

Beauty of Tess' Virtue—Daughter of Peasantry

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Abstract. “Tess of the D’Urbervilles” is the master work of Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)—British critical realism writer at the end of the 19th century. It has always invited the attention and popularity. Titled by the name of the heroine, the work described Tess' love tragedy to deeply disclose moral hypocrisy of capitalist society at the end of the 19th century. It argued a powerful indictment of sinful capitalist and showed the author's deep sympathy for the protagonist, playing a dejecting and weeping elegy.

Introduction

Thomas Hardy is one of the greatest 19th century critical realistic writers. There is no denying that he is also an excellent modernist writer. He created poetry, novels, etc. “Tess of the D’Urbervilles” reached the peak of Hardy’ creation of tragedy novel. In the novel, he integrated the character’s tragedy fate and tragedy personality into social tragedy, causing huge response in the novel critics. Hardy created the moving yet tragic character--- Tess, in his own way for us, who was a product of subjective and objective factors. There was nothing in her couldn’t reflect the reality of the time. Her way of life, her tragic ending and her thoughts and feelings has aroused sympathy for her. In this great works, Hardy showed us real emotional experience of an ill-fated girl in Victorian period. In the fight against the fate and society, she eventually failed. The story indicated that the tragedy was anything but accident, and it should have been taken into deep thought. Hardy has written in his article that: “ Tess, a pure woman, but her weak and strong character eventually led to her tragedy.” The reason of saying pure Tess was that she had not known the evil of the world, yet had become the victim of the evil.

At the end of the novel, Hardy described the scene of Tess’ death which was desolate and dignified: the master of the gods that Aeschylus referred called the end of the tease on Tess. The warriors and the rich ones in the family of D’Urbervilles were still buried in the tombs, knowing nothing about it. The two watched, leaning on the ground, like a prayer, standing still for a long time. The black flag billowed in silence. The two finally cheered up, and went forward with hand in hand. These words incisively and vividly expressed Hardy’s perception of tragedy. In hardy's writing career, he had a view of destiny haunting around. Although he considered it a unchanged fact that the traditional patriarchal society had to be converted into the capitalist society, there was the supernatural power that dominated human and controlled life in the shadow. Behind the tragic fate of Tess, there were "gods" who manipulated her fate. The contrast between the suffering of Tess’ family and the glory of their warrior ancestors also showed the "changing fate". Hardy attributed the tragedy of Tess to fate tragedy, and this idea ran through the text. As a critical realism novelist, Hardy held full sense of the unjust law system and the hypocritical ethics. This story was actually his indictment of the society, and his contempt for the so-called "justice" in society. Such expression invisibly added Tess’ tragedy with profound social meaning.

A Nature girl

As the daughter of peasantry, Tess showed virtue of hard-working, kindness and selfless giving

At the end of the 19th century, individual farmers went through poverty and bankruptcy with the capitalist economy invading into the British country leading to the disintegration of small-scale peasantry economy.

Tess, hoping to help the poor family, repressed her dislike of Alec and went to the Derbers' to raise chicken, with the result of being raped by this agricultural capitalist. Alec, ran amok with wealth, arbitrarily abused Tess, making her a victim to sexual pleasure and a sinner of bourgeois moral codes. Later, a chain of misfortune has fallen on Tess' family: mother was ill, father died, the whole family had no place of dwelling, with the only exception of living in the graveyard of their ancestors. For the sake of mother, sisters and brothers, she made spiritual sacrifice as well as physical, agreed to move in with Alec. The press and destruction on Tess from the bourgeoisie represented by Alec is one of the important factors causing Tess' tragedy. For the family, Tess sacrificed her own life.

Tess' self-sacrifice not only reflects in the obligations and responsibilities to the family, but also in dealing with relations with three other women in milk factory. Tess and three other women fell in love with Clare at the same time, while Clare was only fond of Tess. Tess did not show off in front of these three workmates, instead, she thought of her virginity, repressed her feelings, helping any of three finding love with Clare. Working in pasture, Tess praised three girlfriends to Clare, claiming "beautiful, capable, the ace of 'milk' as they were", while belittling herself as "beautiful but not durable". She tried every means in her hands to draw Clare's attention to them. This modesty did not work, because love did not possess the nature of gifts. Despite this, facing love that is the most selfish, the most personal, the most exclusive in human feelings, Tess' chivalrous generosity and kindness is very touching.

As the daughter of peasantry, Tess smelled fragrance of untouched soil, maintaining peasantry' daughter identity all the time

The first time Tess came in front of the reader, who is a naive, dignified and pretty young girl with self-esteem. Under the author's pen, she was as beautiful as a painting. She gave birth to a pair of beautiful big eyes, two pieces of delicate and soft lips, the corners of the mouth slightly turning up, appearing somewhat childish. In this age, What Tess had was just a feeling, without any life experience. Childhood trace could be vaguely seen on her face.

In the late 19th century, the bourgeoisie occupied the dominant position in UK. Some celebrated families who have had glories gradually went rundown and declined. D'Urberville family, the ancestor of Tess family, was one of them. After the bourgeois revolution, large-scale capitalist mode of operation intruded into the rural country, with individual farmers falling into poverty and bankruptcy. Under this, being a member of lower laborers, the family of Tess completely depended on their hands for a living. But Tess's parents, Mr And Mrs Durbeyfield, stained with vulgar and vanity, were complacent for their own noble birth. Tess, in such a vulgar family, on the other hand, always kept the working people's virtue, hating her parents' vulgarity, despising their noble birth, insisting she being a farmer's daughter and relying on their labor for a living.

As the daughter of peasantry, Tess showed her fidelity to love

Tess loved Clare, and the love for him was out of love, which differentiated her from bourgeois women who were in love for material things. She thought since she loved Clare, it should be loyal and faithful, giving herself completely. Before marriage, it occurred several times that she wanted to tell Clare that she had been deprived of virginity, but words came to her mouth and were swallowed. Talking about her misfortune was a cross too heavy to stand for her.

At night of wedding, in order to be sincere to her husband, honest Tess, confessed everything about her past misery to Clare, "knelt at his feet", and asked his forgiveness. Instead of forgiveness, Clare heartlessly abandoned Tess and travelled alone to Brazil, considering her a woman with purity inside, lasciviousness outside.

For love, Tess silently endured Clare's unfairness to her. To defend Clare's dignity and pride, she

never used "Mrs Clare", hiding the truth from the outside world, and followed Clare's orders of not looking for him or no letters. She kept her integrity for him. She damaged her beauty without hesitation, cutting off eyebrows, swaddling her face up into a ugly woman. The more touching her Jade's heart was, the more cruel the fate held for her. In despair, she killed Alec who hurt her with harsh words, caught up with Clare, and spent a few happy escaping days with him in the wilderness. Pathetic Tess, remained her faithful love for Clare from beginning to end.

There were unenlightened factors in Tess' love. Under the influence of the old moral codes, deprived virginity was considered as a kind of sin. When Clare abandoned her relentlessly, she couldn't speak for herself, even asked for his forgiveness of her sins in a letter to him. Tess lived in the time when the remaining religion policies and laws still existed in the rural society. It was understandable that people there had been under the influence of traditional moral concepts and showed Tess' limitations and the time's. The old ethical concepts had set the stage for the tragic fate of Tess. Her misfortune was the inevitable outcome of the bourgeois morality at that time, and unavoidable ending for all working people living at the foot of social ladder. It was hypocritical ethics and moral codes that caused Tess' death. How a kind girl as pure as Tess took on ethics and prejudice against the bourgeoisie?

A Rebellious Woman

As the daughter of peasantry, Tess resisted the unfair old morality in her own way

Not only was Tess kind, hard-working, but also she loved life, and had a strong character. There was rebellion glittering in her to break the chains of the old moral codes. She courageously fought against the bourgeois religion, society, and morality all the way.

As a woman of resistance, Tess liked neither vanity nor wealth. She has stood not being accepted by the society rather than yielding to the power. She chose to accept the social status of "a woman lost the virginity" instead of giving up to Alec---the sign of the evil. She said a lie that she loved Alec might be of great benefits for her. But she still had some dignity. Even though she had lost enough, she just couldn't tell the lie. She told Alec that she didn't want to go with him, which showed her extremely hate to Alec and her awe-inspiring righteousness. A few years later, when Alec appeared as a pastor, Tess angrily disclosed the hypocrisy of him to return to religion. When Alec continued to haunt round about her, Tess slapped him in his face and killed him with indignation and grief filled in her, making the villain paid for what he had done.

The action highlighted Tess' spirit of resisting against the unfair society and the evil forces. Pure and innocent Tess walked to the gallows in her easy way, fighting the bourgeoisie injustice law with her life.

As a woman of resistance, Tess despised and denied religion, criticizing its hypocrisy

She didn't believe in religion warnings and cautions and violated canons by having held the christening for her illegitimate child. Because the priests didn't agree to bury the dead baby in the name of Christians, Tess said angrily that she would not like them and would never step on the church. She cut off her religious ties with the church since then, cause she has already seen through the hypocrisy of the religion.

In the late 19th century, British church and law prohibited man from marrying late wife's sister. Tess showed contempt for this legal provision, hoping her husband to marry her sister after her death, considering this having nothing to do with religious law. She would rather die than yield to religion. This plot could be said as the peak of the novel in describing fighting against religion.

As a woman of resistance, Tess thought more, with the awareness of society developing from doubt to negation

In the novel, on the way to a fair for their father, Tess' brother asked her if other planets were like the earth. She said to the younger brother that the planet in which they had been living was a "sick one", otherwise, they would not have been suffering poverty. This kind of metaphor of heavenly bodies showed social criticism to the full extent. After Tess had suffered humiliation, she started to think about the day of birth and death with philosopher's calmness. The thinking of "the day" in

circulation, made her become a sophisticated woman from a simple girl almost all of a sudden. She considered the present age was far worse than the time of Solomon which was two thousand years ago. The statements of the understanding of space and time showed her strong criticism and angry accusation of the social environment that had persecuted her. It also meant that in such a social environment, how a weak woman could have a happy life and marriage, and how she could fight the battle with the outside world?

Summary

All these above showed Tess' resistance to religion, society, and the bourgeois morality. However, the contradiction in Tess was also a factor that caused her tragedy which couldn't be ignored. Tess was born in a small farmers' family that was descendant of a declining noble. The remaining parts of the old morality and view of destiny influencing on farmers could not leave her out without any impact on her mind. For example, she thought her sufferings had been in the hand of fate. This was more clearly showed in her handling the relationship with Clare. She thought she had been innocent of "lost virginity", while at the same time felt guilty when facing fate, and deserved punishment. She told Clare that the punishment he had dished on her was what she deserved. His anger was fair enough and very reasonable. From this, it was very obvious that Tess both fought against the fate, and was of great obedience to it. Sometimes, she couldn't figure out the persecution on her from landlords and the bourgeoisie, owing her sufferings to her destiny. Sometimes she also fell into the disappointment from sad self-pitying, which also reflected the limitations of the author's thought. In short, the tragedy of Tess was not because of her Achilles' heel. It was the tragedy of the destruction of peasantry fighting against capitalist exploitation.

Tess was born and grew up in that filthy capitalist society, but she kept her untouched from the worldly world. The result, however, was she had been destroyed by the unreasonable law inevitably. Rooted in a specific era and the society, Tess' suffering was the tragedy of the underclass people pursuing personal happiness which was unavoidable destruction in the system of capitalism, which clearly reflected and disclosed the reality of the society at the time. This was the great achievement of Thomas Hardy. "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" still shines as a bright star in the world literature.

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