

On the Roots of the Heroine's Tragedy in Tess of the D'Urbervilles

Honggang Sun

Foreign Language Teaching Department
Inner Mongolia University for the Nationalities
Tongliao, Inner Mongolia, China

Abstract—Tess of the D'Urbervilles, written by Thomas Hardy, a British critical realist writer at the end of the nineteenth century, is hailed as the gem of British literature and the world literature. The author successfully creates many tragedy characters, in which the image of Tess is the most typical one. This paper aims to search for the causes of Tess's tragedy in the aspects of social unrest, the patriarchal culture, and the religious and moral beliefs of bourgeoisie brought by social transformation in Victorian age and the practical significance.

Keywords—Tess; roots of tragedy; practical significance

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), British critical realist writer, was born in a declined noble family in southern England. He lived in the period of social transformation. As the capitalist economy penetrated the British countryside, peasant economy collapsed and the peasantry gradually perished, trying to find a new way out. Capitalism invaded the British countryside and caused changes in the social economy, politics, ethics and customs. Such source material fulfilled his literary creation. Hardy had published many novels and collections of poems. "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" is the most outstanding work, hailed as the treasure of English literature and the world literature. In 1891, the novel had been translated into many languages after its publication and became the classic work widely studied by scholars and critics. Scholars interpret the novel from different perspectives and have made fruitful research achievements. As there are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people's eyes, there are various views towards the character of Tess. This paper aims to search for the causes of Tess's tragedy in the aspects of social unrest, the patriarchal culture, and the religious and moral beliefs of bourgeoisie brought by social transformation in Victorian age and the practical significance. Aesthetician Gao ertai said: "The culture of each nation, age and society has its characteristics distinctive from that of other ethnic groups, age and society, which display unique national characters, spirit of the times and social trend of thought". "The great works of art always involve profound philosophical concepts. It is not only the product of national character, the spirit of the times and the social ideological trend and so on, but also in turn actively participates in the formation of them, which is the representative of their own nation, age and society". [1] The enduring charm of Hardy's novel "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" lies in that Hardy reflects and views such aspects as the social

system, morality and laws, religious belief and ideology to different degrees, besides, he exposes and criticizes the culture and morality of the bourgeois society mercilessly rather than does it superficially. Tess's tragedy is the comprehensive embodiment of bourgeois regime, patriarchal culture, bourgeois religion, morality, love and marriage in Victorian age. As the Soviet literary critic Anikst said: "The real reason for the destruction of Tess is of realistic nature. The poverty and helplessness of the heroine as well as the prevailing social customs determine the tragic fate of this woman". [2]

I. THE VICTIM OF THE TIMES

The British capitalism industrial revolution reached at the peak in Victorian times. Economy developed rapidly and soon penetrated the rural areas. The wide use of agricultural machinery gradually brought the peasant economy to ruin. Aristocratic palace-style manor life and peasants' dilapidated cottage contrasted each other like the heaven and hell. The peasants living by a small amount of land must find a new way of living. The heroine Tess was born in a poor peasant family decayed from a noble one in the special period of the transition from the old system to the new. Her father was an alcoholic, greedy, lazy and incompetent haggler. As the eldest daughter in the family, Tess drove the cart to make delivery for her drunken father. The destiny teased the pure, kind-hearted and beautiful girl unexpectedly. The Cart crashed with a mail cab accidentally, killing the old horse which was the only source of living for her family. Tess suffered from the heavy mental burden after the old horse died. However, the vain father and secular mother put the family life burden on Tess. This 16-year-old girl had to bear part of the responsibility to maintain the livelihood of families. At the instigation of her parents, she went to curry favor with the rich, noble D'Urbervilles and claimed relatives with them in order to get a job. Because of her remorse for the death of the old horse, Tess went to the manor and took the job of raising the chicken against her will. This transaction ruined Tess's beautiful life. She was lured by dandy Alec D'Urberville in every possible way and lost her virginity. The pregnant Tess coming back home received no concern or sympathy from parents but complaints. They thought the reason that Tess failed to secure the relationship with the rich relatives was entirely due to her "stubborn" character. Their hope of becoming rich was completely ruined

in her hand. In the eyes of the secular people, Tess had become a typical case in offending public decency and regarded as an example of being alert to lasciviousness against bourgeois ethics. After losing her virginity, her mother persuaded Tess to lure the hypocrite Eric to marry her: "And yet th'st not got him to marry 'ee!" "Any woman would have done it but you, after that!" [3] (112) Tess, "a pure woman", had fallen victim to the capitalist hypocritical morality. The bourgeois were egoistic, selfish, ruthless, cunning and mercenary which destroyed the natural social order and led to the tragedy of Tess.

Every age has its wonderful time, rotted time and victims too. In Victorian era, the capitalist economy developed rapidly and social customs changed too. People were busy making a living and getting around. There was a lack of solicitude between people, which was embodied in Tess's family and her hardship of making a living. The Crick milk factory described in the novel reveals the mode of production at that time. The bankrupt farmers became workers. They lost the land which they had lived on. They had to get round to do hard labor and odd jobs. Women had to do the same job as men did. The experience that Tess and his family suffered and that of other dairymaids' did were the real portrayal of the tens of thousands of bankrupt farmers. Despite her strong, optimistic turn of mind, her tragic destiny was irreversible. Even if she had been given more choices, she wouldn't have escaped from the tragic fate this era had brought to her. She was the microcosm of farmer hirelings and miserable life under the influence of bourgeois wave, which was doomed for the Victorian farmers. Tess was the victim of the times.

II. THE VICTIM OF PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

In the ancient Greek's views, the origin of the world was male and female were only the appendages of male. Male were greedy and lewd which caused tragedies of numerous female and Tess was the typical victim of male supremacy. Tess lived in the time when women had low status. The employees had no stable income so that the basic economic living conditions couldn't be guaranteed. She could not evade the prejudice against women by the "hegemony" patriarchy and the harsh social etiquette. She had been presented to Alec by her own father as a valuable woman to exchange for his desirable value. Alec, the representative of bourgeois upstarts, was dissolute by nature and a philander master. He was having an affair with the Queen of Spades and Queen of Diamonds in the village, which symbolized cruel carnal under the disguise of Western civilization. Tess's beauty in his opinion was the bait inducing the sensual desire of man. From the perspective of male supremacy, he seemed to indicate that his insulation of Tess was due to her beauty enticement. He said shamelessly: "Tess, my girl, I was on the way to, at least, social salvation till I saw you again [3] (447) Alec said, "Because you have driven away my faith, you pretty thing, you just wait for the day of reckoning". [3] (449) which not only suggested Tess's tragedy, but also exchanged the perpetrators with victims. The innocent Tess was pushed into a doomed eternally abyss, becoming a witch causing men to commit crimes. Tess left Alec, but this did not mean that she was free from fetters under male's

perspective, instead, she was pushed to a much harder time. Her beauty did not bring happiness to her. When she fell in love with Clarke, Tess was the victim and the pure moral devotee. Clarke maintained his male power and clang to the moral hypocrisy, choosing not to forgive poor Tess. He was the one who took control of love completely. This showed that male accounted for the main status in Victorian times and women were just subordinate to men's will, Tess became the slave both physically and mentally in patriarchal society and she suffered double hardships both in body and spirit.

III. THE VICTIM OF RELIGION AND MORALITY OF BOURGEOIS

In Marx's view, religious belief of bourgeoisie and feudal ethics are the tool which prevents women's liberation and the pseudo religion provides the theoretical basis for the bourgeois' insulting and defiling women. In this novel, Hardy holds critical attitude towards the bourgeois' religion and morality. The plot that Alec played with Tess shows the religious hypocrisy of the bourgeois. The sinful Alec excused for his wrongdoing with "Bible" and turned into a priest conducting benefactions. When he met her, he revealed his true color and haunted Tess casting aside humanity, justice and morality. Tess met Angel in the big milk factory in Crick, and deeply fell in love with him. However, Angel was seemingly enlightened, refined infidel. In the tide of reform he despised class prejudice, sense of hierarchy, "giving up all ambition to win a wife with social standing, with fortune, with knowledge of the world " and willing to accept new ideas, not willing to serve "God", but the traditional ethics ingrained in his mind made him unable to tolerate his lover's flaws. In his eyes, Tess was "daughter of nature", he only loved her purity, sweetness and virginity. On their wedding night, after listening to Tess's ramble words of her story, he said: the woman I have been loving is not you. "Another woman in your shape." [3 (313-314)] His secular ideas stifled his true love for Tess in his heart. If Alec gave her physical trauma, Angel gave her blow spiritually. The ruthlessness of Angel is a manifestation of the feudal view of virginity. It is a pair of chains for women given by the society and the product of the patriarchal society. Although Angel had lived a life of debauchery in London, he refused to forgive her losing virginity. Angel left her in trouble again and she suffered a heavy blow spiritually once again. Angel was the embodiment of pseudo morality of the bourgeoisie. He was egoistic and does not measure himself with moral yardstick. He believed that it was an unalterable principle for man to do such a thing, but he cannot forgive the innocent Tess, compelling her to die. She killed Alec which implied that she began to resist. She continued to fight and also compromised. She was brave and she dared to fight against the old system, contempt religion, go against the traditional morality, pursue love and happiness boldly, but her revolt was not thoroughly and she cannot shake off the traditional yoke on her own. When her child died, she secretly gave him baptism in hope that the child can ascend to heaven. She couldn't get rid of the secular concept and the shackles of feudal ethical principles. She scared herself with "a cloud of moral hobgoblins by which she was terrified without reason", she

thought of herself as the incarnate of evil. She measured her innocence according to the traditional chastity view. She cannot forget her disgrace more than anyone else. She can't forget the past, unable to remove heavy mental cross on her mind. She tortured and accused herself. She always held an unforgivable sense of sin. She was afraid of the secular public opinion. She was far from the family member and moved to the remote area to avoid meeting those villagers who actually barely remembered her sufferings. She did not look up to see people and even turned to the extreme means of 'nipped her eyebrows off' to issue the slight resistance. This is a weakness in her character. The time she suffered from the world public opinion and traditional morality, she also viewed herself with the moral standards. She killed Alec out of her hatred and on the other hand, she wanted to redeem her sins in order to safeguard her lover's interest. Before her death, she was no longer worried, "now I shall not live for you to despise me!" Therefore, Tess's religious consciousness and the feudal ethics strengthen the tragedy to a certain extent.

IV. CONCLUSION

Tess is the typical character embodying Hardy's criticism of old morality. The uncontrollable age, patriarchal culture, bourgeois religion and morality lead to her degeneration from purity and kindness to murder. Although she has not gained happiness, she strives for women's social status and challenges the patriarchal ideology, the pseudo religion of bourgeoisie and feudal ethics. This is a big step on the road to the fight for the liberation of women.

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