

Analysis of the Cause of Tess's tragedy—Human Factor

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Abstract: Tess of the d'Urbervellie is a masterpiece of Thomas Hardy as one of the greatest Victorian novelists. Thomas Hardy described a tragedy of a peasant girl was of purity, beauty, kindness and diligence-Tess, who was affected by social and other causes, became a murder, and was finally sentenced to death. Over the past century, her tragedy has moved thousands of people all over the world. In this paper I try to explore just only one cause of Tess's tragedy--human factor.

Firstly, the tale of Tess of the d'Urbervellies is given for a better understanding of the later analysis. Secondly, this paper mainly analyses the human factor which causes Tess' tragedy and is divided into two parts: Tess's poor family causes her tragedy; Alec and Angel both cause Tess's tragedy; Thirdly: conclusion, Sex-discrimination.

Keywords: Tragedy; Human factor; Poor family; Love; Sex-discrimination

1. Introduction

The novel is centered on a beautiful and warm-hearted young woman, Tess Durbeyfield, who struggled to find her place in society. In order to let her family get out of poverty, Tess went to the rich but not real d'Urberville to claim kin. Unfortunately, the poor village girl was seduced by Alec d'Urberville. With pain and sadness, Tess firmly left Alec and returned home. She became pregnant but the child died in infancy. Tess worked as a dairymaid on a farm and fell in love with Angel Clare, a clergyman's son. They married but when Tess told Angel about her past, he hypocritically deserted her. In addition, her family was struck by misfortune, and sought help from Tess. Under such double strikes, Tess was barely mad with grief, and she had to yield to accept Alec's financial aid and cohabit with him, that was, Tess became Alec's mistress. Angel experienced the hard life in Brazil, repenting of his harshness to Tess, but Angel found her living with Alec. At the sight of Angel, Tess found her happiness was destroyed by Alec, and at last she killed Alec in desperation. Tess and Angel spent five happy days together, finally, she was arrested and hanged by law. Over the past century, her tragedy has moved thousands of people all over the world.

2. The cause of Tess's tragedy

2.1 Tess was victimized by her parents

The early cause of Tess's tragedy is her parents. Her family life didn't bring her happiness at all. Tess's father, John Durbeyfield, not only he was lazy and poor, but also addicted to alcohol, spending his few shillings at the local pub, 'Rolliver'. Tess was the key to her father's design to regain the family fortune, for his vanity. John Durbeyfield was the head of the family, he had responsibility to raise, even cultivate his children, on the contrary, he considered his children as a chessman, in order to change the family situation. Tess's first misfortune also began with her drunken father. Because of the effect of alcohol, John asked Tess to take the wagon to deliver the beehives. Unfortunately, "prince" (the horse of theirs) died on the way in a fatal accident. Although the occurrence was a complete accident, Tess's reaction to the accident was ironic, Tess believed she herself was responsible for the complete accident for which she had no error; Furthermore, it was her father's responsibility. If John Durbeyfield was not drunk at that night, if John Durbeyfield had a little sense of responsibility for his six little children, if John Durbeyfield was a qualified father... everything would not be in a mess.

However, the fact was, her family lost the only source of income after the death of the horse, so the originally poor family faced the financial crisis, as a Chinese saying goes, "Snow plus frost". Confronting with the problems, Tess's parents had nothing to do, only expecting their elderly child to marry a gentleman that could get their family out of troubles. Meanwhile, Tess blamed herself for

losing the means of living hood, which would lead her to be more susceptible to her family's wish. Since then, she fell in a trap which designed by her own father and started her life with sorrow and hardness.

Tess's mother, An ignorant and superstitious woman, Joan Durbeyfield, offered no help to Tess either. She made decisions about her household and family after she consulted a magazine, the *Compleat Fortune-Teller*. In chapter IV, a conversation between John Durbeyfield and Joan Durbeyfield, "I tried her fate in the *Fortune-Teller*, you should haven't seen how pretty she looked today; her skin is as supple as a duchess'." "Tess ought to go to this other member of our family, she'd be sure to win the lady-Tess would; and likely enough lead to a gentleman marries her." Just imagine as a mother, she dare to say these words! Joan Durbeyfield was not a qualified mother at all. Her so-called "Grand project" (a brilliant idea) was to betray her daughter's good looks to claim kin, and even she had this idea since the birth of her daughter. What a terrible mother! No matter whomever the man was, no matter whether the man really loved her daughter or not. For her, money was everything.

The country woman taught her daughter about men and life through ballads, superstitions and folklore. This was illustrated in the scene in which Tess returned home to Marlott after having been raped by Alec d'Urberville. After her arrival at home, she told her mother what had happened. Dramatically, her mother told her, "You ought to have been more careful if you didn't mean to get him to make you his wife." Tess answered, "Oh, Mother, my mother! How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house four months ago. Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn't you warn me?..." Joan Durbeyfield's reprimanding of her daughter for being seduced by Alec d'Urberville was ironic, for it was she who promoted the idea of a romantic attachment between Tess and Alec. When Tess was submitted to Alec, she followed her mother's orders, yet faced her family's scorn.

If it was not because of her poor family condition, her incapable parents and ignorant sisters and brothers, Tess's tragedy might not be caused so quickly, even completely not be caused at all. It is obvious that her family members play an important role for Tess's tragedy.

2.2 Tess was victimized by two men--Alec d'Urberville and Angel Clare

The two men both professed to love her, even though they hurt her deeply. Although the two men played different roles, in many ways they shared some similarities. They came from a higher social class, having money even though neither of them earned it by themselves, and they both had relations with a poor, working class girl.

Tess was physically victimized by Alec d'Urberville.

Alec, a typical playboy of bourgeoisie, Alec was greedy and possessive, believing that his social status and his financial situation gave him power to possess and control. He played with women and committed all manners of crimes. Tess was one of the victims among lots of the country girls. At the first sight of her, Alec had much evil desire to possess Tess because of her beauty and poverty. He always amused himself by frightening Tess. In one scene, Alec d'Urberville was whipping his horse and driving the carriage faster and faster downhill. Tess was feeling thoroughly frightened. Tess asked him to slow down, to our surprise, he dared to say, "Let me put one little kiss on those holmberry lips. Tess, or even that warmed cheek, and I'll stop..." From these words, Alec had already exposed his bad qualities in front of Tess, even at the beginning of the novel. Tess should absolutely plan to return home, however, how she could face her parents and disconcert the whole scheme for the rehabilitation of her family. Tess had to swallow an insult, therefore, Alec's wealth and lechery combined with Tess' poverty and innocence which foreshadowed the one climax of the story that Alec set a trap to Tess to seduce her.

After Alec gave her a job to take of his chicken, he took advantage of Tess time and time again. In one scene, Tess went to the nearby village to join the weekly pilgrimages with the other workers. Late at night, on the way to get back, Tess was involved into a struggle with one of the women. Alec occurred in such a situation, and Tess had no choice but get on the back of Alec's horse to get out of the conflict. Together they rode along and disappeared in the dark. Tess didn't know what a terrible thing would happen to her. Quoting a sentence from dark Car's mother (one of Tess' companion), "Out of the frying-pan into the fire". While still on the horse, Alec intentionally missed the way and took Tess into the deep of the woods and raped her. However he wasn't condemned or punished, on the contrary, Tess became the sinner, with humiliation and injury. Why does the bad so often ruin the good? Why is beauty damaged by ugliness? Alec knew that Tess felt powerless because of her poor family and her ignorant parents. Alec wields almost unlimited power over the women who was an agricultural labor-the many women like Tess because of his economic power.

Tess returned to Marlott, she was pregnant as a result of the rape, she could not tell anyone. Much worse than we expected, no one could help her. After the birth and death of her baby, Tess wanted to move from Marlott to start a new life where no one knew her. However, good time did not last long. Devil was around her! Unfortunately, Alec came across Tess again. Alec had already been a preacher, as a religious man, he had changed his clothes, his hair, his moustache and his expression, but could he really change

his most secret thoughts and believes? Hardy thoroughly disclosed Alec's hypocrisy, he pretended to swear that he had already distinguished the right from wrong, breaking the evil thoughts, he even indicated that now his only one desire was to help others, especially, to help Tess out of tribulation. However, Tess firmly expressed, "I can't believe in you. I hate it!...your conversation, your scheme of religion." After Tess's words, Alec tore his disguise, showing his hideous face which was concealed under his lies. In chapter XVI, Alec shamelessly said to Tess, "You have been the means-the innocent means-of my backsliding...and why then have you tempted me? I could not resist you as soon as I met you again!" It is absurd that Alec imputed all his wrong-doings to Tess. The consequence was that he abandoned his new found Christian faith, as you know, it is hard to believe Alec held his religion, or anything else, sincerely.

Tess had already clearly identified Alec, her unfortunate sufferings disclosed and censured Alec's carnal desire. Tess denounced his shameless behavior, using the gloves to blow his face. At that time, Alec was shamed into anger, absolutely exposing his nature, quickly changed the sweet words into threat, saying, "Remember, my lady, if you are any man's wife. You're mine! I will have you again." Till at that moment, Alec showed his true colors, there was an evil intent with absolute possession hiding.

Tess was mentally victimized by Angel Clare.

Tess was young and she needed real love from others. Angel Clare, the love of her life, did not bring happiness to her, but also sadness, even tragedy.

Early in the novel, Tess first noticed Angel when he stopped dancing with women in a party celebrating May Day. When Tess first saw Angel, she realized that he was "of the superior class" and received higher education. Hardy showed that Angel left good impression in the memory of Tess.

When Tess second met Angle, Hardy used several chapters to describe that Tess and Angle crazily fell in love with each other, and it was the sweetest time that Tess never had before. Nevertheless, the most terrible misfortune was so close to the happiness.

However, in fact, Angle didn't smash the trammels of old moral concepts and class prejudice, which was reflected in his dealing with the emotional problem. In his eyes, "what a fresh and virginal daughter of nature that milk-maid is". However, he had already idealized Tess, even his love for Tess was unrealistic. Tess clearly made out, judging from his husband's appearance, he was so gentle and polite, but in his inner heart, he had such a strong will that he must change the concrete object to invisible imagination, change the sexual desire into sheer spirit.

On the wedding night, Angel revealed his secret first that he had a brief relationship with a woman in London. Upon hearing this, Tess felt relieved, for she thought Angel would forgive her for her past. However, Angel firmly hold his fanciful ideal, after Tess told him about her unfortunate past, he suddenly came back to the reality. Although he had committed the same crime, the so-called gentleman could not forgive Tess's unfortunately suffering. Angel had imagined himself to be an enlightened humanist, but when he discovered his wife's immoral history he found that his reaction have penetrated no deeper than his inherent thoughts.

Tess said to Angel, "In the name of our love, forgive me as I forgive you, Angel." Angel replied, "Tess, forgiveness does not apply to the case, you were one person; now you are another. My God-how can forgiveness meet such a grotesque-prestidigitation as that?" Angel paused, and then suddenly broke into horrible laughter-as unnatural and ghastly as a laugh in hell. From these words, I think Angel's love for Tess may be abstract, as we guess when he called her "Daughter of Nature". Tess may be more ideal to him than a flesh and blood woman with a complicated life.

When facing the incident which conflicted with traditional moral concepts, Angel exposed his traditional concepts which existed subconsciously. Angel never got rid of the influence of the traditional moral concepts, and he was just a slave of that time, and what was the most important, was that he destroyed a woman's happiness. Originally, they were so crazy to love each other.

In Angel's inner heart, he thought men dominated the society, had their full swing; while women were the bondage of society. Especially, to women, the loss of chastity was the most intolerable. Furthermore, to Tess, the cause of Tess's indirectly mental tragedy by Angel was much more serious than the cause of directly physical suffering by Alec.

When Angle abandoned Tess, no doubt he pushed her into the abyss of despair. In my opinion, Angel is the "slave to custom and conventionality", and the relatively ignorant Tess is the true humanist. It took Angel a year of traveling and suffering during which he had mentally aged a dozen years before he could throw off his strictly traditional concepts and realize the innocence of Tess. However, it was too late to wake up to reality, he only found Tess had already cohabited with Alec. If Angle forgave Tess on that wedding night, everything would become so beautiful. But, everything was in a mess.

Tess murdered Alec d'Urbervellie as a result of the way in which he ruined her precious chance of reunion with Angel Clare. Tess and Angel fled away. With happiness and sweetness, they had five-day together. In the end of this novel, Hardy illustrated: She

stood up, shook herself, and went forward, neither of the policeman having moved. "I am ready," she said quietly. After the temporary happiness, calmly, she went to the gate of the death; however, it may be an extrication for her.

3. Conclusion

During the time of Victorian England, women were treated unfairly by today's standard. They became victims because society treated them differently from that of men. The heroine Tess was one of these victims. As when Alec acknowledged how bad for seducing Tess for his own momentary pleasure, however he didn't be punished by law, on the contrary, Tess was suffered a lot. This is the most serious instance of male dominating female. Even Angle's love for Tess, as pure and gentle as it seemed, dominated her in an unhealthy way. Angle imaged an ideal picture of Tess not a real-life woman. This pattern of male domination was finally reversed with Tess's murder of Alec, in which, for the first time in the novel, a woman took active steps against a man. This act only showed even greater suppression of a woman by men, when Tess was hanged.

In the novel, although Tess was portrayed as an innocent girl who was victimized by many causes which led to her destruction, especially, Tess' parents, Angel Clare, and Alec d'Urberville play an important part in her life, leading to her tragedy.

Tess was innocent and unfortunate, she was a victim of her family and her love, to be more precise, she was a victim of sex-discrimination at Victorian time. During her time, men can dominate woman, exerting a power over them. It was impossible for her to seek her own ideal life. As my conclusion, women at Victorian time had no right and power to control their own lives but were dominated by others. To be more brave, confident and powerful, women should fight for their independent dignity and equal rights and lead a more brilliant life .

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