

The Heroine's Character and View of Life in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

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I will begin with summarizing the novel.

Tess, the heroine of the novel, is a fine and handsome girl, and she has a pure heart and a high degree of sensibility.

The change of Tess's destiny comes from her father, Durbeyfield, who believed what Parson Tringham told him. It is that he is the lineal representative of the ancient and knightly family of the d'Urbervilles, originated from the knight who came from Normandy with William the Conqueror. Durbeyfield celebrates that and drinks too much. So, instead of her father, Tess goes to Casterbridge at midnight driving the wagon to send the hives to the market. On her way she falls asleep and causes an accident which kills Prince, the horse that has been hauling the waggon.

Tess, to make up for the loss of Prince which was the support of the family, goes to Trantridge counting on some help of the d'Urberville family. (The d'Urbervilles, or Stoke-d'Urbervilles are not the real ones. The predecessor had become rich in the north and came to Trantridge and pretended the name of d'Urberville.) There she is hired and looks after the fowl-farm which is the widow's hobby. The widow has a reckless son, Alec, living in the house. Tess is seduced by him and finally raped. And she has a baby born. An illegitimate baby coming into the world is an offence against society, so it torments her much. But when she forgets about it and her moral sorrows are passing away, the baby is suddenly taken ill. In spite of her heartfelt wish, he dies soon.

She has been looking for an opportunity for a new departure, and now she works as a milkmaid at the dairy farm called Talbothays. There she meets Angel Clare, and they fall in love with each other. He proposes to her, but she refuses it. Because on no account can she agree to a step which may afterwards cause bitter rueing to her husband for his blindness in wedding her. Her inner struggle is very fearful. But she consents to marry him, for "the 'appetite for joy,' which pervades all creation; that tremendous force which sways humanity to its purpose . . . was not to be controlled by vague lucubrations over the social rubric" (p.149).¹ And Tess, having tried to tell the truth a couple of times in vain, marries Angel Clare. On the night of the wedding, they confess about their pasts. First, Angel tells that, when he was "tossed about by doubts and difficulties in London, like a cork on the waves, he plunged into eight-and-forty hours' dissipation with a stranger" (p.177). Tess hears and forgives him. Next, Tess tells him about her acquaintance with Alec d'Urberville and its results. Shocked, Angel Clare

forsakes Tess.

But he says to her "it was imperative that we should stay together a little while, to avoid the scandal to you that would have resulted from our immediate parting. But you must see it is only for form's sake" (p.190). So she lives with him for a while, but at last she decides to live apart from him. They know that "when two people are once parted . . . new growths insensibly bud upward to fill each vacated place; unforeseen accidents hinder intentions, and old plans are forgotten" (p.193).

"As the hours dropped past, as the motive of each act in the long series of bygone days presented itself to his view, he perceived how intimately the notion of having Tess as a dear possession was mixed up with all his schemes and words and ways" (p.204). And as a new idea, he decides to go to Brazil.

On the other hand, Tess is in changed conditions. Now she is a lonely woman with a basket and a bundle in her own portorage, as at an earlier time when she was no bride. Then Alec appears before her as a converted Methodist.

He tells her he feels "of all persons in the world whom it was his duty and desire to save from the wrath to come . . . the woman whom he had so grievously wronged was that person [Tess]" (p.241). And that he has come with that sole purpose in view. But she cannot believe in his "conversion to a new spirit", and she insists that she fears "such flashes" (p.243) as he feels do not last. Tess cannot endure his temptation any more. So she writes to Angel in a desperate mood. But she cannot get an answer from him. Her father dies and the lease of land expires. The family is driven to an extreme distress. To save the situation, she goes to Alec and becomes his mistress.

Angel repents his own cold-heartedness soon after he left Tess. While he is in Brazil, he notices "what arrested him now as of value in life was less its beauty than its pathos. Having long discredited the old systems of mysticism he now began to discredit the old appraisements of morality" (p.267). And he returns back to her. Tess despairs. She kills Alec for the trap he set for her in her simple youth and his wrong to Angel through her. She runs after Angel and they escape hand in hand. But she is arrested by the police at Stonehenge and later executed.

The novel has the subtitle of "A Pure Woman". Also on Hardy's draft of the title page of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* in 1891, he quotes from Shakespeare: "Poor wounded name! My bosom, as a bed, / Shall lodge thee." From the subtitle and the quotation, I can see how much Hardy loved and esteemed the character and tragic life of Tess. Possibly she can accept cruel happenings meekly for her pure character, so that, I am afraid, many tragic happenings come to her in succession and at last her life ends in tragedy. There are many novels that end tragically, but the end of *Tess* is extremely pathetic. From where comes Tess's pureness? Does she have some

foundation to support her whenever she receives bad treatments in succession from society? I will study her character and consider her view of life and view of fortune.

I read the novel, and I understand that cause and effect are closely connected and causal relations are very orderly. Tomoko Tachibana states in her "Essay on 'Justice was done'" that Tess's fundamental misfortune results from that she was born in a family that has many disadvantages; her father who is weak and idle and likes drinking, her mother who is a little foolish and optimistic, and six younger brothers and sisters, all tormented with poverty, and her beauty that moves men to madness.² I will argue, taking up important occasions in the novel.

Tess's tragedy originates in the news that her father is a man descending from the noble family in ancient days. When he hears that, he is swollen with pride and becomes more neglectful of his work. He is leading a rather poor life, so that is really silly behavior. The first happening is the accidental death of their horse, Prince. Prince which is the only hard worker collides with the mail wagon and dies. Their life becomes poorer. Her father who got drunk and could not drive should take responsibility, but Tess, who took over her father's work, drove the wagon and met the accident, does not blame him. She only blames herself; " 'Tis all my doing — all mine! . . . What will mother and father live on now? " (p.23). She strongly suffers from a guilty conscience that she killed Prince. I can see she has a strong sense of responsibility.

Tess is raped by Alec and comes back home. Her mother, who does not know her feelings toward him, hearing that she will not marry him, says; " 'Why didn't ye think of doing some good for your family instead o' thinking only of yourself? . . . I did hope for something to come out o' this! To see what a pretty pair you and he made that day when you drove away together four months ago!' " (p.64). And when her mother hears how it happened, she scolds Tess, saying; " 'You ought to have been more careful, if you didn't mean to get him to make you wife!' " (p.64). Her mother's words are very cruel to Tess who had her body and heart bruised. It was she who forced Tess to go in spite of her husband's opposition, but she does not notice her fault. Perhaps she feels that Tess is responsible for the accident. The result is that her plan comes to nothing. If she is poor, she should seek mental happiness. There is possibility of it. But Tess does not blame her, and says with tears, asking her mother pardon for her mistake; " 'How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house four months ago. Why didn't you tell me there was danger in menfolk? Why didn't you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o' learning in that way, and you did not help me' " (p.64). Her parents lack love and have material desire, but Tess has marvelous human feelings.

At Talbothays Tess makes friends with three milkmaids, Marian, Izz and Retty. She also meets Angel Clare. All three girls love Angel, but he neglects them and comes near to Tess. Tess keeps down her love, because she thinks she has no qualification to marry such a fine man. And she asks him to marry one of them. But he refuses to be diverted and seeks to marry her. She is grateful, but she trembles with fear when she thinks of Angel. Why does she? Noriko Kitawaki states that it comes from the fact that Angel is a man who belongs to the upper middle class. The society to which he belongs will rumour about Tess, and he will lose his love if he hears the rumour. Tess always asks herself whether she is qualified as his wife, and she worries herself thinking that she is not. She suffers with fear and thinks that she will lose him who is more precious than her life.³ She cannot hide the truth from such a fine man as Angel. So she confesses her fault with a letter. She thrusts it into his room, but it is caught under the carpet. It can happen by accident. I understand how Tess is devoted and full of love. She does not desire her own gain. She is really touching. Three other girls hear that Tess got engaged and kiss her warmly. Marian says, " 'You will think of us when you be his wife, Tess, and of how we told 'ee that we loved him, and how we tried not to hate you, and did not hate you, and could not hate you, because you was his choice, and we never hoped to be chose by him' " (p.157). It is because Tess has always taken the part of three girls in a modest manner. Their gentleness is impressive. After that, they help her whenever she faces difficulties.

Angel changes his attitude when he has heard Tess's confession on the night of their wedding. He says, " 'O Tess, forgiveness does not apply to the case. You were one person; now you are another.' . . . He looked upon her as a species of impostor; a guilty woman in the guise of an innocent one" (p.179). Tess never has such an ill will against him whatever he did. It is a foolishness of Angel's. But he was born in a stern minister's family and taught that he must marry a woman who is a fine Christian. So it is not the problem whether he forgives Tess's past or not, but whether he denies his values and morals which he has had. This attitude which Angel has chosen causes the tragedy of Tess. Tess ought to be relieved if Angel showed a little sympathy and compassion to her. However, when Tess parts from him, she says, " 'I agree to the conditions, Angel; because you know best what my punishment ought to be; only—only—don't make it more than I can bear!' That was all she said on the matter" (p.199). Angel can act as he likes because she does not criticize and she is obedient. Tess steps into the tragedy as a result of her own virtue.

After that, Tess works hard at Flintcomb-Ash Farm. The work there is extremely hard because of the barren soil and inclement season. At this time, Tess happens to meet Alec again, and he follows and begins to tempt her. I have mentioned about this part in my summary of the novel. So I do not repeat again.

Tomoko Tachibana, in her essay, states about it, referring to the former scene where Alec pursued Tess who was leaving Trantridge. At that time he said to her "I am ready to pay to the uttermost farthing. You know you need not work in the fields or the dairies again. You know you may clothe yourself with the best" (p.60). According to Tachibana, the compensation which Alec offered was to make a mistress of Tess and make her live in luxury. He tried to buy his way into her body. Tess declared that she did not love him, and bared her mind, saying, "a lie on this thing would do the most good to me now; but I have honour enough left, little as 'tis, not to tell that lie" (p.61). In other words, even Tess who could not do worldly calculation knew that it would be advantageous to her if she told a lie that she loved him. But she could not forgive herself to do that because of her self-respect. Alec possessed the body of Tess, but he could not have her heart, and it was his miscalculation.⁴ Tess is so honest that she cannot tell a lie. She always thinks of her family who live in poverty. She never loses her hope that Angel will return back to her. She never complains, and she can bear trials. She is really admirable. And she is pureness itself. At last, however, she writes a desperate letter to Angel. But she cannot get an answer from him. The conviction that she is deserted by her husband, with her father's death and the family's extreme distress, drives her to Alec.

When Angel returns home to Eminster, he finds her letter there. Immediately he starts to look for her. At last he learns that she is living at Sandbourne. He goes there and visits the house where she stays with Alec. When she sees him, Tess can only say, "Too late, too late!" (p.298). However much he repents his own cold-heartedness, she says, "Too late!" What pathetic words that move us to tears!

When Tess who has been injured bodily and mentally is arrested by the chasers, she says "I am ready" and obeys meekly. Why can she be so calm and resigned? The author says, "'Justice' was done, and the President of the Immortals (in Aeschylean phrase) had ended his sport with Tess" (p.314). There is no help, but I do not want to say so. Because their true hearts were bound together for a few days while they were escaping. Tess has feared that Angel's love turns into contempt someday. Now she will not be despised by him and she can get an eternal sleep. Her family are supported by her sacrifice. The life of Tess is full of blessing. I may say there is salvation.

Having finished reading the novel, I can see, in many scenes, that Tess is full of affection, that she does not blame anyone for their mistakes and takes a very humble attitude towards other people, and that she has a strong sense of responsibility and does what she thinks right. These characteristics of hers are, in a sense, defects. And they make her life tragic. Reversely, how are they in a good sense? What will we do when we come to a tragic situation? First, everybody is driven to

despair. We will do all we can about ourselves. We know very well how difficult it is to have hope in this world. Tess, however, seems as if she did not accept her tragedy as tragedy. She never gives up even if she is in a painful situation which is difficult to any others. She always has hope in her heart. If she does not think there is certainty of another chance, it is all over for her.

It is one's freedom to choose one's aim, what one aims at or how one lives in one's life. How did Tess live her life? Even if she lived in poor and merciless environments, she did not live only from regard to herself, but always thinking of what she should do at the expense of her life. That act is measured not by how many services she did, but how much love she showed. Sacrifice is to practice real love. It is love that one offers one's life for others. Tess did nothing wrong. So she might blame others and escape, saying that she was not wrong. But she did not do that. She accepted others' faults as hers, and she showed them love.

There are the following words in *the Bible*: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."⁵ Tess really preferred giving to receiving. One always has worries, and one is ready to complain. One tries to seek happiness from the depths of despair. One is self-centred. I have written this thesis, and changed my mind about happiness. Happiness comes not only when one feels pleasure and joy. One is blessed and happy when one makes others happy. The words in *the Bible* may sound beautiful. But it is difficult to carry them out. Because being devoted goes with pain. Tess could do it. It is not from haughtiness which condescends to give, but an act of humble love. It is real love. One has one's view of value in one's life. I learn from Tess who lived through with love and courage in any difficulty. The author loved such Tess and wanted to insist on her pureness and strength.

Notes

1. Scott Elledge, ed., "*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*": *A Norton Critical Edition* (New York: Norton, 1991). All subsequent references are to this edition.
2. "An Essay on 'Justice was done'" in *13 Chapters about "Tess"*, ed., The Society for Studying the Nineteenth English Literature (Tokyo: Eichousha, 1995), p.63.
3. "Sexuality and Double Standards" in *13 Chapters about "Tess"*, p.134.
4. "An Essay on 'Justice was done'" in *13 Chapters about "Tess"*, p.67.
5. *The Bible, the Acts*, 20:35.

Books Consulted

- Ellege, Scott. *"Tess of the d'Urbervilles": A Norton Critical Edition*. New York: Norton, 1991.
- Inoue, Souji and Isida, Eiji, trans. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles in Japanese Translation*. Tokyo: Iwanami Bunko, 1960.
- Society for Studying the Nineteenth English Literature, ed. *13 Chapters about "Tess"*. Tokyo: Eichousha, 1995.
- The Bible*.

Comment by the tutor

Miss Takizawa is a student handicapped by being deaf. It is surprising that she should have finished the curriculum of the English Department in Keiwa College with the graduation thesis to crown her achievement. I have chosen her thesis to be published here in *Veritus*, not only because it is a good paper, but because it shows that any student could do as much if he/she worked hard.

(卒論指導教員 伊藤豊治)