



The diverse symbolism of horse in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

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Abstract

Thomas Hardy is a productive writer, and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is regarded as Hardy's most artistically monumental novel. Since its publication in 1891, it had appealed great public attention. The novel was abundant in symbolist images, and the image of horse frequently appeared in the novel. The paper is going to analyze the diverse symbolism of horse, disclose its significant roles in deepening the tragic theme of the novel, and profoundly portray the personalities of Tess D'Urbervilles and her inner world.

Keywords: *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, symbol, nobility, supernatural force, Tess D'Urbervilles

1. Introduction

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy takes advantages of the images of horse to promote the development of the plot. The novel consists of seven parts, the maiden-aiden no more-the rally-the consequence-the woman pays-the convert-fulfillment, and the image of the horse appears in every part, and Thomas Hardy employed the image of the horse to push the development of the plot and culminate the theme of tragedy. The horse appeared not only as the human instrument, but also symbolize the identity of the nobles, a kind of supernatural force, and even the incarnation of Tess D'Urbervilles herself.

2. Horse-the symbol of nobility

In the beginning of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Jack D'Urbervilles, Tess's father, was regarded as the descendent of the noble family of D'Urbervilles because the clergyman had observed Durbeyfield's name on his wagon. In the history of human kind, horse had always been considered as the valuable possession of the owners, and usable assistant to the people in the agricultural society. The role of the horse in the family is irreplaceable, and the horse is treated as the important member of the family. The number of the horse a family owned is also an important standard of the position of the family. Just as Jack D'Urbervilles admitted in the novel "Well, I have heard once or twice, 'tis true, that my family had seen better days afore they came to Black moor. But I took no notice o't, thinking it to mean that we had once kept two horses where we now keep only one." (Tess, 6). The family of D'Urbervilles declined as they had only one horse. And this horse was treated precious in Tess's family, which can be seen in the name of the horse "Prince".

Unfortunately, with the development of the plot, Tess's family lost the pillar of their economy, the horse "Prince", which started the tragedy of Tess's life. Hardy gave a vivid description of the death of "Prince" in the novel. "In consternation Tess jumped down, and discovered the dreadful truth. The groan had proceeded from her father's poor horse Prince. The morning mail-cart, with its two noiseless wheels, speeding along these lanes like an arrow, as it always did, had driven into her slow and unlighted equipage. 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, 30) the death of the old and decrepit Prince symbolized the downfall of the old aristocratic noble class. "The morning mail-cart, with its two noiseless wheels, speeding along these lanes like an arrow" represents the rising of the new capitalists. With the development of the capitalistic economy, the old agricultural economy was doomed to die, and lots of peasants who were deprived of the land were destined to suffer. No one can turn back the clock of the history. The tragedy was inevitable. The death of Prince caused the family lose the means of survival, hence, Tess had to make amends for her careless, and claim kin from her so-called relatives, which caused her inescapable tragedy.

3. Horse-the incarnation of Tess D'Urbervilles

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy also employed the image of horse as the incarnation of Tess D'Urbervilles. Besides "Prince", the second horse in the novel, Tib, can be seen as the incarnation of Tess. Tib, Alec's horse, appeared as the assistant to Alec, was the incarnation of Tess in a sense. Tib had a very queer temper, and Alec was rather proud in having conquered Tib.

If any living man can manage this horse I can: I won't say any living man can do it but if such has the power, I am he.

Why do you have such a horse?

Ah, well may you ask it! It was my fate, I suppose. Tib has killed one chap; and just after I bought her she nearly killed me. And then, take my word for it, I nearly killed her. But she's touchy still, very touchy; and one's life is hardly safe behind her sometimes. (Tess, 53)

The relationship between Tib and Alec was just like the relationship between Tess and Alec. Alec was the conqueror to both Tib and Tess. To some extent, Tib was the incarnation of

Tess. Alec was very confident that he was the only living man to manage this horse, just as he held a firm belief that he would be the conqueror to Tess. Just as Alec pointed out that one's life would be dangerous behind Tib. Hardy alluded that Alec would finally be killed by Tess, and Tib symbolized the unyielding and rebellious Tess.

Horse can be seen as the incarnation of Tess in the plot after the death of Tess's father. Tess had to shoulder the responsibility of supporting the whole family, she had no choice but to make sacrifices for the whole family, the horse who drove the wagon to help the family to move was the wagon "on which Mrs Durbey field and her family rode was a creaking erection that would scarcely bear the weight of the superincumbent load; one which had known no pain since it was made, and drawn by two horses only. The contrast well marked the difference between being fetched by a thriving farmer and conveying oneself whither no hirer waited one's coming." (Tess, 365). Just like the horse who could scarcely bear the weight of the the superincumbent load, Tess was also too weak to support the whole family after her father's death, she had to turn to Alec for help, which made her tragedy inevitable.

4. Conclusion

In the novel, Hardy employed the image of the horse to vividly portray the personality of Tess and deepen the theme of the novel. The diversified symbols of horse profoundly reveal Tess's rebellious personality and inevitable miserable life.

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