

Thomas Hardy

He was born in Dorset in 1840 and he died in 1928. His life was so long that he can be considered both a Victorian writer and a modern one. He was an architect, too, but after his first popular success with "Far from the Madding Crowd" (1874), he gave up on architecture and started writing novels.

Less of the d'Urvilles (1891) can be considered his masterpiece. But Hardy's representation of life in his most cruel aspects wasn't appreciated by Victorian society.

His style is similar to Verga's verism. Just like the Italian writer, Hardy is a pessimist and recognises in laws the cause of part of the unhappiness and sufferings inflicted on the individual.

Commentary on "Tess of the d'Urbervilles" Luca Palazzo class 5th B

Tess of the d'Urbervilles is the protagonist of the novel. She is the oldest daughter of a man who belongs to a ruined aristocratic family. They are so poor that Tess has to go to work at Alec d'Urbervilles, a rich and distant relative. He seduces her and she goes back home to give birth to a weak child that soon dies. She has to work again to support her family. She finds work in a dairy farm where she meets Angel Clare, a clergyman's son with whom she falls in love. They want to get married, but Tess had another relationship and writes about it in a letter that she sends to Angel. Unfortunately Angel doesn't receive the letter and the night of their wedding she reveals him about it. He can't accept her and runs away. Tess accidentally meets Alec and is seduced again by him. Angel comes back to Tess and decides to forgive her, but he finds her with Alec. The woman wants to go with her husband, but Alec doesn't let her go. In a fit of anger she stabs him and follows Angel with whom she has some happy days. But the police are running behind her since they know she murdered d Alec, they capture her in Stonehenge and hang her.

Tess is the heroine of the novel. She has a deep personality, but she's not strong-willed. Or, even if she makes some important decisions, they always turn against her. We can more precisely notice that, even if she's sometimes strong and plans her actions, fate is always against her and ruins all her projects. This is evident when she sends the letter to Angel and it finishes under the carpet so that Angel doesn't discover the truth. She is a good woman because she sacrifices herself to support her family, but, being a passionate woman, she can't resist to Alec's seduction. Expression of the adverse fate is her being victim of others and of society. She's at her lover's mercy because she's poor and needs protection. But society sees her as a sinful and evil person, deeply

involved in the decadence of her family. Instead of helping her, other people are afraid of her. They don't blame Alec for what he's done to her, but they defend him: in fact they arrest, judge and execute Tess.

The place in which she's arrested is highly symbolic of her condition. Angel and Tess are trying to escape from the police and they get to Stonehenge; they're exhausted and they are going to sleep. But the police comes and, after waiting for Tess's awakening, arrests her. The policemen are like the ancient druids who sacrificed animals to the Sun. And Tess is the sacrificed animal / sacrificial victim

Hardy often uses personification of nature in the passage we have read, but not because he believes nature is a living providential structure. Perhaps Hardy wants to describe in a more suggestive way the setting of the novel. But the personification is often frightening and gives the idea of a living negative force in nature. This force is fate, which is not helpful to man, but it actually obstructs him. Hardy's vision of reality is of course pessimistic and fatalistic. Victorian society is ill, and its illness is given by fate. Hardy is an omniscient narrator and usually unobtrusive, but he expresses his opinion in one of the last lines of his novel: "Justice" was done, and the President of Immortals had ended his spot with Tess". Hardy shares the same conviction as Manzoni: justice, in the effort of condemning injustice, often hits the just people and commits injustice. But Hardy doesn't have an escape in religion, like Manzoni does. Being pessimistic, he believes in the supernatural "President of the Immortals", who can be identified with fate. Fate is pitiless towards the weakest parts of society.

All these characteristics make the novel the story of "A Pure Woman", like the subtitle properly says.