known literary figure in London, attending parties and “crushes”.¹⁴⁾ He most probably had contact with influential people and absorbed many ideas and theories there. He also realized that there were many people who would not benefit from the flourishing enterprises of Great Britain. He put many characters

who resembled his acquaintances into the story, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, and tried to give us messages about real life through this story. This paper will extract his messages from this novel and discuss them.

I. John d’Urberville: A Man behind the Times

John Durbeyfield, once a d’Urberville, was not an energetic man. At times, he had good strength to work, but these times could not be relied on to coincide with the hours required of him. He had never settled down to any day-labor. That a haggling business had become his occupation was not surprising.

He was not a respectable man. His nickname, a “slack-twisted” fellow, described his appearance very well. He was an alcoholic with a heart disease. In those days, people valued appearance more highly than today, and estimated gentlemen too superficially.¹⁵⁾ They counted drunkenness, illegal drinking, and slack-twisted clothes as vices in Victorian society. No wonder they regarded him as a clown or a boor.

John Durbeyfield was once a d’Urberville. One day, John happened to get some information about his fine pedigree from Person Tringham. His ancestor was a renowned knight from Normandy who came to England with William the conqueror, and at one time branches of his family had held manors over all Wessex. Now his family had come down in the world. Person warned him about his future.

John was a thoughtless father. He should have put more heart into his occupation in order to overcome poverty. Even on the same day as Person’s advice, his appetite pressed him to drink at Rolliver’s inn until midnight despite of his plan for an early departure the next morning. He ought to have left at two o’clock in order to get to Casterbridge in time because of the rough thirty-mile-road and the fact that he had the slowest horse and wagon. At last, sixteen-

year-old Tess, his daughter and nine-year-old Abraham, his son took over his duty. Prince was a decrepit horse and did not pay attention to his surroundings. The early departure caused them to become sleepy and have an accident. At dawn, a speeding mailcart with its two noiseless wheels had driven into their slow, unlighted wagon. The pointed shaft of the cart stuck through Prince's breast like a sword, and his blood was spouting from the wound in a stream onto the path. The mailcart was new and represented the modern civilization, and their horse and wagon looked out of date, or like the old civilization. This scene symbolizes the clash between the modern civilization and the old civilization. Historically the old one is usually ruled by the new.

John was obsessed with his fine pedigree, and seemed to live among his ancestors. At last, he announced that he would sell his title to Alec d'Urberville as his daughter left for Trantridge. After his daughter became Angel Clare's deserted wife and came home, he said, "I shall put an end of myself, title and all I can bare it no longer..."¹⁶⁾

John's haggling business, which had depended mainly on Prince, became disorganized. He had no choice except to become a foot-haggler. The figure of the dying Prince in the accident symbolized John who was a grimacing ruining personage. The corpse of Prince represented a collapse of his pride.

He had been unable to carry out his mission as the head of d'Urbervilles. He died from heart disease, leaving his family in debt and homeless. Pedigree, ancestral skeletons, monumental records, and the d'Urbervilles' lineage did not help him and his family in life's battle. Victorian lucre was much more attractive than Norman blood.

John d'Urberville represents the ruined. They are encouraged to chasten themselves in order to change their lives.

II. Joan d'Urberville: A Woman without Identity

Joan Durbeyfield, John's wife, was anti-Malthusian. Her husband had a haggler business with a decrepit horse. She gave birth to six children in a rented house.

In 1798 Thomas Malthus(1776-1834) published his *Essay on Population* which was to prove to be the most influential book ever written on the subject of population. Malthus concluded that "a rising population sooner or later spelled disaster and suffering for most of too poor members."¹⁷⁾

The 1870 Education Act was enacted and gave all children the right to an elementary school education. Hardy described women's generation gap between the uneducated and the educated. Joan was a fine singer with no public education. At that time the women, especially in the working class, dreamed of marrying middle-class and high-class men in order to get stable positions. There were some rumors of some newly rich marrying into fine families that were now in poverty. Ladies commonly said, with sweet smiles, that a true woman could always persuade her husband to do what she wanted.¹⁸⁾

Joan caught gossip and rumors as fast as new ditties. They naturally infected her with the trend of the times. She had been looking for a rich husband for Tess almost from her birth. Hearing of husband's fine pedigree, she hit upon an idea to send her daughter to claim kinship to the d'Urbervilles. Her thoughtless conduct decided Tess's fate.

Joan was a careless woman. She neither checked the gentleman's personality nor gave her daughter the chance of learning man's tricks beforehand. Her attitude helped lead to Tess's pregnancy. After her baby's death, Tess spent almost two years with her family. Then she left her native village to work at Talbothays dairy. There, she fell in love with Angel,

and sought her mother's advice about confessing her offence of having given birth to a child out of wedlock, to Angel Clare. Joan's advice did not have sufficient power to help her daughter out of difficulty. Tess was not made to hold her tongue against her integrity. Consequently, Angel deserted her.

Joan was an irresponsible mother. She usually tagged along with her husband to the inn to refresh herself. During her hours of enjoyment, Tess, Joan's eldest daughter, was at home, and used all of her strength to take care of her younger sisters and brothers. Even on the day of John's doctor's advice, she did not forbid him to go drinking at the inn, but followed him and didn't come back until Tess fetched them. Joan's most irresponsible act was when she compelled Tess and Abraham to go Casterbridge by themselves. This made it more difficult for their family to overcome poverty.

Joan was a dependent woman. Angel Clare left some amount of money for Tess when he deserted her. On hearing it, Joan asked Tess for more money, and compelled her daughter to live on her own small income. In her husband's critical condition, Joan sent for Tess and made her organize everything for her family. Shortly after that, John Durbeyfield died. Joan sacrificed her daughter to Alec, and salvaged her family.

The author usually challenged Joan's conduct, and tried to give us some messages through her courses of action. Women should have the proper knowledge to cope with their own lives and fulfill their responsibilities of motherhood. This novel supports the important role of a mother in a family, and emphasizes that a woman with a strong identity is indispensable to the happiness of a family.

III. Tess d'Urberville: An Attractive Independent Young Woman

Hardy used the method of Naturalism and attempted to examine the vices of society through this novel. He tried to show the vicissitudes of his heroine through the climates of the places her sojourn took her.

First of all, all of the scenes were set in Wessex. Tess d'Urberville, the heroine, moved around Marlott village, Trantridge village, Talbothays dairy, and Flintcomb-Ash farm as if Wessex were a living laboratory. The climate of each scene had some relationship to the life of Tess. The village of Marlott, Tess's native place, located within four hours journey from London, lay northeast of the beautiful Vale of Blackmoor. Tourists and landscape-painters had not yet trodden most of that place. The village of Marlott represented a pure uncultivated sixteen-years-old girl, Tess.

Trantridge was Alec's village where Tess worked. The young inhabitants' spirits there were ruled by levity. Those surroundings hinted at Alec d'Urberville's personality. One can easily imagine that Tess would be in a great deal of trouble here.

Then, Talbothays dairy was near the place of her ancestor's manor, and the wife of the dairy owner was her mother's friend. Everything there surrounded her warmly. Those scenes indicated her happy daily life, and her wonderful love affair.

Flintcomb-Ash farm was a desert land. Tess had to work many hours in that wild place with Marian who had been her friend since the Talbothays dairy days. The howling wind was cold, and drove the rain at them horizontally, like glass-splinters. Even in such conditions, they were happy chattering about Angel. Those scenes indicated that Tess was in financial difficulty, but she still had hope for the future.

Next, Tess's character is depicted through her

heredity. Her beauty came from her mother, but her pride from her father.

Tess was a self-sacrificing young woman in poverty. She intended to be a teacher, but fate had decided otherwise. She had five younger sisters and brothers, and tried to help them as much as possible. Furthermore, Tess was urged to go the d'Urberville's mansion to reform her ruined family.

At Trantridge, Tess's colleague persuaded her to join the weekly Chasborough pilgrimages. One night she came back to Trantridge with strangers. She was involved in a fray. Alec saved her from that difficulty. But she was raped by Alec, and became his mistress. She was sacrificed to a lewd and vulgar character.

At Talbothays, Tess met Angel Clare. Owing to her past offense, she gave every chance to the others who wanted to marry Angel. Her love, however, was stronger than her sacrificing mind. She finally accepted his marriage offer, and married him. But, her honest noble spirit caused her to become a deserted wife. She was sacrificed to Angel's conventionality.

And again, she became Alec's mistress to help her family out of difficulties after her father's death. She was sacrificed to a "money-talk" society.

Tess was a pure woman with various womanly characteristics. She gave birth to Alec's baby. At that time, the church refused to baptize any baby of spouseless mothers. When her baby was about to die, she baptized him herself in order to have him saved in the next world. By lantern light at night, her baby was buried in one corner of the place where all unbaptized infants, notorious drunkards and suicides were buried. Tess bravely decorated his grave with a little cross of two laths and collected bunch of flowers that night. She then visited his grave for several nights to keep the flowers alive.

This behavior indicated her resistance to the Christian religion that forgot its real responsibility of

salvation, and also her deep affection for her baby.

Tess had pride enough to call herself Lady Tess d'Urberville. After her father's death, the quarrel between Tess and Alec showed her character very well.

Tess: "I shall not come...I have plenty of money!..."

Alec: "Where?"

Tess: "At my father's-in-law's, if I ask for it."

Alec: "If you ask for it. But you won't, Tess; I know you; you'll never ask for it... you'll starve first!"¹⁹⁾

After Tess became Alec's mistress, nothing changed her pure mind. When she saw her husband, her resolve was lost. Tess murdered Alec and followed Angel.

The motivation of Tess's act of murder was the words of Angel and Alec. Angel had said:

"...or you may not see all my difficulties. How can we live together while that man live? He being you husband in Nature, and not I. If he were dead it might be different...."²⁰⁾

Alec had said:

"Remember, my lady, I was your master once! I will be your master again. If you are any man's wife you are mine!"²¹⁾

At last she realized that her life was at the mercy of Alec, luster and Angel, a hypocrite. Alec had played with her flesh. Angel had played with her mind. They both did not recognize her true value. Now she knew that she should not live with Angel having scorned her.

She was arrested in a tragic state and hanged for murder.

This novel uses Tess to symbolize a self-sacrificing young woman caught in a modern civilization. People believe that one will make every effort to become happy. Tess believed it, and did it, too. Even so, she was gradually driven further into adversity.

Sexism is harshly criticized as the root of all social evils which drive working class women into a miserable plight. The amelioration of women's position in society must be indispensable to people's happiness.²²⁾

IV. Alec d'Urberville: A Luster in the Bourgeoisie

Industry in Great Britain flourished in nineteenth century. People's wealth rendered them influential. If a man becomes rich, he will desire fame and a fine blood. That is human nature.

Hardy showed such a typical phenomena through the d'Urbervilles in Trantridge. Mr. Simon Stoke made his fortune, and got his family name, d'Urberville, through money. He completely ignored Tess's family which was now the Durbeyfields. His ways hinted of the affairs of his son and Tess.

The d'Urbervilles' estate expressed its owner's personality suitably. At first, Tess was astonished to see the estate of the d'Urbervilles and Alec d'Urberville, the owner.

The mansion was almost new, and everything on the d'Urbervilles' snug property was bright, thriving and well kept, and looked like money.

Alec d'Urberville was a son of Mr. Stoke d'Urberville, but he was a stepson of Mrs. d'Urberville. He and his stepmother showed no affection toward each other. His background affected his thought and behavior.

Alec was a new bourgeoisie who did whatever he wanted. After a while, he came to Marlott and asked Tess's mother whether Tess could really come to manage old lady's fowl-farm or not. Tess unwillingly accepted his offer. After that, he never missed a chance to court her.

Finally, Alec got his chance on the way back to the estate one night. When Tess followed one group, she became involved in a fray. He saved her and took her somewhere in a deep wood. He coaxed her by saying that he gave acceptable presents to her family. His words seduced her into an error of judgment. His wealth gave him the right to trifle with her virtue. He was only a luster who had been dazzled by Tess's charm.

This scene shows the social system of the rich squeezing the poor. Alec's conduct was criticized as a typical example of the bourgeois in those days.

Alec was a capricious man. Encountering Tess, he was preaching to the villagers as a clergyman. Reason had had nothing to do with his whimsical conversion, which, distraught by his mother's death, was the mere freak of a careless man in search of a new sensation. On seeing Tess's figure at Fintcomb-Ash farm, he lusted after her again with capricious impulse.

His mission as a clergyman should have altered his evil course, but could not. For him, Tess was more attractive than Christianity. Finally, Alec broke his promise of preaching in order to try his best to lust after her and forced her to come with him.

Alec's change from Christianity to paganism questioned whether the Christian religion of those days might salvage a capricious lustful man's spirit or not.

As soon as he tried to carry her body to his coach, she hit his face with her glove screaming that "once a victim, always victim...that's the law."²³⁾

Tess symbolized the exploited class, and Alec

represented the exploiting class. This scene indicated that when the former encountered the latter, however hard the former resisted, it was doomed to be a victim of the latter.

Finally, Alec got his chance due to Tess's father death. He used his cruel persuasion upon her. Her husband did not respond to her sad letter either. What was worse, her mother gave Alec a hand in order to get them their house. Consequently, she accepted his offer and followed him to Sandbourne. Shortly after that, Angel turned up there in search of her. At the same time, Alec's plan of keeping Tess as his mistress broke down. He was able to rule her flesh, but not to subdue her mind. Tess murdered Alec.

The author argued that capitalism as well as sexism should never subdue the venerable spirit of the people. The bourgeoisie were accused of being despots in society.

V. Angel Clare: A Hypocrite in the Cultivated Middle Class

Old Mr. Clare was, Angel Clare's step-father, an earnest man, the last of the old Low Church in all of Wessex. He was an Evangelical of Evangelicals as well as a Conversionist. Angel's parents practiced their religion earnestly, but did not consider other's feelings.

At that time, the Low Church had a great influence on people in England. A typical clergyman of the Low Church is shown through Angel's parents. Angel had two elder brothers, who were non-evangelical, well educated, hallmarked young men, but somewhat shortsighted. They both were deeply influenced by Victorian Values, and discriminated against the working class. They could not see with their own eyes the true aspects of society.

Felix and Cuthbert were criticized for not looking beneath the surface of things in spite of holding

enough power to help reform society.

Angel was the only son who had not taken a university degree. His parents were for his studying the Christian religion, but against other areas of study. He did not have the will to go to a university against their wishes.

Therefore Angel went round a lot of farms in order to acquire the practical skills of farming, with the dream of having his own farm in the future. He had come as a six month pupil to Talbothays dairy.

Angel was a man of conscience as well as dreamer in a sense. He loved Tess dearly, perhaps rather ideally and fancifully. A d'Urberville's descendant in poverty was a most useful ingredient to the dreamer. After courting her many times, he got her to accept his proposal.

Angel was an egotistical man. Angel and Tess confessed each other's offenses on their wedding night. He was distraught by Tess's confession. Tess argued that her mother knew several cases worse than she. They had different manners in different levels of societies, Angel replied. His words showed the typical discrimination of the middle class against the working class.

Angel was somewhat of a hypocrite. He scorned her for having a baby, but Angel had no right to have contempt for Tess's life. Mr. Clare's first wife left him behind with a daughter, and Angel's mother was his second wife, She, however, had already had Felix, Cuthbert and Angel, three sons from her previous husband. Angel's family insulted Tess, too. His mother asked him whether he was Tess's first love. When she in her adversity visited the vicarage to see Angel's parents in order to get some information about her husband, Angel's brothers caught sight of her old shabby boots in the hedge, dragged, derided the owner of them, and tried to throw them away. She said to herself in pity, that they did not know that she wore

those over the long rough road to save her pretty shoes that Angel had bought for her. This incident dissuaded her from visiting Angel's parents.

With all his attempted independence of judgment, this advanced and well-meaning young man was still a slave to Victorian Values. Through a placard of Brazil as a field for the emigrating agriculturist, Angel hit upon a new idea of going to Brazil. He supposed that Tess could eventually join him there and perhaps the environment of Brazil was not so conservative as that of England. So he joined a group of emigrants to go there.

His long hard journey made him appreciate Tess's worth. He realized that the dream of the emigrants coincided with his desire to escape from his past existence. He began to discredit the appraisal of Victorian Values, and the need to readjust to them nowadays. The beauty or ugliness of a character lay not only in its achievements, but in its aims and impulse, its true history lay, not only among things done, but among things willed.

Angel answered nothing to his deserted wife's sad letter of her plight. His attitude led Tess not only to be Alec's moneyed mistress, but also to murder Alec.

Angel symbolized the hypocrisy of the cultivated middle class.²⁴⁾ Victorian Values ruled his mind and he thought in conventional manner. His conventionality victimized Tess, an innocent self-sacrificing woman with a pure venerable spirit.

The middle class was accused of not facing various social problems, but expected them to reform themselves.

Conclusion

Capitalism and the Industrial Revolution had, gradually but deeply, corroded many family lives in those days. The family of Thomas Hardy was no

exception. His family were old landowners who had come down in the world through lack of ambition. One ancestor was the commander of a warship in the Battle of Trafalgar. His mother was the daughter of a yeoman. His wife and his father-in-law were both racked with their sense of social superiority. John Durbeyfield with his absurd delusions of aristocratic grandeur, and other characters in the story were not quite the free standing comic creations, but rather real reflections of the ordinary people of that time. Through this novel, he intended to examine the fate of the weakest innocent people in the society and tried to find some ways of ameliorating their lives. He chose his characters from representatives of several social classes, and put them into his novel's world like a real chaotic society, and depicted their automatic reactions.

He tried to explain the fate of his heroine by using Empiricism, Existentialism, and Marxism.

First, the cycle of life was accepted as the flex and reflex of life through that of the d,Urbervilles in terms of Empiricism.

Next, he used Existentialism to explain the results of one's own search for happiness as well as that of the family. The importance of parenthood is emphasized through John and Joan Durbeyfield. The essence of a family is entirely dependent on the judgment of the two parents. Parents should take great responsibility for their families.

Neither Empiricism nor Existentialism, however, had enough strengths to justify many workers' difficulties, as well as the plight of Tess who was an innocent self-sacrificing, exploited young woman. Capitalism destroyed self-sufficient life of many and produced a "money-talk" society. Almost all of them worked hard in order to get out of their difficulties. The working class was forced to work in bad conditions. Women fell into more inferior positions in badly paid, dirty and dangerous jobs in factories, mills,

and mines. If they were not badly paid servants in middle class homes, some of them were caught in the trap of being a mistress.

Hardy accused people of having sexist attitudes toward working class women. He tried to use Marxism in order to raise miserable women from their squalid conditions. A woman's right to own property(1882) was not enough to secure a good life for herself and her children. Equal rights and equal treatment among all classes are indispensable to gaining a secure life everyone.

Even if one were to put all three theories into practice, the very practices do not establish happiness. Hardy depicted this viewpoint through his novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

The novel is composed of five main characters: Tess Durbeyfield, her parents, her master, and her husband. Tess, his heroine in adversity, is an innocent self-sacrificing beautiful young woman with pride. Her fate was decided by those four characters surrounding her. The vice factors which drove the heroine into her own hell are represented by the other four main characters of the novels.

The first factor is John Durbeyfield, her father. He was a man behind the times. Against people's advice, he never kept control of himself in order to overcome poverty. His ancestral aristocratic pedigree did not help him and his family in life's battle. Victorian lucre was much more attractive than Norman blood. He was accused of not fulfilling his mission as the head of d'Urbervilles.

The second factor is Joan Durbeyfield, Tess's mother. She was a woman without an identity. She had neither challenged her life, nor fulfilled her role as a mother. Her thoughtless conduct led the whole family to deplorable conditions. Both parents were attacked for not meeting the full responsibility of parenthood.

The third factor is Alec d'Urberville, her master. He was a luster in new bourgeoisie. From the beginning, Alec treated Tess as an object of his sexual appetite. His mind was contaminated with the sexism of Victorian era. His sexism was attacked for bourgeoisie's discrimination against working class women.

The fourth factor is Angel Clare, her husband. He is a hypocrite as well as an idealist. Though his mother, burdened with him and his brothers married Mr. Clare who already had a daughter, he scorned Tess for her affair. His conventional mindedness incited him to desert her. He, with growing perplexity, joined emigrants to Brazil. As a result of his hard journey, he was transformed from an idealist into a pragmatist. His personal transformation came too late to salvage his wife's life as she had become Alec's mistress. Angel's appearance motivated her to murder Alec. His idealistic and hypocritical attitudes were criticized for those of the middle class toward the working class.

All factors are ruled by the social climate, especially Victorian Values and the flippant trend of the times. The former stirred up sexism among people, which is the belief that the members of one sex, usually women, are less intelligent or less capable than those of the other sex and therefore need not be treated equally.²⁵⁾ The latter brought chaos and devastation to working class women. In order to make life worth living, society would have to make major adjustments. Hardy entrusts the cultivated middle class to lead the older segments of society in joining modern civilization.

He, however, had no explanation but to use the will in Schopenhauer's philosophy to get the answers of Tess's tragic life. The Christian soul may feel cherished and cared for even in its imperfection. She, however, was none the better for her good soul and her innocent self-sacrificing attitudes. Therefore, her fate

was only justified through Schopenhauer's philosophy. Schopenhauer states that everything happens as a matter of necessity under the law of causality. The world is in some kind of perpetual motion. There is no freedom. Only the will is not governed by the law of causality.²⁶⁾ Thus, one may admit the possibility of retribution lurking in the present catastrophe. The sins of the fathers are said to visit upon their children. Retribution is a good way for the divinities to improve people's morality, but a harsh way for some innocent children to struggle with their catastrophes. Nobody knows when and where one will become a victim of retribution.

A humane outlook is the only way to overcome the retribution one is accorded in life. Hardy said that men and women are too often harsh with ones they love or have loved. Yet this harshness is tenderness itself when compared with the universal harshness out of which they grow. Mutual understanding and cooperation are essential to obtain the strength necessary to cope with life's difficulties.

This novel was published almost one hundred years ago. Since then, feminists who believe that women should have the same rights, power, and opportunities as men, have fought hard for this cause. Even in Britain, where women have won many equal rights through laws, the two sexes are still unequal in reality. If a new social welfare system were to be established, women could win equal rights in practice as well as in theory, and parents would then be able to carry out the full responsibility of parenthood.

Through this novel, Hardy analyzed life and society and presented several social problems, and what is more, suggested some hints of how to improve one's life. Even now, his messages are still remarkably efficacious for people in modern society.

All these things considered, Thomas Hardy is not only a great novelist but also a great philosopher.

Hardy could surely be called a life reformist.

Note

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