

## The Individuality of Grace in *The Woodlanders* and What Surrounds Her

Toru Soeda

The perusal of this novel surprises me with the variety of its characters. They seem to be groping in an unknown sphere incapable of breaking through, though they themselves believe they behave of their own accord.

This trial is the study of the above subject. Grace is a daughter of a timber-merchant in Little Hintock. The first question to solve here is the course of the development of the action of Grace with her will. The action with her will comes from knowledge. The knowledge education inspires. Can Grace who was at a fashionable school in a city have the result of education effectual which aims at inciting the establishment of individual personality? Here does the personality of Grace's father play an important part. He is a fine gentleman sensible enough to wish to have his child well educated, conscious of the lack of his education, being born in such a wood land. He has worked very hard and has become a rich timberman well-known in this woodland village. He is such a nice father as to wish to have his child realize his desire now. When he knows that Felice Charmond, the wealthy widow here is pleased with his daughter, he pats his head with pleasure saying "that freemasonry of education made 'em close at once."(p. 67) To Grace's surprise at the great deal of money spent for her education, he merely replies "...I merely meant to give you an idea of my investment transactions. But...never mind. You'll yield a better return." Grace's complaint, "Don't think of me like that. A mere chattel." never makes him feel amiss, always well-pleased.

Such a view of education as this fond father has is quite different from that of the people in general now. It is true that even now we find some rich people who are glad to spend his money in getting pictures and other curios, not for their value but for the vanity to pride himself on. So is Melbury. As for him education is nothing but a show. Naturally he regards learning as an investment. To him an investment without interest means nothing.

Conscious of the sin of robbing a woman whom Giles' father wanted to make his wife, he swears to have his daughter married to Giles. But he can be cold enough to give up this engagement when Giles comes to lose his house owing to the question regarding ordinary leases of three lives. He is ready to take up Edred Fitzpiers as his daughter's husband, saying "he's only a gentleman fond of science, and philosophy, and poetry, and, in fact, every kind of knowledge..." (p.34)

Grace educated for individuality well enough to make a complaint against being treated as a mere chattel succumbs to her father's plan. Strange to say, education for individuality comes to be an important factor for making her lose individuality. She is made to marry Fitzpiers.

At Earl of Wessex Hotel at Sherton Abbas, the last hotel of their eight-weeks' tour, she happens to find Giles at work to press juice from apples in the yard. She is greatly attracted to him, but she says, "No,—I could never have married him! Dear father was right. It would have been too rough a life for me." (p.223) Here is seen the inclination of easy adaptability to circumstances characteristic of women. Yet she herself insists that her husband is of her own choice. Chance, however, plays a great part, or inevitability governs.

The marriage she first thought to be happy brings remorse to her by the relation sad to her between her husband and Lady Charmond. Yet jealousy does not rise, but reflection cool and real on her past behaviour reigns. She even says to Mrs. Charmond "If your love to Fitzpiers is pure and true and not flippant, I don't hate you, but rather

sympathize with you." Seeing off her husband going to Middleton Abbey where Lady Charmond is, Grace stands on High-Stoy Hill. There she meets Giles. Giles looked and smelt like Autumn's very brother, his face being sunburnt to wheat-colour, his eyes blue as corn-flowers, . . . his hands clammy with the sweet juice of apples, his hat sprinkled with pips, and everywhere about him that atmosphere of cider which at its first return each season has such an indescribable fascination for those who have been born and bred among the orchard. (p. 260)

A glimpse of such Giles makes her revel in the sudden lapse back to Nature unadorned. (p. 260) Passionate desire for primitive life (p. 261) catches her quite regardless of nobility suitable for her husband's position or veneer of artificiality falsely cultivated at school. Contrast between Fitzpiers degrading to flippant worldly love and Giles living honest and simple is that between night and day. When Melbury tells Grace to make the best use of the position leading to advancement in life, Grace cries, "I wish you had never, never thought of educating me, I wish I worked in the woods like Marty South! I hate genteel life, and I want to be no better than she." (p. 280) She adds that school gives us nothing but inconvenience and annoyance. Here is to be seen Hardy's view of Education: high culture and knowledge give harm to the goodness and simplicity of men and only useful to play with theology or philosophy. Culture and education without deeds worthy leads to falsehood and error.

Nature is in itself good and man remains pure unless he is distorted by society. Accordingly the development rather than oppression of natural instinct must be a guiding principle for human life. This is Rousseau's view. This Hardy seems to inherit and display. Hardy shows in his works learned men despised by farmers and those learned men changing into a rustic farmer getting rid of civic and intelligent characteristics they once was proud of in the surroundings of mountain and river. He seems to be fond of depicting such characters.

Melbury's investment in her daughter naturally brings returns un-

expected to him in the least. Her complaint against her father shows her in her naivety desirous for primitive life trying to give up fastidious and sophisticating traits. She is now a woman of Nature. She finds her interest in Giles while young reviving with rich growth after her knowledge of the marriage and of the world at large. She now knows what is valuable in life. Giles's simplicity does no longer contradict with her tastes gained nor his lack in culture prevents him from ranking with her. A nature that seemed quite worthless to a man intelligent can truly cope with wonderful knowledge, which she gets to be well aware of now. A strong protest against all that have once seemed valuable and fascinating rises in her heart. Giles with "honesty, goodness, manliness, tenderness, devotion, which for her only existed in their purity now in the breast of unvarnished men..." (p. 277) shows himself before her eyes as an idol to realize her lost ideal. Giles reminds her of a knight in the medieval age in the character of devotion to the lady. For the first time expressing her idea undaunted by nothing, she finds the establishment of individuality of her will. It comes from primitivism.

"Nature was bountiful. No sooner had she been cast aside by Edred Fitzpiers than another being, impersonating chivalrous and undiluted manliness, had arisen out of the earth ready to her hand."(p.260) In front of such a nice revival of Grace hangs a dark cloud of the question of divorce. The social circumstances as a severe reality of life, namely the traditional moral characteristic of such a poor village, social necessities and other factors of chance stand as obstacles.

After Fitzpier's decampment to the lady, Melbury is told by Fred Beaucock that there is a new law which enables her daughter to divorce her husband and be free. Here the father tells his daughter the new fact and advises her to approach Giles. Meticulous Giles, however, has a fear, not because he lacks in reptivity but that he is menaced by the fear for future from his past sad experience in his life. The new bright light upon Giles is not strong enough to let him forget the cold treatment from both Melbury and Grace only several

months ago. He says to himself, "Surely the adamantine barrier with another could not be pierced like this! It did violence to custom."

Yet he is not disinclined to marriage. On the other side the vitality of that fastidiousness and timid morality common to a gentle girl makes Grace hesitate to accept his proposal in spite of her own favour to him and her father's back-up. "I am in a very anomalous position at present, and I cannot say anything to the point about such things as those." (p. 352) Even in a conversation in a passion which is usually ready to get rid of the past miserable circumstances or the future fear, she is forced to say, "... and if—O, suppose I *never* get free!—there should be any hitch or informality!" (p. 353) A lot of bad prospects govern her. Bright sunlight always brings dark clouds with it. Yet her thought runs in a different channel. She fears "her freshness would pass, the long suffering devotion of Giles might suddenly end—might end that hour." (p. 362) "The thought takes away from her all her former reticence and made her action bold." (p. 362) Her decision is, however, too late, because the news of the failure of the question of Grace's divorce has been brought to Giles. (Here Hardy seems to explain there is something in the world which goes against human will.)

The seducement to kiss from the side of active Grace raises a wave in Giles's mind—"The wrong, the social sin, of now taking advantage of the offer of her lips, has a magnitude in the eyes of one whose life has been so primitive, so ruled by household laws as Giles, which can hardly be explained." (p. 365) To such a one as Giles the moral of this old village is absolute. "Indeed, the law of the land is more to blame than the natural law which directs man's actions." (H. C. Webster: *On a Darkling Plain*. p.170) Yet this offer is great enough for him to jump over the old moral and accept and hold her in his arms. Strange to say, Grace incited by a sort of inspiration suddenly leaves from him, saying, "O I suppose, . . . that I am really free?—that this is right? Is there really a new law?" (p. 365) As for this, Hardy himself says, "Her timid morality had, indeed, underrated his

chivalry." (p. 394) Douglas Brown mentions as follows.

Thus Grace is criticized; and the chivalry by which she is judged has its origin not in "Victorian morality" but in customs of behaviour sanctioned by immemorial household laws of village communities. (Douglas Brown: *Thomas Hardy*, p. 86)

Her timid morality and the traditional law of the old village as a concrete expression of a certain Will cause Giles's devotion and self-denial, resulting in his death. Both Grace's character and behaviour seem to have been doomed by the invisible old tradition of the native village. H. C. Webster says as follows: the determiners, Chance and natural law, work together against man's opportunity for joy. In their operation we feel the presence of the "Unfulfilled Intention," indifferent in its aim but cruel in its effects. (H. C. Webster: *On a Darkling Plain*, p.169) Dear sacrifice of the death of Giles awoke her to natural woman forsaking her character poisoned by civilization. In other words, Grace absorbed Nature from Giles, leaving him as a mere worthless carcass. Grace seems to have inherited his naturalness. Hardy regards it very important that men should return to Nature. Accordingly it is obvious that Hardy plots to bring Grace as a girl of individuality toward primitivism. Disgusted with artificial life and foolishness in the city, Hardy left London, where he says lives four million hopeless hopes, and lived in the country with Nature as a hermit. Here will be found the key to the attitude of his work. A wider view of his works reveals that his aim is not to make a diagram of life describing reality objectively, but to show what is at the bottom of life and moves the life. For instance, as in case of Grace's scribbling all are fooled by chance and fall to poor victims. Characters in the work cannot hold on their own will but succumb before difficulties and at the very moment of importance they lose their personality. This unintelligible turn of mind will prove intelligible by thinking of Hardy's Immanent Will. This Will, he says, intends and acts without any purpose. Man thinks he acts of his own accord, but eventually is governed by this great Will with no purpose. In his

description the law of causality prevails, the spell of conventional morality also showing its power. In this work Hardy aimed to describe primitivism as a moral that should be followed by a man awaked to individuality, but came halfway. It is because his interest is drawn to the village where is still found a life seen in good old age, simple and primitive, never poisoned by civilization.

When a writer treats B as his subject, but in his mind A more attractive to him lives, it is not difficult to suppose A plays more important part conscious or unconscious in his work.

(The quotations in this study are from *The Woodlanders*, Macmillan)