

## Existence and Essence of Cosmic Absurdity in Thomas Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented

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### ABSTRACT

Thomas Hardy, a world-famous English novelist, is not only known as the 'Saint of Max Gate' but also a 'Proto-Existentialist' in the domain of English literature. Both his life and his works are in the grip of Existentialism. As his novels, especially tragic ones, are, either directly or indirectly, affected by the themes, thoughts, and concepts of Existentialism, his sensitively hectic life is also, either directly or indirectly, influenced by the existential thinkers and writers like Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Sartre, Nietzsche, and Camus, etc. As his thoughts existing in his works prove, his novels reflect the predicament of human existence, which is concerned with the experiences of individuals' life. The Absurdity of the cosmos and human life, angst, authenticity, dread, despair, existential crises, preceding existence over essence, facticity, and the Other and the Look, are such existential concepts as are brimming in his novels. The concept of 'Cosmic Absurdity,' which is related to the concept of the 'Absurd,' that is the crux of 'Absurdism,' is an axis around which revolves around his most tragic novels. This article explores the existence and essence of 'Cosmic Absurdity' in Thomas Hardy's novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles. In addition, it discusses its tools and how more or less, they affect the plot, characters, and theme of the mentioned novel.

**Keywords:** Janus, Rampant, Proto-existentialist, Blip, Etiquettes, Ethics, Hara-kiri

Thomas Hardy seems to be a Janus in the realm of English literature, for he sees two centuries—the second half of the 19th Century and the first half of the 20th Century—with two faces—fiction and poetry. He witnesses past and future without partiality, but his witnessing of the latter is synthetically presented. He has been a famous creative writer since the publication of the corpus of his novels. Enough has been said and written about him as a thinker and artist. A theory is as old as Methuselah remains unanswered. He is a great thinker, not the creator of a consistently worked-out philosophy. His novels, chiefly, have been approached from various angles: critics like Richard Sewall, J.W. Crutch, and S. Crook attempt to analyse his fiction from the views of generic criticism, and H.C. Webster, T.R. Spy and Holloway trace

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out the philosophical undercurrent, while critics like L.W. Berle and Helen Garwood endeavor comparative assessment, but the approaches of V.R. Collins, Clive Holland, and Edmund Blunden are biographical. Critics, whether they are native or alien, evaluate him as a tragic novelist, a famous moralist, an able regionalist, a transmutative meliorist, and an earnest visionary. Thus, his novels which evoke complex reactions are distinguished by the seriousness of thought, the subtle directness of narration, the subtleties of style, and the projection of philosophical vision.

Matthew Arnold thinks that “for the creation of a masterwork of literature two powers must concur, the power of the man and the power of the moment, and the man is not enough without the moment” (Matthew Arnold 109). Undoubtedly, the former is not sufficient without the latter. For they synthetically produce a great literary work. They provide such a good and great (generative) ground where great ideas ever grow. If anyone of them is absent, the existence of any great work is impossible. Undoubtedly, Hardy has the power of man as his habit of changing his career again and again witnesses his biographies dictate, and the autobiographical elements contained in his works prove. The power of the moment, which Victorian age has, may be a curse for someone, and a boon for someone, but for Hardy it is a windfall. Throughout the 19th Century, the exploration of human existence has been in the high stream. The result is that “The nineteenth Century turned the novelist into a philosopher— one who sought to examine the principles that underlie human existence. This was attempted through the medium of fiction in one way invalidates the effort made by the greatest of the novelists whether in England, or America, or France, or Russia” (Percy Marshall 183). How can Hardy escape this power of moment? It is impossible for him. The power of man in him and the power of the moment of the age collectively make him a great philosophical novelist of the age, but his novels in which the traces of Existentialism— especially human existence— are found is nothing but the result of the joint venture of these two powers— the power of man and moment. Hardy’s life and works as well have a close relationship. They reinforce and fulfil each other.

The existential themes that underlie his novels result from his visions, provisions, sensitivity, and self-exploration. What he observes, what he realizes, he depicts in his novels, i.e., his life and authorial revelation, and his existential leaning are brimming in his novels, and his verses are brimmed with his personal experience and temperament of the time. He often advocates the essentiality of everyman’s philosophy. He says, “After reading various philosophical systems and being struck with their contradictions and futilities, I have come to this: let

everyone make a philosophy for Himself out of his own experience” (W.R. Rutland 89). What Rutland writes here is quite accurate to Hardy. He has his philosophy, which has been tried to decipher by critics and scholars for decades.

Critics are critics. They try their best to assess creative works and pronounce critical judgments, but they are not omniscient. They have their limitations and delimitations—Critics’ personalities, emotions, and spirit of the time, etc. —due to which they cannot assess a creative work as a whole. What they do remains partial. Such is with Thomas Hardy and his works. The critics’ judgment of his life and his works is one-sided. Most critics have ignored his philosophical visions and provisions, which are related to human life and the world in which they reside near Existentialism. Gilbert Nieman is credited with raising the existential issues in Hardy’s novels in his article titled “Thomas Hardy, Existentialist” (1965). Roy Morrell also contributes to this field when he deals with the problem of human existence in his book *Thomas Hardy: The Will and the Ways* (1968), while David J. De Laura, in the article “The Ache of Modernism in Hardy’s Later Novels” (1967) traces the elements of fear and trembling—the two pivots of modern existentialist imaginations. Later on, comes the flood of writing on Hardy’s proximity to Existentialism— its themes, its thoughts, and its concepts as well. Even today, many scholars try their hand at his works to explore and analyse the various untouched and unexplored aspects of existential thoughts and their concepts which are annexed to his works and his life. They find that the crux of his works is rooted in Existentialism.

Existentialism, which is opposed to all those traditional philosophies which are essential in approach, does not consider man and his/her existence as an abstract idea, but a concrete reality of living, suffering and dying, has been defined variously by various philosophers, critics, and scholars. According to Janko Lavrin it is “a form of philosophical inquiry that explores the problem of human existence and centres on the subjective experience of thinking, feeling, and acting” (Janko Lavrin 43). In this queue, the name of Robert Solomon comes to the front. While presenting the core of this ‘ism,’ Solomon in his book *Existentialism* (1974) writes:

Existentialist thinkers frequently explore issues related to the meaning, purpose, and value of human existence. In the view of an existentialist, the individual’s starting point has been called “existential angst”, a sense of dread, disorientation, confusion, or anxiety in the face of an apparently meaningless or absurd world” (Robert C. Solomon 1-2).

When Existentialism is viewed through telescopic lenses, it’s found that it’s a philosophical protest which is made against Hegel’s absolutism and sterile complexity of metaphysics. This

is the reason why Majorie Grene writes: “Existential philosophy...has rebelled against the arid technicality of metaphysics and has brought philosophy closer to living the problem of real life” (Majorie Grene 26). Additionally, it is called the critic of speculative philosophy for studying the predicament of human existence, which is concerned with the experiences of man’s life. Diametrically, it’s against all those movements and ‘ism’ that considers man an idea or a thing. In other words, it can be said that rejecting the absoluteness of reason; advocates that philosophy must be related to an individual’s own life and experiences with the historical situation (birth and place) in which an individual finds himself/herself in the dilemma of being or not being— “To be or not to be” (William Shakespeare. Hamlet Act III, Sc. I, L. 55, p.886). The thinkers of this ‘ism’ often matter in questions related to the meaning, purpose, and ethics of human existence.

When Existentialism is minutely analysed, it is found that this ‘ism’ is a set of concepts that comprises “existence precedes essence” (J.P. Sartre 52), the absurd, facticity, authenticity, the Other and the Look, angst, dread, and despair. The first proposition of Existentialism (the preceding of existence before essence) signifies that man is born before s/he can be anything. Existence, freedom of choice, and a sense of responsibility combinedly make or mar his/her essence. The Absurd, the second concept of this train of philosophy, is defined as a confrontation between the world’s ways and man’s will. Facticity, the third notion of this school, is related to such limitations and conditions of yore which are not selected (birth in a poor or rich family, etc.,) by man but by God or Cosmos gifted. The fourth concept of existential philosophy is authenticity which “involves the idea that one has to “create oneself” and live in accordance with this self” (Wikipedia-Existentialism). The Other and the Look is the fifth conception which describes how an individual looks at the world and how the world (especially its People) looks him/her. Existential angst, the sixth postulation of this group, is often called existential dread, existential anxiety, or existential anguish. It is nothing but a negative feeling which arises from such experiences as an individual gets from freedom and responsibility, while its seventh abstraction is despair, which is described as the loss of an individuals’ hope.

A mutual bonding emerges among the ‘Cosmic Absurdity,’ ‘Absurdism,’ and ‘Absurd.’ They correlate to one another with a bit of similarity and dissimilarity. The expression ‘Cosmic Absurdity’ is the unification of the two words: ‘Cosmic’ and ‘Absurdity.’ In a modern sense, the former stands for ‘pertaining to the cosmos or universe’ and the latter for ‘Out of harmony’

or ‘Out of tune.’ Synchronously, it suggests the disharmonious nature of the world to man: the confrontation between man and the world. It proposes the notion that this world (universe/cosmos) in which man dwells is as meaningless as man’s existence. Although man makes his/her existence meaningful, the world has no meaning except what man gives it. Its inherent meaninglessness always gives birth to ‘unfairness.’ Contrasting with the idea of the ‘Universal Truth (right or wrong)’ which advocates that bad things do not happen to a good man, it pleads that bad to good and good to bad is common in this irrationally meaningless world, which is entirely unintelligible by human reason or perception. Its point of origin is ‘Absurdism’, which suggests that human existence as a whole is absurd for lacking order and meaning or a higher purpose. It is another thing that ‘Absurdism’ is its point of origin, but for its existence and essence, it depends on the term ‘Absurd’, which is also its part and parcel. The term ‘Absurd’ refers to actions, persons, or situations that are ridiculously unreasonable or extremely silly. It signifies the lack of order or value in human life. Additionally, the need here is to clear that the roots of ‘Cosmic Absurdity’ reside in the term ‘Absurd,’ but there is a significant difference between them. Their main difference is that where ‘Absurd’ refers to man’s effort to find meaning in this meaningless cosmos, it (cosmic Absurdity) refers to the confrontations between man and the universe.

In Existentialist literature, there are two interpretations of the absurd. The first is by Albert Camus, a French philosopher, while the second is by Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher. According to the former, as Thomas Wartenberg writes that “the world or the human being is not in itself absurd. The concept only emerges through the juxtaposition of the two: life becomes absurd due to the incompatibility between human beings and the world they inhabit” (Wikipedia-Existentialism-The Absurd). According to the latter, as writes Stephen Michel, “Absurdity is limited to actions and choices of human beings. These actions and choices are considered absurd since they result from human freedom, undermining their foundation outside themselves” (Stephen Michelman 27). In other words, it can be said that cosmic Absurdity, a philosophical vantage point, is related to the absurdities of the cosmos. Whatever man proposes, it (the cosmos) often disposes. The reason behind this purposing and disposing is theirs being out of tune or harmony. Consequently, such type of disharmony gives birth to such anguish, despair, forlornness, loneliness, and estrangement in the mind and soul of human beings, as they experience such a godless cosmos that is already bereaved of true meaning (religious, spiritual, or metaphysical) and universal truth or ethics.

When cosmic Absurdity is explored through the telescopic lenses in the novels of Thomas Hardy, it is found that his tragic novels— *Tess of the d'Urbervilles: a Pure Woman Faithfully Presented*, *The Mayor of the Casterbridge: The Life and Death of a Man of Character*, *The Return of The Native*, *Jude The Obscure* (Originally entitled as *The Simpletons Hearts Insurgent*) *The Woodlanders* (In Three Volumes), and *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (In Three Volumes) — are highly brimming with it. The rest novels are not without touching it. They also have the elements of cosmic Absurdity, but not so much as it is found in his major tragic novels. Nothing but this Absurdity, as it seems, makes his novels tragic. Hardy's works are the result of the "power of man and power of moment" (Matthew Arnold 109).

The power of the self or spirit is high in Hardy. It's the sum and substance of those all haps and mishaps which immensely affect his life. It includes his sensitivity, the agony caused by the death of his beloved wife Emma, his self-consciousness of class divisions, his feeling of social inferiority, and his nature of criticizing Victorian society, while the power of a moment (the spirit of the age)—stands for all those events which highly affect his age. Such events include industrialization, modernization, and impending war. They are also responsible for such types of novels which he writes. It's the power of moment which horrified (the destruction of the war) him so badly that he says, "I do not think a world in which such fiendishness is possible to be worth the saving...better to let western 'civilization' perish and let the black and yellow races have a chance" (George William Sherman 447). In a letter to John Galsworthy, the novelist and playwright of Edwardian era, he (Hardy) writes that "the exchange of international thought is the only possible salvation for the world" (George William Sherman 447). It is to say that many things— but especially the power of man in him and the power of moment or spirit of the Victorian Age— force him to be a visionary, and consequently, he becomes, but he becomes such a visionary who looks the absurdities of the world through a meliorist's eyes.

Cosmic Absurdity, the result of a confrontation between rational man and irrational cosmos; a collision between intention and outcome; and a contradiction between subjective assessment and objective outcome, performs its blackish deeds through the hands of chance and coincidence, fate and place, bothering and compulsions, sins and failures, natural calamity and empathy as well. It induces a deep feeling of the absurd, angst, anguish, anxiety, alienation, dread, despair, death, choice chosen in confusion, the irrationality of will, meaninglessness of life and cosmos, and purposelessness of birth in man's mind and soul. Undoubtedly, the vision and provision of (cosmic) absurd—individuals craving for order and justice, which are enraged

by the pococurante drift of the forces of the universe—is powerfully projected in his novels. It is rampant in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. The personage of Tess is near and dear to Hardy. Besides writing the novel entitled *Tess Of the d’Urbervilles* on her (Tess), he (Hardy) has composed many verses such as “Tess’s Lament,” “We Field Women,” “Beyond the Last Lamp,” “A Maiden’s Pledge,” and “The Ruined Maid or The Well-Beloved” which present her mental and physical condition. About his liking for her (Tess), J. Hillis Miller writes: “Hardy’s feelings for her were strong, perhaps stronger than for any of his other invented personage” (J. Hillis Miller 119). Critics being critics, perform their duty in their ways. The present novel (*Tess of the d’Urbervilles*) is not beyond their touch. A number of critics have shared their views about it. For instance, where Arnold Kettle in the *Study of Tess* writes: “A pessimistic and deterministic view of the world in which man is at the mercy of an unyielding outside fate is the conscious philosophy behind the novel...and there is no doubt that this conscious philosophy affects the book, in general, for worse” (Arnold Kettle 34), where Geoffrey Harvey describes her (Tess) as “a victim of an ambivalent attitude towards the woman that is traceable both to Hardy and to the culture in which he lived” (Geoffrey Harvey 169), there Tola Odubajo presents Tess as “a naïve woman whose pitiful existence was defined by the patriarchal dictates which dominated the Victorian consciousness” (Tola Odubajo 9229), there Penny Boumelha thinks the novel mentioned above “a woman’s tragedy” and presents “nature as a woman” (Penny Boumelha 123-124). Whatever it is, one thing is clear: to Hardy, Tess is a sort of Wessex Eve who suffers lots for giving into Satan’s (Alec’s) temptation.

No doubt, the novel *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* is set in such an absurd world as there are several events, situations, persons, or phases in persons’ life which is absurd and reflect various collisions between the rational men (characters) and the irrational cosmos; between the intention of characters and the outcomes what they get; and between their subjective assessments and cosmic objective returns. Tess, the novel’s protagonist, leads a futile life full of pains and pangs in her heart. She seems to be a puppet in the hands of indifferent forces (cosmic absurdities) that continually trample her aspirations and ridicule her love and life with laughter and derision. Her rationality seems null and void before the irrationality of the universe. Although she tries to penetrate the nature of the cosmos, she fails due to the inability of her bounded reason. She continuously struggles to make her life meaningful and fruitful in such an inherently meaningless world. Again and again, it opposes her wills and wishes and oppresses her rainbowy desires. In the ‘Phase First’ novel, Hardy describes the universality of

the cosmic Absurdity, which is common to all. The difference is that for some, it's mild, and for some, profound. None can escape from it. That is why Hardy writes:

All these young souls are passengers in Durbeyfield—entirely dependent on the judgment of the two Durbeyfield adults for their pleasures, their necessities, their health, even their existence. If the heads of the Durbeyfield household choose to sail into difficulty, disaster, starvation, disease, degradation, death, thither are these half dozen little captives under hatches compelled to sail with them— six helpless creatures, who have never been asked if they wish for life on any terms, much less if they wish for it on such hard conditions as are involved in being of the shiftless house of Durbeyfield. (Tess of the d'Urbervilles 17).

On the bases of such incidents as they occur in this novel, it can be said that this novel is the novel of chances and coincidences which lead to consequences. In this novel, they are great deal in numbers through which cosmic Absurdity performs its controversial deeds. They are too influential for Tess' future. Four such significant chance instances and coincidence change her course and the discourse of the novel as well. The first one is the death of Tess' horse; the second is her father's discovery of his old ancestry; the next is slipping of her passionate letter written to Angel, and the last is her father's death. In 'Phase the First: The Maiden (Chap. IV)' of the novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Thomas Hardy introduces the essence and existence of cosmic Absurdity with the help of chance and coincidence. The first instance of chance and coincidence is seen in Tess' life in the incident where her dear horse named 'Prince,' the only means of earning livelihood for his family, dies in an accident by the mail-van shaft. It's the alpha of crisis that is brought by none and nothing but by inadvertent illogical engagement of the universal Absurdity. Describing the conditional pathetic conversation between Tess and her brother Abraham, Hardy writes:

Tis all my doing—all mine!" the girl cried, gazing at the spectacle. "No excuse for me—none. What will mother and father live on now? Aby,Aby!" She shook the child, who had slept soundly through the whole disaster. "We can't go on with our load—Prince is killed!"

When Abraham realized all, the furrows of fifty years were extemporized on his young face.

"Why, I danced and laughed only yesterday!" she went on to herself. "To think that I was such a fool!"

"Tis because we be on a blighted star, and not a sound one, isn't, Tess? Murmured Abraham through tears.

In silence they waited through an interval which seemed endless. At length a sound, and an approaching object, proved to them that the driver of the mail-car had been as good as his Word (Tess of the d'Urbervilles, 26-27).



In this novel, the second major instance of chance and coincidence is seen when Tess' father (John Durbeyfield) discovers his ancient ancestry or d'Urbervilles lineage. A local person tells him that 'Durbeyfield' is the changed form of "D'Urbervilles," and he belongs to an ancient 'Norman' family who once was one of the wealthiest families in its regime. Here too, Chance and coincidence play their role. Such a discovery, which he celebrates by getting drunk, becomes a never-lasting curse for his family. It results in a collision between intention and outcome. He intends to get help from the 'd'Urbervilles family,' but what he gets is cathartic—his girl (Tess) is raped and ruined, and his family reaches the verge of penury. What he proposes, cosmic Absurdity disposes through the help of chance and coincidence. About Tess' family's ancient lineage, satirically writes Hardy:

Thus, the Durbey fields, once d'Urbervilles, saw descending upon them the destiny which, no doubt, when they were among the Olympians of the country, they had caused to descend many a time, and severely enough, upon the heads of such landless ones as they themselves were now. So do flux and reflux – the rhythm of change— alternate and persist in everything under the sky (Tess of the d'Urbervilles, 326).

Later, her letter of confession to Angel Clare, which she slips under his door, goes under his carpet, and never reaches him in time, is also the witness of time and coincidence, which is also a part of cosmic Absurdity. Nearly twenty years before this novel comes into its existence, Hardy pens in his diary: "All is vanity," saith the preacher. "But if all were only vanity, who would mind? Alas, it is often worse than vanity: agony, darkness, and death. A man would never laugh were he not to forget his situation, or were he not one who has never learnt" (F.E. Hardy 148). What the tense and sense of the world his mind and soul feel, he pens in his diary, and further, he depicts it chiefly in his tragic novels. The present novel is not an exception. Tess is aware of the condition of life—agony, darkness, death, etc. Her conscience is badly disturbed by the bitter realities of the darkness of this absurd world, which surround her with the aim of checking her will and blocking her way. Hardy has vividly depicted her difficult conditions of life in this absurd cosmos. Most of the characters of this novel feel the cosmic Absurdity. Mostly, through the metaphor of 'blighted star' and 'blighted apple,' Hardy often tries to present such a cosmic absurdity that affects more or less to all in different degrees. He tries to convince that none can escape it. There is mentioned a conversation in which Tess and her brother Abraham talk about it. About it, Hardy pens:

The renewed subject, which seemed to have impregnated the whole family, filled Tess with impatience.

“Never mind now!” she exclaimed.

“Did you say the stars were worlds, Tess?”

“Yes.”

“All like ours?”

“I do not know, but I think so. They sometimes seem to be like the apples on our stubborn-tree. Most of them splendid and sound- a few blighted.”

“Which do we live on- a splendid one or a blighted one?”

“A blighted one” (Tess of the d’Urbervilles 24).

... ..

“Why I danced and laughed only yesterday?” she went on to herself. “to think that I was such a fool!”

“Tis because we be on a blighted star, and not a sound one, isn’t, Tess? Murmured Abraham through tears” (Tess of the D’Urbervilles 26).

The fourth major example of chance and coincidence is observed when her father, John Durbeyfield, dies. His death brings destitution and homelessness to his family. The family of Tess has to leave the village because of the end of the lease of her home, and for the sake of the morality of the village. About it, Hardy writes:

Ever since the occurrence of the event which had cast such a shadow over Tess’s life, the Durbeyfield family (whose descent was not credited) had been tacitly looked on as one which would have to go when their lease ended, if only in the interests of morality. It was, indeed, quite true that the household had not been shining examples either of temperance, soberness, or chastity... By some means the village had to be kept pure (Tess of the d’Urbervilles 327).

It is cosmic Absurdity of chance and coincidence that her father’s death brings her near to Alec again. Along with this nearness slowly-slowly comes the pathetic end, not only of Alec but also of Tess i.e., it (cosmic Absurdity of chance and coincidence) goes on its way like an easy-going insane elephant trampling all who come under its feet without any mercy and compassion in its heart.

Tess is fed up with the enigmatic condition and situation of her life. Although she is aware of her predicament, the ‘primitive hostility of the universe’ saddens her. What David Benatar writes in the book *The Human Predicament: A Candid Guide to Life’s Biggest Questions* is also true with Tess. For she often thinks what he (David Benatar) writes, “We are born, we live, we suffer along the way, and then we die— obliterated for the rest of eternity. Our existence is but a blip in cosmic time and space. It is not surprising that so many people ask:

“What is all about?” Further, he writes “The right answer, I argue in this book, is “ultimately nothing.” Despite some limited consolations, the human condition is in fact, a tragic predicament from which none of us can escape, for the predicament consists not merely in life but also in death” (David Benatar. Preface to the Human Predicament i).

Thomas Hardy has also presented the human predicament through a wonderful image of the ‘Swede Field at Flint comb Ash’ in this novel. He writes:

The upper half of each turnip had been eaten off by the live-stock, and it was the business of the two women to grub out the lower or earlier half of the root with a hooked fork called a hacker, that this might be eaten also. Each leaf of the vegetable having been consumed, the white field was in colour of 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 expression with the lineaments gone (Tess of the d’Urbervilles 264).

Fate, the comrade of chance and coincidence, is also one of those tools of cosmic Absurdity through which it brings upheaval in human life. Although it is within the limit in Shakespeare, it is over and over in Hardy. When the mentioned novel Tess of the d’Urbervilles is read between the lines, it is found that destiny plays the most striking role in this novel because it can be said that it is nothing but the story of cruel fate. Tess, the protagonist of this novel, is dominated by such uncontrollable fate as she can neither change nor bear it. She is its victim from the beginning to the end of the novel. It is her destined fate that her tragedy begins with the death of her horse and comes to an end with her death, in between falls, many instances where it dominates her life. For instance, it is her fate that she is born into a family on the edge of penury. Her father is a drunkard. She is the eldest among her brother and sister. She has to go to the D’Urbervilles for help. She has to separate from her parents and lover and, at last, from her own life. Owing to her miserable condition caused by it, in a poem entitled “Tess’s Lament” which works as a supplementary to the aforementioned novel, Hardy describes her pathetic mental and psychological condition. While lamenting, she tells the tale of her sorrow to end her existence—to die. Hardy vividly writes:

I would that folk forget me quite,  
Forget me quite!  
I would that I could shrink from the sight,  
And no more see the sun.  
Would it were time to say farewell,

To claim my nook, to need my knell,

Time for them all to stand and tell

Of my day's work as done. (Thomas Hardy. "Selected Poem" 69)

The present novel is brimming with several incidents of chance, fate, and coincidence, which force not only the major characters— Tess, Angel, and Alec, etc., —but also minor characters— Mr. and Mrs. Durbeyfield, Sorrow, Mercy Chant, etc.—of the novel which lead a miserable life in their own way. Alec, as well as Angel Clare, is also its victim. Angel feels that it is too earnest to live on this blue planet. This is why he asks Tess, "This hobble of being alive is rather serious, don't you think so (Tess of the d'Urbervilles 114). In 'Phase sixth—The Convert' of the novel, time and coincidence play a greater role than ever. No sooner did she (Tess) meet Alec again, she got Angel's letter. At once, she says to him: "I have learnt things in my trouble" (Tess of the d'Urbervilles 288). The universality of cosmic Absurdity and pains and pangs of the minor character's heart is also heard when, before reaching Kingsbere, Tess' younger brothers and sisters sing a pathetic choric note at the churchyard while staying at the graveyard of the d'Urbervilles' forefathers. What they sing, Hardy writes:

Here we suffer grief and pain,

Here we meet to part again;

In Heaven we part no more (Tess of the d'Urbervilles 331).

Cosmic Absurdity often rules over the world of Wessex with the help of its agents, namely time and place. In Tess of the d'Urbervilles, they (time and place) also cause it (cosmic Absurdity). Every era and regime has its code of conduct, ethics, and taboos. The Victorian age also has its etiquettes— manners, and methods. Hardy has used this novel as a vessel for his criticism of the late 19th Century Victorian society. Its most prominent critique is related to the double standard of sex—the sexual double standard. Rules and regulations differ for the same deeds and misdeeds for men and women. Several conventions of this age are oppressive to individuals, especially to women. This is the reason why Victorian society condemns Tess as an impure woman, for she is raped. Alec is Alec, a male, miles away from such an impurity. What to say about Alec, even though Angel fears her past. The reason behind his rejection of her is his thought about what his family and community will think if her past is discovered. Keeping all this in mind, Thomas Hardy writes: "Every village has its idiosyncrasy, its constitution, often its code of morality" (Tess of the d'Urbervilles 54). Cosmic Absurdity of

time and place can also be seen when and where Tess is raped, and Alec is killed. In her case, the arbitrary rules of time and place literally ruin her life.

Hardy, who has a sensitive temperament about nature, and is its keen observer of massive and minute things, is directly affected by it. He is a naturalist—a part of the Darwinist. Different writers have treated nature differently. To Keats, its shape is mellowing; to Wordsworth, it's 'mother', friend', and 'Anchor'; to Shelley, it has a positive shape, but to Hardy, like to Alfred Lord Tennyson, it's always "red in tooth and claw" (A.L. Tennyson, In Memoriam. Canto56). It has nothing to do with human beings and their suffering. It is pretty indifferent to them. Almost all his novels reflect its dark aspects— its cruelty and crashing power. It has been presented as a living personage who interferes in human indulgences without mercy and kindness. It has nothing good to offer Tess but only destruction and suffering. Like William Wordsworth's 'Lucy Gray', she belongs to it by birth and is her (nature's) daughter, yet it neither protects nor helps her in her misery. She is raped in its lap, yet it does nothing. In this context, describing a dialogue between Tess and Alec, Hardy Writes:

"Tess!" said d'Urbervilles.

There was no answer. The obscurity was now so great that he could see absolutely nothing but a pale nebulosity at his feet, which represented the white muslin figure he had left upon the dead leaves. Everything else was blackness alike. D'Urberville stooped; and heard a gentle regular breathing. He knelt and bent lower, till her breath warmed his face, and in a moment his cheek was in contact with hers. She was sleeping soundly, and upon her eyelashes their lingered tears.

Darkness and silence ruled everywhere around. Above them rose the primeval yews and oaks of The Chase, in which were poised gentle roosting birds in their last nap; and about them stole the hopping rabbits and hares. But, might some say, where was Tess's guardian angel? Where was the providence of her simple faith? Perhaps, like that other god whom the ironical Tishbite spoke, he was pursuing, or he was in a journey, or he was sleeping and not to be awaked (Tess of the d'Urbervilles 67).

The prudence of Tess's simple faith in nature does not check her calamity that she is raped. Her infant named 'Sorrow' dies, yet it (nature) does not solace her. It remains silent. Again and again, it ignores her miseries and sufferings. It has no sympathy for her but only empathy that bothers her. This is the reason why Hardy describes it as a villain character. In this way, natural calamity and empathy also become the tools of cosmic Absurdity in the tragic novel.

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, there is a confrontation between Tess's subjective assessment and the objective outcome of the cosmos. She is an intelligent lass with a striking personality, and she is distinguished by her deep sense of morality and intense passion. She is the icon of compassion. She aims to lead a peaceful and happy life. She works hard to improve the

miserable condition of her family with a keen sense of responsibility and commitment in all deeds in all weather and seasons. Nights and days do not make any difference to her. Sweat is sweet to her. To her, ‘sweet are the uses of adversity.’ But she gets in its exchange is unbearable misery, heart-wringing suffering, a deep feeling of angst, anguish, anxiety, alienation, dread, despair, and torment will. Her choice is shattered into pieces like a sheet of glass. The existential crises that cause the tornado of unpleasant experiences and anxieties in her mind and soul make her feel the meaninglessness of life and the cosmos. She feels the universality of the purposelessness of her birth. It is to say that her subjective assessment is praiseworthy, but the objective outcome that she gets is against her hopes and aspirations. It is negative that all the feelings that stir her psyche result from the negative outcomes of her desired objectives. These facts are reflected well in the letter she writes to Angel Clare. When her letter is read between the lines, it becomes crystal clear that the thoughts of her mind and feelings of her soul are the upshot of the cosmic absurdity, which indirectly governs the cosmos. It interferes with one’s subjective and objective assessment. What one proposes, it disposes. The objective outcomes of her subjective efforts are reflected well in the letter that she writes to Angel:

... I must cry to you in my trouble—I have no one else! ... I think I must die if you do not come soon or tell me to come...please, please not to be just—only a little kind to me! ... If you would come, I could die in your arms! I would be content to do that if so be you had forgiven me! ... If you will send me one little line and say, “I am coming soon,” I will bide on, Angel—oh so cheerfully! ... Think... how it does hurt my heart not to see you ever—ever! Ah, if I could only make your dear heart not ache one little minute of each day as mine does every day and all day long, it might lead you to show pity to your lonely one.... I would be content, aye, glad, to live with you as your servant if I may not as your wife, so that I could only be near you, and get glimpses of you, and think of you as mine.... I long for only one thing in heaven or earth or under the earth, to meet you, my own dear! Come to me—come to me and save me from what threatens me! (Tess of the d’Urbervilles 311-312)!

Sense of the purposelessness of life, the meaninglessness of existence, and the cosmos as well cause death wish in Tess. They are nothing but the consequence of cosmic Absurdity. Again and again, they haunt her hopes, shatter her dreams, and stir her psyche for hara-kiri. This is why Tess says to Angel: “My life looks as if it had been wasted for want of chances! When I see what you know, what you have read, seen, and thought, I feel what a nothing I am! I’m like the poor Queen of Sheba who lived in the Bible. There is no more spirit in me” (Tess of the d’Urbervilles 116). Later on, once again, she says to him: “Oh, what only hurts me now would torture and kill me then (Tess of the d’Urbervilles 227)!” Frequently, she reflects on her wish for self-destruction. The novel’s narrator also has vividly described what she thinks before seeing Angel: “My soul chooseth strangling and death rather than my life. I loath it; I would not live away (Tess of the d’Urbervilles 115). In the terminology of the existentialists, it is

nothing for her but a philosophical suicide that is caused only by the ways of the cosmic Absurdity. The unavoidable death also works as its tool. Invisibly and simultaneously, both govern and control the universe in their ways. As Tess is a moral being, she falls prey to ‘Cosmic Absurdity.’

If the present novel is read between the lines, it is found that Tess is the sum and substance of cosmic Absurdity. As Hamlet is the prince of the existentialists’ world, she seems to be the queen of the same world. Both of them suffer a lot due to cosmic absurdity. Both are affected by it. Both represent their category well. Both of them face the proportion of being or not being. It is another thing that cosmic Absurdity is a part of Existentialism which gives importance to an individual’s subjective experiences, whether it’s concerned with thinking, feeling, or acting rather than other things, but it makes no difference between individuals and individuals. It crushes all with or without impartiality. In this context, Thomas Hardy describes, owing to it, how pathetically she (Tess) thinks, feels, and acts. He writes:

Thereupon our heroine resumed her walk. Tears, blinding tears, were running down her face. She knew it was all sentiment, all baseless impressibility, which had caused her to read the scene as her own condemnation; nevertheless, she could get over it; she could not contravene in her own defenceless person all these untoward omens. (Tess of the d’Urbervilles 279).

All the religions of the world say that this cosmos is created by God, who is Almighty, Omnipresent, and Omniscient. He (God), who created this cosmos, is also its part and parcel. Since His creation has several absurdities, He also is not away from it. It may be the cosmic Absurdity, as it seems, due to which Fredrich Nietzsche says that God is dead. In this novel, through the mouth of a significant character Angel Clare, Hardy also says something like this. He quotes a line from Robert Browning, a famous Victorian poet, but with a bit of change. This slight change utterly changes the sense and tense of the line. He says: “God’s not in His heaven /All’s wrong with the world” (Thomas Hardy. Tess of the d’Urbervilles 235)! These lines remind The Tragedy of King Lear in which William Shakespeare, the Bard of Avon, through the mouth of the Earl of Gloucester, projects how man’s predicament in this world is. He says: “As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; / They kill us for their sport” (Act IV, Sc. i. Lns 36-37, p. 930). What action do the naughty boys take with the insects or the worms, the same action is taken with us (human beings) by cosmic Absurdity. Its sport makes us a plaything. It plays on and on and on; we moan and moan and moan.

Tess also says to Alec D’Urberville, “How can I pray for you,...when I am forbidden to believe that the great power who moves the world would alter His plans on my account” (Tess of the

d’Urbervilles 297)? Here, she expresses her doubt about the Great Power (God). As it seems that she does not believe in Him. The cosmic absurdities check her to accept His existence. She often wishes to commit suicide believing that this world and this life are without any higher purpose. She tries to rebel against it but often feels feeble and helpless.

At last, her rebellious nature is seen when after killing Alec, she says: “And he is dying—he looks as if he is dying...And my sin will kill him and not kill me...Oh, you have torn my life all to pieces—made me be what I prayed you in pity not to make me be again... my own true husband will never, never—oh, God—I can’t bear this! I cannot” (Tess of the d’Urbervilles 353)! In this way, she rebels against the absurdities of the cosmos. After killing Alec, she says to Angel: “All is trouble outside there; inside here content” (Tess of the d’Urbervilles 362).

To conclude, it can be said that the existence and essence of cosmic Absurdity in Hardy’s Tess of the d’Urbervilles can’t be ignored. It dominates the novel and signifies that human beings are absurd at the root. It decides the course of the characters and the discourse of the novel. The existence and essence of confrontations—between rational man and irrational cosmos, intention and outcome, between subjective assessment and objective outcome—are seen so highly that this novel becomes the novel of cosmic absurdities.

The role that death and existential crises play makes scholars feel the essence of cosmic absurdities in the nook and corner of this novel. In the concluding paragraph of Tess, while presenting the narrator’s weariness with the ways of the world, Thomas Hardy, in bitter tones, writes: “Justice” was done, and the President of the immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess. And the d’Urberville knights and dames slept on in their tombs unknowing” (Tess of the d’Urbervilles 369). Here lies the cosmic Absurdity which has become the alpha and omega in Tess of the d’Urbervilles.

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