

## Setting Parallels with Character's Circumstances in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

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### **Abstract**

Often the setting of a novel can be looked at as a minor portion of a work. However, with Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* 1892 landscapes seem to be close to the main character, Tess. The story is about a teenage girl who experiences life in six different places; Marlott, Trantridge, Talbothays, Wellbridge, Flintcomb-Ash and Stonehenge. Each location shows a phase in her life and has a great impact on her in different ways. They allow the reader to understand her feeling and emotions at the time. This research examines Hardy's use of setting and its reflection on the main character in order to show how the two are related together.

**Keywords:** Character, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy, Landscape.

### **Introduction**

One of the aspects worth remembering of a story is setting; the specific surrounding in which a character exists and where an event occurs at a particular point in time. Places, locations and settings are often stored in ones' memories. One can enjoy a scene for its own sake. Readers are often charmed by the imaginative presentation of the constituent details (Gill, 2006). At times, setting is considered as a tiny section in a literary work, during other times it is an essential element in understanding it. Setting has an impact on the story's events directly or indirectly. It has a role in determining the character's mood in a story (Safier, 1996). In Thomas Hardy's work, landscape provides more than a mere background, "it is a living and dynamic force, molding the characters

and helping determine their actions and responses” (“Geographical Symbolism”, para. 1). In fact, they are unnamed characters. Hardy pays great attention to settings. He uses extensive details in describing them. He lingers over the smaller details of a place and “draws out the significances of the interplay between nature and humanity” (Gill, 2006, p. 56). One of the strong points of the novel is the ability to shift easily from the detail description of the outer world to the complex inner flow of the character (“Function of Landscape”).

In *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*, Kramer states that Hardy “had begun to understand that he was the historian of a Wessex now passed, the recorder of a series of unique micro-environments, ways of life and speech, which together had formed a cultural whole” (1999, p. 31). Hardy makes the region the setting of his novels the reason why he is well-known as a Wessex novelist. Compared to other English writers his description of valleys, villages, woods, meadow, and lakes of the region is regarded the most realistic. Peter Widdowson claims that “anyone who has read *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* . . . will be in no doubt that the novel is emphatically visual in many of its effects” (1994, p. 80). According to Widdowson, Hardy’s self-conscious techniques of visualization are particularly insistent in *Tess*. He further states, his detailed and accurate description of the landscape “render talk about Hardy's proto-cinematic techniques more than merely chic” (1994, p. 80). Illustrating the scenes in such a way delights the readers and allows them to interpret the character’s actions and emotions. Setting in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* comprises more than the location. As a part of the setting, nature is an important constituent in understanding the novel.

## Setting in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*

### 1. Marlott

In the novel, setting occupies a prominent position. Hardy introduces the reader to an innocent young girl, of the lowest agricultural class in rural England, living in the village of Marlott. The reader lacks many details about Tess’s life yet the fact that “she passed Sixth Standard in the National School” leads the reader to believe that though she lives in a poor family, she has a fine childhood and a loving family.

Hardy describes the rural beauty of the village of Marlott and its surroundings as, “the village of Marlott lay amid the north-eastern undulations of the beautiful Vale of Blakemore or

Blackmoor aforesaid– an engirdled and secluded region, for the most part untrodden as yet by tourist or landscape-painter” (Hardy, 1891, p. 11). He carefully chooses words like “secluded”, “untrodden” and “sheltered” to point that the land is untouched. Its picturesque scenery gives a feeling of comfort and relaxation to the viewer. The fields are depicted as “never brown and springs never dry” (Hardy, 1891, p. 11). This vivid description and great deal of imagery reflects an innocent and peaceful atmosphere of the country, just like Tess at the beginning of the novel. On the May- Day dance she wears a white gown and a red ribbon, “she was a fine and handsome girl- not handsomer than some others, possibly-but her mobile peony mouth and large innocent eyes added eloquence to colour and shape” (Hardy, 1891, p. 15). Tess’s natural beauty, innocence and purity seem to be in complete harmony with the beautiful atmosphere that surrounds her (Litwin, 2016).

Through the realistic portrayal of the landscape or surrounding environment, Hardy often conveys the passage of time to mirror Tess’s mood and plight. It is night time when the family horse is killed in an accident on the way to deliver beehives to the retailer. Hardy writes, “the atmosphere turned pale, the birds shook themselves . . . the lane showed all its white features . . . Prince lay alongside, still and stark” (Hardy, 1891, p. 42). The death of the horse means ruins for the family because without a horse there is no way for them to make much of an income, it also marks Tess’s tragic beginning.

Marlott is parallel with the economic roots and the tragedy in Tess’s life.

## 2. Trantridge

To help save the family from complete poverty and financial ruin, Tess is forced to go to Trantridge, a town northeast of Blackmoor vale, to work; there the tragedy of her life begins. Tess begins her journey to Trantridge, she “dreamed of an aged and dignified face” of the owner of the house but she is stunned to see the house and its owner, as everything was contrary to her prediction. The house is not an old one as she expects, instead, it is a new one with “crimson brick lodge” (Hardy, 1891, p. 49).

On her first encounter with Alec, the latter shows his desire for Tess. He fills her basket with strawberries and puts roses in her bosom. The landscapes are enclosed by red color reflecting her growing womanhood that arouses Alec’s lustful desire for her. Hardy writes,

He watched her pretty and unconscious munching through the skeins of smoke that pervaded the tent, and Tess Durbeyfield did not divine, as she innocently looked down at the roses in her bosom, that there behind the blue narcotic haze was potentially the ‘tragic mischief’ of her drama. (Hardy, 1891, p. 55)

From this scene the reader expects the relationship between events and settings and can foresee the danger clearly (“Function of Landscape”).

It is also through the setting that Hardy depicts the kind of relationship between Alec and Tess. While Alec was giving her a ride in his carriage, “Down, down, they sped, the wheels humming like a top, the dog-cart rocking right and left, its axis acquiring a slightly oblique set in relation to the line of progress . . . Sometimes a wheel was off the ground” (Hardy, 1891, p. 73), this scene shows that her life with Alec is out of control and is going downhill quickly (Khan, 2015).

It is also night-time when she is lost in the wood with Alec and he rapes / seduces her. Hardy writes,

The midnight airs and gusts, moaning amongst the tightly wrapped buds and bark of the winter twigs, were formulae of bitter reproach. A wet day was the expression of irremediable grief at her weakness... But this encompassment of her own characterization, based on shreds of convention, peopled by phantoms and voices antipathetic to her, was a sorry and mistaken creation of Tess’s fancy - a cloud of moral hobgoblins by which she was terrified without reason. (Hardy, 1891, p. 125)

That night is described as “lonely”, “foggy”, “gusts, moaning”, “peopled by phantoms”, “voices apathetic to her” and “clouded with moral hobgoblins”. Tess’s inner turmoil is similar to this description of the setting. She feels estranged in this scary and lonely forest. The visionary power of Hardy’s description of setting documents Tess’s tragic and gloomy mood.

After this accident Tess returns to her hometown burdened with grief, she slowly passes the narrow, crooked lane “Sad October and her sadder self-seemed the only two existences haunting that lane” (Hardy, 1891, p. 115).

Whether Tess is raped or seduced is unclear, but having a child born out of wedlock is a heinous crime against the social standards. This causes Tess to be forever disgraced (Khan, 2015). She is subjected to unmerited judgment of her actions, from this point forward in the novel. Tess does not risk going into the public as her reputation tarnished. At the places, such as church, where

she once found pleasure, she is no longer welcomed. She finds that their whispers made her “grow sick at heart”.

Tess gives birth to the child and christens him “Sorrow”. Few days later, Sorrow dies during night and she buries him by herself in darkness. She begs the Vicar to bury her child in a Christian grave but as the baby is illegitimate and the Vicar is forced by social and religious beliefs of the time he does not allow it. Hardy carefully chooses words and phrases to reveal her desperate situation, “So the baby was carried in a small deal box, under an ancient woman’s shawl, to the churchyard that night, and buried by lantern light, at the cost of a shilling and a pint of beer to the sexton, in that shabby corner of God’s allotment where He lets the nettles grow, and where all unbaptized infants, notorious drunkards, suicides, and others of the conjecturally damned are laid” (Hardy, 1891, p. 142).

Trantridge is parallel with Tess’s being a social outcast and a disgraceful person.

### 3. Talbothays

After the death of her child, Tess goes to look for work elsewhere. Leaving Trantridge behind marks a new start in Tess’s life. Hardy wants the reader to see her positive expectation. Tess goes to the Vale of the Great Dairies in spring “On a thyme-scented, bird-hatching morning in May, between two and three years after the return from Trantridge - silent reconstructive years for Tess Durbeyfield - she left her home for the second time” (Hardy, 1891, p. 148). “The season developed and matured . . . flowers, leaves, nightingales, thrushes, finches, and such ephemeral creatures, took up their positions where only a year ago others had stood in their place . . . Rays from the sunrise drew forth the buds” (Hardy, 1891, p. 189) the cheerfulness, freshness and strong vitality of the landscapes reveal Tess’s spiritual condition. The reader expects hope. It is a tranquil and pleasant landscape described as fresh just as Tess’s new life. The words are light, springy and abound with hope. Gill states that “the words have the spring of poetry” and it shows that “pulse of life stirs in her” (2006, p. 57).

Hardy asserts that she finds “sweet pleasure” when she becomes a dairy maid at Talbothays farm and meets the love of her life, Angel Clare. Tess’s cheerful mood makes her see the landscape “with a particular emotional coloring” (Gill, 2006, p. 57). Her spirits and emotions are improved as she becomes aware of her and Angel’s mutual love. Hardy declines to reveal Tess’s feelings directly. He leaves this to the reader to decide and recognize her mood through picturing her

location that matches how she acts and feels. Charles P.C. Pettit says that Hardy creates a real feeling of Tess using the minimal narration technique (1994). It is as though the landscapes themselves contain the entire secret about the characters.

Hardy places them in appropriate settings to reveal their gradual love to each other. As a part of the setting, the seasonal background copes with the inner feelings and emotions of Tess. It was spring time when she first meets Angel. Their love grows and develops like the flowers, “They met daily in that strange and solemn interval, the twilight of the morning; in the violet or pink dawn” (Hardy, 1891, p. 190). The love between them blooms rapidly and matures as the summer unfolds. “Amid the oozing fatness and warm ferments of the Var Vale, at a season when the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fertilization, it was impossible that the most fanciful love should not grow passionate” (Hardy, 1891, p. 218). The reader feels strong intimacy between the pair as they hear words and phrases such as ‘oozing’, ‘fatness’, ‘rush of juices’ and ‘fertilization’. The natural background is fertile and full of life; it expresses an atmosphere useful for their courtship.

The atmosphere grows tranquil and dreamy for Tess when one day, while milking, she hears Angel playing his harp;

Tess was conscious of neither time nor space. The exaltation which she had described as being producible at will by gazing at a star... she undulated upon the thin notes of the second-hand harp, and their harmonies passed like breezes through her... The floating pollen seemed to be his notes made visible, and the dampness of the garden the weeping of the garden’s sensibility. Though near nightfall, the rank-smelling weed-flowers glowed as if they would not close for intentness, and the waves of colour mixed with the waves of sound. (Hardy, 1891, p. 180 - 181)

The milkmaids enjoy life at Talbothays, “Dairyman Crick’s household of maids and men lived on comfortably, placidly, even merrily; their position was perhaps the happiest of all positions in the social scale” (Hardy, 1891, p. 189). They feel secure and at home as Dairyman Crick provides accommodation for them. Here, workers and owners help each other. And as there is no mechanization, all the works are done by hand and all are in harmony with nature (Litwin, 2016). At Talbothays, Even the cows are treated tenderly; they were given names and the milkmaids adapt themselves to them. During the long, lovely summer at Talbothays everything is ripe for positivity.

Though Tess never visited this part of the country before, yet “she felt akin to the landscape”. This shows that she likes the place more than her place of birth which is described as “a dark patch” a reminder of her past. Thus “her spirits, and her thankfulness, and her hopes, rose higher and higher” (Hardy, 1891, p. 152). Even her journey is described as a pilgrimage, “Tess Durbeyfield, then, in good heart, and full of zest for life, descended the Egdon slopes lower and lower towards the dairy of her pilgrimage” (Hardy, 1891, p. 153).

Talbothays where Tess has her greatest happiness is portrayed as a beautiful place in a lush, green and fertile agricultural region of southern England, “the valley in which milk and butter grew to rankness, and were produced more profusely, if less delicately, than at her home– the verdant plain so well-watered by the river Var or Froom” (Hardy, 1891, p. 247), depicting the place using this rich image suggests good things for Tess. The reader is captivated by the life of the dairy; milking, churning butter and making cheeses. The only positive things happen to Tess while she is there.

Talbothays is parallel with Tess’s only happy period after Trantridge.

#### 4. Wellbridge

Tess and Angel decide to leave Talbothays and go to Wellbridge flour – mills; their wedding house. It is afternoon as they bid farewell to their friends and are about to pass the gate of the dairy when suddenly they hear a cock crow. The crowing of the cock in the afternoon makes the reader predict that something bad will happen.

When they reach the house, Tess becomes depressed as she sees a drawing on the wall. Angel looks up and,

perceived two life-size portraits on panels built into the masonry . . . these paintings represent women of middle age, of a date some two hundred years ago . . . The long pointed features, narrow eye, and smirk of the one . . .; the bill-hook nose, large teeth, and bold eye of the other suggesting arrogance to the point of ferocity, haunt the beholder afterwards in his dreams. (Hardy, 1891, p. 319)

The terrible picture inserted an awful mood to the house. Suddenly the charming and vivid landscape outside completely withered, “out of doors there began noises as of silk smartly rubbed; the restful dead leaves of the preceding autumn were stirred to irritated resurrection, and whirled

about unwillingly, and tapped against the shutters. It soon “began to rain” (Hardy, 1891, p. 321). Tess’s happiness is reduced to the minimum. Angel notices she is “absent-minded” and she is not cheerful as she used to be (“Function of Landscape”).

With each seasonal or daily cycle the characters change. Throughout the novel, the shifting state of Tess and Angel’s relationship is indicated by spring and winter, night and day. Tess’s confession to Angel of her past, her unintended sin, happened while day is passing into night. Hardy writes, “The night came in, and took up its place there, unconcerned and indifferent; the night which had already swallowed up his happiness, and was now digesting it listlessly; and was ready to swallow up the happiness of a thousand other people with as little disturbance or change of mien” (Hardy, 1891, p. 344). Night that preys on their happiness represents their deprivation of joy and the heart rendering change of their relationship. As Tess finishes her story the fire was about to extinguish. Hardy writes, “The pair were, in truth, but the ashes of their former fires” (Hardy, 1891, p. 346). This indicates that all their love has turned to ashes.

Angel thinks that society would make it difficult for him if news of this was ever to leak. He finds it difficult to cope with it so he decides to leave for Brazil by himself. When Angel abandons her, she returns hometown; what remains of her is just a living corpse. The natural weather occurrences happening around them display their seasons of happiness and hurt. The sweet summer closely parallels their pastoral courtship while their painful separation is echoed by the cold winter (“Function of Landscape”).

At Wellbridge Tess’s happiness grows dim. This place runs parallel to Tess’s anxiety and sadness.

## 5. Flintcomb-Ash

Tess begins her journey to Flintcomb-Ash. She “went onward with fortitude, her recollection of the birds’ silent endurance of their night of agony impressing upon her the relativity of sorrows and the tolerable nature of her own, if she could once rise high enough to despise opinion. But that she could not do so long as it was held by Clare” (Hardy, 1891, p. 409). Her sudden declining of emotions and mood is reflected in the sad and near-to-death landscape of Flintcomb-Ash.

It is winter-time when Tess arrives at Flintcomb-Ash where she spends the worst and roughest of times. Being heartbroken, the harsh season deepens Tess’s sense of misery, loneliness and



feeling of abandonment more. Tess finds a sharp contrast between Talbothays and Flintcomb-Ash. Here the weather is cold and gloomy;

The air was dry and cold and the long cart-roads were blown white and dusty within a few hours after rain. There were few trees, or none, those that would have grown in the hedges being mercilessly plashed down with the quickset by the tenant-farmers, the natural enemies of tree, bush, and brake. (Hardy, 1891, p. 411)

This place is quite depressing for Tess; she is without Angel for many months. Like the trees, she is lonely and severely injured. She detests working in this spot, but her family's harsh poverty forces her to take the job.

The place is neglected by its land owner. It is devoid of life and love, hanging on the edge of death; in Tess's case, her spiritual death. As a part of the name being "ash" is described as mired in mud, rocks, poor conditions, and near starvation. It is a barren region, revealing severity of the work and the misery of Tess's life as all her dreams turned to ashes. It is a harsh, ghostly and strange place that mirrors Tess's feeling of detachment, "the whole field was in colour a desolate drab; it was a complexion without features, as if a face from chin to brow should be only an expanse of skin. The sky wore, in another colour, the same likeness; a white vacuity of countenance with the lineaments gone" (Hardy, 1891, p. 418). Just like Tess, the landscape has no passion ("Function of Landscape"). Marian who formerly worked in Talbothays and was fired because of being drunk has come to Flintcomb-Ash for work and calls the new farm "a starve-acre place" (Hardy, 1891, p. 414).

A rough relationship can be seen between farm labourers and their master. Farmer Groby, Tess's boss, is pictured as, "man of stone, who would have cuffed her if he had dared" (Hardy, 1891, p. 465). Farmer Groby's treatment of his workers lacks sympathy, "Izz and Tess, with the other women workers in their whitey-brown pinnars, stood waiting and shivering, Farmer Groby having insisted upon their being upon the spot thus early" (Hardy, 1891, p. 474). He depersonalized everything and everyone. Long working hours and the cheapness of labor is what he was much concerned about. They have to work outdoors during torrential rains and freezing snow because "if they did not work they would not be paid" (Hardy, 1891, p. 418).

This place is parallel with Tess's abandoned and lonely condition.

## 6. Stonehenge

After many years of her separation with Angel, Alec manages to find Tess. He explains that he changed a lot and he devoted himself to missionary work and wishes for Tess to marry him, but she refuses. Tess's father died, to make matters worse the family lost the legal right to their sole residence, ending in living in grave yards (Urbanowicz, 2017, p. 181). Having no place to live in, Tess is left with no choice except to go back to Alec. This tragedy diminishes and swallows everything that Tess has ("Function of Landscape"). The night preceding their removal "It was getting dark betimes", Tess sits alone and reflects the household, she sees a spider web "probably starved long ago, which had been mistakenly placed in a corner where no flies ever came" (Hardy, 1891, p. 517), she thinks she is as frail as this web of spider.

Tess's strong love for Angel and her powerful disgust towards Alec makes her kill Alec and get rid of him when Angel comes back to look for her. It seems that Hardy refuses to put an end to Tess's life so sadly, so to reduce her misery he creates a brief period of calm and loving environment for her. Being victimized by Alec's ruthless pursuit, Angel's abandonment, her family and social standards it seems as if she "is being hounded from the world" (Grimes, 1996, p. 98). Only outside this world, not in it, can Tess find peace, pleasure and satisfaction. She escapes with Angel for miles till they find an isolated house and hide there and spend a few days of loving reconciliation. In order not to be revealed they leave the house. Tess yearns to stay there wondering, "Why should we put an end to all that's sweet and lovely! . . . What must come will come . . . All is trouble outside there; inside here content", Angel looks around and finds "it was quite true; within was affection, union, error forgiven: outside was the inexorable" (Hardy, 1891, p. 572). On their departure, Tess turns to have a last look at the house and says, "Ah, happy house - goodbye! . . . My life can only be a question of a few weeks" (Hardy, 1891, p. 574).

They go to the forest and keep going till they reach a place full of doors and pillars called Stonehenge. Tess grows tired and flings herself upon a rectangular board which keeps her from wind. Unlike the human world who rejects her, the Stonehenge accepts her (Khan, 2015); Tess "was sheltered from the wind by a pillar" and "the stone was warm and dry", she says, "I like very much to be here . . . It is so solemn and lonely-after my great happiness-with nothing but the sky above my face" (Hardy, 1891, p. 577). The Stonehenge is the sacrificial altar which shows Tess's sense of peace. The next day, she awakes at dawn surrounded by a circle of policemen. Tess's life and her suffering come to an end in the Stonehenge, surrounded by beautiful landscapes.

## Conclusion

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Hardy's description of the landscape matches with the main character's mood. A unique characterization of Tess is shown through an elaborate description of the setting which mirrors her spirits, experiences and plight. Hardy's excellent depiction of the setting makes the reader feel sympathy for Tess.

Hardy carefully sets the landscape description of the six places in which Tess lives so that they unite with her blissful experiences and her tragic life. The setting mirrors the constant movement of her feeling between pain and pleasure. The immense suffering, she undergoes and her beautiful feeling is reflected in the setting.

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□ پوخته:

زۆر جار ئهتوانریت سهیری دهووبهر یاخود کات و شوین له کاری ئهدهبی دا بکریت بهوهی که بهشیکی بچووکه له کارهکه، بهلام له رۆمانی (تیسی دوربرفل) دهووبهر وا دهردهکهوویت که زۆر نزیك بیته له ئهکتهره سهرهکی یهکهوه، تیسی. چیرۆکهکه باسی کچیکی ههزهکار دهکات که ئهزموونی زیان دهکات له شهش شوینی جیاواز: مارلوت ، ترانتریح ، تالبوسیز ، ویلریج ، فلینتکۆمب ئاش وه ستۆنهینج. ههر شوینیک لهم شوینانه قۆناغیک له قۆناغهکانی

ژيانى پيشان دهيات وه كارىگهري زۆريان ههيه لهسهه ژيانى ئهكتهر به رىگاي جياواز. دهووبهه وا له خوينهه

دهكات له ههست و سوژى ئهكتهرهكه تى بگهه لهو كاتانهدا.

ئهم تويزينهوهيه باسى بهكارهينانى كات و شوين دهكات لهلايهه هاردى يهوه و رهنگدانهوهيهه لهسهه ئهكتهره

سهههكى يهكه بو پىشاندانى پهيوهندي نيوانيان.

### خلاصة:

غالبا يمكن النظر إلى المحيط أو الاطار القصصي في الاثر الادبي على انه جزء صغير من العمل. لكن في (تيس من دوربرفل) لثوماس هاردي ، المناظر الطبيعية تبدو قريبة جدا من الشخصية الرئيسية ، تيس. تدور القصة حول فتاة مراهقة تجرب الحياة في ستة أماكن مختلفة: مارلوت ، ترانتريدج ، تالبوتهايز ، ويلبريدج ، فلينتكومب آش ، وستونهنج. يعرض كل موقع مرحلة في حياتها وله تأثير كبير عليها بطرق مختلفة. فالمحيط يسمح للقارئ أن يفهم مشاعر الشخصية وانفعالاتها في ذلك الوقت. يدرس هذا البحث استخدام هاردي للمحيط القصصي وانعكاسه على الشخصية الرئيسية من أجل إظهار العلاقة بين الاثنين.