

# *Sleep and Death, Tess's Divorce of Body and Soul*

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**Abstract:** In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Tess's sleep after Clare knew her past and her sleep after killing Alec was full of existential meaning, both as a sign of her fall and a loss of subjectivity. Tess thought she had two deaths, including after meeting Angel and her real death. Under the frame of existentialism theories, including Bad Faith, transcendence, and Temporality, the relationship between sleep and death emerged. The way she went from sleep to death is the way she went from falling to suicide. Tess's sleep is an escape from subjectivity and her death is a way to change her life into destiny by making her a part of being-in-itself. Her system was made past when her body and soul separate from each other and she submerged in this world. It is in her sleep and death that she can lose the possibility of transcendence and sleep finishes the philosophical suicide, so she was dead before being sentenced, and her death is a corporal complement of suicide.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Brief introduction of the work

*Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is one of the representative works of Thomas Hardy. Thomas Hardy was an English novelist and poet whose works were increasingly at odds with Victorian morality. This work tells the story of Tess Durbeyfield, who was sent by her parents to work for a nearby wealthy family that bears the ancestral name d'Urberville. She met Alec d'Urberville here and was raped and had a baby who died later. She then went to work in Talbothays, falling in love and marrying Angel Clare, who left her after he knew her past. After hard days alone and the loss of her father, Tess gave in again to d'Urberville, but she murdered him when Angel returned.

### 1.2. Literature review

Rutland said: "let everyone make a philosophy for Himself out of his own experience"<sup>[1]</sup>. His words made clear how Thomas Hardy wrote because his work embodied the trace of his integration of the feature of time and personal experiences. Despite studies on Thomas Hardy within the tradition of Fatalism, Realism, and Darwinism, relatively fewer researches were done on Existentialism.

Gilbert Nieman is credited with raising the existential issues in Hardy's novels in his article titled "Thomas Hardy, Existentialist" (1965). It first concluded his works' common ground with existentialists' assumptions. He noticed the element of failure involved in the condition of man in

Hardy's work. However, Nieman mainly focused on Hardy's poems, and the existential evidence in his novel remains unstudied.

Tess of the d'Urbervilles revealed a dilemma between the protagonist's inner purity and outer calamity has been shown and brings about the conflict between her being-for-itself and being-in-itself. Consequently, it is necessary and possible for us to study from the existentialist perspective.

Dharmendra Kumar Singh's study in 2022 holds that "this novel is the novel of chances and coincidences which lead to consequences"<sup>[2]</sup> and explained how Cosmic Absurdity performed its controversial deeds. Cosmic Absurdity is a generalized term to explain the conflict between Tess and the world, but a further detailed explanation of how this Absurdity works remains unstudied.

To study how Tess dealt with problems brought by Cosmo Absurdity, Lin Wei (2018) holds Tess's sleep as a part of the solution. Despite Tess's painful past, she still held that her "self" had not changed, and only by sleep could she get rid of the distractions of reality and return to her cherished "self". Though she did not mention the term "existentialism" directly, the "self" she mentioned is her being-in-itself and her return to her real self is her return to her being-for-itself.

As a result, the study of the state of Tess's body based on the analysis of her sleep and death with the frame of the Existentialism theory is meaningful. These two states are all relatively static compared with her speeches and actions and can reveal her motive and her original project.

## 2. Tess's sleep—the sign of the fall

### 2.1. Tess's sleep after Angel found out her past—escaping from being subject

After Tess and Angel got married, they moved out from Talbothays and went to the house they had engaged lodgings, they started to tell each other their faults. After Angel knew about Tess's past, he was trying to hold back his love for Tess. Tess begged for his forgiveness and went to her room when Angel told her not to put an end to herself for him. So she went upstairs and fell asleep. The reason why she could get to sleep in such a tough situation was that she escaped from being a subject and relying on bad faith.

The loss of motive leads to the absence of thinking, which means "having nothing to more to fear, having scarce anything to hope"<sup>[3]</sup>. Before Angel knew her past, Tess defined herself by the love from him, and the meaning of her life was given by this love. With the disappearance of love, Tess was faced with the reconstruction of her project, which reveals that the first act of bad faith is to flee what she cannot flee, to flee what she is. As a result, bad faith enables her to escape from the question "who am I".

The goal of her bad faith can be seen as she tried not to be what she was in the mood of "being what she was". The project of bad faith is not a reflective and voluntary decision, but a spontaneous determination of her being<sup>[4]</sup>. Her sleep became a good choice with the help of drowsiness and bad faith. As a result, she made herself exist in the mode of the in-itself first, which means a thing did not include any desire, morality, and responsibility, as Sartre said: "the divorce of the body from the soul is accomplished"<sup>[4]</sup>. When she was asleep, she did not have to give a reason for her doing nothing, because her faith disintegrated in the fall of sleep, for this fall carries her toward the absence of questions, toward the unconditional and in dubitable affirmation"<sup>[5]</sup>.

Besides, the affirmation enabled her to be in a state where she would be more like a part of nature, so she was able to change her body with "those agile vegetative powers whose activity is doubled while we sleep"<sup>[6]</sup>, and her body was closer to being a part of nature instead of being a human body. As the daughter of nature, she was more like in the embrace of nature when she was asleep and quiet like all vegetation. This is also the reason why "her measured breathing told that she was sleeping profoundly"<sup>[3]</sup>. Her breath is a significant sign of her quietness and calmness.

This is why “among so many happier moods which forbid repose this was a mood which welcomed it, and in a few minutes the lonely Tess forgot existence, surrounded by the aromatic stillness”<sup>[3]</sup>. When she held subjectivity, she had to face all the sudden changes in her life and took action to reach her aim and project. She wanted to flee what she was, and she could not flee from it.

## 2.2. Tess’s sleep before the death—to pay tribute to the unconscious

Tess and Angel had gone into exile after she killed Alec. They changed their lodgings casually and spent some time together when finally Tess did not want to go further and slept in a Stonehenge. Her sleep before death was closely related to her original project, that is, her being-in-the-world and this being as a choice. She had to choose whether she should resist her fatigue and walk to a farther and safer place or stay here and rest at risk of being found by others. It is a reflection of freedom, and then is a question: could she have done otherwise without perceptibly modifying the organic totality of the project of who she was. If she moved on her way to other places with Angel and indulged in the happy time they spent together, she allowed her to be despised by her lover. If she changed her original project, her happiness was what she despised, thus leading to a contradictory project for her.

Sleeping was a way to back to her original project and let her unconscious have an access to freely express itself before she decided to be sentenced by justice. Tess had her views of the world, which conflicted with the tradition of the age. She did not change her original project even after the pain and difficulties that she met after Angel left. However, sticking to her original project took a price, and this price was exhaustion.

The places Tess chose to sleep were where she thought to have affection, union, and error forgiven, so they separated them from the indifferent and moral-judging outside. After the long way they took, she found the last place to sleep. The chill grass around Stonehenge, which is said to be a religious place for ancient people to hold sacrifices, made her feel at home because she was both daughter of nature and the heathen in others’ eyes. Though it was outdoors and it was visible for miles by day, she did not think it dangerous or uncomfortable. She found it a safe place for her inner self and the environment was no threat to her real self, so she fell asleep. It was narrated that “in a minute or two her breathing became more regular, her clasp of his hand relaxed, and she fell asleep”<sup>[3]</sup>, and her regular breathing again was proof that she was safe and free.

Wei held that coupled with her subjective willingness of sleeping, Tess accelerated her death<sup>[7]</sup>. However, sleep, as all insomniacs know, cannot be willed. They had the strongest willingness to sleep but failed, so sleep here for Tess was the autonomy of her unconsciousness. The best way to fall asleep is to think of anything but sleep. Her inner self, that being-for-itself, needs a little freedom to be expressed.

## 3. Tess’s death—changing life into destiny

Tess went through two times of death in her view. The first one was when she tried to get away from her past and rebirthed from the love that Angel gave, and the second one was after she woke up in Stonehenge and was surrounded by the polices.

For the first death, Tess had once written in the letter to Angel that: “What was the past to me as I met you? It was a dead thing altogether. I became another woman, filled full of new life from you.”<sup>[3]</sup> She wanted to separate who she was now from who she was before meeting Angel and build a new self. “Death reduces the for-itself-for-others to the state of simple for-others”<sup>[4]</sup>, so she made her past being-for-others. Being-for-itself implies complementarily a being-for-others. Upon anyone of my conducts it is always possible to converge two looks, mine and that of the other. Tess had her look on herself, and led the emphasis to her being-for-other. After that, the responsibility

that she should take as a woman who had an affair with a man and did not marry him but married someone else can be erased.

Tess who was being loved and Tess who made some mistakes can both be her modes of being. Under this frame of death, her past went through the transition, and become a being-for-other, which released her from the stress of guilty and moral condemnation, and gave her the motive and project to chase love again. In a word, the conception of the past originally had little to do with death, but the past is turned into a dead mode by being being-for-other.

Tess's first death is more about the change of attitude towards her being. "The terrible thing about Death," said Malraux, "is that it transforms life into Destiny" (qtd. in Sartre Paul 112). When the past is no longer a being-for-itself, her past becomes an external part of her as a part of destiny. It is unchangeable and fixed, so the impact of her past was decided by her. That life changing into destiny happened again when the real corporal death happened.

The second death happened after killing Alec and spending some sweet time with Angel. However, her death at the final can be predicted from her views of love. After the happy time with Angel, she was satisfied by the love she had again, and also, she believed that her lover despised her. The motive to kill Alec is to deny disloyalty to Angel. She was never beaten down by misfortune, but by the happiness she had.

Her death only can be defined as destruction when it is experienced as such. There must be first relation of man to being i.e., a transcendence; and within the limits of this relation, man must apprehend one being as destructible<sup>[4]</sup>. Transcendence has the property to surpass real possibilities and made death one of its patterns. Death connected reality with her will and made the destruction meaningful. Before she died, she spent several days with Angel, so her life was changed from sadness to joy. What is more important is not when will she die, but what she was before she dies. The question of "who am I" can have a satisfactory answer the last time, because as long as she lives, this answer can have any possibility to develop.

Every judgment that someone makes concerning oneself is already false when one makes it because one has become something else, so the motive and project of death can be suspected. This false judgment may be what Tess wanted from death. She needed to tell herself that at the end of her life, she had her happiness and she made her life meaningful when the external world kept on denying her right to be loved and her purity, and she went back to her being-for-itself.

Death changed life into destiny. By death, for-itself is changed forever into an in-itself in that it has slipped entirely into the past. This mode has close relation with sleep, in which for-itself has a chance to stop the arduous process to make reality closer to possibility.

## **4. Sleep and death—reuniting Tess with herself**

### **4.1. An active response to the existential angst**

Death reunites Tess with herself. Eternity has changed Tess into herself. Her death was described indirectly by "something moved slowly up the staff, and extended itself upon the breeze; it was a black flag"<sup>[3]</sup> and said, "'justice' was done". The "black flag" and "justice" are all judgments and impressions from the outside world, because Tess gave herself to them to judge freely after she had her firm answer to the question "who am I". She was no longer under the look of the other. Death enables Tess to be back to herself, which has some common with the way sleep does.

When Tess sleeps, she gives her autonomy to her unconsciousness, and there is a flow of change between mind and body because she is in an inner world that sleep creates for her. The person who sleeps is a mental body or a bodily mind, one lost in the other. In this, the sleeper is always two-fold<sup>[5]</sup>. When Tess fell asleep, she let the soul animate sleep. Her soul can work as well as she was awake, but it watches in the midst of sleep when sleeping. Sleep does not authorize the analysis

of any form of appearance whatsoever, since it shows itself to itself as this appearance that appears only as non-appearing, as returning all appearing on itself and in itself<sup>[5]</sup>. Sleep and death are both active responses to the existential angst brought by absurdity.

With the absurdity reflected on Tess through all the misfortunes she went through, Tess tends to make choices passively. The consequences followed were a way in which she chose to assume her being-for-others, a free solution she gave to the other's existence. It is necessary to understand reactions of inferiority and one's failure behavior in terms of the free outline of one's inferiority as a choice of oneself in the world.<sup>[4]</sup> Failure can be seen as the main way to show freedom of Tess by motion. Her motionless way to show freedom is sleep and death. These two patterns are an active way to make choices.

First of all, she was never forced to sleep or die. Together with labor and the tiredness from the problems in the real world, she flowed into sleep naturally and inevitably. This fatigue was not a forced element, but a chance for sleep to happen. It is obvious that in front of big changes in her life, existential angst came as well. The two sleeps that we analyze above all gave her a window to enjoy her inner life peacefully because her thoughts on the problem she faced were different from the social consensus, and she needed to gain some agreement or at least some silence from her inner self.

Secondly, the state of sleep or death is carried out by her body, and the departure of the mind is harmless. At that time, she was released from the anxiety of being penalized by the law and the crowd. In other words, her body is partly deposed. The angst, which requires transcendence to reduce, is also brought by transcendence. The deposition of the body can reply to the urge for transcendence through motionless rest, which means that sleep and death itself are the way to achieve transcendence.

Many times, Tess wanted to put an end to herself. She was either tortured by pain and daily livelihood or by the absurdity of the world. When her child was dying, when Angel wanted to leave her, and when she was writing a letter to Angel, all these times she showed the intention to die. However, she never really committed suicide for whatever reason, because her ego, of which the sleep is in service, would not allow her to renounce its nature. Sleep brings with it some of the most important questions Freud has to ask about the limits, the outermost boundaries, of the mind<sup>[6]</sup>, and death went to the limits and push the boundaries farther and farther.

#### **4.2. The simultaneity and arrest of Temporality**

The most obvious similarity between sleep and death is that there is no awakening. One could say that sleep is a temporary death, but one could also say that death is necessarily temporary, for it lasts only as long as time lasts. Temporality is so important that sleep and death both show a pause of time, but what's more, death is the arrest of Temporality. Sleep and death all provide an empty period for Tess, no matter how long this period will last. In this empty time, she could deal with the emotions that she experienced, and make them all something "in the past", which means that the past-tensed emotions now are expelled with the result that being-for-itself.

Time is where shows the difference and relation between sleep and death, let alone the physiological condition.

There is simultaneity only in the realm of sleep, and it creates a world where there is no past or future. It is the great present, the co-presence of all composability, even incompatible one<sup>[5]</sup>. For the first sleep, which happened when Angel knew her past, the simultaneity enables all the things about Alec, the indifference to Angel, and all her worries about her future without the man she loved come at the same time. These incidents emerge as the external world in a static state, and she was able to have a distance from them, which means that she was invisible in front of them. Also, to be



submerged in the external world, she became indistinct. She no longer properly distinguished herself from the world or others, from her own body or her mind, either. The body was deposed, so the mind mingled with the body.

While for death, there is no simultaneity, but the arrest of Temporality. When death put an end to everything that she went through, her system became a past-tensed object, which means that it lost the possibility of transcendence. Death realized the arrest of Temporality “by the making-past of the whole system, or, if you prefer, by the recapture of human Totality by the In-self”<sup>[4]</sup>. Before Tess died, she was surrounded by the world and tortured by universal absurdity. However, by death, she radically transcended her past toward the future to the same extent that she “was it”. When all her misfortunes became past, the Temporality disappeared and the concept of future and present was dispelled. As a result, sleep and death allow her to jump out of the external world’s imprisonment and become part of it.

## 5. Conclusion

Tess of the d’Urbervilles concentrates upon social issues at that time and is concerned with a universal existential dilemma. The agent of Cosmic Absurdity that helps it was time and space. The Victorian age has its special manner and methods, and the double standard for different sex made it more difficult for Tess to choose what she wanted and prove her purity. She is faced with the complex existence predicament brought by the conflict between being-for-itself and being-for-other. A mild and helpful way to deal with it is sleep, and the final way is death.

Through sleep, she reunited with herself and pay tribute to her unconsciousness and being-for-itself. The clue of sleep appeared repeatedly before or after the important events in Tess’s life because sleep was a window for Tess to the divorce of the body from the soul. Tess fell asleep and at the same time she vanished as “she”, and when she went to death, this “she” escape from her body and became a part of the external world. Death is the tomb of sleep, and with no attempt to take on an identity fashioned on any model whatsoever, Tess was freed from the being-for-itself and defined herself in her chosen way.

Sleep and death reveal the bad faith behind her motionless behavior; they give Tess the pattern to realize her transcendence; they also reveal the mingling relation between body and mind. The simultaneity related to sleep lays a foundation for her to deconstruct the concepts of past, present, and future so that the arrest of Temporality can be realized. With the final deposition of body, sleep meets death and they transcend Tess’s final project, which is the completion of her being-for-itself. When she was sentenced, she showed no fear because her suicide would be accomplished together with the philosophical death by sleep.

Focusing on the static state of Tess, sleep, and death provides us some proof of whether her end was a tragedy or not. They offered us another way to look into the inner life of Tess.

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