

# Angel Clare: A Hypocritical Secularist

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Received: October 9, 2018 Accepted: December 20, 2018 Published: December 24, 2018

doi:10.5296/elr.v4i2.14104 URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/elr.v4i2.14104>

## Abstract

In Thomas Hardy's masterpiece, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Angel Clare is often referred to "angel" who is gentle and kind. However, it is Angel Clare who loves her that pushed Tess D'Urbervilles into deep abyss of death and ruined her step by step. This paper is going to analyze Angel Clare from a totally different perspective, the image of Angel Clare is not the conventional "angel" in the eyes of most critics of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, whereas, he appeared to be more like a hypocritical secularist, who wants to dominate both women and nature, and the hierarchical and patriarchal values are deeply rooted in his thoughts no matter how hard he tried to decline.

**Keywords:** *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Angel Clare, Hierarchical values, Patriarchal values

## 1. Introduction

*Tess of the D'Urberville* vividly presented the pathetic destiny of Tess Durbeyfield, an innocent village girl. Hardy described the heroine as a "pure woman" in the subtitle of the novel. At that time, Hardy openly challenged the social morality by praising a woman like Tess Durbeyfield who lost her virginity to a man rather than her husband. Hardy severely criticized the bourgeois ethics represented by Clare, and Hardy believed that Tess was the victim of this secular fallacy. Hardy indicated that it was the hypocrisy and cruelty of Angel Clare that forced Tess into deep abyss of death. Through out the novel, the nature of Angel Clare is rather deceptive to the readers, he is not the "angel" to Tess as the readers expected, he is indeed a hypocritical devil who wants to dominate both women and the nature, and no matter how hard he tried to decline, he was deeply influenced by the hierarchical and patriarchal values of his time.

## 2. Angel's Domination of Nature

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Angel Clare was deeply influenced by the traditional patriarchal values, and he had a strong desire to control both the nature and the women. Angel's interest

in nature did not lie in the nature itself, but in its practical values. In his eyes, nature is a reasonable excuse to liberate himself from the constraints of earthly world. In Tess of the D'Urbervilles, in the introduction of Angel Clare, the writer stated clearly that Angel's intention was to acquire a practical skill in the process of farming, "He was the youngest son of his father, a poor parson at the other end of the county, and had arrived at Talbothays Dairy as a six months' pupil, after going the round of some other farms, his object being to acquire a practical skill in the various processes of farming, with a view either to the Colonies, or the tenure of a home-farm, as circumstances might decide"(Hardy, 186 ). Farming was Angel's choice to avoid worldly restraints and get intellectual liberty, "Farming, either in the Colonies, America, or at home - farming, at any rate, after becoming well qualified for the business by a careful apprenticeship - that was a vocation which would probably afford an independence without the sacrifice of what he valued even more than a competency-intellectual liberty" (Hardy, 190).

Angel's desire to dominate the nature was based on the practical values of the nature, nature was just a instrumental tool to make big profits to him. He always aspired to run a profitable farming business to distinguish himself from other worldly creatures. To realize his farming dream, he engrossed himself in learning various kinds of farming skills in different farms, just as demonstrated in the novel "It was true that he was at present out of his class. But she knew that was only because, like Peter the Great in a shipwright's yard, he was studying what he wanted to know. He did not milk cows because he was obliged to milk cows, but because he was learning how to be a rich and prosperous dairyman, landowner, agriculturist, and breeder of cattle. He would become an American or Australian Abraham, commanding like a monarch his flocks and his herds, his spotted and his ring-stroked, his men-servants and his maids" (Hardy, 202). Angel's choice of wife also reflected his instrumental values. In order to be a thrift hardworking farmer, Angel needed a wife who is able to "milk cows, churn good butter, make immense cheeses; know how to sit hens and turkeys, and rear chickens, to direct a field of labourers in an emergency, and estimate the value of sheep and calves?" (Hardy, 236). Tess D'Urbervilles was undoubtedly the ideal helpmate of an agriculturist, which was one of the most important reasons for Angel Clare to choose Tess as his wife. In this case, nature was just a practical instrument to Angel Clare, however, his aspiration to dominate the nature never succeeds, he was never a successful farmer. He was badly hurted in Brazil when he experimented his ideals. As a representative of androcentric values, Angel suffered badly in the end of the novel.

### **3. Angel's Domination of Women**

The influence of traditional patriarchal values in Angel Clare culminated in his eagerness to dominate women. Both women and nature were just tools for Angel Clare, and their appeal to Angel did not lie in themselves but in their practical values. Throughout the novel, Angel demonstrated a strong desire to control women including Tess D'Urbervilles, his lover. To Angel Clare, Tess was just a visionary essence of woman, a typical form of a whole sex. In their early contacts, Angel did not like Tess' name, he preferred to call her Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names, to his disappointments, Tess did not accept Angel's nicknames because she did not understand their meanings. On the one hand, Angel Clare admired Tess

for her natural beauty, on the other hand, his aspiration to tame Tess never disappeared in their contacts. To Angel Clare, Tess was just a imaginary perfect woman who only exist in his minds. He had a strong desire to civilized Tess in his own stubborn way, at the beginning of their contacts, he always tried to change Tess into his own imaginary goddess. Angel tried to tame Tess by teaching her history and civilization, and he liked to judge Tess from the perspective of a philosopher, an outsider. "Tess was the merest stray phenomenon to Angel Clare as yet - a rosy warming apparition which had only just acquired the attribute of persistence in his consciousness. So he allowed his mind to be occupied with her, deeming his preoccupation to be no more than a philosopher's regard of an exceedingly novel, fresh, and interesting specimen of womankind" (Hardy, 185). Tess was never a real living individual to Angel, and she was more like a typical reflection of his domination of women.

Angel's domination of Tess reached the peak when he refused to admit Tess' chastity. To Angel, a woman's virginity should only be obtained by her husband, Tess was not qualified to be his wife if she lost her virginity before marriage. The stubborn fossil morality of Angel finally pushed Tess into abyss of agony. Angel refused to admit Tess was his lover, and he insisted that Tess was "dead", and he even tortured Tess by lying her into the stone coffin. A woman without virginity was not qualified to be his lover, and he would never show any respect to the woman who lost her virginity to other man except her husband. In his mind, a husband own complete control over his wife, his weirdness and stubbornness obviously showed his indignation and voidness when he lost control of Tess. All of his passion and warmth were replaced by repulsion and aversion. And since he could not change the cold reality, the only choice for him was to escape, and from the moment he abandoned Tess, his image of a righteous gentleman was completely shattered. He admitted:" let me speak plainly, or you may not see all my difficulties. How can we live together while that man lives? - he being your husband in Nature, and not I. If he were dead it might be different...Besides, that's not all the difficulty; it lies in another consideration - one bearing upon the future of other people than ourselves. Think of years to come, and children being born to us, and this past matter getting known - for it must get known. There is not an uttermost part of the earth but somebody comes from it or goes to it from elsewhere. Well, think of wretches of our flesh and blood growing up under a taunt which they will gradually get to feel the full force of with their expanding years. What an awakening for them! What a prospect! Can you honestly say Remain, after contemplating this contingency? Don't you think we had better endure the ills we have than fly to others" (Hardy, 216). His absolute selfishness of mentioning the predicament of their children in the future was the last straw to Tess. Tess had no choice but to admit her inferiority and leave Angel. Tess was never a perfect woman for Angel because she was always an independent living individual who never yielded to the patriarchal society. Angel never truly dominates Tess which was the main reason for him to abandon Tess in the end.

#### **4. The Hierarchical Values in Angel**

Born to be a son of a clerical family, Angel Clare can not get rid of the limitness of the class which he belongs to, and the hierarchical values are strongly rooted in his minds from beginning to the end of the novel. No matter how hard he tried to be mixed with the lower

class, he could not hide his feelings of superiority above others. No matter how diligently he worked in the dairy, his identity as an upper class never changed. His work in the dairy was just his growing process of learning new practical skill which would prepare him for a better and profitable career as a master of farm. He worked not because he had to, but because he wanted to learn practical skills.

In the farm, Angel always managed to do all kinds of farm chores, however, the dairyman's reverence and modesty toward him always distinguish him from other workers in the farm. Even Tess was astonished why Angel should be addressed as "Sir" even by the master of the dairy. Angel felt undignified at the beginning of sitting down as a equal member of the dairyman's household. And "by Mrs Crick's orders, who held that he was too genteel to mess at their table, it was Angel Clare's custom to sit in the yawning chimney-corner during the meal, his cup-and-saucer and plate being placed on a hinged flap at his elbow" (Hardy, 156). In the dairyman's house, Angel sat alone and had his own table while eating because Mrs Crick thought it was demeaning for Angel to sit on the same table with other workers, and he even had his own comfortable room where he can read and play harp at his ease. Those priorities Angel enjoyed in the farm indicate his superior social status, and Angel's acceptance of those benefits implied he deep rooted hierarchical values in his minds.

He had his own pride and principle as a member of upper class, and no matter how hard he tried to be a real member of the dairy, his ideas were strongly influenced by the hierarchical values, which corresponded with his identity as a member of the upper class. His determination to marry Tess was also considered as a sacrifice for love. In his mind, Tess was not the perfect woman for him considering social status. "'My position - is this,' he said abruptly. 'I thought - any man would have thought - that by giving up all ambition to win a wife with social standing, with fortune, with knowledge of the world, I should secure rustic innocence as surely as I should secure pink cheeks'" (Hardy, 231) In order to make compensations for his sacrifice in marriage, he expected a rustic innocent wife, Tess' loss of virginity was unbearable to Angel although he was also not pure before marriage. It was obvious that Angel's stubbornness on hierarchical values have smashed all the relationship between Tess and him.

### **5. The Patriarchal Values in Angel**

In the novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy stated over and over again his expectation of equal relationship between man and woman, and Tess was the typical representative of a fighter against patriarchal society. And the conflict between Tess and Angel was inevitable because Angel was deeply influenced by the patriarchal values which were imparted to him when he was a boy. Angel Clare was a hypocritical, selfish, cruel man throughout the novel.

Angel's patriarchal values were clearly demonstrated in his love with Tess. In his eyes, Tess was never a real living individual, she was just a idealized goddess who only existed in his imaginations. Tess always tried hard to confirm that she was just a common milkmaid, not any other goddess he had wanted. Before Tess' confession of her loss of virginity, Angel did love Tess, but this love was not based on real life. And Angel's love to Tess was selfish as he

loved himself more. The aim of his love is to get some profits other than to make sacrifices. It was futile for Tess to try to change Angel's minds which was strongly influenced by patriarchal values. After the confession of Tess, Angel's dream of obtaining an ideal wife fell apart, and almost at the same time, Tess was regarded as a devil to Angel. Just as Tess defended that she never deceived Angel, and it was Angel who never treated Tess as a living individual. "What have I done - what have I done! I have not told of anything that interferes with or belies my love for you. You don't think I planned it, do you? It is in your own mind what you are angry at, Angel; it is not in me. O, it is not in me, and I am not that deceitful woman you think me!" (Hardy, 233). Angel was not angel to Tess who can bring her comfort and love, indeed Angel was the devil for Tess who hurted her dreadfully in the mind. And Tess would never be the household "Angel" to Angel Clare, Tess's female consciousness grew as the development of the plot, and Tess would never sacrifice herself to satisfy the selfish needs of the men. Tess, as the daughter of the nature, would inevitably be abandoned by Angel Clare, a traditional hypocritical and patriarchal man. Just as Thomad Hardy stated in the novel, "Within the remote depths of his constitution, so gentle and affectionate as he was in general, there lay hidden a hard logical deposit, like a vein of metal in a soft loam, which turned the edge of everything that attempted to traverse it. It had blocked his acceptance of the Church; it blocked his acceptance of Tess. Moreover, his affection itself was less fire than radiance, and, with regard to the other sex, when he ceased to believe he ceased to follow: contrasting in this with many impressionable natures, who remain sensuously infatuated with what they intellectually despise" (Hardy, 238). It was Angel's stubbornness on the patriarchal values that have shattered all the love between Tess and Angel. He had been one of the murders who destroyed Tess completely

## 6. Conclusion

In Tess of the D'Urbervilles, the nature of Angel Clare is deceptive. He is not the angel as the name indicates, on the contrary, he was a hypocritical secularist who wanted to dominate both women and nature, and the hierachical and patrichal values were deeply rooted in his blood. No matter what he said and did, he belonged to the upper class who had an inherent despise for the lower class. The stubborn adherence to the old fashioned values finally destroyed every wonderful thing in his life. He was not qualified to deserve Tess, the daughter of nature.

## Acknowledgements

This work is supported by Top-notch Academic Programs Project of Jiangsu Higher Education Institutions

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