

An Analysis of Tragedy of Tess of the D'Urbervilles

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Abstract

Tess of the D'Urbervilles is a tragic monumental work of Thomas Hardy, an English writer of critical realism. The paper will analyze Tess of the d'Urbervilles through character's personalities, its social background and the old traditional religion. The paper introduces the causes of Tess's Tragic fate which is influenced by personalities of main characters, hypocritical moral, unjust law, depression of capitalism. Tess is just one of the victims who are suffering sorrows. Through Tess, we can see female's low status at the same time, which shows that we should develop a habit of economic independence and spirit of revolt.

Keywords: personalities, hypocritical moral, unjust law, depression of capitalism

1. Introduction

Tess of D'Urbervilles is regarded as Hardy's tragic masterpiece. It is a story of a country girl who is first presented as an innocent girl but turns into a tragic heroine. From Hardy's point of view, Tess is not responsible for what she has done. She is a victim of a series of misfortunes which slowly destroy her personality.

The novel is written in seven chapters; each chapter representing a phase of Tess's life after which Tess becomes more mature. With the life as series of tragedies, Tess refuses to remain a victim and struggles through life. Tess of D'Urbervilles is a tragic novel of a young country girl named Tess who goes through many struggles in her life but ends up "violated by one man and forsaken by another" (Heap). She is a poor country girl, Tess's father discovers that he is the descendant of the Norman noble family of the d'Urbervilles. As they very poor, Tess is sent to the new found relatives by her parents, hoping to marry a nobleman. Unfortunately for Tess, the new "relatives" have taken the name because it sounded good. There, she meets Alec, the man who seduces and rapes her. Tess returns to her parents' home where she gives birth to a boy who soon died. Tess leaves home again to work as a milkmaid on a farm where she meets Angel Clare and they fall in love with each other. Scared of losing him, Tess does not tell him about her past. However, Tess confesses about her past to her husband in their wedding night, after Angel confesses his previous affair with a woman. Angel can not bare the thought that Tess is not pure as he believes, and therefore leaves Tess for Brazil. Tess struggles through poverty but in the end accepts the help of Alec. Angel finally returns to find Tess live with Alec. Tess still loves Angel, so she murders Alec and runs away with Angel; however, the police find them at Stonehenge and Tess is hanged.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles is both a tragedy of love and a tragedy of life. The process of tragedy is the process of various contradictions between the characters and the social environment. The cause of the tragedy is either the character as the dominant factor or the environment as the main guide or the result of the interaction between the two. Although Hardy interprets the heroine's misfortune as a joke of fate, Tess's misfortune is due to her social, economic, political environment and class status. Tess was born in a peasant family, lives in a new and old age, and is bound to be influenced by some old moral and fatalistic ideas. The novel belongs to Hardy's novels called "Character and Environment". The image of Tess is a modern woman suffering from the old moral persecution, a new farm worker. Tess, as a figure, has a typical significance in exposing and accusing the whole system at that time.

Tess came from a peasant family, and some old moral and fatalistic ideas left her with a weak side in her

resistance to traditional morality. When she was persecuted by public opinion and traditional morality, she regarded herself as guilty. The later tragedy resulted from the deeply rooted feudal concept of society and her lover's virginity complex. She regarded herself as an incarnation of sin, and always felt that people all over the world are paying attention to her situation. She couldn't forget her shame more than anyone else. It was with a net of her own morality that Tess bound herself up. In fact, her consciousness of self-binding had a profound historical basis and is the concrete expression of the whole social consciousness. Tess, as an individual in a certain historical period, inevitably formed the social consciousness and moral concept in a specific historical period, and her thoughts and actions were inevitably restricted by the times and social ideas.

The paper introduces the causes of Tess's Tragic fate which is influenced by personalities of main characters, hypocritical moral, unjust law, depression of capitalism.

2. Social Background

The nineteenth-century Britain was the greatest economic power of the world, it was an extraordinarily complex age, which has sometimes been called the Second English Renaissance. "It is, however, also the beginning of Modern Times" (Miller). The period between 1837 and 1901 is known as the "Victorian age", named so after the Queen Victoria. There were two historical elements which affected the English society of the nineteenth-century: colonization and industrialization. Both of these brought great increase in wealth, making Britain the leading economic power of its time. It was a time of prosperity, imperial expansion, and great political reform. During that time, the factory system gradually replaced the system of people working in their own homes or in small workshops. This caused great shifts in social structure, making owners of industries and trades people more powerful. The industrial revolution created a great demand for female and child labour, who were often made to work twelve hours a day or even longer. Some writers and intellectuals of that period protested against it. The reforms did not change the reality of the working classes, although they did gain some rights.

In the nineteenth-century, there was a great shift of population from rural to urban areas. People seeking better living conditions for their families left everything and populated big cities in search of work. They lived in a very bad condition with long working hours. Therefore, drinking and abuse were frequent in family lives, since people thought that life had very little to offer them.

3. Features of the Characters

The personality determines the fate of life. -----Carl Gustav Jung

Hardy once said that: Tragedy, that is to say, tragedy expresses a man's condition. His instinct and desire will lead to the tragic ending. This part introduces the characters of Tess, Claire and Alec. Tess's compromise, inferiority, Claire's selfish and Alec's brutality, all that makes Tess into death step by step.

3.1 Tess's Character

Tess was a pure, beautiful and industrious rural girl who yearned for the true kindness of life, but was always attacked by false and evil. Tess was a brand-new woman model of hardy. She has a dual personality. On the one hand, she dared to resist the traditional morality and the false religion; On the other hand, she couldn't get rid of the shackles of traditional morality. In particular, the latter is directly related to her tragic fate.

3.1.1 Tendency Towards Compromise

Though Tess dared to resist the traditional morality and bravely to pursue her happiness, she was an uncompromising resistance. But Tess didn't completely get rid of the shackles of traditional morality. Although she understood that she was the victim of violence, under the villagers' criticism, she also believed that she was "guilty". As a result, it made her torture and condemnation.

When her family's horse was died, her parents asked her to climb noble family. Her instinct was simple and she did not agree to go, but she took a guilty feeling and strong sense of responsibility. She had to do this. "Her pale face, without expression, seems to think that her own murder", wrote in the book. This is the turning of her life and casting a layer of indelible shadow over her later life.

Tess knew that Alec was bad for her, but to accepted his help. His parents threatened her to go to Alec's home, she could refused but couldn't. Out of sympathy and responsibility for her family and for the living, she agreed to live with Alec. When she felt her love for Claire was imperfect, she asked Claire to marry her sister as a wife. She constantly struggled, and then compromised. And struggled. And compromised. And struggled. And compromised. Her feelings were complex.

This personality was expressed in the relationship between her and Claire. Lovers should be equal on rights, however, Tess always belittled herself and raised Claire. Her miserable past didn't get Claire's tolerance. In the

face of Claire's abandon, she didn't make the slightest resistance. A series of enthusiastic letters didn't call back Claire's heart. In front of love, Tess lost her dignity. It is this kind of blind and unequal love that made Tess lose the right to strive for happiness. Instead, it deepened the tragedy of Tess.

3.1.2 The Lack of Self-Consciousness

At first, the lack of self-consciousness was reflected in Tess's attitude towards love. For the first time she saw Claire, she was attracted by his knowledge and handsome expression. In Hardy's eyes, Tess was portrayed as a perfect woman, but her characters also contained some weakness. She always wandered between Claire and Alec. She loved Claire but out of ignorance, she was seduced by Alec. She often considered about other people's needs, but ignored her own requirements. She had to sacrifice herself for her family. She didn't have her own ideas which brought her into the abyss of suffering, and finally led to the tragedy of her life.

When Alec played some tricks for her and taught her whistle, she was so grateful. In the night of the incident, because avoiding the language war, Tess carelessly jumped on Alec's carriage and fell asleep. When she discovered Alec's fraud, she was not determined to leave. These details gave Alec an opportunity and let her into the bad luck. On the contrary, if she noticed Alec's behaviors, and kept an eye on him. She was not bound to lose her reputation and lost her lover. That is to say, the tragedy will not occur.

3.1.3 Deep Inferiority and Simple Mind

Tess was beautiful but self-abased, she was kind but simple-minded. Her inferiority exaggerated her pain. Who would never conscientiously allow any man to marry her now, and who had religiously determined that she never would be tempted to do so, draw Claire's attention from other woman. When she wanted to tell Claire the whole story happened on her, her feeling was complex. On the one hand, she wanted to release herself. On the other hand, she thought that this was her own fault. She was afraid that Claire did not forgive her and looked down upon her. But when Claire told something bad for her, her inferiority disappeared. She thought this was equal between them. So she was determined to tell the truth. However, Alec left her. She often made a judgment from the traditional customs and distorted her normal psychological state. Tess was subject to its morality when she against the traditional bravely. Sometimes, she would fight with traditional moral, at the same time, she would become its defenders. Tess made a big net around herself and tied up. She wanted to escape but couldn't. This sense of self-restraint had its profound historical basis, and it was the manifestation of the whole society. Therefore, Tess's ending can only be tragic.

This is the image of purity in the heart of Hardy. Tess as a typical character with such outstanding, prominent. But because of the sense of responsibility. Although she began to realize the intentions of Alec's plot, she was too naive. "I have forgiven you for the same!" That is to say, it is her simple mind that cause her to death.

3.2 Alec's Characters

Alec was a son of a wealthy businessman, used his father's money and power in the countryside to show off. The first time he saw Tess, his dissolute face was completely unmasked lewd. "What a funny thing! And what a crumby girl!" He set a trap to defile Tess and destroyed Tess about her lifetime of happiness. Though he later repented himself with the help of a pastor and intended to go to Africa to preach, but his abuse did not eradicate. When he met Tess again, regeneration of evil appeared, but Tess refused him. This didn't destroy him instead Alec entangled her all the time. In the end, Tess was forced to do his mistress. Tess became the biggest victim in Alec's indulge life.

3.3 Claire's Characters

Claire was an open-minded man who was eager to devote himself into farming. His dream was to become a great farmer. So he looked forward to simple, natural clean countryside life. Claire didn't want to marry rich women as his wife. When he saw Tess who was so industrious, his heart was beat. However, his love rather ideally and fancifully than with the impassioned thoroughness of her feeling for him. He could love desperately, but with a love more especially inclined to the imaginative and ethereal. So when Tess honestly confessed to him her own past insults, then the Claire's idol would be collapsed. Claire did not show the slightest sympathy, he even "can't tolerant Tess". He turned a blind eye to the Tess and her kindness. He abandoned her, leaving Tess in grief and despair, and extinguished the hope of love in his heart.

Claire gave Tess a misunderstanding that made Tess think he loved her very much. And his behaviors gave Tess hope, his words moistened her heart. All that he did was for himself, not for Tess. Would not a farmer want a wife, and should a farmer's wife be a drawing-room wax-figure, or a woman who understood farming? He got the correct answer. His selfish and hypocrisy are also reasons of Tess's tragedies.

4. Deep Stratification

Besides characters of main figures, there are other reasons that resulted in Tess's tragedy. In Hardy's work, it reflected the great changes about social economy, politics, morality and customs when capitalism flew in to British rural town. Under this circumstance, hypocrisy of bourgeois morality, laws and religion was revealed. This part will involve Tess's family background and the society she lived.

4.1 Family Background of Tess

Tess was born in a poor peasant family. The decline of a noble family, the family economic situation and irresponsible parents were destined to her tragic fate.

4.1.1 Vanity of the Parents

Her parents were full of vanity, and loved money. Her mother could not consider Tess's feelings. From the beginning to end, Tess's mother only thought herself. She hoped Tess would marry a rich man and brought her comfortable life. In fact, it is her mother's vanity that led Tess into an abyss, and opened a door to Tess's tragedy.

4.2 Ruthless Capitalist Society

After the industrial revolution, the business pattern of capitalism also slowly immersed into rural areas. The widespread usage of new agricultural put individual farmer into bankrupt. Tess and her workmates were the representatives of hired workers. They worked everywhere to make a living. They didn't go until the fall came. They were suffered torment and did the same work like men. Tess, one of the victim of this real cruel portrayal, was social unfair deprived her life.

4.2.1 Hypocritical Moral

Tess of the D'Urbervilles was published, this novel was regarded as disloyalty, uncharitable, obscene. In Victoria era, the rights between women and men are not equal. Even divorce was regarded as immoral behavior. Tess was just right the victim of this ethics. Her whole life lived in the violence and forces. The society and laws both thought it was valid that insulted Tess, so Tess couldn't find a way to protect herself. At the same time, Tess thought that she was "guilty". She hid her head into arms. What's more, those people who once said that they loved Tess escaped at the critical moment. Because of hypocritical moral, male didn't think it was illegal when they bullied women. But women would suffer more than physical pain.

In Victoria era, male regarded female as their personal belongings, especially female's purity. In this society, it's impurity that a woman lost virginity. If she lost her virginity, she should be condemned. In this novel, Claire was the typical representative. He had done excessive action and he wanted to get Tess's forgiveness. But he could not forgive innocent Tess. Though he was a open-minded man, he was constrained by traditional morality.

4.2.2 Unjust Laws

In the late nineteenth century, all of national rules were served by the ruling class. And of course the legal system was no exception. When Tess was occupied by Alec, she did not get the protection of society and law. She faced the rumor alone but Alec did not get unpunished. However, Tess killed Alec with anger, the law uphold its justice and hanged Tess. Apparently, the law was unfair. It is preferred to the aristocratic society not to a tenant. As a low society, Tess was destined to face the injustice and this injustice would bring bad luck for her.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, it is Tess's compromise, ignorance, inferiority, Alec's evilness, Angel's hypocrisy, her parents' vanity, the social convention and hypocritical laws that causes Tess's tragedy. Tess was a fine and very charming girl, but she was flabby, submissive. She lacked revolting spirit. All these characteristic doom her miserable fate. So Tess's tragedy is not accidental.

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