A SCIENTIFIC READING OF THE PROTAGONIST'S TRAGEDY IN THOMAS HARDY'S *TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES*¹

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บทคัดย่อ

นวนิยายของทอมัส ฮาร์ดี้ล้วนข้องเกี่ยวกับความทุกข์
ระทมและเคราะห์ร้ายของตัวละคร นักวิจารณ์วรรณคดี
พยายามอธิบายโครงเรื่องดังกล่าวผ่านการศึกษาชีวิตของ
ตัวละครหลักซึ่งส่วนใหญ่เป็นชนชั้นล่างหาเช้ากินค่ำ
นักวรรณคดีบางคนศึกษาสภาพสังคมสมัยวิกตอเรียนที่
มีกฎทางสังคมเคร่งครัดและมองว่ากฎเหล่านั้นเป็น
ต้นเหตุของความทุกข์ อย่างไรก็ตามนี้มุ่งอธิบาย
เคราะห์ร้ายของตัวละครหลักในนวนิยายเรื่อง *Tess of
the d'Urbervilles* ผ่านมุมมองวิทยาศาสตร์ โดยศึกษาใน
บริบทของวิกตอเรียนซึ่งความก้าวหน้าทางวิทยาศาสตร์
ท้าทายความเชื่อดั้งเดิมของคริสต์ศาสนา อีกทั้งยังศึกษา

ผู้ประพันธ์ซึ่งสนใจฟิสิกส์วิทยาศาสตร์และมีข้อกังขาต่อ
ศาสนา บทความฉบับนี้ชี้ให้เห็นว่าเคราะห์ร้ายที่ตัว
ละครหลักประสบอธิบายได้ด้วยทฤษฎีการคัดเลือกโดย
ธรรมชาติซึ่งเสนอว่าชีวิตมนุษย์เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการ
คัดเลือกโดยธรรมชาติและเป็นผลผลิตของความบังเอิญ
พระเจ้าไม่ใช่ผู้กำหนดดังที่คริสต์ศาสนากล่าวไว้
นอกจากนี้ทฤษฎีพันธุกรรมยังอธิบายการกระทำของตัว
ละคร ทฤษฎีสุดท้ายที่นำมาใช้คือทฤษฎีการสะกดจิต
ผู้วิจัยยังใช้ทฤษฎีนี้ในการตีความฉากจากหนึ่งซึ่งนัก
วิจารณ์วรรณคดีถกเถียงกันมากที่สุด

Abstract

Thomas Hardy's novels are known for the portrayal of their protagonists' ill fortune and tragedies. Attempts have been made to understand the pessimism that pervades his novels through the study of the harsh life of the rural proletariat, the class into which many of his protagonists fall, or of Victorian society itself which, with its forms of social constraint, limited people's life and was a cause of unhappiness. This paper offers an alternative way of understanding the pessimism in Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891) through a scientific reading of the protagonist's tragic life. By contextualizing this novel in the Victorian period when advances in science challenged religious belief and by considering the author's interest in science and his ambivalent attitude towards religion, this paper aims to show that the calamitous life of the protagonist can be explained by the theory of natural selection in which living things are

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controlled by chance and randomness as opposed to religious belief which holds that God is behind human destiny. This reading also ties in with the theory and power of heredity which denies the individual any real choice, making the protagonist unable to control her own actions. The last approach will look at mesmerism which can shed light on the most important and controversial scene in the novel and which greatly contributes to the protagonist's tragedy.

Introduction

Thomas Hardy's poem "The Convergence of the Twain" (1912) which describes the sinking of the Titanic is elucidative in understanding Hardy's view of life and the universe and his depiction of them in his literary works. The poem shows that whilst the Titanic was being built in Belfast, the iceberg was simultaneously being formed in the North Atlantic and the Titanic was fated to collide with it; in other words, the "convergence" of these two was predestined. It was an inevitable tragedy, controlled by those forces, identified in the poem as the "Immanent Will, that stirs and urges everything" and "the Spinner of the Years", a reminder of the three Fates in Greek mythology. The "Will" and "Spinner" here clearly refer to fate, destiny and predestination. As in his poetry, these forces are destructive in his novels; they operate behind a series of unfortunate events and the tragic lives of the protagonists in his fictions and end with the death of a main character. His works clearly represent a pessimistic and agnostic view of life.

"Scepticism", "agnosticism" and "atheism" were frequently heard words in the Victorian age when the literal truth of the Bible was challenged and people's religious faith was undermined by scientific progress. As Professor Richard J. Evans suggested in his lecture on "The Victorians: Religion and Science" at Gresham College, London, in 2011, apart from various versions of the Christian faith that attempted to dispute with the established religion of the Church of England, "in the longer run, the greatest threat to faith was to be posed by science". Early in the period, Sir Charles Lyell's *The Principles of Geology* (1830-33) was introduced only to shock people by suggesting that there was no evidence for Noah's flood and that the world was a million-years older than God. In 1844, Robert Chambers anonymously published *Vestiges of the Natural History of Science* which asserted that human beings were just one kind of animal, "considered zoologically, and without regard to the distinct character assigned to him" as quoted in Evans' lecture. Another important work was David Strauss' *Life of Jesus* (1835) which was translated into English by George Eliot in 1846. Using the modern method of historical criticism, the so-called Higher Criticism, it argues that there is insufficient evidence for the existence of the historical Jesus. Science clearly brought rational knowledge into conflict with religion and, as John Kucich suggests, "A series of scientific theories (primarily those of geology and astronomy in the first half of the century, and those of evolutionary biology in the second) put into question the biblical account of divine creation, and of human pre-eminence

among species” (2005:120). Evans also noted that many Victorians initially reacted to these works by taking refuge in natural theology which attempted to prove the existence of God through the observation of nature and emphasized the grand divine plan of nature. However, it became increasingly difficult to adhere to a naturalistic theology from the second half of the century onward and more and more people became skeptics and agnostics. The most influential work in the latter part of the century was Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*³ (1859) whose theory of evolution greatly contributed to people’s ever stronger scepticism.

Among the intellectuals who were exposed to these scientific works was Hardy whose religious faith consequently waned. According to Pamela Dalziel’s study of Hardy’s religious beliefs, as he himself said in his letters, he was raised “according to strict [High] Church principles” (Purdy and Millgate, 1978: 259). As a child, he regularly attended the parish church of Stinsford and he aspired to enter the church, his youthful enthusiasm for the clerical life manifesting itself in his attempt at writing a sermon which Dalziel notes was Evangelical in its tone and evangelistic in its favour (2009:72). Dalziel also observes that during the late 1850s and early 1860s, “Hardy had a personal faith that was ardent, orthodox, and Evangelically

inflected” in contradistinction to his unimpassioned portrayal of his own churchmanship and his determination to adhere to his High Church side (2009:72). His Evangelical sympathies, however, did not dissuade him from his High Church leanings. From the late 1850s until the mid-1860s, in fact, Hardy worshipped in both High and Low churches and while such dual churchmanship was thought to be unusual by mid-Victorian standards, it reflected his theological openness (Dalziel, 2009: 73). It can be concluded that the period of his late teens to early twenties was, as Hardy subsequently wrote, his “theological days” when he referred to himself as an “orthodox English churchman” (quoted in Dalziel, 2009: 73).

In his mid-twenties Hardy began to question Christian orthodoxy but biographers have suggested that “[a]lmost nothing is known of what led to Hardy’s loss of faith” (Dalziel, 2009:73). Documentary evidence of his attitude towards dogmatic religious belief scarcely survives from the mid-1860s to the early 1880s and the only reference to this crisis of faith in his own autobiography, *Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* (1984), is both short and vague. His plan to study at Cambridge and to become a curate, he wrote, “fell through less because of its difficulty than from a conscientious feeling, that, after some theological study he could hardly take the step with honour while holding the views that on examination he found himself to hold” (53). Dalziel also notes that “the views” are never specified and that there is no clear suggestion why Hardy abandoned his university plan (2009:73). It is not even

³ The full title runs *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection on the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. This paper refers to this work, briefly, as *Origin of Species*.

known when he ceased attending the church. Regardless of whatever led him to reject Christian orthodoxy, Hardy's new religious and philosophical position, which, as a majority of critics and biographers have agreed, he maintained throughout the rest of his life, was established through "his inability to be persuaded by theodicean arguments" (Dalziel, 2009:74). In other words, Hardy, who was acutely aware of the suffering of the world, was unable to bring himself to believe in a benevolent and omnipotent creator. Whilst still acknowledging the significance of religion and the Church he perceived what he himself called "rational religion" for "thoughtful people who have ceased to believe in supernatural theology" (quoted in Dalziel, 2009: 76-77).

Hardy's wide range reading of heterodox, agnostic and scientific works severely shook his religious faith. Indeed, as he himself declared in his *Literary Notebook I*; "My pages show harmony of view with Charles Darwin, T. H. Huxley, Herbert Spencer, David Hume, John Stuart Mill and others..." (quoted in Levine, 2009:36). There have been studies by critics and biographers alike to elucidate his loss of faith from various perspectives and, whilst not dismissing other influential readings which contributed to his loss of faith, this paper aims to engage only with the way in which his scientific reading contributed to his rejection of Christian orthodoxy and consequently to his pessimistic view of life and also intends to show how the protagonist's tragic life in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) can be read through a scientific lens.

Darwinism

Darwin's evolutionary theory of variations and natural selection contests the Christian notion of creationism. This work theorizes that all species evolve, through modification, by means of natural selection from the original species rather than being created independently. Even though Darwin's use of the word "creation" in his work is ambiguous, its reference to creationism can be read as an indirect challenge to the Christian belief in a separate act of creation. *Origin of Species* is particularly controversial in its implicit conclusions about human beings in the scheme of evolution. In spite of Darwin's omission of human beings from his discussion of descent with modification, he argues that all living organic beings are potentially included and strongly implies that human beings are no exception in the evolutionary scheme, though he does pose the question of whether there is any limit to his theory. Later, in *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), Darwin applied evolutionary theory to human evolution to less public outrage than expected; *The Descent of Man*, with its illustration of humans in the scheme of evolution, did not meet with such a hostile reception since people were well aware of the strong implications concerning humans in evolution in *Origin of Species*.

Darwin's evolutionary theory challenges not only the religious belief in a single creation but also the notion of a benevolent God. In a letter (dated May 22, 1860) to his friend the botanist Asa Gray, a reviewer of *Origin of Species*, Darwin

wrote: "I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidae with the express intention of their feeding within in the living bodies of caterpillars" (Francis D., 1896:554-5), thus expressing his scepticism about the benevolence of God, if there be a God at all, and His designs for such a cruel reproduction. One important fact which should be noted about *Origin of Species* is that it is not solely about progress as it was then and is still now often misinterpreted. As Angelique Richardson suggests, "Natural selection (the survival of those individuals who were best able to fit, or adapt to, their environment) worked toward adaptation, not progress"; evolution can move backwards (2005:212). As a result, the idea of physical and moral degeneracy was prevalent in society.

Darwin's *Origin of Species*, including *The Descent of Man*, had an immensely negative impact upon society and Hardy. The theory of natural selection and the randomness of evolutionary variation were contributory, in an immeasurable way, to pessimism in the way they opened the door to the notion of the absence of God or, at least, of an indifferent God and the vision of the insignificance of man in the cosmic process (Kucich, 2001:224). Hardy himself wrote in *Life and Work* that he was one of the "earliest acclaimers" of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, his pessimism being "fundamentally anchored in his conviction—bolstered by scientific theory, particularly Darwin's late works—that human life lacked cosmic purpose" (Kucich, 2005:130) or meaning for the world itself. His novels overwhelmingly

dramatize this scientific pessimism by demonstrating the protagonist as an insignificant being in the universe and the victim of cruel chance (Kucich, 2005:130).

Tess of the d'Urbervilles portrays its protagonist as an insignificant being and not superior to other animals as declared in the concept of the "Great Chain of Being"⁴. Belonging to the rural proletariat, Tess is constantly in search of work. On many occasions she is placed against the vast background of a field and described, not like a human being, but as an insignificant animal. She is described as a small fly in the middle of a vast area: "Not quite sure of her direction Tess stood still upon the hemmed expanse of verdant flatness, like a fly on a billiard-table of indefinite length" (120). Not only is she portrayed as a small fly but also as one in a field of indefinite length, becoming almost an unrecognizable being. The description here reinforces the sense of man's insignificance and is indeed reminiscent of Darwin's proclamation in his *Origin of Species*: "How fleeting are the wishes and efforts of man! How short his time and consequently how poor will his products be, compared with those accumulated by nature during whole geological periods" (63). Not only is Tess compared to an animal, at one of the most miserable moments of her life, she is reduced to becoming a part of the animal world. After her separation from Angel Clare, her one

⁴ The concept of hierarchy or the place of beings in the universe; at the top of the Chain God presides and so downwards follow Angelic beings, humanity, animals, plants and minerals.

night husband who leaves her after discovering her past involving her sexual indiscretion, Tess wanders from place to place in search of a job again. One night, she sleeps under a tree and wakes up the next day to discover, all around her, dying game birds that have been shot. The metaphorical significance of the dying birds in relation to Tess is clear; they symbolize victimization and insignificance since they have been shot for human pleasure and they also symbolize Tess' desperate condition. To a great extent, she differs in no way from those dying birds, physically being placed among them and figuratively having no God to protect her since she is one of world's animals. The scene of Tess' execution at the end of the novel also diminishes her significance. It is performed offstage and observed from a distance. When it is done, everybody just moves on. Her death here is similar to the death of those birds, insignificant and having not the least impact on the universe.

The notion that God is absent from the world, indifferent to human life and detached from his creation is prominent in this novel and explains Tess' destruction. The novel frequently refers to the absence of angelic and ancestral guardians and suggests that this absence is contributive to the human tragedy. A guardian angel, according to Christian belief, can be both a deceased relative of a human and one sent by God. At the opening of the novel when Tess, still an innocent country girl, attends the traditional May-Day dance, the hero of the novel, Angel Clare, happens to pass by and decides to join the dance. However, he does not choose her as his partner. The novel makes clear that Tess's ancestral

angel does not help her capture Angel's attention at the May-Day dance: "Pedigree, ancestral skeletons, monumental record, the d'Urbervilles lineaments, did not help Tess in her life's battle yet. Even to the extent of attracting to her a dancing-partner over the heads of the commonest peasantry" (32). If he had danced with her, they might have married and lived happily ever after and Tess laments that missed chance to Angel when they are reunited towards the end of the novel. When Tess is seduced by Alec, whom she thinks is her relative, the narrator echoes: "But, might some say, where was Tess's guardian angel? Where was the Providence of her faith?" (82). Lacking help from the d'Urbervilles' or God's angel, Tess is destroyed. Hardy's question "Where was the Providence of her faith?" clearly reflects his loss of faith in such things as God and His Providence. Tess is a virtuous and good woman but why she is not predestined to happiness; why is her life like a "blighted star" (37) and why, on the other hand, is the ruthless Alec bestowed with wealth which empowers him to seduce other girls, including Tess? Struggling on her own like other animals, she has been deserted by her guardian angel who is supposed to protect her from any dangers.

In the absence of divine Providence, Tess' tragedy is more a product of chance than fate and predestination because these two words are redolent of religious and supernatural denotation. The word *predestination* is clearly associated with Christian theology being defined by the Oxford Dictionary online as "the doctrine that God has ordained all that will happen"

and *fate* as “the development of events outside a person’s control, regarded as predetermined by a supernatural power”. Since these words give the impression of a belief in the supernatural, a belief in fate appears to be contradictory to the image, which Hardy, as an agnostic, favoured and strongly promoted, of a “rational religion” without superstitious associations. Indeed, if as Sternberg observes “in a God-directed world there is no room for coincidence” (1985, 142), Hardy’s universe, which this paper is trying to argue, is neither ruled nor directed by God has humans that are part of a neutral universe whose network of cause and effect subjugates them to the workings of chance. In addition, it should be noted that the word “fate” in this novel is very close to, or even synonymous with, the word “Providence”. When Angel informs his father of his potential wife (Tess): “[Angel] said that fate or providence had thrown in his way a woman who possessed every qualification...” (181). This suggests Angel’s belief in God and divine Providence and points to Hardy’s ascribing the word “fate” with a religious character like Angel and a superstitious character like Mrs. Durbeyfield who declares that she tries “[Tess’s] fate in the *Fortune-Teller*” (33).

In keeping with the idea that life depends on chance and the randomness of evolution and that chance undermines the traditional belief in Providence and predestination in the certainty of progress, Hardy’s novel clearly dramatizes the workings of chance in the creation of Tess’ destiny. Hardy copied into his notebook the words from George B.

Shaw’s *Back to Methuselah* (1918-20) concerning Darwinism, “the Darwinism process may be ascribed as a chapter of accidents” (quoted in Richardson, 2005: 212) and from this quotation Richardson sees “chance and coincidence” as “a plot device that Hardy is often taken to task for overusing” (2005:212). In addition, the notion of chance fascinated or, rather, grieved both scientists and Hardy. As Kucich suggests, “late Victorian scientists...bemoaned the randomness of evolution [and] Hardy’s novels also brood on the workings of chance in creating human destiny” (2005:130).

When God is absent, or least, indifferent, Tess, like other humans, is left to struggle on her own, becoming a victim of chance which is often tragic; a series of cruel randomness brings about her destruction. The novel opens with John Durbeyfield, the father of Tess, being stopped by Parson Tringham to be informed that his family is descended from the ancient and knightly family of the d’Urbervilles. Poor and insecure, John sends Tess to claim kin with another d’Urbervilles family whom he believes to be his relatives. The said d’Urbervilles are not his relative but, in fact, the Stoke family which has adopted the name and lives in a nearby village. Once Tess has gone to work for Alec (Stoke) d’Urbervilles, she is seduced and ruined. It may be the workings of fate or simply by chance that the parson forgot to mention to John that the “Stoke-d’Urbervilles [at Trantridge] were no more d’Urbervilles of the true tree than he was himself” (44). Had John been told that, Tess would not have been sent to “claim kin”. It is also by chance that the ruthless

Alec happens to purchase the d'Urbervilles name and lives within Marlott neighbourhood. At the May-Day Dance, Angel Clare misses an opportunity to dance with Tess as mentioned earlier because "owing to her backwardness, he had not observed her" (23). She happens to be behind other girls and thus is not seen by Angel. He laments that missed chance, "he wished that he had asked her; he wished he had inquired her name" (24). Before the wedding, she wishes to confess to Angel her past with Alec. Lacking courage, Tess sends a letter to Angel instead but the confession is accidentally slipped under the carpet at the threshold of his lodging. If the letter had been received, there would have been the possibility of forgiveness. When Angel learns about her past disgrace, he leaves for Brazil. His choice of Brazil for his departure shows the workings of chance since his "original intention had not been emigration to Brazil but a northern or eastern farm in his own country. He had come to this place in a fit of desperation, the Brazil movement among English agriculturists having by chance coincided with his desire to escape from his past existence" (359-60). Knowing that he still loves Tess, Angel comes back to her but only to learn that she is now Alec's mistress. It is too late now that Angel accidentally finds himself in the wrong place at the wrong time; reconciliation is out of question. F. B. Pinion suggests that "the tragic situation created by irresolution, confession, irreconcilability, and submission is 'the chance of thing'" (126). Hardy, in an interview with Raymond Blathwayt (Black and White 27, August 1892), defended Tess's purity when Blathwayt said that her

act of murder (Tess kills Alec at the end of the novel when Angel comes back) was 'absolutely unjustifiable':

"but I still maintain that her innate purity remained intact to the very last; though I frankly own that a certain outward purity left her on her last fall. I regard her then as being in the hands of circumstance, not morally responsible, a mere corpse drifting with the current to her end" (quoted in Pinion, 1977:134).

Hardy here states clearly that Tess is a victim of circumstance, random events over which she has no control. Almost all the events in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* happen by cruel chance and the plot is, thus, inevitably tragic. The narrator also declares after Tess has met Angel for the first time: "In the ill-judged execution of the well-judged plan of things the call seldom produces the comer, the man to love rarely coincides with the hour of loving...[S]uch completeness is not to be prophesied, or even conceived as possible" (48-49). Instead of meeting Angel who is to be her soul mate, Tess happens to meet her seducer first. Again, Tess is always in the wrong place at the wrong time. Kucich reads the above quotation as Hardy's attempt to "illustrate the prominence of chance in shaping human destiny, and the consequent dimming of faith in progress" (2001:225).

Finally, Tess' tragedy can also be read in the broader context of "the survival of the fittest". Developing from Darwin's evolutionary theory, Herbert Spencer

coined the phrase “the survival of the fittest” in *Principles of Biology* (1864) and this concept found its way to becoming a social theory, the so-called Social Darwinism, whereby racial and social hierarchies became biologized. The idea of the survival of the fittest, when it has been applied to Hardy’s novels by critics, holds that the world in his novels is in a constant state of warfare where each species competes with others in the struggle for survival. Basically speaking, Tess is not strong enough or perhaps is not made strong enough and that is why she is unfit. However, this idea was picked up quite differently by Hardy. For him, it is not all about the fittest or the best that surviving but the most in harmony with the environment as Hardy’s copy of Theodore Watts-Dunton into his notebook shows: “science tells us that, in the struggle for life, the surviving organism is not necessarily that which is absolutely best in an ideal sense, though it must be that which is most in harmony with the surroundings conditions” (quoted in Richardson, 2005:205). The relationship between the organism and the environment is crucial here. Tess fails to be in harmony with the environment which is, in this case, the social class to which she belongs. Being a member of the rural proletariat, Tess appears to be different from those of her social rank. For one thing, she is of “knightly family”. In the Victorian age, the lower class was believed to be biologically determined to be less intelligent and morally inferior but Tess is intelligent, attractive and morally sensitive and Angel is surprised to discover in Tess

“the ache of modernism⁵” (140), partly because of her noble descent. Tess is too sensitive and too fragile in the cruel world of the poor. Her marriage to Angel is cut short because, again, she is not in harmony with middle-class’ Christian morality or at least with Angel’s idealism.

Heredity

Closely related to fate is the idea of free will which should be mentioned here before embarking on the discussion of heredity with which it is also connected. Human free will was a subject of heavy debate during the Victorian age. In psychology, the question of the individual’s capacity to gain control over his emotions, ideas and behaviour and the fostering of both mental and character development was discussed throughout the century. As Athena Vrettos, in quoting Sally Shuttleworth, has noted, there were conflicting psychological models in the nineteenth century, “one emphasizing the individual as ‘a powerless material organism, caught within the operations of a wider field of force’, the other emphasizing the individual as ‘an autonomous unit with power of self-control’” (2005:68). Associationist

⁵ The phrase “the ache of modernism” has been variously interpreted by critics. Some of them read this phrase as referring to certain qualities not found in the lower class. Angel, before coming to the daily farm, has preconceived “[t]he conventional farm-folk of his imagination—personified in the newspaper-press by the pitiable dummy known as Hodge”. But, in the farm, he meets Tess whom he considers to be different from other rural folks due to her intelligence.

psychologists and psychiatrists in the late nineteenth century maintained that both the inheritance of internal structure and social and environmental determinism account for the development of human character, thought and habits of behaviour (Vrettos, 2005:71). In philosophy, John Stuart Mill argued in *System of Logic* (1843) and *On Liberty* (1859) that humans, as rational and self-governing beings, are able to choose their own path of life and action; it is even their duty to do so because humans have free will as Mallett's interpretation of Mill's *System of Logic* illustrates:

To argue that our actions are caused is not to claim that they are compelled: while it is true that "our volitions and actions are invariable consequents of our antecedent states of minds (Mill [1843] 1987:25), it does not follow that we could not act otherwise if we wished, since that wish would itself be a new antecedent. Except in cases of monomania, the causes on which action depends—our motives—"are never uncontrollable" (Mill [1843] 1987:25) (2009:29)

Mill goes on to assert that not only an action but also, to some extent, a character is something that humans can choose (Mallett, 2009:29). Hardy disagrees with Mill, particularly with his observations on human character. As J. H. Miller argues in the case of Hardy's characters: "Their distinctive natures are imposed upon them, willy-nilly. They cannot help being what they are, and act accordingly to" (quoted

in Mallett, 2009:29-30). According to this interpretation, Hardy's characters are what they are and that determines their fate. Any real choice they think they have and any choice making them think they are exercising it is, in fact, dictated by who they are. Humans do not have free will although they seem to have it.

The question of what makes people who they are (and therefore act accordingly) preoccupied Victorian intellectuals, particularly scientists who became interested in the theory of heredity. According to this scientific discipline, mental and physical traits are genetically determined. Violence, criminality, vice and even alcoholism were also discussed as possible traits passed on from one generation to another. The role of heredity in child psychology, for example, was also increasingly discussed decades after Darwin's *The Descent of Man* (1871) and *The Expression of Emotion in Men and Animals* (1872). The human "mind was not a blank slate, rather, as William Preyer argued, it had been written upon 'before birth', with many illegible, nay unrecognizable and invisible marks, the traces of long-gone generation" (Vrettos, 2005:73). Hardy's interest in this scientific discussion of heredity was said by some critics to have begun with his reading of *Origin of Species*.

Hardy's sixth volume of poems, *Moments of Vision* (1916), contains two poems dealing directly with heredity. In "Heredity", as the title of the poem clearly suggests, the speaker considers himself a product of an intergenerational network: "I am the family face", and that even if

“Flesh perishes, I live on/Projecting trait and trance/Through time to times anon”. In “Pedigree” the notion of heredity appears to be disturbing to the speaker since his own individuality is undermined. By looking at his “chronicler”, the speaker is left horrified by the idea that his physical, and behavioural as well as mental processes are an inherited predisposition:

That every heave and coil and move I made
Within my brain, and in my mood and speech,
Was in the glass portrayed
As long forestalled by their so making it

Considering himself to be in a vast chain of inheritance, the speaker concludes, “I am merest mimicker and counterfeit!” Thus the theory of heredity seems responsible for creating pessimism in Hardy’s novels. The immutability of character and the heredity flaw emphasise “the non-progressiveness of human life, and contribute[s] to the pervasive atmosphere of decay and degeneration.” (Kucich, 2001:225)

The d’Urbervilles’ ancestors pass on to Tess their physical appearance as well as the trait of violence. At Bramshurst Court, where Tess and Angel spend the night after their marriage, the portraits of the d’Urbervilles ladies display their “long pointed features, narrow eyes, and smirk of the one, so suggestive of merciless treachery, the bill-hook nose, large teeth, and bold eyes of the other, suggesting arrogance to the point of ferocity” (235). The novel makes clear that Tess’s “fine features are unquestionably traceable in these exaggerated forms” (236).

Presumably, these two female ancestors of Tess are hundreds of years away from Tess, yet there appears a traceable physical resemblance and though Tess’s “ferocity” does not appear in her eyes it hides somewhere in her waiting to come out at anytime.

The murder committed by one of the d’Urbervilles members transmits to Tess the trait of violence. Patricia Ingham observes that Tess’s violence surfaces once at Flintcomb-Ash. After Alec insults Angel’s negligence in front of Tess, the d’Urbervilles’s “armed progenitors” momentarily come to Tess as she throws the glove at Alec.

“One of her leather groves, which she had taken off to eat her skimmer cake, lay in her lap, and without the slightest warning she passionately swung the glove by the gauntlet directly in his face. It was heavy and thick as a warrior’s, and it struck him flat on the mouth. Fancy might have regarded the act as the recrudescence of a trick in which her armed progenitors were not unpracticed”. (351) (My underline)

This passage suggests that this action may largely be the result of the trait inherited from her predecessors. At the end of the novel Tess also repeats her ancestor’s crime (the one committed in a coach as the legend goes). That is, she kills Alec. Indeed, her act of murder is ultimate violence or one of the “recrudescence[s]...which her armed progenitors were not unpracticed”. Whilst Tess is aware of her capability of

performing so violent an act as she admits, "I fear long ago, when I struck him on the mouth with my glove, that I might do it [kill Alec] some day for the trap he set for me in my simple youth" (407), it is Angel who links her violence to her heredity:

"He looked at her as she lay upon his shoulder, weeping with happiness; and wondered what obscure strain in the d'Urbervilles blood had led to this aberration...There momentarily flashed through his mind that the family tradition of the coach and murder might have arisen because the d'Urbervilles had been known to do these things." (408)

Angel is convinced that Tess' violence is inherited. Her violence has been inscribed upon her since birth and it is almost impossible to control or eliminate it. It can be concluded that her violence, passed from her ancestors, forces her violent and, later, fatal outburst which consequently leads to her destruction and execution.

Mesmerism

Whilst the theory of heredity was considered to be contributive to the formation of the human mind and character, mesmerism raised the question of the power of one person to manipulate the body and mind of another. According to Vrettos' study of mesmerism, originally termed "animal magnetism", this theory was introduced by the Viennese physician Franz Anton Mesmer who claimed that there was a powerful magnetic fluid that

connected heavenly and animate bodies and that he could manipulate this fluid, which is only found in humans and animals, to assuage human suffering. Reaching its peak of popularity between the 1830s and the 1860s with a further revival at the end of the century, mesmerism, however, was marginalized from the scientific mainstream throughout the century since it was considered not sufficiently scientific and was viewed with medical scepticism. Mesmerism, nevertheless, received considerable attention from the scientific and medical community and the crucial mesmeric questions about "free will, the connection between mind and body, the presence of invisible forces in nature...the power of human influence and suggestibility, the permeability of mental boundaries and the reliability of memory" (Vrettos, 2005: 79) constantly appeared in magazines and intellectual debates.

Mesmerism was viewed with skepticism due, not only to its efficacy and validity, but also to its association with social and sexual power. James Brad claimed that "the mesmeric, or hypnotic, trance was a product of human imagination and attention, rather than magnetic or electric fluids, and involved a voluntary suspension of the will" (quoted in Vrettos, 2005:79) and it was Brad who substituted the term "mesmerism" with "hypnotism". In addition, mesmerism became associated with male social and sexual authority (Winter quoted in Vrettos, 2005:79). Although both men and women could be mesmerized, this tool of dominance was generally used by men alone because men's minds were medically and

traditionally believed to be stronger than women's. Mesmerism was not only believed to be used to control women's minds and bodies but also their sexuality because women were made to enter a (sexually) "ecstatic state under male physical direction" (Pearl, 2006:163). The mesmeric session, in addition, was sexually controversial because it involved close physical contact, with the male mesmerist staring deeply into his patient's eyes and moving his hands over the (female) patient's body in order to arrange the body's magnetic fluid. There was a huge anxiety in society over this kind of practice which could lead to the sexual exploitation of women.

This idea of "animal magnetism" as associated with sexuality or male sexual charisma was picked up by novelists. Vrettos argues that literature involved mesmerism's aspect of male social and sexual authority: "Fictional representations of mesmerism and hypnotism in the nineteenth century often emphasize these disparities of gender and class" (2005:79). In Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Vrettos observes that Count Dracula's victims are exclusively women and his mesmeric power is associated with male sexual authority and demonic power (2005:79). In Charles Dickens' unfinished novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), Willis and Wynne suggests that the man's exercise of control over a woman's sexuality is made clear in the character of the malevolent John Jasper who penetrates Rosa Bud's mind to impose his sexual desire (2006:3). As Rosa states: "He has made a slave of me with his looks...When I play, he never moves his eyes from my

hands. When I sing, he never moves his eyes from my lips...I avoid his eyes but he forces me to see them without looking at them" (quoted in Willis and Wynne, 2006:3). John Jasper is not a practicing mesmerist, he is just a choirmaster who falls in love with Rosa Bud but he attempts to mesmerize her in order to possess her sexually.

Like Mr. Jasper, Alec who has been seen by many critics as the moustachioed seducer of Victorian melodrama, uses his sexual attractiveness to mesmerize Tess. When Tess goes to claim kinship with Alec for the first time, Alec's predatory sexuality can be seen as he guides Tess around his house, looking at her "in a way that makes her blush a little" (46). After he artfully feeds a ripened strawberry into her mouth, Tess becomes mesmerized, clearly not in Mesmer's medical sense where a mesmerist can direct his subject to his will, but rather in a state of trance. Whatever Alec offers Tess, she eats in "half-pleased, half-reluctant state" (47). It is possible that Alec knows that she is in a trance as a result of his exercising of his sex appeal and he furthers his exploitation to mesmerize Tess by walking her around the rose trees. It is reported that "[s]he obeyed like one in a dream, and when she could affix no more he himself tucked a bud or two into her hat, and heaped her basket with others in the prodigality of his bounty" (47). Alec then leads Tess to a tent where he sits smoking; he "watched her pretty and unconscious munching through the skeins of smoke that pervaded the tent" (47). While Alec drives Tess home, "he inclined his faced towards hers as if—" (48). Again, Alec knows that Tess

is still in a state of trance as he perhaps tries to kiss her. Tess only becomes mesmerized when she is away from Alec's presence and addressed by passers-by. Immediately, she "became aware of the spectacle she presented to their surprised vision: roses at her breast; roses and strawberries in her basket in the brim..." (50). Tess' obliviousness to her physical appearance here is extraordinary and it suggests that the whole scene is not a mere lower-class female's awe-filled response to the higher social status of a man but comes close to an act of mesmerism when Tess, in fact, is put into a trance by a man who is her social and sexual superior.

Tess becomes aware of Alec's sexual demeanour and prevents herself from being mesmerized while she is working with him by, for example, keeping a physical distance from him until they are in The Chase where the two are brought closely together. While driving Tess home at night, Alec pretends to get lost and lingers in a forest called "The Chase". At this point, Tess is "inexpressively weary" (78). Her physical state is weak and thus her mental state is susceptible to being easily mesmerized. Alec works out his "physical direction" to mesmerize her and stirs her sexuality by stretching out his arm to clasp her while simultaneously pouring out sweet words to impress her: "you know that I love you, and [I] think you the prettiest girl in the world..." (78). Tess "express[es] no further negative" (78). Alec later on "touched her with his fingers, which sank into her as into down" (81). By his actions Alec is able to exploit her sexual instincts but it should be noted that Tess here is not fully mesmerized like

those in the medical process or unconscious of anything around her. Rather, she is in a state of half dream. When Alec approaches her, she is "sleeping soundly" (82) but the fact that "upon her eyelashes there lingered tears" suggests that she knows what is happening, but psychologically she cannot resist it. Therefore, there is the possibility that the mesmerized Tess is seduced rather than raped. The possibility of seduction becomes even stronger when Tess, later on, loathes and hates herself for "[her] weakness" (89), lamenting, "My eyes are dazed by you for a little, and that was all" (89). In addition, she reflects on the situation after leaving him for her parents' home:

"She had never wholly cared for him, she did not at all care for him now. She had dreaded him, winced before him, succumbed to adroit advantages he took of her happiness; then, temporarily blinded by his ardent manners, had been stirred to confused surrender awhile; had suddenly despised and disliked him, and had run away." (94) (My underline).

The Chase scene is a heavily debated scene in the novel because the text does not say whether Tess is seduced or raped. However, reading this incident in the light of mesmerism, we can conclude that Tess is seduced rather than raped.

Conclusion

Science in the Victorian age was able to explain almost everything. The attempt to offer a scientific explanation was inevitably seen as a challenge to the church which, previously, had provided people with answers to both secular and theological questions. The concept of an omnipotent God who had created and made a plan for humans, in particular, was seriously contested by various scientific works, particularly those of Darwin, whose theory of evolution brought the Book of Genesis into conflict with biology. Instead of being children of Adam and Eve, humans had evolved from apes. Humans, then, were not distinctive from other species and not only occupied no special place in the universe but also struggled for survival on their own. God was believed to be absent from His creation, if He had really created it, and, ultimately, if there were God at all.

The notion of natural selection and randomness not only disputed the existence of God but also, consequently, created an atmosphere of pessimism in society and in Hardy's novels. In *Tess*, the protagonist, Tess, is consistently portrayed as an insignificant being who is left to struggle for survival on her own without a guardian angel to protect her. There appears to be no benevolent God in Hardy's novel. Tess is, as Hardy himself famously argued, just a "being in the hands of circumstance...a mere corpse drifting with the current to her end", becoming a victim of chance which is destructive, not a being whose life has been planned by a loving God.

The human is not only the victim of (cruel) chance but also a product of a genealogical network which aggravates the level of pessimism in a society. On the one hand, the theory of heredity led to a belief in the immutability of character as well as the inherited nature of flaws, both of which determined the progress and development of people and inevitably highlighted the idea of degeneracy which was a cause of wild anxiety. On the other, the theory that the human was genetically determined undercut the importance of individuality and posed the question of the degree to which an individual had a control over his/her own actions. In *Tess*, the protagonist is shown to be the product of heredity in which both her physical appearance and her inner structure are inherited. Tess' act of murder, which leads to her execution, is an act that springs from, among other circumstances, a violent trait passed on to her by her ancestors. She cannot help it.

Mesmerism further threatens the notion of the individual's ability to have control over him/herself. Literary exploitation of this scientific discipline focused upon its association with social and sexual authority. Mesmerized by Alec's social and sexual power, Tess is put into a trance in which she is directed to do things without her knowing. This tool of dominance leads to a seduction which, arguably, is the turning point of her life. Indeed, Tess' life consists of a series of misfortunes but, if science is used to explain all these things, her tragedy is not exceptional.

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