



## The Character Development of Angel

### Clare in *Tess of the D'urbervilles*

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#### Abstract

Through the analysis of the character--Angel Clare in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'urbervilles*, this essay tries to show the effects of Angel Clare's experiences on the development of his character. And it also presents the goodness and the evilness of man's nature.

**Keywords:** *Tess of the D'urbervilles*, Angel Clare, Character

Whether human nature is good or evil has remained a controversial problem for centuries. Actually everyone has his good side and evil side. In a certain stage of one's life, when the good side of man's nature takes upper position, and the person appears to be a good person who is accepted by others, and vice versa. This essay attempts to show the effects of experiences of Angel Clare (one of the main character in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'urbervilles*) on the shaping and developing of his character. In the developing process of Angel Clare's character, the good side or evil side takes superior position to the other alternately due to his different experiences.

In the novel, *Tess*, who is born into the family of poor rural tradesman, is sent to work for the D'urbervilles for a living. Unfortunately she is seduced by the son of the master, Alec D'urbervilles, who is rich and sensuous. By him she has a child who dies in infancy. Under the pressure from poverty and the attack of losing her son, Tess leaves for a milking farm where is far away from her home. There, she meets Angel Clare, a free-thinking son of the clergyman, whom she loves with her whole being and who abandons her when he hears, immediately after their marriage, of her earlier violation. With the mental agony and physical suffering, she becomes Alec's mistress once again. However a few years later, Angel Clare comes back from Brazil with sincere regret for his past misdeeds. So strong is Tess' love for her husband, and so powerful her disgust at what Alec has forced her to become, that she kills Alec. Husband and wife, united but on the run from the police, spend a few days of loving reconciliation together before Tess is arrested. And Tess is sentenced to death for murder and executed.

Angel Clare was the son of a parson and the youngest of the three brothers; he did not enter college as his siblings, despite his superior intellect, but rather diverged from the career path his father intended for him, the ministry, so study agriculture so that he might become a farmer. He has a nebulous, preoccupied quality, for he is a man with no very definite aim or concern about his material future. He sees something new in life and humanity, making close acquaintance with natural phenomena. Therefore, he loves Tess, whom he idealizes as a "fresh and virginal daughter of nature" (p124, Thomas Hardy, 1895), so deeply that he finally marries Tess without caring about his family's strong opposition. He particularly appreciates her words: "I do know that our souls can be made to go outside our bodies when we are alive" (p124, Thomas Hardy, 1895). When he discusses his marriage with his family, he mentions Tess as "a woman who possessed every qualification to be the helpmate of an agriculture", "she was a regular church-goer, of simple faith, honest-hearted, receptive, intelligent, graceful to a degree, chaste as a vestal and in personal appearance exceptionally beautiful" (p166, Thomas Hardy, 1895). Hardy indicates: "It was for her that he loved Tess, her soul, her heart, her substance-not for her skill in the dairy, her aptness as his scholar, and certainly not for her simple, formal faith-professions" (p167, Thomas Hardy, 1895). Tess refuses Angel because she believes that her history prevents any possibility of happiness with Angel Clare. With Angel's persistence and the intensity of his love, she cannot find a good opportunity to tell him her past story until the wedding day. In Angel's eyes, Tess is special because of her innocent. So, Angel is an equal symbol of purity and goodness, as shown by his name and his demeanor.

Despite holding more liberal opinions than his father and brothers, Angel Clare is nevertheless equally dogmatic and obstinate. He has a deeply theoretical mindset just as Hardy describes, "Early association with country solitudes had bred in him an unconquerable, and almost unreasonable, aversion to modern townlife." (p121, Thomas Hardy, 1895). And it is this quality that causes him to reject Tess when he learns the information about her past that contradicts his

idealistic view of her. In the wedding evening, Angel promises to tell Tess all of his faults and admits how in London, he plunged into a forty eight hour dissipation with a stranger, which seems worse than Tess's single moment of weakness. When Tess tells Angel about her sin, a tragic irony results from Angel's reaction to Tess's similar admission. Tess finishes her story, which she had given in a monotone and without any displays of emotion. Angel's face withers as he cries out that this cannot be true. She begs for his forgiveness, "In the name of our love, forgive me! I have forgiven you for the same! Forgive me as you are forgiven!" But Angel answered coldly, "Tess, forgiveness does not apply to the case! You were one person; now you are another." "I will obey you, like your wretched slave, even if it is to lie down and die." "You are very good. But it strikes me that there is a want of harmony between your present mood of self-sacrifice and your past mood of self-preservation." From their dialogue, we can see clearly the intellectual character of the love that Angel feels for Tess becomes apparent in Angel's reaction. He speaks calmly and rationally rather than resorting to a burst of anger at the news. His behavior is cold and clinical and his words cautious and precise. This contrasts sharply with Tess's motional behaviour, as she vows that she would die for Angel if he were to so demand. So the intellectual and free-thinking Angel is the "slave to custom and conventionality", and the relatively ignorant Tess is the true humanist. In conclusion, Angel's dogma and selfishness results in the tragedy of their marriage.

However, it takes Angel a year of traveling and suffering during which "he had mentally aged a dozen years" before he can throw off his strictly moral upbringing and realize the validity of Tess's viewpoint. Hardy indicates that Angel's suffering in Brazil has influenced this development. Angel returns to England aged and sickly, having suffered greatly and matured from the obstinate idealism he once displayed. So, when Angel inquires here and there and finds the way to meet Tess, he said huskily, "Tess! Can you forgive me for going away? Can't you come to me?" "But don't you love me, my dear wife, because I have been so pulled down by illness? You are not so fickle-I am come on purpose for you -my mother and father will welcome you now". But Tess replies, "It is too late." (p365, Thomas Hardy, 1895). So the hardship he experiences in Brazil has influenced to be a perfect man with considerate and tolerant characteristics.

To some extent, the character of Angel Clare is shaped and developed by his early career, his dogmatic and obstinate thoughts and his difficult experience. When he is a young boy, his career, studying agriculture and being a farmer, leads him to love nature. So, he falls in love with the 'daughter of nature'-Tess. Then, his dogmatic thoughts prevent him from forgiving Tess's past 'stains'. But, after his experiencing the hardships in Brazil, he becomes a mature man with noble character.

Through the analysis, we may conclude that one's living environment and experiences have a great influence on the development of an individual's character. Only as we experience all kinds of hardships, can we realize the most valuable thing which is always neglected when we have it while we regret when we lose it.

#### References

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