

# Pedigree in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and Theodore Dreiser's *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911): A Comparative Study

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**Abstract:** This article analyses the notion of pedigree in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and Theodore Dreiser's *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911). It compares between the two authors' consideration of the importance of family belonging, revealing thus the English and American societies' perception of lineage at the turn of the twentieth century. Being influenced differently by the theories of heredity that developed at that time, the two authors developed different perspectives toward the importance of family belonging in the individual's life. Hardy, who recognizes his interest in Darwin's and Weismann's theories of heredity, exposes in his novel his obsession by family lineage. As any Victorian, he shows the importance of the noble pedigree of his main character in her life, linking thus the concept to nobility and prestige. Dreiser, who is rather influenced by the philosophy of Naturalism, adopts heredity within the context of Determinism. He demonstrates in his novel how his main protagonist's fate is determined by her heredity as well as the social environment in which she is living.

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**Key words:** Pedigree, English society, American society, Thomas Hardy, Theodore Dreiser, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Jennie Gerhardt, Heredity, Nobility, Determinism.

## النسب في روايتي "تاس دوربيرفيل" (1891) لتوماس هاردي " و جيني جيراردت" (1911) لثيودور درايزر: دراسة مقارنة

**الملخص:** تدرس هذه المقالة مفهوم النسب في روايتي "تاس دوربيرفيل" (1891) لتوماس هاردي و "جيني جيراردت" (1911) لثيودور درايزر. الهدف منها هو مقارنة اعتبار الكاتبين لأهمية الانتماء لأسرة معينة ، ميينين بذلك اعتبار المجتمعين البريطاني والأمريكي للنسب في مطلع القرن العشرين. نظرا لتأثر الكاتبين بنظرية الوراثة بطريقتين مختلفتين ، طورا نظرتين مختلفتين تجاه أهمية الانتماء لأسرة معينة. هاردي ، الذي اعترف باهتمامه بنظريتي داروين وايزمان للوراثة ، بين في روايته اهتمامه بنسب العائلة. كأى فيكتور في زمانه ، بين أهمية النسب في حياة الفرد من خلال بطله روايته ، رابطا مفهومه بالنبل والهيبة. درايزر المتأثر أكثر بفلسفة المذهب الطبيعي ، تبنى نظرية الوراثة في سياق الحتمية ، مظهرها في روايته كيف أن مصير بطلتها ليس فقط محتوما بالوراثة بل أيضا بمحيطها الاجتماعي .

**الكلمات المفاتيح:** النسب ، المجتمع الإنجليزي ، المجتمع الأمريكي ، توماس هاردي ، ثيودور درايزر ، تاس دوربيرفيل ، جيني جيراردت ، النبل ، الحتمية .

### 1- Introduction:

By the turn of the twentieth century, Western societies underwent considerable changes due to the Industrial Revolution that turned their economy from agriculture to industry and capital. In fact, many families of noble origin lost their prestige and became poor, and many others rose from rags to riches. As such, "family belonging", or what is scientifically termed lineage or pedigree knew a reconsideration comparing to the past in both Europe and America. This is apparent in the literature of the period which gave an image about the important transformations that affected society in

general and family in particular. What is noticeable is that American authors reflected in their writings individuals that began to detach themselves from the codes of belonging and pedigree which characterized the old traditional agricultural civilizations. They introduced characters that were mainly placed in the industrial urban centers, where they started to build themselves as new individuals without considering their origins. Their English counterparts, however, portrayed families that lost their prestige due to the industrialization of economy but were unable to get rid of the importance of belonging in the life of an individual. Among the writers who represented in their fiction the importance of pedigree in the European and American societies respectively, the English writer Thomas Hardy and the American Theodore Dreiser.

This article will draw a short comparison between two selected novels of the above mentioned authors, namely Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and Dreiser's *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911), focusing on their representation of the concept of pedigree. The investigation of the two novels will emphasize the views of the two writers about the importance of family belonging in the English and American societies in the turn of the twentieth century. It will show how both Hardy and Dreiser were influenced by the philosophical movements that prevailed in their societies at that time in their dealing with sensitive social issues as kinship.

A short review of the literature dealing with the two novels shows that critics agree on the fact that both Hardy and Dreiser picture in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jennie Gerhardt* respectively the English and American societies in the turn of the twentieth century, reflecting on the main movements and philosophies that characterized the era. For example,

Rosemarie Morgan, in her *Student Companion to Thomas Hardy*, states that Hardy presents the life of his protagonist, as in the majority of his novels, in the Victorian society. The latter was characterized by rigid morality and a shift in the majority of aspects of life, especially economy that moved from agriculture to industry. She adds that the novel is set in Dorset, Wessex, a village situated in Southern England, where people suffered from poverty because of the decline of traditional farming and the emergence of the farming industry. It is from this village that “Tess wends her way, walking some 10 miles southeast to Alec’s family home of the Stoke D’Urbervilles, at Trantridge, on the edge of the Chase” (Morgan, 2007: 105) in order to bring money and name to her family. Tess, in her way, wants to make a shift from country to urban life; from D’Urberfield to D’urberville, following the shift that affected the whole British society at that time (Ibid).

The movement of Hardy’s protagonist that Morgan emphasizes is also present in Dreiser’s novel. In fact, the American author presents his protagonist Jennie as a poor country girl who moved with her mother to work in a hotel in Columbus. Leonard Cassuto and Virginia Eby Clare, in *The Cambridge Companion to Theodore Dreiser*, assert that Dreiser sets his *Jennie Gerhardt*, as the majority of his novels, in the modern American city. He always writes about the age of modernizing in The U.S.A. He “wrote the history of the urbanizing United States between the Civil War and World War I.” (Cassuto and Eby, 2004: 63). Jennie, like the majority of his characters, is shifting from tradition to modernity, enduring the harsh conditions of industry and capitalization that shaped the American environment at that time.

The movement of the main protagonists of the two novels from one place to another and from one mode of life to another is representative of the movements that occurred in both English and American societies in that period in all the fields of life. In fact, the economy which shifted from agriculture to industry brought with it many other changes, especially at the social and cultural levels. People were drifting from countryside to urban spaces to try their lives in these industrial centers. Moreover, many noble families lost their prestige with the collapse of agriculture and they had to seek a decent living within the new economic system. Simultaneously, many scientific and philosophical movements emerged to change their view about the world.

## **2- Issue and Working Hypothesis:**

As aforementioned, the Industrial Revolution changed the English and American people's view about many matters concerning their daily lives. The giving away of agriculture and the engagement in industrial and capital venture engendered a change in the structure of society. Many noble families which relied on agriculture to make wealth lost their prestige and fell in poverty, and many humble families rose to riches thanks to their success in investment. As a result, people's view about nobility and family belonging started to take another direction, and many theories and philosophies emerged to emphasize the fact. This is apparent in the writings of the period, which reflect on their authors' view about lineage and belonging in this age of transition from tradition to modernity.

This article studies two masterpieces of English and American literature, namely Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and Theodore Dreiser's *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911), to point out the difference between the

English and American perceptions of lineage or pedigree at the turn of the twentieth century. The analysis will show how the cultural and the social movements of the period influenced the English and American authors differently and how the American society was more involved in social change than the English one. In fact, Dreiser portrays characters that succeeded to detach themselves from the confines of pedigree and focus on their present lives. Hardy, however, presents characters that struggle to get rid of their ancestral belonging but the latter comes always to challenge their newly built lives and destroy their dreams.

### **3- Theoretical Grounds:**

Hardy's views on heredity are clearly represented in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, in which the D'Urbervilles family plays an important role in the life of his main protagonist Tess. It is argued that his preoccupation with heredity is influenced by his personal interest in his lineage and the whole Victorian society's obsession with Darwin's theories on heredity as well as the degeneration of noble families (Williams and Moorehead, 1997, 1998). Hardy is particularly influenced by Darwin's "blood theory" of Pangenesis, which states that parents' characteristics are genetically transmitted to their children. In his *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Darwin states that the variability between children and their ancestors is due to domestication. The latter means that the later generations are "raised under conditions of life not so uniform as, and somewhat different from, those to which the parent species have been exposed under nature." (Darwin, 1859: 9).

Hardy notes in his biography that he read also Weismann's *Essays on Heredity* while writing *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (Op. Cit. Williams and Moorehead, 1997, 1998). August Friedrich Leopold Weismann, a German

evolutionary biologist, contributed to the field of heredity through his germ plasm theory of heredity, which stipulates that inheritance takes place by the means of germ cells (egg cells and sperm cells), which transmit characteristics of parents to children (Weismann, 1889). Therefore, we notice that Hardy is influenced by the theories of heredity and natural selection of his day while producing his literature. This justifies his views about the importance of family belonging.

While Hardy shows his interest in the theories of heredity and pedigree developed in his day, Dreiser overlooks the importance of belonging and family in his novel. He, however, focuses on his protagonist's social relations with men of social classes higher than hers to secure a living for herself and her family. These men, in their turn, are not interested in Jennie's origins or class and focus only on her beauty of face and heart. So, elements of heredity are injected by Dreiser in his work just to highlight the physical and innate beauty that his protagonist inherited from her family not to evoke nobility. The reason is perhaps his influence by the theory of Determinism, which states that the individual's fate is not only determined by elements of heredity, but also by his/her social environment which exercises a major force over his/her actions.

Dreiser does not give details about his protagonist' past except her belonging to a family of German immigrants. So, he is more influenced by the post-Darwinian philosophy of Determinism, which held that man belongs entirely to nature without possessing soul or any other thing that connect him to the religious or the spiritual. He/she is, accordingly, a higher-order animal, whose character and actions are determined by two natural forces: Heredity and environment. He/she, however, inherits only his/her

personal traits and instincts, such as hunger and sex, which, in their turn, are determined by the social and economic forces of his/her day. Lin Xianghua argues that individuals “can react toward the exterior and interior forces but they are helpless before these forces” (Lin, 1989: 528).

Determinism is reflected in literature under the theory of Naturalism, which started in Europe with Emile Zola and influenced American authors at the turn of the twentieth century. Zola, a French writer and theorist who is labeled the father of literary Naturalism, presents the naturalistic philosophy by emphasizing the effects of heredity and environment on human nature and action (The Webster’s Dictionary of English Language, 1989: 667). Naturalist writers are influenced by Darwin’s theory of natural selection and believe that one’s heredity and environment determine his/her actions. Dreiser, as a naturalist, uses elements of this theory in his *Jennie Gerhardt* to justify the protagonist’s fate.

What is noticeable is that the theories of heredity influenced the English and American authors differently. While Hardy appropriates Darwin’s theory to emphasize the importance of the noble origins of his protagonist, Dreiser employs it to justify his protagonist’s actions in the present moment. Nobility and ancestry are not given importance in *Jennie Gerhardt*, which shows that the American society in the nineteenth century succeeded to a certain extent to free itself from the confines of traditional life and glorified past. The Victorian society reflected by Hardy, however, was still besieged within her past despite its economic development. The fact is that the notion of nobility is inherited from the Middle Ages when Domesday Book, one of the oldest European genealogy records, was written. At that time, one’s ancestors guaranteed religious and secular prestige.



#### 4- Pedigree and Nobility in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

The difference in the English and American perception of the notion of pedigree in the turn of the twentieth century is influenced by many factors that characterized social life in these societies. certainly, the English society, as it is presented by Hardy in his *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, is different from the American one presented by Dreiser in his *Jennie Gerhardt*. This difference is apparent in many aspects of the two novels, but can be summarized in the fact that Hardy's protagonist is portrayed as a traditional woman struggling to reach modernity, but failed at the end and submitted herself to the codes of her society. Dreiser's protagonist, however, is described as a modern woman who succeeded to detach herself from the restraints of tradition and to convince the rest of her society to accept her as she is.

Indeed, many aspects of traditional societies are present in Hardy's novel and absent in Dreiser's one. Among these aspects, one can mention the importance of ancestors and family name in the European society, male dominance and rigid Victorian principles, the importance of religion and morality. All these factors are not given importance in Dreiser's work in which the belonging of his main protagonist is ignored and moral values are neglected and substituted by the importance of money and social class. Moreover, we notice in Hardy's work the concentration of people's lives on farming despite the shift of their society from agriculture to industry. Angel Clare, for example, prefers investment in farming than other industries. Tess also moves from one farm to another in her jobs as if she is only suitable to rural work. In Dreiser's work, however, Jennie performs jobs that are related to urban and industrial life despite her lack of education.

Considering Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, one can notice that the author emphasizes the importance of social titles and kinship in the novel. The title itself is indicative of this matter. In fact, Tess is not identified by her actual name which is Tess D'Urberfield, but by her ancestral name Tess of the D'Urbervilles. Her story starts when she knows that she belongs to this family, and all the changes and the events that will happen in her life later are based on her and her family's will to claim this name.

Before informing his reader about the belonging of Tess to the D'Urbervilles, Hardy introduces her as a member of a poor family. Her father is a drinker and her mother gave birth to a great number of children of whom she cannot take care and assume responsibility. This fact obliges Tess, the eldest of her brothers, to take care of her family at a young age. She is described as an embodiment of a countryside girl; ambitious, active, intelligent, half educated, and more importantly responsible. The author makes it clear that "to almost everybody she was a fine picturesque country girl and no more." (p. 2).

Hardy's initial description of Tess is significant to the coming events of the novel. Indeed, her humbleness and activity reveal her belonging to the countryside with its simplicity and hard working activities, and her intelligence and education despite the non completion of her studies reveal her belonging to noble origins. Her feeling of culpability and responsibility after the death of her family's horse, which is the only source of survival for them, provides her with enough courage to accept her father's will to go to the D'Urbervilles to claim kin, and restore her ancestral belonging. For her and for all the members of her family, identifying themselves as D'Urbervilles will help them to rise to the high ranks of society and get rid of

their poverty. It will also serve them to convert from rural traditional inhabitants to modern urban ones.

We notice that Tess's ancestors in Hardy's novel play a more important role than the other active characters. Rosemarie Morgan, in her *Student Companion to Thomas Hardy* (2007), depicts Tess's ancestors "the D'Urbervilles" as minor characters and argues that

certain minor characters who never actually appear in Tess's life carry a special significance in this novel. They hang in portraits on the walls and lie in tombs. They are her ancestors. These rollicking D'Urbervilles play a larger part in her short history than do Retty or Marian Or Izzy, her diary-farm companions at Talbothays. (p. 99).

Claiming the D'Urbervilles pedigree is not only planned by Tess's father, but even by her mother. The latter intends for an eventual marriage between Tess and the eldest son of this family to get their prestige. At a certain moment, even Tess is convinced by the story of claiming her ancestry and raising to aristocracy and decides to satisfy her parents' will (Ibid.). Even though at the beginning she has not reached her desire from this family, her visit is at a certain extent an achievement, since she succeeds to seduce their son Alec who provides her with a job in her desperate moments. Unfortunately for her, Alec's interest in her marks a turning point in her life. In fact, he is not as good as he appears, but like the majority of his class's members he is fake. He offers her the job of taking care of his mother's birds just to keep her near him and seize the best opportunity to control her beautiful body. Hardy says that "Alec watched her pretty and unconscious munching through the skeins of smoke [...] Tess D'urberfield did not divine,

that there behind the blue narcotic haze was potentially the ‘tragic mischief of her drama.’ (p. 47).

Working in the D’Urbervilles’ farm, Tess is constantly watched by Alec, who does not miss the opportunity to approach her. It is noticeable that the young man’s intentions are not based on any feeling of love, respect or pity, but on his impulsive instinct that cannot resist his cousin’s physical strong charm. In return, the objective of the heroine’s seduction of her cousin is built upon her will to get the wealth of his family. Yet, this is not her only objective, but she is also driven by her need to help her family. This is why she accepts the job, and yields to Alec’s advances. All this facilitates to Alec the way to reach his desire. Indeed, one night, returning from a rustic revel, he takes advantage from her tiredness, and succeeds to rape her.

Tess’s relation with Alec brings to her nothing but bad feelings. She feels collapsed, ruined and weak. Indeed, she knows that this relation will change her life radically; and this is what happens. Hardy says: “she looked upon herself as a figure of guilt.” (p. 125). Alec, in the novel, points at her vulnerability by saying: “you are as weak as a bled calf.” (p. 422). Moreover, she is submitted to inward suffering, because in her very deep soul she feels that she is a fallen woman. Instead of gaining a name, she loses the most important things in this age of rigid morality; her virginity and honor. Indeed, Alec has never regarded her as his relative, but as an object of sexual desire. When he satisfies his desire with her, he leaves her and migrates to the industrial North. Worse than this, she becomes pregnant, and after some months she gives birth to her child that she names “Sorrow”.

The name “Sorrow” is of great significance. It summarizes Tess’s experience with Alec. Definitely, this relation brings sorrow to her life. After

losing her status as a good girl, she is regarded as an evil in the Victorian society. In fact, when she returns to her home, she is rejected by her father, and when she goes outside, she is rejected by her society. We conclude from this that Tess's desire to reach the Bourgeoisie ends badly and her pedigree is not of benefit for her.

As a result of this failure, and after the death of her child, she decides to move away from her village and initiate a new living where no one knows her. She is determined to begin her life as a modern woman, free from the titles of her family; she wants to start her life as Tess not Tess of the D'Urbervilles. Despite all what happened to her, she remains active and courageous. In this sense, Rosemarie Morgan argues that "Tess is not weak and passive, but is like a strange male protagonist —possessed of sexual vigor and moral vigor." (Qtd in Devereux, 2003: 118). When she leaves her village, she lets behind her the name and the blood of the D'Urbervilles. She departs from Marlott, the place of her birth and tragedy, to Talbothays, where she works as a milkmaid in a great dairy.

In the diary, Tess meets new friends and starts a new living. Moreover, she gets together with the love of her life Angel Clare. The latter seems to her a modern liberal man, especially when he detaches himself from his family without caring of their name, and decides to start his own business. Yet, despite this appearance, he, like all the members of the Victorian society at that time, has signs of traditional life of which he cannot get rid. Like all his fellows, the notions of ancestry and blood have their weight in his life, and reappear in his discourses when the moment is adequate. Even Tess who decides to give up her ancestry cannot do it. In this context, Morgan argues:

In a desperate moment, even Tess falls back, on her ancestry upon aristocratic principle. When courage fails her as she struggles to broach her confession to Angel, she uses it to cloak her inner conflict: “I was told by the dairyman that you hated old families” (188). While feeling her way in a roundabout manner into a confession and also sidetracking Angel into his contempt for pedigree, Tess intuitively his mind—one way or another he will hate *her*. Hardy uses this moment to expose Angel’s hypocrisy. He does not hate old families at all, although his first reaction is to stand his ground. (Morgan, 2007: 99).

From this citation, we understand that both Tess and Angel cannot live without making reference to their pedigree. The heroine has not in mind another subject to which she can turn her lover’s attention when she loses the courage of telling him the truth of her past, except this topic of old families. This proves that she is still believing in them. In his turn, Angel seizes the opportunity to speak about the importance of blood and pedigree in the individual’s life. His hypocrisy toward this matter is shown when he starts to speak about his sounding and his newly acquired socialist principles, and then shifts to base his argument on the whole society, using the third person. “He tells Tess that people are ‘hopelessly snobbish’ and will be impressed by her blue blood. This in turn will improve, he says, her chances of being accepted as his wife.” (Ibid.). By this, he expresses his desire for Tess to be identified as D’Urbervilles that he finds more beautiful and attractive than D’Urberfield and more suitable to his social position, trying to hide his snobbishness and to ascribe it to the whole society. Yet, he cannot keep his words and says it deliberately:

“ D’Urbervilles—from this day.”

“I like the other way rather best.”

“But you *must*, dearest! Good heavens, why dozens of mushroom millionaires would jump at this position!” (p. 211).

Once again, the notion of pedigree reappears in Tess’s life. Despite all the efforts she makes to get rid of it, she cannot free herself from it. The reason is due to the fact that the whole society is shaped by ancestry belonging. In this context, Rosemarie Morgan notes:

The ancestors, the pedigree issue in all its implications, which Tess had earlier decided to repudiate as being not only fanciful but an impediment to her autonomy, the self-determination of her existence, rears its ugly head again. This time, however, it’s not at the father’s will but at the husband’s. Angel now goes out of his way to choose what he calls “one of your ancestral mentions” for the honeymoon (Morgan, 2007: 100).

Tess comes to understand that pedigree is one pillar of her society just like religion and the other moral values of the Victorian era. Accordingly, she has to accept it and live it. If she succeeds to flee it with a father, she cannot do the same with a husband, who wants her to merit his status and name before getting it. Even for their honeymoon, he selects a house which belongs to her ancestors to remind her that she belongs to them. This detail, according to him, makes her at the same level of importance as his family. It also gives him the chance to be proud of his choice of a wife in front of his relatives that object their marriage and always label her an agricultural girl. The author tells that the house’s “exterior features are so well known to all the travelers through the Froom Valley once a portion of a fine manorial residence, and the property and seat of D’Urbervilles.” (p. 242).

Angel's choice of the house is symbolic. Indeed, its walls are painted by portraits of important women of the D'Urbervilles, which cannot be removed despite their oldness. This signifies the fact that ancestry and family names constitute a substance engraved in the Victorian minds, and even natural phenomena had not the force to remove them. It is a kind of a message from Angel stipulating that Tess's blue blood cannot be removed. It is engraved in the walls of her life, and it is a fixity.

May be, it is this fixity to her family blood that drives her once again to Alec when Angel leaves her in destitution. Indeed, the idea of being held by him is perceived by her as a natural matter when he provides his help to her family. Moreover, before accepting his offer for help and house, her relatives spend the night in Kingsbere church, which is an ancient D'Urbervilles seat. Referring to Tess's ancestors, Morgan comments that

The Kingsburg church episode becomes a nightmare of a different kind , but the symbolic meaning is clear. The ancestors are indeed inescapable, fixities. Paradoxically, while they feature in *Tess* as the most significant of the minor characters, they sustain their power not as living beings but as phantom, legendary characters, ghosting the story of Tess's life, as it were (Morgan, 2007:101).

From this, we deduce that in the turn of the twentieth century, the English society was driven by the sense of community and family belonging. The Victorians were struggling to reach modernity at both the economic and social levels, but only the former was realized. Economically speaking, they attained advancement through the different inventions made in science and industry, but at the level of society they remained traditional. Some of them, like Tess, tried to reach this modernity, but all, like her, found themselves



switching from modernity to tradition and from tradition to modernity. The Victorians' fate was not determined by their personal being and achievement, but by their ancestral belonging. Noble blood could save someone from any kind of evil and raise his/her position in society. Humble belonging, however, kept the individual in his/her lower position whatever the efforts he/she could make.

It was in this period that the notion of "blue blood", which was repeated several times in Hardy's novel, appeared in the British society. This conception was of ancestral (historical) and even racial significance. The blue blood, in fact, refers to the white race on the first ground. This is explained by the fact that the white race's skin which is of a light color permits to the veins which carry blood in their body to be apparent on the surface of the skin with their blue color (José Couto Nogueira, 2020).

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, this notion is mainly attributed to the D'Urbervilles family that is, according to some historians, of Norman origins. Their pedigree goes back to the noble Normans that came to England during the Norman invasion, and settled there for the rest of their life. This origin is clear in the spelling of the name "D'Urbervilles" which contains the French "D" of the English translation "OF". With time, this name was divided into two different, but similar names: "D'Urbervilles" and "D'Urberfield". This division is also of great significance in Hardy's novel. The former contains the suffix "villes" which means "city" in the English language, and the latter contains the suffix "field" which refers to the countryside with its agricultural activities. Indeed, the D'Urbervilles are described as city dwellers, with capitalistic tendencies, urban education and prestige (Alec is an example), and the "D'Urberfields" are depicted as

countryside inhabitants, with agriculture as their only activity and with rural education and poverty (Tess is an example).

The difference made by the author between the two families is a way of showing that during the Victorian era, wealth and prestige moved to the city, and the countryside became a place of poverty. In fact, the period was no more the age of agriculture, but the one of industry and investment. So, in economy, the shift was made and accomplished, and people had to follow its mainstream. For those remaining in the countryside, even when they belong to a noble pedigree, their prestige was lost. Then, in the Victorian era, nobility moved to the urban space. Yet, the movement to the city imposed on people the approval of modern phenomena in their society, which they were not ready to accept at that time. Their attachment to their ancestral names and titles kept them unable to embrace the modernity brought about by the new economic system.

It is in this way that Hardy and many other late nineteenth century European writers presented their societies. This description seems to be different from the one given by Dreiser about the American society, which made a long path by succeeding to accept Capitalism with its modernity at both the economic and social levels. In fact, Americans at that time started to detach themselves from tradition and from the past to live the present and dream about the future. Matters as family belonging became secondary in the individual's life, and they are evoked only in scientific and biological terms to stress their influence on the individual's natural life.

### **5- Pedigree and Determinism in Dreiser's *Jennie Gerhardt*:**

In *Jennie Gerhardt*, Dreiser makes reference to Jennie's belonging only to evoke her poverty. He makes it clear from the beginning that Jennie belongs

to a family of immigrants to explain the reason of her poverty and expose the real life of this class in the American society. It is a kind of criticism addressed to the American government which opens its land to immigrants and neglects their situation in the end. Indeed, the story of Jennie draws upon the real life of one of his own sisters: “Its heroine was based on his sister Mary Frances Dreiser, called ‘Mame’ within the family.” (Newlin, 2003: 210). Dreiser’s writing about real events and characters is due to his influence by the philosophy of Determinism which draws from Realism and Naturalism. “His interest in them is a product of a novelist natural curiosity about the men and women who inhabit his world.” ( Cassuto and Eby, 2004: 30).

All along the novel, Dreiser puts apart Jennie’s belonging and concentrates on her life as a woman determined by money and capital in a modern society, and her struggle to help herself and her family to survive and overcome all the evil of her age. Indeed, when Jennie leaves home to work with her mother in the hotel, she is neither looking for a name for herself nor trying to climb to the high ranks of society; she is just seeking a humble job to sustain her distressed family. And when she has an affair with Senator Brander, she has not made any effort to seduce him. Moreover, despite his great interest in her, she has never asked him to marry her, and when he proposes marriage to her, she accepts just to thank and reward him for all what he does for her family not to borrow his name. Indeed, her father is against this relation. It is Brander who struggles to get her as his wife, regardless of her origins. In this context, W.M. Frohok argues:

Working with her mother in a hotel in Columbus, Jennie catches the eye of George Sylvester Brander, the junior senator from Ohio, who is moved by

her sweetly simple ways and good looks. He helped her bedraggled family, overrides her father's surely objections, and says he intends to marry her. More out of gratitude than love Jennie goes to bed with him. (Frohok, 1972: 18).

We understand from this that instead of seizing the opportunity of marrying Brander to get his name and social class, Jennie is ready to satisfy his male desire just to thank him for his positive intentions toward her, which means that she is a modern naïve character.

Another event which shows Dreiser's neglect for names and titles is Jennie's relation with Lester Kane. When Jennie moves to work in Cleveland as a maid, she is looking for a job to feed her baby. When she is acquainted with Lester, she has not the intention to seduce him. Just like Brander, he interested in her beauty of body and mind. And when he proposes his love and respect for her, she is satisfied, and offers to live with him despite the fact that he has no intention of marriage. The love he offers her and the help he provides to her family are sufficient for her.

Similarly, Lester is satisfied by her love and good behavior, and lives with her for several years without looking for marriage with another woman. He is so faithful to her that he accepts even her secret baby, and they start a new life together as a happy family. Even when he learns about the last will of his father, he prefers to stay with Jennie until she advises him to accept his father's command before the end of the ultimatum. In the end, he accepts to marry a woman from his social class, but he is not happy in his life. Living with his new wife, Jennie does not leave his thoughts, and in the last moments of his life he asks for her to be at his side.

Lester's attachment to Jennie is rather due to his awareness of her beauty of heart and mind not to her exterior beauty. Indeed, in her life she is not expecting more than offering a good life to her destitute family, and she is always thankful to those who help her to do it. In this context, Frohock argues:

This is what the poor may expect in life. In all senses but the technical, Jennie is a good woman –kind, loving, loyal: she has been helpful to an unresponsive family; she even takes in and cares for the old father who once wanted to put her out of the house; she is a good mother to her child, and devotedly faithful to Kane. The latter does not leave her in want, but otherwise her goodness has to be its own reward. Like the heroine of Flaubert's *Simple Heart*, she has loved without return (Frohock, 1972:18).

Dreiser's neglect for titles and family names is the result of his reliance on real events in his work. In fact, he portrays the real image of the American society in the age when the latter knew huge waves of immigrants that went there just to live the American Dream of material success, regardless of the origins of the different people who transformed the U.S.A. into a melting pot. He portrays the lives of these Americans who found themselves driven by the wind of Capitalism that swept the country in this new modern age. These peoples' lives, according to Dreiser, did not belong to them; they were determined by the socioeconomic conditions of the period, which stipulated that one had to get money in order to survive.

Historians argue that during that period of time, America drained almost half of immigration in the world and was the first refuge for the oppressed on earth. Indeed, between 1870 and 1920, twenty million of Europeans reached the U.S.A. (Pauwels, 1997: 81). Being attracted by the economic wealth of

this nation and job opportunities mainly based in the industrial centers of the great cities, the latter became overpopulated by people of different races and social backgrounds coming there from outside the country and from the rural areas. In this context, John C. Teaford, in *The Twentieth-Century American City*, argues:

Having witnessed the dynamic urban growth of the late nineteenth century, few Americans could deny that the tide of population was surging in the direction of the city. In 1850 only six American cities had over 100,000 inhabitants; by 1900 thirty-eight cities could claim this distinction [...] In 1850, Chicago was a town of 30,000 residents; by 1900 it boasted a population of 1,700,000. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the population of New York City increased sevenfold, as did that of Saint Louis; San Francisco's rose tenfold, and Detroit's soared fourteenfold. City streets were reaching out miles from the metropolitan centers, and acre after acre of farmland was succumbing to urban development (Teaford, 1993: 1).

Unfortunately for those people who came to settle in the city, conditions of life there were not as they expected them to be. Indeed, the great majority of families, just like Jennie's family in Dreiser's novel, suffered from destitution, the thing which put them in the obligation to accept any humble job offered to them. In addition to this, they suffered from the exploitation of the captains of industry. Since the origins of these people who populated the cities were left behind them in their homelands, their ancestral names were not of great importance. In this age of Individualism, a person is measured according to his individual capacities and physical appearance not according to his ancestral importance. This is what made the uniqueness of the American society and distinguished it from the European one which could

not get rid of its ancestral ideas and principles, despite their movement to modernization.

Dreiser has well portrayed this fact in his *Jennie Gerhardt* through several events and characters. For instance, when Jennie's two lovers, Brander and Lester, decide to make an alliance with her, they interest in her physical and interior beauty, they do not give importance to her humble origins. In the novel, Dreiser always makes reference to Jennie's competences as an individual not as part of a family. Such expressions as " a girl like Jennie is like a comfortable fire to the average masculine mind; it is like warmth after the freezing attitude of harder disposition." (pp. 120, 125), " a girl like Jennie is a comfortable fire to the average masculine mind." (Ibid., 76), "she posses natural industry and love of order", she provides for Lester "exactly the service and the atmosphere which he needed to be comfortable and happy." (Ibid., 197) and others are all examples of Dreiser's focus on the natural and individual competences of his character, not the inherited name and blood of her family.

Moreover, the two lovers of Jennie do not consider their own belongings and social status when they decided to engage with her. Senator Brander is ready to marry her without caring of his social position as a senator. Likewise, Lester Kane when he is put in a choice between her and his father's fortune, he prefers to stay with her. For him, being with Jennie is better than inheriting his father's name and prestige in society. Even at the end when he becomes an important man after his marriage with a woman of his class, he is always dreaming of his life with Jennie. After Lester's death, Jennie is left caring for children that do not belong to her but treated by her as her own

natural children, which is another example that shows Dreiser's neglect of belonging.

## **6- Conclusion:**

The analysis of the notion of pedigree in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and Dreiser's *Jennie Gerhardt* reveals the disparity between the English and American societies in their consideration of family lineage and heredity in the turn of the twentieth century. Hardy portrays a Victorian society which is retrospective and traditional. This is apparent in his characters' consideration of social titles and nobility. Despite their desire to reach modernity, they could not free their minds from the restraints of their past. Family names in this period were important in the life of an individual since they were indicative of his social class. Aspects of heredity in Hardy's novel reflect on his own interest in his family lineage. The Hardys, according to him, belong to noble origins but experienced a decline from their noble status. As a result, he became obsessed with this idea of decline, the thing which urged him to interest in the theories of heredity of his day.

The American society portrayed by Dreiser, however, appropriated the theories of heredity differently from the English. In this age of Individualism, Americans started to forget about tradition and ancestry and focused on their modern life. Dreiser's longing to modernity in *Jennie Gerhardt* begins by the presentation of his characters and their ideas as being purely American and different from the European ones. He describes them as modern individuals who freed themselves from the restraints of the old societies. Indeed, *Jennie Gerhardt* makes it clear that the notions of nobility, blood, and title inheritance have no place in the American society of that age. What matters for people is the individual and his capacities and most of all the pursuit of



his happiness whatever the conditions are. The American people at that time were fascinated by the principles of the American Dream, namely life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This seems to be a revision of the European writing of the same period in which the characters are presented as the ones who cannot get rid of the values of their ancestors based on nobility, social titles, and blood. It is, then evident that the Americans perceived the theories of heredity differently from the Europeans.

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