

## Research on the Theme of "Pursuit" in Short Stories of Thomas Hardy

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**Abstract:** British novelist Thomas Hardy enjoys a great reputation in the history of British literature. Touched by the ever changing outer world and mysterious human minds, Hardy is good at discovering the charm of nature. He constantly represents positive humanity and dedicated pursuits in his novels. Human essence is highlighted in the integration of simplicity and tranquility between human and nature. Meanwhile, in the process of novel creation, Hardy's pursuit of ideas manifests the vitality of his life.

### 1. Introduction

Thomas Hardy is an influential British novelist and poet in the late nineteenth century. As a writer with personality in Victorian Era, Hardy occupies an important position in the history of British literature. He deeply analyzes human nature, and has formed his own views on this issue. Hardy's emotional and psychological characters are truly reflected through his novel creation.

### 2. Thomas Hardy's Interpretation of Images of Human's Nature and Freedom

Thomas Hardy can discover the charm of nature. In novels, he deliberately portrays some natural scenes: from living things like plant and animal, to nonliving things like rocks and islands. His description of nature provides readers with spiritual shocks. From these natural images, the author deeply excavates the profound meaning behind these images: human's freedom and pursuit.

In the novella of *The Well-Beloved*, Hardy describes the natural scenery of seaside vividly: "towering cliff, the roof is stacked with houses ... everything in the garden is suspended in the air... All this, under the background of colorful sea... form a unique landscape." The natural scenery described by the author shows the emotional pursuit of the hero, Jocelyn Pierston, a sculptor. The free space nourished his aesthetic sense of art. The artist found his spiritual sustenance, and thus created sculpture works full of wisdom and the beauty of emptiness. The author explains that the hero, Pierston, keep to his pursuit because of his character and the natural environment. Thanks to the geography conditions of UK, British literature is bound up with islands. "Touched the warm rocks around, it is the temperature of his afternoon sleep." These narrations illustrate the close relationship between people and the island, represent the peculiar islanders' feelings of British people, and realize the pursuit of the highest agreement between man and nature.

When it comes to the natural image of island, people can think of two hidden images: the sea and the continent. Isolated islands must be far away from crowds; rough water would evoke islanders' inevitable desire to explore the outer world. The continent is an ideal place. Their spiritual pursuit is to acquire new knowledge. In a series of short stories, Hardy creates protagonist images and their own unique spiritual philosophy. Careful readers can find that all these protagonists come from different "roads". In the novel *The Beautiful Single*, the leading character "came from the Casterbridge; the North Road was boring and monotonous with few pedestrians". In *The Well-Beloved*, the hero, Pierston "climbed on a steep road with a walker, who was not the same with local people." All of these roads are symbols of seeking and exploring. Readers can find that no roads are smooth; they are all tortuous, hard to travel and sparsely populated. The author uses these images to illustrate the hardships of human life. For the purpose of pursuit, Hardy carefully arranges his novels, in order to realize his goal of spiritual exploration, so as to expand thinking space, and realize the unlimited

freedom of spirit and soul. This kind of "pursuit" is also the reflection of human instinct, and represents that the true meaning of life is the never-ending pursuit.

### **3. The Theme of Pursuit and Instinct in Thomas Hardy's Novels**

In the period of Vitoria, economy prospered in Britain. People lived and worked in peace and contentment. But when people enjoyed the stability of life, lazy and conservative thoughts appeared. Especially in the later period, the country gradually went into decline, but people still held the lethargic thoughts, and did not aware of the upcoming crises. Thomas Hardy, who grew up in this era, deeply thought about life, constantly pursued in struggle, and expressed his understandings of human nature in writing. Human life is in constant pursuit; different needs constitute the clues and tracks of people's life. Their pursuit truly reflects their inner thoughts. That's the connotation of identifying human needs. Maslow divided human needs into five levels. The first level is physiological need; it is mainly composed of material need. When the physiological need is satisfied, people will focus on the second level of safety needs, namely to keep away from pain and fear. Then is third level – the need of love. It is related to the fourth level — the need of esteem. Being esteemed enables people to achieve the fifth level— the need of self realization. Through novel creation, Hardy expresses how people pursue the truth of life, and reveals the true human nature behind happiness.

Baptista, the heroin of *A Mere Interlude*, followed his father's will to leave the island and go to the continent. At first, it was also her pursuit to study at school and get a job in the future. The dream was finally realized when she became a primary school teacher. But she was annoyed by the calmness of work. After the basic material needs were satisfied, the position of primary school teacher became the shackles of her life. She decided to marry a rich man, Mr. Heddegan, to get rid of her work and seek the spiritual freedom and peace. But then, Charles appeared and became her true love. Baptista felt uneasy, because she knew that she did not fall in love with MR. Heddegan. Through this story, the writer shows the lack of "love" behind humanity. For love, Baptista instinctively married Charles. But unfortunately Charles died at the day of wedding. The heroine gained true love, but she couldn't tolerate the accusations of destroying marriage from family members and friends: this is the need for esteem. She had to marry Mr. Heddegan as scheduled, and told him all the truth. Thus, the writer shows the most important aspect of human nature: self realization. At the end of story the author expressed, "her tragedies and comedies, the words in her life, have always been blurred; but now it's getting clearer."

Hardy also expounds human pursuit from another point of view: people usually do not cherish what they have already possessed, but pursue and expect what they do not have. The novel *An Imaginative Woman* is an example. The female poet Ella enjoyed a wealthy family with her husband and three children. As they hired a housemaid, Ella did not need to do housework; she had enough time to create literature works. What was more admirable was that Ella had a caring husband who loved her deeply. But Ella did not to appreciate the happy life she enjoyed; she was tired about the peaceful life, and wanted some stimuli to break the peace of life. During a vacation at the seaside, Ella fell in love with an idol poet, Robert Trewe. Trewe became the spiritual pursuit of Ella; she used the affair to express her discontent toward real life. Ella acted weird afterwards. She listened to his poetry alone, wore his coat and kissed his photos. After Trewe's death, Ella kept a lock of his hair, and kissed the hair from time to time. This "imagination" made the heroine fall ill and die. The author tells the story to show the great attraction of unrealized things.

### **4. Fortuity and Mystery in the Theme of Pursuit in Thomas Hardy's Novels**

#### **4.1 Fortuity**

In Hardy's novels, the description of "fortuity" and "mystery" actually represents the writer's tragic conception. By means of novel narration, the writer thoroughly subverts and deconstructs the traditional life consciousness. Fortuity in Hardy's works is composed of troubles in life, and represents the strong modern consciousness of life. In Hardy's works, life is composed of accidental

events. The author reveals the truth of life by describing accidental events which change characters' lives unexpectedly. In an Imaginative Woman, Mrs. Marchmill lived in the room of Trewe in a fortuitous vacation. Trewe was a poet she had worshiped for a long time. That brought her misery and suffering. In The Waiting Supper, Christine and Nicholas wanted to rebuild their relationship after a long time separation. But Christine was told that her husband would come home tonight. This fortuity made Christine wait for a dozen of years. When her husband was found dead, her love had lost forever for his occasional appear.

Through these stories, we can easily find that the writer wants to warn people that life is real and complex. People should give up illusion and face the real life. Fortuity offers human weakness with opportunities; it watches us in every moment of life. In turning points of life, real life is beautiful because of its shortcomings. No weak points of human nature should be shaken. Like convex lens, fortuity in our pursuit helps us to determine our direction in the world. Fortuity is the challenge of human nature, and the touchstone of human frailty. Accidental events often bring people to the fork in the road, and we should emphasize the positive side of human nature. We need to have clear understandings of ourselves and make reasonable decisions, and then be responsible for our own choices. In that way, we can control our life. Through the mirror, Hardy brings people with opportunities of better life.

#### **4.2 Mystery**

In the pursuit process of human, "mystery" means difficult to guess or comprehend. In Hardy's novels, mystery is the black hole of pursuit process. Someone is afraid to be stuck by the vortex, while others face the mystery and consider it as an opportunity. The different understandings of mystery form the infinite extension of people' pursuit and better reflect the nature of the human.

For instance, Withered Arm is the classic of Hardy's mystery complex. In this story, the author combines some mysterious factors and represents a strange story. It tells the story of a kind, beautiful, young lady, Gertrude, who married the farmer Lodge and met with unforeseen tragedy. The most mysterious factor in this story is a dream. Lodge' ex-wife Rhoda, was very jealous of his new wife. One day, she dreamed of a Gertrude, and she grabbed Gertrude's left arm and desperately fell her. Then the mysterious things happened: four fingerprints actually appeared on Gertrude's left arm; then arm began to wither. Through a wizard, Gertrude knew that Rhoda pinched her arm, and accepted the treatment method of touching the arm of a condemned prisoner. When the protagonist implemented this treatment, she accidentally found that the prisoner was Lodge and Rhoda's son. The weak Gertrude could not afford bear a huge shock and died. Hardy set the image of wizard Trendle on purpose, and deliberately arranges the character to play a non omniscient image to reflect people's yearning and awe toward mystery, and allow readers to absorb the spiritual nourishment in this mysterious environment.

#### **5. Self-pursuit Symbols for Thomas Hardy's Pursuit of Ideas**

Thomas Hardy lives in the backward rural and pastoral areas of England. His growth path is not smooth. Meanwhile, in the late Vitoria epoch he lives, the society has declined from prosperity. Social crises abound. The ambitious Hardy is always strict with himself, and he is more aware of the historical mission on his shoulders. The pursuit of ideas is Hardy's attitude towards life, which makes his works more profound and penetrating. The pursuit of "ideas" is more capable of showing the recognition to human beings to the greatest extends. Hardy's short stories are full of urgent calls for human freedom, and indicate the positive direction for human soul.

In addition, Hardy has deep understandings on girls' inner world. He writes love letter for illiterate country girls, and learns the most intimate discourse of girls since childhood. It has a great influence on his creation. Therefore, Hardy grows up very early, and has a strong desire towards love. In Hardy's works we can see his expression of love. The most prominent feature is that he does not pay attention to the portrait description of characters, but he is keen to the changes of people's minds, and shows readers with the profound core of characters' spiritual world. Such as Pierston in The Well-Beloved, his pursuit of love was not a real entity, but "the concentration of women, twinkling

eyes, moving lips." Though ordinary in appearance, he persevered in his entire life. Through this characterization, Hardy's thought of perfect humanity is expressed. It is also the symbol of Hardy's self-pursuit.

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