



## ***Tess d'urbervilles: A red girl***

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### **Abstract**

Thomas Hardy is one of the most outstanding novelists who have made great contribution to the English literature. Among all of his literary creations, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is one of his greatest. Today, more than 100 years after its publication, the readers and researchers worldwide are still deeply touched and moved by its moving plots and outstanding artistic writing styles. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Hardy frequently used the color of red. With the employment of the color red, Hardy vividly described to the readers about the life of the heroine-- Tess D'Urbervilles. To some extent, Tess is a "Red Girl". This paper attempts to study *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* from the perspective of the red color. By analyzing the color of red, the character and the miserable fate of the protagonist is vividly presented to the reader.

**Keywords:** *tess of the d'urbervilles*; color; red

### **1. Introduction**

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, red is the theme color of the novel. Thomas Hardy is adept in taking advantages of colors to appeal the readers' emotions. And among all kinds of perceptions, the perception of colors is the easiest to be brought back. Throughout the novel, Hardy frequently employed the red color to reveal Tess's inner world and her miserable destiny. The red color is the color of romance, the color of lust, and the color of death in the novel.

### **2. Red---the color of romance**

In the beginning of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Tess stands out among all the other girls in the May Day dance because "A young member of the band turned her head at the exclamation. She was a fine and handsome girl - not handsomer than some others, possibly - but her mobile peony mouth and large innocent eyes added eloquence to colour and shape. She wore a red ribbon in her hair, and was the only one of the white company who could boast of such a pronounced adornment" (Tess, 14). The red ribbon and mobile peony mouth made her stand out from the other common village girl, here, the red color represent youth and romance. It was at this May Dance, Tess first met the love of her life---Angel. The employment of the color red added to the beauty and freshness of young Tess. Red is the beginning of a romantic love.

### **3. Red---the color of lust**

In the Christian culture, red can also represent lust and temptation. Tess's first meeting with Alec, Tess was given a strawberry by Alec. This red strawberry is just like the forbidden fruit which Satan tempted Eve to eat. It implied that Tess was eventually be seduced by Alec and driven away from the Christian world.

On her way back to home after her first visit to her so-called relatives, "One among her fellow-travellers addressed her more pointedly than any had spoken before: "Why, you

be quite a posy! And such roses in early June Then she became aware of the spectacle she presented to their surprised vision: roses at her breast; roses in her hat; roses and strawberries in her basket to the brim. She blushed, and said confusedly that the flowers had been given to her. When the passengers were not looking she stealthily removed the more prominent blooms from her hat and placed them in the basket, where she covered them with her handkerchief. Then she fell to reflecting again, and in looking downwards a thorn of the rose remaining in her breast accidentally pricked her chin." (Tess, 56) Actually, the "prick" is a bad omen which implies her tragic fate after her first meeting with Alec. The red color was frequently employed to indicate lust and temptation in Tess's first meeting with Alec---the man who ruined her peaceful life.

### **4. Red---the color of death**

Red also symbolized death in *Tess of the d' Urbervilles*. The death of the family horse "Prince" started the tragic life of Tess. In the novel, Tess had to drive "Prince" to the market to deliver the beehive because her father drank too much to work. In the darkness, Tess took a nap which led to a crash. "Prince" died because of Tess's carelessness. "The pointed shaft of the cart had entered the breast of the unhappy Prince like a sword, and from the wound his life's blood was spouting in a stream, and falling with a hiss into the road. In her despair Tess sprang forward and put her hand upon the hole, with the only result that she became splashed from face to skirt with the crimson drops. Then she stood helplessly looking on. Prince also stood firm and motionless as long as he could; till he suddenly sank down in a heap" (Tess, 41) the old horse's fresh blood was spouting in a stream which ended the horse's life and started Tess's unavoidable tragic fate. In order to support her family, Tess had to claim kin which foreshadowed her tragedy. The red blood of the old horse pushed Tess to the cliff of life which led to her death in the end.

The novel ended with the color of red. Tess was hanged in a red house because she killed Alec, a man who ruined her love and life. Tess's life started and ended with the red color, and red accompanied all her life.

## 5. Conclusion

In the novel, the symbol of red contributed a lot to the deepening of the theme. To conclude, the employment of the red color enliven the character of Tess, and make her tragic life unforgettable in the readers' minds. Tess is a pure woman as Hardy stated in the subtitle of the novel, and the innocence of Tess often manifested in her blushing face. To some extent, we can conclude that Tess is a red woman who cannot escape from her predetermined tragic fate.

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