

# On Aspects of Sleep in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

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## 1 Introduction

Some scenes of sleep are found in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891). Each scene causes interruption in Tess's life. Each phase of sleep gives a crucial moment to Tess and casts her into new distressed circumstances. Generally speaking, sleep leads to conclusion of distress, recovering from fatigue, or renewal of energies. Sleep functions as the means of relieving persons from anxiety, distress, or pain. Tess, however, is forced into new states of suffering caused by the sleep which she should have avoided. Tess falls into sleep after dissipating her energies in various activities, because in most cases she comes to the end of strenuous exertion in her life and is completely exhausted. Yet as a result she is confronted by a new crisis. In addition, each incident of sleep takes Tess closer to her ancestors sleeping in the underground vault of the d'Urbervilles, and Tess is assimilated with them after she herself commits a similar crime one of the ancestors has done. It seems as if Tess has the embodied spirits of the ancestors of the d'Urbervilles. By scattering ancestral images around the story, the author helps the readers to connect Tess with the d'Urberville history as the story advances. Tess Durbeyfields also takes advantage of the notion that the Durbeyfields are descendants of the d'Urbervilles. In each occasion of sleep she seems to resemble her ancestry in her appearance, her spirit and her conduct, as Angel Clare regards. After a deep sleep on the huge rock of Stonehenge Tess accepts difficulty with calmness and quiet courage, and joins the pagan ancestors of

human beings.

The aim of the present paper is to survey some aspects of sleep found in the story and analyze the function of sleep which works as the means of causing new problems for Tess. Tess's ordinary sleep inside of a house is not minutely described, nor affects her life, but her sleep in the open air is both crucial and symbolic. Her innocent sleep on the carriage in the middle of the night causes the death of the horse and casts her parents into an economic predicament. As a result she is forced to work for a fake relative and earn money to help her parents. Her second sleep in the woods is the worst one for herself. She is deprived of her virginity by Alec, and she experiences childbirth and the death of her child. This is the very beginning to the thorny path of her life. Then Clare's sleepwalking reveals his unconscious desire that he wants to get rid of the difficult situation in which he is unable to tolerate Tess who is the wife of an other man. He thinks that she has the embodied spirits of the ancestors of the d'Urbervilles and that she is forced to take revenge on men. Tess's third sleep with bleeding pheasants indicates that her great suffering in mind continues until someone relieves her of pain by helping her to pass away. Tess's last sleep on the huge rock of Stonehenge purifies her, sets her free from the sinful and painful world, and brings her to agree to conclude her activities in this world.

## **2 Tess's innocent sleep**

Tess's first sleep is natural and innocent, but it turns out to be the very first step for the great change in Tess's life after that, because her sleep causes the death of the horse which was the one and only motive power for the Durbeyfields. Tess falls asleep holding the reins of the carriage in the middle of the night when she takes honey to retailers in Casterbridge in place of her drunken father. Consequently, her carriage collides with the mail-coach. Her sleep is the result of her day's fatigue and with no malice, but it

symbolizes weariness of everyday life with the Durbeyfields. Her father is strong enough for work, but he is lazy and unreasonably opposes the wishes of other persons. As he is unwilling to be hired by the day, the members of the Durbeyfields are driven to be destitute. Besides, the magnificent history of their ancestor, which Parson Tringham has told, affects her father, arouses a fancy in him, and reduces his willingness for work still less. The accident caused by Tess's natural and innocent sleep puts the members of the Durbeyfields into an economic predicament and makes them dependent on their so-called relative.

In accord with the imprudent decision by her thoughtless parents, Tess agrees to visit a fake relative who gives his name as d'Urberville. She notices that the relative's house is not one of distinguished families, but a recent one in everything, and an unexpectedly young man appears and tells her Stokes is their family name. As her purpose is to obtain an opportunity to work as a means of assisting her parents, she disregards marginal things contrary to her expectation, which greatly affect her in the future, however. Therefore she does not tell her parents the exact information of how different the relative is from their expectations. Tess and her parents are easily deceived by a false letter written by Alec d'Urberville. Tess is possessed with the idea that she should be helpful to her poverty-stricken parents by working somewhere. As she does not want to lose an opportunity to earn money, she encourages herself to work at the poultry run where Alec is angling for her, and starts her new life which is full of mental anguish over being amorously approached by Alec.

Thus, Tess's first sleep plays the important part as a transition stage, in which she moves from the village, Marlott, to the village, Trantridge, from being a dependent of her parents to a supporter of them, and from a girl being ignored by young men to a woman being courted by Alec.

### 3 Tess's crucial sleep

Tess's second sleep is the worst one for herself and the very beginning to the thorny path of her life. As a result she has to endure an unexpectedly hard life in which she is deprived of her virginity by Alec and she experiences childbirth and the death of her child "Sorrow."

Tess's crucial sleep occurred in the woods. She joins a country fair and a market held in Chaseborough and has a quarrel with one of the fellow girls she goes home together with. The quarrel escalates into a big wrangle among comrades. She wants to slip away from the quarrel. Then Alec appears and persuades her to get on his horse behind him. It is an impending danger for her to remain in the whirlpool of the brawl, and it is also dangerous for her to follow Alec's allurements. She should have avoided both situations, but she must change her terror and anger against her antagonist comrades to her victory by joining a fake knight on a horse. For that reason she chooses to risk and getting on the horse with Alec. Her quarrelling comrades clearly perceive that her choice is as dangerous as insects flying into fire.

As expected, she sleeps on the horseback behind Alec. Moreover, she lies asleep in the woods while Alec goes off to ascertain their way back home. Tess falls into this dangerous situation in the course of fatigue from her several days' work and with the day's excursion and quarrel. And it leads to the loss of her virginity. The narrator says that Tess is the object of retaliation for the crimes committed more cruelly by her brutal ancestors. The narrator intends to treat her case as one of historical and tragic experiences.

To Tess, however, this sleep is the crucial one which does not allow her to go back to her former situation, and brings her to a quite different outlook on life. The consciousness of her sinfulness pricks her; her light-headed act is against human morality; her hesitation in baptizing her baby is quite wrong; she regards all these things as the result of her foolishness.

She secludes herself from society into her own room and with a sense of remorse she is sorrow-stricken. And yet the work of binding sheaves of wheat outside relieves her from resentment, and gives her an opportunity to exhibit her earnestness and skillfulness to other village people. She tries to merge into the work as one of laborers though she is ill-matched to them and keeps aloof away from them.

The accidental death of her child “Sorrow” attacks Tess as an other form of sleep. This sleep of her child’s, however, plays a role which mitigates a part of her sin. It is a chance to end her sufferings from ruin in Trantridge to the burial of her child. Many days of lamentation and remorse, and months and years of her depression come to an end with this accident. Though she obtains a detached air, she thinks it still difficult for her to have a carefree and comfortable life in Marlott, so she leaves for a dairy farm in Talbothays. The village, Talbothays, is located near the underground burial place of the great family in the former domain of the d’Urbervilles. Her work in the ancestral domain is regarded as her restart.

#### **4 Clare’s sleepwalking and Tess in a coffin**

After the love and marriage of Tess and Angel Clare at the dairy farm in Talbothays is described in a dulcent manner, the great problem is suddenly presented. The anguish of Angel who is unable to tolerate Tess’s past weaves a great tragedy with the grief of Tess who is forsaken by Angel.

In one of the tragic scenes the third sleep scene which is described to the readers is Clare’s sleepwalking, and the power which disturbs the peace of Clare’s mind greatly affects him. Clare mutters thus:

‘Dead, dead, dead!’ .... ‘My poor, poor Tess ---- my dearest, darling Tess!  
So sweet, so good, so true’ .... ‘My wife --- dead, dead!’ (37-272, 273 )<sup>1)</sup>

He carries Tess out of the house to the stone coffin of the cloister chief

which is located against the north wall of the ruined choir seats. This act reveals Clare's wish for a restart with the idea that the death of his dear wife will lead to the end of the detestable past. During his sleep he experiences the anguish of controlling himself who cannot tolerate his wife's fault that occurred before his marriage with her. Clare, however, without noticing his own sleepwalking and his murmuring, leaves for Brazil to learn how to run an agricultural business.

On the other hand, Tess composedly observes Clare while she is carried by him from their room to the stone coffin. She is satisfied with his deeds and resigns to her fate. She thinks it desirable that they would be crushed to pieces if they together fell down from the steps, that Clare is allowed to deal severely with her as one of his possessions, and that she is forced to drown by being thrown into a swift-running river. She regards it as a much better thing that both fall into the river, so that both are able to escape the anguish for Tess's past and Clare's marriage with her. She has the hope that both fall headlong down into an abyss after a short time filled with true love. She wishes that both are simultaneously able to leave this world without any pain. With these kinds of wishes she is carried by Clare, but her lying in the coffin means to Clare her assimilation with her ancestors, the d'Urbervilles, and to Tess a forecast of her life.

The room Clare has rented after their marriage is located in the farm house which has been built partly from the house of the lord of a manor, the d'Urbervilles'. There are two life-sized portraits of middle-aged ladies, which were painted about 200 years ago. One portrait reveals merciless treachery and the other hints of arrogance and ferocity. Clare notices that Tess closely resembles them without the slightest doubt. As Clare knows Tess's past, he is convinced of Tess's resemblance to the portraits which have the secret intention of taking revenge on men. It is symbolic that Clare and Tess come to the face of ruin in the manor house of Tess's ancestors during their honeymoon. Tess's father, John Durbeyfield, imagines that one

of their remote ancestors has pursued vicissitudes of fortune and still lives in luxury, while his daughter, Tess, meets the last stage of tragic distress in the remains of the manor house. Although Tess comes to the resting place of her ancestors, it does not render help to her, but drives her into ruin.

Clare unconsciously wishes that he is delivered from Tess's malice imbued in her by her ferocious ancestors. By laying Tess in an empty stone coffin in the graveyard next to the manor house, Clare wants to consign the wrong of Tess's past to her ancestors, and to obtain a pure maiden, Tess.

## **5 Bleeding pheasants and Tess's sleep**

Soon after Tess returns from Talbothays to Marlott, she moves to Chalk-Newton by way of Port Bredy. She is not given an opportunity to continue stable work at one place, but she must move to new places to work as a part-time worker one after another. She makes a quick escape from a certain rustic near Chalk-Newton and gets into the woods and falls into a doze. She thinks that 'All is vanity' (41-301) in her wasted life, and that 'All was, alas, worse than vanity---injustice, punishment, exaction, death' (41-301). She thinks it the most appropriate occasion for her to die. Tess is juxtaposed with bleeding pheasants in the woods. They are driven into a tight corner and shot by hunting men. They are bleeding, and yet do not get to die, but writhe in pain. They are Tess herself. Bleeding pheasants symbolize the very situation Tess is caught in. Tess's sleep in the woods near Chalk-Newton gives her a chance to realize the wretchedness of her life. From the economical, physical, and spiritual point of view, Tess's past is the worst of all, for which she is bleeding and writhing in pain. Death awaits her, but much of the torment that severely attacks her before she arrives at death seems to be the greater evil. Bleeding pheasants in pain tell that Tess's great suffering in mind continues until someone relieves her of pain by helping her to pass away as Tess helps the pheasants to die. After this incident she

endures various kinds of hard work, agrees to live with Alec d'Urberville in order to give aid to her parents and her brothers and sisters, and resigns herself to her displeasing life with Alec.

On the other hand, as for Tess's parents with their children, because of the end of their lease in Marlott, they move to Kingsbury which is the hometown of the d'Urbervilles. As they are unable to find accommodation, they take their household goods from the wagon at the foot of d'Urberville Aisle which contains a huge underground cemetery in the church graveyard. This means that they arrive at the entrance of their ancestors' cemetery and that they are driven to an inescapable predicament. However, the historical episodes of the d'Urbervilles scattered in the story are only connected to their ruin and their extinction. The following are a few examples related in the story: 'Norman blood unaided by Victorian lucre' (2–42), 'her useless ancestors' (16–131), and 'its partial demolition a farm-house' (44–244). Besides, another one Alec knows is 'a murder, committed by one of the family, centuries ago' (51–377). Their ancestors do not help them, nor have anything to do with them even though they are about to be ruined. The last episode provides an inkling of Tess's murder at the end of the story. Tess's ruin is piled up on the ruin of the d'Urbervilles.

## **6 Tess's sleep at Stonehenge**

Several days after Tess kills Alec d'Urberville, she takes flight with Angel Clare and arrives at Stonehenge exhaustedly. She sleeps on a huge rock there. Her sleep on the rock is peaceful, and she is resigned to her fate. Besides, her sleep shows the end of her several days with fulfilling contentment. The appearance of Angel Clare gives her the last chance to escape from Alec d'Urberville, whom she reluctantly lives with. Clare's emergence means his forgiveness of her past sin, and his atonement for his wrong attitude to her. This is the very last chance for Tess to be united with



Clare. If she loses this opportunity, she must continue to be a living corpse. Clare's appearance gives her the most crucial moment to decide what to do. Killing Alec is the most effective way for her to escape from him, because she has tried to escape from Alec to various towns and villages many times, but he has appeared without fail and claims that he is her husband. This time also he may appear and claim that he is her husband even if she runs away with Clare. Moreover, a woman who has a husband cannot marry with another man. In order to obtain Clare's true love, Alec is the biggest obstacle. Tess says, 'It came to me as a shining light that I should get you back that way' (47-407). Killing Alec is regarded as the best way for her to get Clare back to her. Clare considers her eccentricity as the reincarnation of 'the family tradition of the coach and murder' (57-408) and as a 'strain in the d'Urberville blood' (57-408). As Tess absolutely trusts Clare, he forgives her sin and receives her as his wife. He leads her to safe places under his protection even though she is a criminal who should be pursued. Clare plays the role of the affectionate guardian though he knows that helping a murderer to run away is an illegal act.

Tess's sleep on the huge rock at Stonehenge shows that she has the firm belief in the fair judgment of law. Stonehenge, which is the ruin of a pagan Druid temple, is her spiritual home. The huge rock Tess sleeps on is the altar and she is the sacrificial offering there. She quietly falls asleep at the end of her life with a feeling of satisfaction in her several happy days with Angel Clare. After she wakes up from her sleep in the morning light, she is really ready to be judged. A ray of the morning light shines on her making her feel purified, and with calmness and quiet courage, she joins the pagan ancestors of human beings.

## **7 Conclusion**

Each of Tess's important sleep scenes is held outside. Her sleep in her room

is an ordinary one which does not affect her life, nor is minutely described. Her sleep outside, however, has symbolic meanings in each case. Each sleep event drives her to more serious matters than before, and takes her to ruin. Her face, figure and conduct are related to the legend of her ancestors, the d'Urbervilles. Angel Clare regards her as the reincarnation of her ancestors. Therefore he unconsciously wishes to put an end to the relation with the sinful person, his wife. His sleepwalking shows this unconscious desire.

On the other hand, Tess's sleep on the huge rock at Stonehenge purifies her and gives her a chance to recognize that she has had several happy days with her beloved Clare. She is ready to receive the fair judgment of law. By sleeping on the altar of the pagan temple, Tess is set free from the sinful and painful world. Tess does not trust Alec, who has become an evangelist, but she loves Angel who has skeptical opinions even though he is a son of Vicar Clare, and who tries to be a farmer. As Tess is molded to be a pagan girl, she is unconsciously attracted to Angel. The most symbolic scene is when a ray of the morning light strikes Tess on the altar of the pagan temple, and that she feels purified by the ray. This shows that there are other possibilities for human beings to be set free from the sinful and painful world other than by Christianity. This is one of solutions in addition to Christianity Thomas Hardy has tried to find.

## Notes

I am very grateful to Mr. William Kumai, my colleague, for his helpful comments on my English, but the responsibility for all mistakes in this essay remains my own.

- 1 Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, The New Wessex Edition (Macmillan, 1975). All the passages hereafter cited are taken from this edition, and the numbers in the parentheses indicate the chapter and pages.

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