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## Transformation Of Some Of Thomas Hardy's Central Characters From Egotism To Altruism

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### Abstract:

*The novels of Thomas Hardy are a pleasure to read for all and sundry. His novels are varied in their settings, textures and endings. Its really difficult for a common reader to find out a pattern in his novels. But if studied carefully, one can find that his central characters undergo a distinct transformation: most of his pivotal characters have a journey in the course of the novel from egotism to altruism. By selecting Far from the madding crowd The mayor of caster bridge and Tess of the D'urberVilles, it will be possible to compare works spanning from early to late in his career as a novelist. The settings of these three novels are also varied : rural, urban and with The mayor of casterbridge, somewhere between both the rural and urban.Finally,the ending of these three novels are also interesting.Far from the Madding crowd, though Hardy subtitles it a tragi -comedy, has a happy union at the end while Tess of the D'Urbervilles, clearly ends unhappily for the central character, The mayor of castridge again can be looked upon in both ways. It will be entertaining as to find out the effect of the Victorian theorists and their works (namely Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin and Lesly stephen) on Hardy in general and upon these characters in particular.*

### KEYWORDS:

Effect of Victorian Theorists, Ending of the novels, transformation of the central characters.

### INTRODUCTION:

Far from the Madding Crowd deals with the central character of Bathsheba Everdene with three men: the faithful Gabriel oak, the extravagant and romantic sergeant Troy and the middle aged grave and good farmer William Boldwood. Through the character of Bathsheba Hardy shows the transformation from a self seeking egotistic individual to a person more concerned about the welfare of others. She reveals her frivolous character by sending Boldwood an anonymous valentine. Later her decision to marry Troy is again an example of her self seeking, spontaneous and intuitive action. Her reasoning faculty is completely overshadowed by the dashing romantic disposition of Troy. She even blushes at his subtle flirting. She forgets her social position, the amount of respect she deserves and at the same time the responsibility of those who live around her. But during the course of the novel Bold wood shoots Troy and then is sentenced to penal servitude for life. At this critical juncture of her life, experience makes new realize the worth and importance of Gabriel oak in her life. She understands that the acceptance of oak's proposal now will not only save her but also protect the welfare of all depending on her farm. But the marriage Bathsheba and oak has pointed out doubts in critics. As Tohru kojima in her essay The male characters of Thomas hardy's major fiction points out: "Hardy finally unites oak with Bathsheba in marriage as a reward for his faithfulness, though artificiality exists in the development of the plot." Perhaps she is pointing out at the attachment of Bathsheba to Gabriel oak is judicious and it is not spontaneous and intuitive like here earlier attachment to Troy. However, it seems that there is no artificiality in the plot, because the union between oak and Bathsheba is an attempt by the novelist to show that "the highest form of man's moral perfection lies not in

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self-seeking but in self sacrifice for the benefits of others.”

Susan Beegel in her *Bathsheba's lovers: male sexuality in Far from the Madding crowd*, points out that the ending of the novel was tragic because of the “reduced expectations” of oak and Bathsheba. But the transformation of Bathsheba from a self-seeking individual to a person with deep concern for others, conforms with Hardy's interpretation of Darwinism.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### The Mayor of Casterbridge

In the Preface of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* Hardy said “the story is more particularly a story of one man's deeds and character, than perhaps, any other of those included in my *Exhibition of Wessex life*.” Thus Hardy has given the subtitle, “A story of a man of character.” Henchard, the man of character, is the central figure here who undergoes a drastic change from egotism to altruism. His egotistic, stubborn and jealous character is revealed in the way he treats his wife at the beginning. His authoritarian attitude is also criticized through his behavior with anyone who comes in contact with him. He sells his wife and daughter without being responsible. He tried to establish himself even at the cost of his wife and daughter. Even after of long twenty years when he is at the height of his prosperity, Henchard seems to be a selfish egotistic person. He tried to sell bad grain deliberately with the assumption that the people of the town have no right to reject what he as a mayor sells. His relationship with Farfrae also stamps out his self seeking attitude. Though at first he is attracted by Farfrae's striking ability, but gradually he feels jealous of his increasing high reputation and popularity among the people. But towards the end of the novel he is redeemed. Gradually he learns that his real interest lies in the welfare of others. His love for Elizabeth Jane humanized him and thus brought him to the altruistic plain of life. Thus F.B. pinion said “this change in the character of Henchard is in conformity with Leslie Stephen's theory of man's ethical perfection towards altruism even at the cost of his personal happiness.”

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE. Tess of the D'Urbervilles

*Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the best of Hardy's novels, conforms the same pattern of transformation from egotism to altruism. In her relationship with Angel Clare Tess reveals the character of a self-seeking person oozing with over-confidence. She does not take Angel as a person of flesh and blood. Instead she loves the idea of love itself rather than Angel Clare. She finds in him “..... a quality she had never expected to find in one of the opposite sex” she is attracted by those qualities of Clare which she adores and misses them in the person with whom she came into contact. As Hardy wrote: “There was hardly a touch of earth in her love for Clare. To her sublime trustfulness he was all that goodness could be”. On the contrary Angel took Tess as the epitome of rustic innocence and beauty. He is obsessed with the idea that woman must be pure. Through he asks for feminine chastity, his own character is in great doubt. He even cannot think of Tess marrying another. He seems desperate in possessing Tess for ever through marriage. At this critical juncture though Tess agrees to marry him, there seemed a doubt in the depth of her mind. She wants to tell Clare about her past premarital sexual experience. Her egotistic attitude is reflected through her over-confidence. Incidentally Clare does not receive her letter of confession and on the night of their marriage, she narrates everything about her past life. Her egotism compelled her to believe that Clare, a man free from social taboo, prejudices and dogma, will not take her past affair seriously. She takes her confession as a proof of her loyalty and faithfulness. But unfortunately the next incidents go against her and she is forced to come out of her illusion and land in real world. As soon as Angel comes to know everything, his dream world is shattered. His reaction here is that of an egoist. He can't accept the fact that he has married a woman who experienced sex before marriage. But after his separation, he reaches a state of altruism where he no longer sees Tess as a goddess but as a woman of flesh and blood. Suffering makes her realize the injustice that he has inflicted upon Tess. Tess, on the other hand, after being rejected by Angel Clare, finds herself again in the clutches of Alec.

The union of Alec and Tess at this point is a complete failure of Tess's self-egotism. This failure of her self-ego takes a violent expression when she sees Angel Clare. Utterly frustrated, she stabs Alec and flees with Clare. But she knew quite well that she can't evade the law. Here she reaches beyond the consideration of herself. She only thinks of the well-being of Angel Clare. She requests Clare to look after her sister Liza-Lu who will be a perfect match for him. Thus both Tess and Clare shows a gradual transformation from egotism to altruism by thinking the well-being of others even sacrificing their own happiness.

#### **METHODOLOGY: PAPER DEVELOPMENT**

Journey from egotism to altruism is clearly at work in the character of Bathsheba in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Henchard in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and Tess in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Bathsheba, when she learns that Oak is leaving the farm, feels the urgent need to stop him - a decision which will have a grand effect upon everyone living on her farm. Henchard at the beginning and the person leaving Casterbridge at the end - are not the same one. Tess also through distress and suffering, leaves the world a transformed individual.

#### **RELEVANCE TO THE FIELD**

Criticism of Hardy's novels is not a new phenomenon. And a lot has been written about Hardy which may seem similar to mine, I want to take those views and ideas further. I wish to add to Hardy scholarship by pointing different factors which shape and mould the central characters. I want to focus on the pessimistic view of Hardy's philosophy implied in the ending of almost all his novels. I also believe that these central characters have often been stereotyped in criticism both for better and worse. I think this an area that has not been explored, and I hope my paper will offer fresh interpretation.

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