
**Between the Cyclic Text – Context:
Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*
in the Context of the Hermeneutic Circle**

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Abstract :

Hermeneutics is chiefly related to the discipline of interpretation of a specific body of texts. The process of interpretation of literary texts hermeneutically is regarded as the consequence of the academic arena. It is a fact that literary hermeneutics shares mutual threads with various schools of literary criticism but what sets it apart from literary criticism proper are its philosophical leanings and its self reflexive and meta-critical character. Thus, this study is an attempt to concentrate on the application of hermeneutics to literary texts. It does reread Thomas Hardy’s most distinguished tragic novel, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891) with the interpretive procedure of the hermeneutic circle as developed by Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and Gadamer. The study also examines the relationship between the text – context, and how they both occur as a dialogical space; and how this space of the text exists as a *route* of interpretation the part (Tess) and the whole (text).

Keywords: Hermeneutics, hermeneutic circle, Gadamer, the part and whole, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*.

I. Introduction

Unlike philosophical hermeneutics which has a transcendental dimension, literary hermeneutics has a practical orientation in that it deals with the explication and interpretation of literary texts. Hence Peter Szondi in his book, *Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics (Literature, Culture, Theory)* (1995) points out that “literary hermeneutics is the theory of the interpretation, interpretation of literary work”. Although literary hermeneutics focuses on literary works as such, it does not shy away from discussing fundamental hermeneutical issues such as *mens auctoris* (authorial intention), presuppositions, hermeneutic circle, linguisticity and fusion of horizons, for micro-hermeneutics is subsumed under macrohermeneutics. Even while partaking of some of the key issues in philosophical hermeneutics, literary hermeneutics operates in a province of its own. (Szondi 99)

During the past centuries, Gadamer and Heidegger’s ontological approach of was tackled by the focus of the concern after it was concentrated on text. The afford mentioned approach brought into

understanding a being mode. Interpretation process to reflect its dynamics which is called “hermeneutic circle” that shows its repetitive move forward and backward from “part to whole”. This part is between text sections to the events in history up to ourselves. As for the whole, it ranges from the entire text, to the context expressed historically till reaching the roots in ourselves that took their historical course in the world. Summing up, the fixed reminder that explanation concerns not only the understood matters but also includes the doer of understanding is known as the hermeneutic circle. Furthermore, the procedure of interpretative understanding is a historical process with historical values.

Gadamer develops these notions of the historical work and identifies that this process of interpretation is accurately survival. “Trying, as the earlier hermeneuticians did, to locate the (scientific) value of the humanities in their capacity for objective reconstruction is bound to be a wasted effort. The past is handed over to us through the complex and ever-changing fabric of interpretations, which gets richer and more complex as decades and centuries pass. This, however, is not a deficiency. It is, rather, a unique possibility, a possibility that involves the particular kind of truth-claim that Gadamer ascribes to the human sciences: the truth of self-understanding” (Gadamer 84).

Historically, Aristotle has the seeds of this hermeneutic tradition in his thesis, *De Interpretatione*. The Medieval Times are endemic with theses on interpretation. “Modern hermeneutics encompasses everything in the interpretative process including verbal and non-verbal forms of communication as well as prior aspects that affect communication, such as presuppositions, preunderstandings, the meaning and philosophy of language, and semiotics” (Ibid, 332). The origin of the term ‘hermeneutics’ is derived from “the Greek verb *hermeneuein*, meaning to interpret, and the noun *hermeneia*, meaning interpretation”. This approach of textual interpretation stresses “the sociocultural and historic influences on qualitative interpretation. It also exposes hidden meanings”. (Knight, 335) Moreover, the hermeneut is an interpreter, a ‘hermeneut’ insofar as he/she navigates from the text to its margins, where he will make the anchor of the reading, understanding and emotions experienced in the central space of the text (Ibid, 335).

In fact, the early modern age and for most of the eighteenth century, there was no hermeneutic art dedicated to literary text. The writers of this era such as Samuel Johnson and Alexander Pope used literature as a means to reflect life but did not concentrate much on its explanation. Their most valuable issue was evaluating their poems, finding another form to write literature, specifying the main principles of creating poems and literature, and ask specified questions about the esthetics and morality of these writings. Writing precisely captured their attention, not to

interpret what they write to others. They focused on the transparent meaning of writing and left over the interpretation to be done by other people. When writing any prologue to any play, the playwrights were not making any good to their writing but adding more obscurity to them (Fidler, 90).

As the eighteenth century was in its leaving time, the dominance was taken over by Romanticism which was based on the principle that the author's spiritual insight was the source of everything in his writing and that the production of literature is left to be understood by the receivers of that production. This production is the creation that made others look at the writer as a divine one. The "secular scripture", the name that was given to Romanticism participated in the Enlightenment period that added more understanding to Romanticism. What makes understanding of literature more difficult is due to its subjectivity and its being disconnected to the values that were engaged in showing the significance of literature that were commonly shared (Fidler,83).

The appearance of secular scripture caused adding more to the significance of literature and made understanding it more difficult which included hermeneutic sciences and arts. Friedrich Schleiermacher, the distinguished theologian in the time of Romanticism dedicated his efforts to identify the basic ideas and thoughts of hermeneutics that were to be devoted to literature, not only for the analysis of the scripture, and could create a new tradition that enabled understanding the principle that the core concern of hermeneutics was literature (Ibid, 88).

At About the end of the century comes the works of Wilhelm Dilthey, of Heidegger who created Being and Time that was done in 1927, and then Heidegger's student, Gadamer who all founded a specific tradition that depend on Schleiermacher with all his participation to the Romantic period as a source for their works.

Now, what is the major problem for hermeneutics while dealing with this tradition? It is the connection between the reader and the text being read, and this is called the circle of hermeneutics. Most theorists concentrated on the relationship between the reader and the text except for Gadamer. They focused on the connection between a reader and an author as they considered that this connection is shown through the text and that the text is the document that conveys what the author's means and wants to deliver to the reader (Knight, 340).

But Gadamer was thinking differently. He used his tradition to demonstrate that the connection is relay between the reader and the text which could be expressed in various manners and ways. He believes that this relationship is the strong connection between that part and the whole. "The circularity of this interpretative engagement has to do with moving

back and forth between a certain preconception about the whole and the part” (*Malpas, 77*).

II. Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and the Hermeneutic Circle

The well-known author of the Victorian novel, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), one of the most celebrated British authors (Bantam, 96). His position as a writer in the nineteenth century is seen by a host of critics as no less importance than Charles Dickens. Hardy is highly recognized for his fairly grim portrayal of the human suffering, and his keen concern with the philosophy of existence. Many of his novels have stimulating authority of catastrophic tragedies. *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* is regarded as a typical model of his most debated novels that go through endless interpretative process (Ibid, 96).

The hermeneutic circle is a *process* of interpretation which “regularly goes back and forth between the ‘parts’ and the ‘whole’” (Bal, 123). Hermeneutics as a methodology of interpretation began “with Schleiermacher and later with Heidegger and later was extended beyond the interpretation of texts to the interpretation of all forms and beings” (Ibid 123). Interpretation of texts is the essential procedure of literary hermeneutics. Generally, understanding is associated with the meaning of a text. “The tradition of literary hermeneutics even describes human beings in terms of their understanding: human beings are hermeneutic animal” (Palmer, 74).

The hermeneutic view of literary texts would thus be one that, in every case, tends to deny the otherness of the other and benefit only the ‘original’ text, discourse and language by supplementing them, stretching their limits, making them more valuable by clarification and expansion (Coste, 95). In his book, *A Reader*, the American literary critic, philosopher, and novelist, George Steiner has applied the theory of hermeneutic circle on Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. Steiner “scatters bright ideas everywhere in the text,” and bridge a relationship between the text and the reader. Steiner begins his interpretive tradition with the very title of the novel, explaining its significance. Tess stands as convertible to the text as a whole. The relationship between the part (Tess) and the whole (text) (Steiner, 74).

This hermeneutic circle can also be implicated as “a relationship between the present and the past, the historical horizon and some other historical horizon, an understanding of the way in which the past text speaks”. Steiner emphasizes the idea of the past text and the present text to highlight the intention of the author (Thomas Hardy) of the consecration of the written word. So, he includes a long column of symbols and images throughout the text to open the arena of numerous possible interpretation which can be done by the reader (Steiner, 89).

Hardy's novel, *Tess*, is built on numerous symbols; symbols which are seen as essential parts of the whole text. One of these central symbols is the incorporation of pagan superstitions and practices. Charlotte Bonica's states that "Hardy's use of paganism in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is part of the reason for Hardy's incorporation of these pagan elements is because he believes that there is an innate and inescapable human need to make sense of the universe in humanly understandable terms" (Bonica, 849).

Mankind, Gadamer debates, "is a being in language. It is through language that the world is opened up for us. We learn to know the world by learning to master a language. Hence we cannot really understand ourselves unless we understand ourselves as situated in a linguistically mediated, historical culture". (Malpas, 85) Nature and paganism have been used by Hardy as part of the hermeneutic cycle to connect the part to the whole text. On the other hand, Bonica adds that this amalgamation of nature and paganism is seen as an unconventional conviction. She states that "at the heart of the country people's paganism is the tendency to see congruence between two events and situations in their own lives, and phenomena in the natural world" (Ibid, 85).

Accordingly, Bonica sees this circle of past and present occupies the whole text and links its historical horizon to fate. Hardy's text, Bonica states:

"grants the existence of fate, a great impersonal, primitive force, existing from all eternity, absolutely independent of human wills, superior even to any god whom humanity may have invented. The power of fate is embracing and is more difficult to understand than the gods themselves. The scientific parallel of fatalism is determinism. It acknowledges, just as fatalism, that man's struggle against the will behind things, is of no avail, but does decree that the laws of cause and effect must not suspend operation. Determinism seeks to explain conditions which fatalism is content to describe" (Bonica 99).

Fate draws the heroine of the novel in a vast diversity of figures. Fate is existed "through chance and coincidence, and the manifestations of nature, time, and woman" (Fidler,188).

Hardy also connects the symbol of animals (especially birds and mice) with the fate of Tess; Tess cannot get rid of this circle of fate. Tess is compared to a wounded bird whose life is ended miserably. She breathes her last breath at the last part of the novel by execution. Nature's lack of sympathy to Tess's agony and torture is mirrored in the song of birds. Hardy obviously juxtaposes the agony of birds to that of Tess's. Tess addresses the birds clearly in a gloomy tone: "Poor darlings-to suppose myself the most miserable being on earth in the sight o' such misery as yours!... And I be not bleeding; and I have two hands to feed

and clothe me” (*Tess*, 274). Hardy’s comparison of Tess to the birds signifies Tess’s unity with the natural world, recognizing the birds as mutual beings of her own misery. Both are the victims of the austerity of the whole eco system and the lack of sympathy of man. According to Northrop Frye, “The animal world is portrayed in terms of monsters or beast prey, which from Shakespeare to Hardy has been associated with tragic destiny” (Frye, 211). Tess’s destiny is interpreted in the whole context of the novel with blood, love, and desire. The color of blood is related with Tess from the very beginning to the end and Tess recognizes “The huge pool of blood in front of her assuming the iridescence of coagulation” (*Tess*, 27).

Throughout the novel, Hardy makes an equivalent connection between Tess’s circumstances as a part and the state of the natural world around her as a whole. The compassion with the natural phenomenon and the strong faith that nature is a means of destiny, is regarded as the anchor of the novel. Thus, coincidence as a context is responsible for the direction of textuality. From the very first pages of the novel, Tess is depicted as a perfect instance of this coincidence, especially when “Angel Clare and his two brothers, pass through Tess’s village and see her and her companions dancing on the green. He looks on for a while and then chooses a partner. He took almost the first that came to hands, but he did not take Tess. After dancing a short time he left, not having noticed her at all” (Johnson, 254). The basis Hardy possibly sets up this incident “is to make his readers understand that if Angel had chosen Tess as a dancing mate, both of them would have abandoned their disastrous tragedy” (Stewart, 234).

In reality, nearly every opportunity “that Tess takes and every coincidence she experiences, brings her distress within the long term” (Ibid 234). One of the instance, Tess grasped an opportunity to assist her parents by selling the milk in the market, but she unfortunately lost the ancestors’ mare. “A like crave sends her to her deadly position at the D’Urbervilles” (Ibid 234).

Nature as a cognizant specialist, ordinarily is fiendish is regularly found in Hardy’s works (Donovan, 213). Nature ordinarily grants the notion of “being persuasive, but as Hardy shows, nature can too take on evil perspectives, getting to be more of an onscreen character than a setting for an activity” (Ibid, 213). Steiner states in his book, *A Reader* that “nature also took on the evil impact, especially when the wind murmurs sadly when distress debilitates Tess” (Steiner, 74). “The incidental hurl of the wind go to be the moon of a few colossal pitiful soul, conterminous with the universe in space, and with the history in time” (*Tess*, 31). Steiner adds, “at other times nature cannot so effortlessly reflect the disposition of its individuals” (Steiner, 75). Hardy

describes nature and the disposition of the individuals in a poetic language which is full of symbolic layers. "July passed over their heads and the Thermidorean climate which came in its wake appeared an exertion on the portion of the nature to coordinate the states of hearts at Talbothay Dairy". (*Tess*, 166) Reading nature in the context of the hermeneutic circle allows the reader to approach nature as "a kind coincidence as well as Destiny" (Steiner, 77). Hardy utilized the theme of nature with fondness and sympathy. He senses the domestic surrounded by the awesome outside. Nature is deciphered and appeared exceptionally "obviously in *Tess* that he considers Time a foremost sign of Destiny" (Ibid, 77). In his book, *The Same and the Different: Standards and Standardization in Thomas Hardy's "Tess of the D'Urbervilles"* (2000), Jennifer Wicke stands with two main interpretations for the theme of Time. Wicke states his interpretations clearly:

"the colossal significance of the minute, and the frustration and alter which come with the long time. The first stresses how much may depend on a couple of seconds; the other how small truly things in a thousand a long time or more. There is huge significance set on the minute, for time may be an awesome arrangement of minutes. Minutes of bliss may be turned into intensity by time. Love may be altered by time" (Wicke, 51).

For instance, when Blessed messenger and the heroine of the novel, Tess recognize the fact that the interest by means of the control over each other "would likely in their to begin with days of partition be indeed more strong than ever, time must constrict that effect... when two individuals are once parted.... New developments numbly bud upwards to fill each cleared put; unexpected mishaps ruin eagerly, and ancient plans are overlooked" (*Tess*, 36). As a curve mechanism of Destiny, time takes a fundamental part in the layers of the text of the novel, "it works inside the limits of validity and as a capable help to qualification in *Tess*" (Wicke, 52). Tess and the dairy housekeepers are a great illustration. The discussion of the resting compartment appeared to pulsate with the miserable enthusiasm of the young ladies. They withed hotly beneath "the oppressiveness of a feeling pushed them by brutal nature's law. A feeling they neither anticipated or wanted... the contrasts which recognized them a people were disconnected by this energy, and each was but parcel of one life form called sex" (*Tess*, 23). Tess spots on hurt in duplicity, in the event that "there is anything to be picked up by it. Trickery recommends a theme which leads unfailingly to catastrophic; a woman's mystery" (Wicker, 124). Both Tess and Blessed messenger would have been saved if Tess would have told Blessed messenger of her mystery issue with Alec. She was hesitated enough in informing Blessed messenger, and held up until her declaration driven it were to catastrophe (*Tess*, 79). Hardy depicts this catastrophic picture in this extract of the text,

“the vision of D’Urberville coach may be an awful sign, as is the stone of the Cross-in-hand. Destiny could be a portion of life, and much can be clarified by it. Blessed messenger chooses Tess, but it is truly destiny which has made the choice, hence the dairy housekeepers do not fault Tess for any option of it. Marian says it must be something exterior both Blessed messenger and Tess which has caused their partition, for she knows not one or the other of them has any flaws. It was to be that Alec ought to tempt Tess, that is she is not to fault. The passing of the horse, the information of Tess’s terrible good fortune with Alec, indeed the disappointment of her marriage with Clare, her mother acknowledges as in spite of the fact that a few tall and uncompromising” (Wicke, 55).

Mainly, the hermeneutic paradigm is motivated by “the paradoxical, double assumption that no text is self-explicit within the boundaries of the natural language in which it presents itself (it is either obscure, secretive, or incomplete as totality) and it can be better displayed by means of another natural language and/or another discourse type” (Bal, 133).

In his book, *The Eternal Act of Creation* Northrop Fry emphasizes on the idea of “secular scripture”. Fry asserts that “the interpretation of the narrative’s title “*Tess of the d’Urbervilles*” becomes more difficult under the weight of symbols and no longer obvious”. Names and its significance also shape an organic view of the text (Frye, 334). It is a constant process of “the hermeneutic circle which moves back and forth between the part and the whole of *Tess*” (Ibid, 334). Hardy portrays Tess Durbeyfield, the central character of the novel as “a mythic courageous woman...; her eyes are neither dark nor blue nor dark nor violet; or may be all these shades together, like an nearly standard woman” (*Tess*, 84). He further visualizes Tess as a saint whose character regularly alludes to legendary characters. This legendary allusion is depicted in the text when Blessed messenger identifies Tess as a “Daughter of Nature”. Tess is described as “more than a person lady, but as something closer to a legendary incarnation of womanhood” (Ibid, 334). Hardy presents Tess through the scenario of the late nineteenth century Britain as rural laborer. Concerning her education and literacy, Fry states that clearly:

“since Tess has passed the 6th Standard of the National Schools, she does not very fit into the society culture of her forerunners, but budgetary imperatives keep her from rising to a better station in life. She has a place to that higher world, but that as it may, as we find on the primary page of the novel with the news that the Durbeyfields are the surviving individuals of the respectable and old family of the d’Urbervilles. There is nobility in Tess’s blood, unmistakable in her graceful beauty-yet she is constrained to work as a farmhand and milkmaid. When she tries to specify her

bliss by singing lower-class people numbers at the starting of the third portion of the novel, they do not fulfill her- she appears not very comfortable with those prevalent tunes. But, on the other hand, her lingual authority, whereas more cleaned than her mother's, is not very up to the level of Alec's or Angel's. She is in between, both socially and socially. Past her social imagery, Tess speaks to fallen humankind in a devout sense, as the frequent biblical references within the novel remind us. Fair as Tess's clan was once brilliant and capable but is presently tragically decreased, so too did the early eminence of the primary people, Adam and Eve, blur with their removal from Eden, making people pitiful shadows of what they once were. Tess in this way speaks to what is known in Christian religious philosophy as unique sin, the debased state in which all people live, indeed when- like Tess herself after slaughtering Sovereign or capitulating to Alec- they are not entirely or specifically capable for the sins for which they are rebuffed. This torment speaks to the foremost all inclusive side of Tess: she is the myth of the human who endures from wrongdoings that are not her possess and lives a life more corrupted than she deserves" (Fry, 337).

Another character who makes a difference the content to stand firmly is, Blessed messenger Clare, freethinking child. He belongs to the ancestors of priests but instead of joining Cambridge, he decided to follow agriculture. He stands for a defiant endeavoring toward an individual vision of goodness. "He may be a man who longs to work for the honor and eminence man, instead of the honor and radiance of God in a more distant world". (*Tess*, 87) This youthful self-motivated Blessed messenger witnesses the general public as a reshaped entity, thus, he deeply believes of the task of the individual. Blessed Messenger's affection and care for Tess, lies as the first priority, while the communal obligations stand as the second rate. His free soul, compassion and sense of humanity add charm and magnetism to his personality and attract all the people that surround him at Talbothays. Not to mention what the text states, "Blessed messenger sparkles instead of burns which he is closer to the learned people reserved writer Shelley than to the carnal and enthusiastic artist Byron". He also adds, that "his love for Tess may be theoretical, as one figures out when she calls her "Daughter of Nature"". Hardy repeatedly represents Tess as a microcosm of Wessex Eve. She is the incarnation of the natural phenomena. Another significant issue the novel tackles seriously is "the sexual double standard to which Tess falls victim" (Fry, 340).

Nevertheless, Hardy's novel does not offer an accurate interpretation on what occur between the heroine Tess and Alec on that crucial night, but the text has been read as a novel of rape and catastrophe; "the

rape interpretation is by no means the only possible one" (Ellen, 79). And what buttresses this probable interpretation is that Tess's feelings and inclinations to Alec may possibly encounter hidden attraction, even before that momentous night. Tess's reaction proposes that her feelings are swinging and she expresses her mood plainly through her own words: "I don't know – I wish – how can I say yes or no" (Hardy, 60). This is verified by Hardy who identifies that Tess "[was] temporarily blinded by his ardent manners, had been stirred to confused surrender awhile" (Hardy, 69). However, the process of interpretation does not end at this point, Tess perceives Alec as the master of "lip-shapes that had meant seductiveness" (Hardy, 71). The conflict between rape and seduction readings of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is evident from the very beginning of the novel, alike hermeneutic bewilderment encloses a variety of interpretations of the connection between Tess and Alec. Jennifer Gribble resolves the rape-seduction argument extremely convincingly:

"Changes between 1892 and 1912 see Tess succumbing to Alec's persuasions in some measure, and by the 1912 version it is clear that Tess has remained at Trantridge as Alec's lover, despite her inner resistance to him: "If I had ever sincerely loved you, if I loved you still, I should not so loathe and hate myself for my weakness as I do now! ... My eyes were dazed by you for a little, and that was all" (Gribble, 97).

Notwithstanding in opposition to her enhanced decision, Tess here gives the impression of admitting to sexual attentiveness. Gribble debates that Tess's virtue is a "literary construct ... stuck on in retrospect to meet objections the novel had encountered even before its publication in 1891" (Gribble, 9).

In his book *Anatomy of Criticism*, Fry clarifies the role played by the advocate and only of friend of Tess. He even subtitled his book as "a pure woman faithfully presented" and decorated it with a preface that was based on the words of William Shakespeare "Poor wounded name! My bosom as a bed, Shall lodge thee" (*Tess*, 95). Despite the fact that Hardy directed his pen to attack the female purity of the Victorian age, he also assured his readers that Tess's fate and inevitable tragedy became a possibility. Hardy also draws the reader's attention from the traditional notion of gender, especially when he presents Tess as a feminized attractive body. Through Hardy's double standard hints that Tess was doomed to suffer her ancestors' misdeeds or to give the gods certain amusement because of the deadly flaw in here little character that she inherited from the old clan she belonged to. Tess could be seen as a god on earth or a victim to be sacrificed to the gods because of the repeated pagan references and the neo-Biblical ones given to her. She joined a Ceres (Harvest goddess) festival at the beginning of the novel, and chose "a text from Genesis and preferred it over the New Testament, to perform Baptism" (*Tess*, 99). When it was the end of the novel, Tess lied on the altar just to do accept her destiny to be the gods' sacrifice, she was making herself as a sacrifice for Angel, not for the gods actually. This

symbolism may help to explain Hardy's code of unnarratability in Hardy's novel (Barthes, 122).

III. The Unnarratability in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

Roland Barthes' influential essay, "From Work to Text," (1977) provides an approach of examining a novel structure of language, "examining a transfer away from the conventional notion of the 'work' towards the new object of the 'text'. The notion of text is understood as either written or visual" (Barthes, 150). In comparing the two, Barthes describes the text as "a process of demonstration that speaks according to rules or against rules and occurs in language as an activity of production" (Barthes, 157). *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* engages a space in a text that is what Barthes called as a notion of "playing with the text" in contrast to how a reader/interpreter.

The aesthetic and/or motif or unnarratability constitutes a systematic pattern in the narrative fabric of Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Moreover, there lies deep in this pattern the Scheherazadean topos or mythos which is thus posited by Tzvetan Todorov: "narration equals life: the absence of narration, death" (Todorov, 92, qtd. in Jameson, 199). Therefore, by extension, "man is only narrative; when narrative is no longer necessary he may die" (Ibid.) Hence, in *Tess* "narrative strives not to narrate its unnarratability and reads its unreadability—that interrupts the progress of life/literature—by becoming what it hesitates to be (Mahdi, 133).

Such, *Tess* prestigiously belongs to a long line of mythical and historical heroes and heroines whose narrative represent the paradoxical possibility as well as non-possibility of tale-telling and the blockage of the voice at the heart of narrativity. These mythoi, to mention but a few, are: Cassandra's abduction and her being unable speak up her disgrace; Philomel's rape and having tongue severed so as not to cast her adversary to the world; Crispus's being horrified by the god of sun and his raving being thus mis-disciphered: "my horror [is taken] for hymns, my blasphemies for raptures" (Barth, 114). This is to be followed by the queen of Sheba's being overtaken by a new deity's agency, the bird hoopoe, that "mistranslates ... [her] pain into cunning counsel," and to which she responds: "how I'd hymn you, if his tongue weren't beyond me—and yours" (Ibid, 115). These instance of the halt of narrative are to be found echoed in *Tess*'s case. Her inability to narrate her story and then her succumbing to silence brings fracture to the formation to the self which is here conceived as the unity of fundamental for mankind as "homo narrans," where the self is constructed by narrative (Fisher, 6). And this is what the Scheherazadean prototype stands for.

One of the main issues that *Tess* faces is that "she cannot articulate her past in the form of a narrative. During the courtship period with

Angel, the novel focused on her anguish caused by her dilemma: whereas she thinks it necessary to tell him her past with Alec, unduly forsaken by her husband” (Ibid 6).

However, after eavesdropping on a conversation between Angel’s brothers, she loses her courage and misses her chance to appeal to the parents-in-law. And this is how Tess’s course of life is formulated through narrative failures. The consequence of these multiple failures is her silence. “The tendency for silence is a significant characteristic in Tess. After a series of narrative failure, Tess would rather remain silent than try to justify herself through narrative”. “After she has learnt that narrative is not in favour of her, the strategy she takes is not to tell a story. Instead of reconstructing her past with story, Tess tries to negate her past by refusing to talk about it” (Eagleton, 92). Here the unnarratability of Tess’s story (past or life-story) might be assumed under what Jacques Lacan terms “the *Objet a*. For Lacan”:

The *Objet a* is ... the object as such, the object :in the real.”

Although the *objet a* is vehiculed by language as a result or product of the signifier, it nevertheless evades expression in or capture by all signifiers and appears as what is ineffable or unsayable, as object, but lost object (Lacan, qtd. In Grig, 67).

When Alec has been murdered, “Tess and Angel are united and fled together. At this juncture, even though Angel regrets having forsaken her, Tess does not ask him to revise her life history so that she can be regarded as pure. Instead, she simply requires him not to talk about the past”:

“Don’t think of what’s past!” said she. “I am not going to think outside of now. Why should we! Who knows what to-morrow has in store?” ... By tacit consent they hardly once spoke of any incident of the past subsequent to their wedding-day. The gloomy intervening time seemed to sink into chaos, over which present and prior times closed as if it never had been (389-390).

To put it in Lacanian terminology, Tess here thinks where she is not and she is where she does not think (Eagleton, 170). Her life moves in unstoppable circle. On both sides of the coin, her life-story is unsayable; i.e., unnarratable as far as the gap between her experiencing self and narrating self never cease to be. In a state of confusion, following the murder of Alec, “Tess thinks that the murder results in the nullification of her past sin itself”: “Angel, will you forgive me my sin against you”. (*Tess*, 96) As if the whole text is twisted with Tess the character and moves around and around in a continuous circle.

Conclusion :

Reading a literary text in the context of hermeneutics opens a fusion of horizons in constituting a systematic pattern in the narrative

construction. Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* establishes a model understanding of the hermeneutic convention, including such as, narrative interference and unreadability in a cyclic text/context. This hermeneutic cycle provides profundity and novelty to the novel and engages the reader/interpreter in a constant process of interpretation. When viewed within the context of hermeneutics, Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* incorporates the claims of Schleiermacher and Dilthey of the part and the whole. Thus, Tess is presented as a symbol of the hermeneutic circle which revolves continuously within the text. On one hand, the part of the text presents Tess as a vague figure of the nineteenth century Britain. On the other hand, the whole of the text presents her as a wretchedly decorated representation--an embodiment of the agony of the victimized female of the Victorian Age. Tess herself is the constant image of fate and destiny. She opens the text with a hopeless course of life. And there is a permanence of actions from the moment she is initiated until she departs her life. Hardy succeeds amending central components of the nineteenth century hermeneutic practice. In particular, he criticizes the idea that understanding is a reconstruction of the intention of the author.

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