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(Eng. Hons.) Role of chance and Fate in "Tess of the D'Urbervilles". (4th Sem.)

In English tragedy before Hardy, it had been a convention that hero must commit some deed for which he suffers. This deed may be due to an error of judgement as it is in "King Lear" or "Julius Caesar" or it may be of a criminal nature as in the case of "Macbeth". But Hardy has his own conception of tragedy and he is an innovator of a new form of tragedy. The tragedy in his novels occurs mainly on account of the circumstances beyond the control of the hero or heroine. So, his characters are puppets in the hands of malignant chance or fate which robs them of any chance of happiness. It comes both from without and within and all the misery and sorrows that we see in the world, are there because of some external power called - Fate, which thwarts human happiness in many ways but most common of them is chance. Chance in its purely malevolent aspect enters our life and spoils it, brings trials and tribulations, sorrows and sufferings, pain and agony in its train. What is the use of being a plaything in the hands of 'the President of the Immortals'.

"Like flies to wanton boys; are we to the gods;
they kill us for their sport."

In "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" chance thwarts the happiness of Tess. It is chance that Jack

Durbeysfield happens to meet Parson Tringham who informs the former that he has descended from the noble D'Urberville family and this information has a tremendous effect on him and the novel. It is because of this news that Tess is sent to Trantridge to claim kinship with the rich Mrs. D'Urberville. Again, it is chance that when Tess calls at the D'Urberville mansion, she meets the wrong man Alec who destroys her chastity and she no longer remains 'a pure woman'. A little later when she is returning to Trantridge from Chaseborough, it is just a coincidence that Alec appears on a horseback and asks her to jump on the horseback behind him. Her Fate is working against her because Alec gets the chance to seduce her. The tragedy of Tess does not stop here, she loves Clare and they are going to be united. She does not want to deceive him; so she writes a confession, but by chance the letter slips under the carpet. On the wedding day she herself finds it and thinks about handing this to him but she is dominated by the passion of love and tears it. This simple incident ruined her married life for which Angel deserted Tess. When he returns from Brazil a little late, it is just the matter of chance that in his absence Tess is again seduced by Alec and she has to suffer a lot. Alec persuades her that ~~Angel~~ Angel will not return to her and she accepts Alec. But again Angel Clare appears before her and in a fit of anger she murders Alec and joins Angel Clare with the hope to live with him.

for ever. But she is caught, found guilty and hanged.

Thus we see that the malignant fate plays a dominant role in Tess through the agency of chance. There is a constant struggle between man on one hand and, on the other, an omnipotent and indifferent Fate. Since Fate plays an active part in a human drama, it is personified in various forms. In this connection Lord David Cecil observes, — "Hardy embodies Fate in various forms. Sometimes it appears as a natural force. sometimes it embodies itself as some innate awareness of character." Referring to the part played by chance in Tess, Cross says, — "In harmony with Hardy's view of character as the resultant of heredity and environment, is his notion of events that lie outside and beyond us; of happenings, chance and fortune."

— R. D. .