



The images of bird in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

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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 hold the deep conviction that people living in the world are just like actors on the stage, like birds in cages, and human beings can not determine their fate, and the destiny of people is controlled by the supernatural forces. According to Hardy, human beings are not the master of their destiny, and people are at the mercy of indifferent forces which manipulate his behaviour and his relations with others. To some extent, Hardy is a pessimist, but Hardy preferred to call himself a social meliorist. This paper attempts to study *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* from the perspective of the images of animals, centered on the analysis of the images of the symbolized birds.

Keywords: *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*; Images; Bird

1. Introduction

Thomas Hardy is considered as one of the most prominent writer in British Victorian period. Hardy's masterpiece *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* has appealed to the concern of many scholars. Studied from the perspective of the symbolic images of birds and cow in the novel, this paper analyzed the relationship between humankind and the nature, centered on the close similarity between the fate of Tess and that of animals in the novel. Tess's tragic ending is unavoidable from the beginning of the novel. and through the animals in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Hardy maked the outside setting a kind of sharer in the people's fate. With his close observation, Hardy employs nature as the determinant of the protagonist's fate. Of all the animals, Hardy endowed the bird with prophetic and mystic power.

2. Prophetic bird in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, bird is the most common seen animal, and its fate has a close relationship with the fate of Tess. At the beginning of the novel, a local parson brought a dim light to Tess' father, a penniless old man. The parson discovered that Tess' family was the descendants of the ancient and knightly family of the D'Urbervilles, who derive their descent from Sir Pagan D'Urbervilles, that renowned knight who came from Normandy with William the Conqueror, as appears by Battle Abbey Roll (Tess, 4). Tess' s father was greatly encouraged by the parson's discovery, hence, he urged Tess to claim kin and ask help with the local rich gentry who bought the name only because of snobbery. The bird firstly appeared in the novel when Tess left home to claim kin and ask help from her distant relatives. "On the morning appointed for her departure Tess was awake before dawn—at the marginal minute of the dark when the grove is still mute, save for one prophetic bird who sings with a clear-voiced conviction that he at least knows the correct time of day, the rest preserving silence as if equally convinced that he is mistaken" (Tess, 46). Hardy endowed the bird with a

kind of mystic power, the bird is prophetic about the future of Tess from the beginning of the novel, everything was doomed to be a mistake, and Tess's destiny was predetermined when she decided to claim kin from her so-called relatives.

Alec, the only son of the lately deceased gentleman who bought the family name D'Urbervilles just for the sake of family honor, employed Tess D'Urbervilles to manage his mother's fowl-farm. Tess's job was to whistle to the bullfinches in the cage everyday. Just like the birds which were trapped in the cage, Tess was also stuck in Mrs D'Urbervilles's house. However, "Mrs d'Urberville slept in a large four-post bedstead hung with heavy damask curtains, and the bullfinches occupied the same apartment, where they flitted about freely at certain hours, and made little white spots on the furniture and upholstery"(Tess, 56). The pet bullfinches were often allowed to fly freely in the old lady's room, whereas, Tess also longed for the freedom which she cannot get in her so-called relative's big house, she became a trapped bird.

The bird also appeared when Tess was seduced by Alex. "Darkness and silence ruled everywhere around. Above them rose the primeval yews and oaks of The Chase, in which there poised gentle roosting birds in their last nap; and about them stole the hopping rabbits and hares. But, might some say, where was Tess's guardian angel? where was the providence of her simple faith?" (Tess, 126). Tess's guardian angel did not appear when Tess was raped, and the bird did not wake up Tess, everything remained silent during the rape which symbolized the tragic starting of Tess's fate. The gentle roosting birds in nap represent that Tess had no physical strength to resist when she was seduced by Alex. If the birds can wake Tess up, everything would be different, Hardy expressed his deep conviction that man can not control their destiny, and everything was predetermined by the mystic and uncontrollable force.

Tess was abandoned when she confessed her affair with Alex to Angel, she was insulted by a villager with mean words, and she ran to the forest to escape the harsh reality. There in the woods, she found “Under the trees several pheasants lay about, their rich plumage dabbled with blood; some were dead, some feebly twitching a wing, some staring up at the sky, some pulsating quickly, some contorted, some stretched out—all of them writhing in agony except the fortunate ones whose tortures had ended during the night by the inability of nature to bear more. With the impulse of a soul who could feel for kindred sufferers as much as for herself, Tess’s first thought was to put the still living birds out of their torture, and to this end with her own hands she broke the necks of as many as she could find, leaving them to lie where she had found them till the gamekeepers should come, as they probably would come, to look for them a second time. “Poor darlings—to suppose myself the most miserable being on earth in the sight of such misery as yours!” she exclaimed, her tears running down as she killed the birds tenderly.” (Tess, 386) these dying birds are the victims of the cruel world, they can not fly freely in the sky just like Tess can not live a peaceful life with her Angel, the birds were deprived of the rights to fly, the pain of these flightless birds originated from the cruel and harsh hunting, Tess killed these birds by breaking their necks, similarly, Tess was finally hanged as punishment for murder of Alex. Tess’s killing of the bird also symbolized her parting with the old passive self, death was a kind of relief to Tess.

3. Conclusion

In the novel Hardy employed the images of the bird to make the novel colorful and lively, and the fate of the protagonist has a close relationship with the bird. At the beginning of the novel, Tess was just like the bird, wearing beautiful feathers and fly freely in the sky. In the end, Tess was hanged just like the bird, the birds represent the downtrodden people who can not control their life. Tess killed and buried her love and life with her hands the way she killed and buried the painful birds.

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