

A Glimpse Of Pessimism In Thomas Hardy's 'The Woodlanders'

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Abstract: *Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), the great Evolutionary Meliorist and the Progenitor of the world of Wessex preserves a remarkable place among the authors of Victorian Era. His philosophical outlook towards life along with skilful projection of the harsh oddities of life in his novels creates a pessimistic impression regarding him in the mind of his readers. He, no doubt, painted the dark side of life but it was also the reflection of the gloomy age he belonged to. This article intend to focuses upon Hardy as a pessimist thinker and the glimpse of his thoughts getting reflected in his novel- 'The woodlanders' where we see the protagonist struggles hard with the unseen forces like nature, fate and circumstances to survive.*

Keywords: *Evolutionary Meliorist, Pessimism, Wessex, Victorian age, Gloomy, Circumstances*

Thomas Hardy as a novelist was greatly impressed by the tragic pathos of humanity. He was caught between its craving for happiness and the harsh limitations of fact, material and social, as well as those rooted in the contradictions of human nature itself. He was a realistic observer as in his work there was always the reflection of harshness of nature, the struggles of common people to maintain their livelihood as well as survive against the hostile forces that try to evade them. *The Woodlanders*, one of the masterpieces of Hardy, is a wonderful tale of love, ambition, expectation and tragedy where the rustic and the sophisticated mass meet with their pre-defined destiny through the changing circumstances. A thick Shield of sadness and pessimism covers the plot of almost all the novels of Hardy and *The Woodlanders* was also not an exception to it. The disappointments of human life get clearly reflected in the plot; in every character who were the victims of circumstances and misfortune. Every character suffered in one way or the other except the rustics. Hardy's novels are the realistic presentation of life where we find both suffering and happiness, both Love and separation. But, the suffering, separation and pain always become heavy upon the characters for whom happiness and love appear as rare realization. Hardy doesn't prioritize the beauty of human life in his writing because he believed – "happiness is but an occasional episode in the general drama of pain".

The plot of the woodlanders begins with the portrayal of nature also creates a gloomy set up. The opening paragraph- "The trees, timber or fruit-bearing, as the case may be, make the way-side hedges ragged by their drip and shade, stretching over the road with easeful horizontality, as if they found the unsubstantial air an adequate support for their limbs. At one place, where a hill is crossed, the largest of the woods shows itself bisected by the high-way, as the head of thick hair is bisected by the white line of its parting. The spot is lonely. The physiognomy of a deserted highway expresses solitude to a degree that is not reached by mere dales or downs, and bespeaks a tomb-like stillness more emphatic than that of glades and pools." (*The Woodlanders*, Chapter1) describes the beautiful setting of little Hintock which carries the air of loneliness. As the plot moves on, the Author projected nature as a cruel merciless master who kills the hero, Giles. He died of being exposed to wind and Rain. Hardy dealt with several love relations but neither they were successful nor ended happily. Love in hardy's novels plays a major role in leading to loneliness and misfortune. In the woodlanders we see several love triangles between the characters such as Marty-Giles-Grace, Fitzpiers-Grace-Giles, Mrs.Charmond-Fitzpiers-Grace. The relationships become complicated as the circumstances suddenly take different turns stabbing their emotions. Marty expected to find her Love within Giles but Learnt about Mr.Merbury's decision to make amends of his

own sin by getting Grace marry Giles. The realization of losing her love made her dejected and lonely as well. Giles, completely unaware of this, was much excited about Mr. Melbury's proposal to get married to Grace but to his utter dismay found a completely changed and sophisticated Grace when he met her, who was not much interested in him. The indifferent attitude of Grace perturbed him but still he attempted to present himself as an eligible bachelor for her but Fate, certainly had some other plan for him. The hope to win her heart still provided solace to his pained heart but later the series of events gave hints that it may take other turn. The death of John South invited doom for Winterbone and his dreams to marry Grace scattered as he lost the houses he owned. Dr. Fitzpiers, was nothing more than a philanderer. He is presented as a merciless, unwavering, irresistible scientist and a lonely man who loved to flirt with girls openly for his amusement. He made Grace believe about his love for her and wish to marry her but on the other side seduced Suke. Later, after marriage, he developed another illicit relation with Mrs. Charmond which inflicted much pain to Grace's expectations. The Love relations become puzzles and doesn't shower bliss upon any single heart.

All the characters are in one way or the other the victims of circumstances and misfortune. The marriage of Grace and Giles would have given a very different turn to the plot but the changing circumstances ruined them all. We clearly see the glimpses of occasional happiness. Winterbone's happiness doesn't last long which got smashed as Grace developed an inclination to marry Dr. Fitzpiers with an expectation to live a refined and sophisticated life which Giles could never give her. He was bitten by his destiny when he lost his property and was penniless. Marty and Giles now travelled in the same boat which already was about to sink but still they struggled hard to survive. Grace married Dr. Fitzpiers and gradually discovered his reality. His disloyalty killed her from within which nurtured the liking for Giles. Now, it was not that sophisticated lifestyle and the smart outlook she looked for, rather she was in search of true love which she could have found within Giles. This repentance made her move closer to Giles and Dr. Fitzpiers's Dwindling Character made him feel for Felice for her artificial beauty and endless luxury. Love demanded a huge sacrifice from Giles and Marty as well. The two characters appear pitiable as Giles went to the extent of sacrificing his life in order to provide comfort to Grace but was rewarded with death in return. Marty lost everything but was ultimately left alone after Giles' death. Happiness and love played a hide and seek game with the characters.

Hardy's concept of life was essentially Tragic. His Novels concentrate on human suffering and show that there is no escape for human beings. The Character sketch of Giles and Marty Clearly Shows this philosophy of Hardy. Giles is presented as a man not particularly young for a lover nor particularly mature for person of affair. Marty is an innocent Maiden who deserved all the happiness but found only pain. Fate snatched away their love, left them dejected and lonely. Even if, they saw a slight faded glimpse of love, it proved to be a mirage which devastated their lives completely. Their

condition shows the helplessness of human being in front of fate which is omnipotent:

As flies to wanton boys,
So are we to god,
They kill us for their sport.

Hardy's novels constantly revolved around human helplessness in the hands of some unseen power where we always see the human beings struggling, suffering, sacrificing but ultimately losing everything, giving up. The woodlanders also end in a similar note. Giles died a tragic Death. Marty lives alive but was partially dead having no body around, completely alone. The last scene we see Marty sitting alone at Winterbone's grave.

She stooped down and cleared away the withered flowers that Grace and herself had laid there the previous week, and put her fresh ones in their place.

"Now, my own, own love," she whispered, "you are mine, and on'y mine; for she has forgot 'ee at last, although for her you died. But I--whenever I get up I'll think of 'ee, and whenever I lie down I'll think of 'ee. Whenever I plant the young larches I'll think that none can plant as you planted; and whenever I split a gad, and whenever I turn the cider-wring, I'll say none could do it like you. If ever I forget your name, let me forget home and Heaven!--But no, no, my love, I never can forget 'ee; for you was a GOOD man, and did good things!" (*The Woodlanders*, Chapter 48)

These lines not only show her deepest love for Winterbone but also her lonely, pathetic life. The author only presented pain, dejection, struggle, suffering in the hands malicious forces who rule over their life.

Among others, Mrs. Charmond too dies. The only survivors are Grace and Fitzpiers who were somehow reconciled with an expectation that they may find happiness ahead but still the author left some doubt regarding it. As the character of Fitzpiers remains questionable still.

"Thomas Hardy was not pessimistic about human beings rather about the governance of the universe"- observed R.A.Scott James. Hardy even claimed himself as maliorist. The set of events, pathetic display of human misery, and merciless display of the rule of fate, malicious game of Chance and circumstances make the characters appear pessimist and leaves a glimpse of pessimism in the novel "*The Woodlanders*".

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