

An Analysis of the Description of the Heroine's Character in Tess under the Background of Urban-Rural Conflict

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Abstract: In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (hereinafter called *Tess*), Thomas Hardy tells the tragic fate of Tess, an underclass woman in a remote English village under the background of urban-rural conflict. During the Industrial Revolution, mass production by machines gradually replaced manual labour. The peasants were further cruelly oppressed by the bourgeoisie. Hardy vividly created the image of Tess, the country girl showing the profound connection between the character, destiny and environment in the period of great social change. Based on the original intention of studying the tragic fate of the heroine Tess, this paper attempts to use qualitative analysis software MAXQDA to code statistics of Tess's character images, so as to realize the organic combination of rational data analysis and perceptual close reading of the text and to excavate the heroine's main traits of character in *Tess* under the background of urban-rural conflict through fine grinding. Using quantitative data and graphic lists to reveal the inner relationship between Tess's character, destiny and the environment, thus providing a new way of thinking for the study of *Tess*.

1. Introduction

In the Victorian period at the end of the 19th century, Thomas Hardy, a famous British novelist of critical realism, witnessed the fundamental impact of the Industrial Revolution on social development, especially that on the rural areas of England. With the gradual invasion of the capitalist mode of production into the remote and backward rural areas in Britain, the social transformation brought countless pains and persecutions to the people of all classes, especially the agricultural laborers ^[1]. *Tess* was a work created when his heart was full of nostalgia for the rural idyllic scenery on the one hand, and filled with helplessness and contradiction of the replacement of manual labor by machine production on the other hand. After the outbreak of the Industrial Revolution, the urban productivity was greatly improved, but the gap between urban and rural areas became wider and wider. With the development of the economy, profound changes have taken place in the mode of production, living standard and values of urban and rural residents, and such uneven development further intensified the contradictions and conflicts between urban and rural residents. Tess, our protagonist is such a rural girl who has lost her land and livelihood in the process of

industrialization and has no choice but to leave her hometown, becoming homeless and suffering a miserable fate. Tess's experience also reflects the gradual disappearance of the peasantry and profoundly reveals the cruel reality of the wanton exploitation by the bourgeoisie.

2. Research Background and Methods

2.1 Research Background

At present, domestic scholars have analyzed Tess from a variety of perspectives, each with its own advantages and disadvantages, mostly from the perspective of pure literature interpretation, such as Feminism, Ecocriticism, religious thoughts and other aspects. Zhang Zhongzai ^[2] understood Tess's tragedy from the perspective of history and society. He believed that Tess's tragedy was caused by her reluctance in the face of threats and the changing era in which she lived. Hardy wrote the ending of Tess's death with ambivalent feelings, which was used to symbolize a dying era.

This paper features on the combination of data analysis and text reading. By using qualitative analysis software MAXQDA to combine objective statistics and subjective evaluation and through text study and qualitative analysis, the coding and data statistics of main character is realized from the perspective of conflict between urban and rural areas, a research perspective which is less discussed by others, this paper conducts in-depth analysis of the characteristics of the heroine in Tess, dissects the deep-seated causes of Tess's tragedy, and tries to provide new ideas and possibilities for later generations to conduct qualitative analysis and quantitative evaluation of literary texts.

2.2. Research Methods and Innovation

2.2.1 Qualitative Analysis

The research method of qualitative analysis is the innovation of this research. It refers to a series of activities starting with the researcher himself, in the natural context, using a variety of data collection methods, conducting in-depth and holistic exploration of the research object, forming conclusions and theories from the original data, and gaining explanatory understanding of the behavior of the research object and the meaning construction through interaction with the research object. The software MAXQDA is an important tool for qualitative analysis. Its main target is to obtain some explanation, understanding or interpretation of some social phenomena.

In qualitative research data analysis, the first step is to grasp the overall situation, that is to do a summary sheet. When making the summary sheet, we should first have a literature frame diagram. In other words, we should make a general combing of the literature field of the research, and relate the important concepts and issues in these literature.

The second step is to set up code to facilitate data indexing. Code is a label, that is, the summary of different types of descriptive or inferential text materials.

The third step is microanalysis. Microanalysis is the detailed coding around the concepts, using data to show the frequency of similar texts.

Based on the qualitative analysis steps above, the text analysis of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is carried out first to summarize the main personality characteristics of Tess and identify ten major personality tags of Tess, namely: high self-esteem, sentimentality, simplicity, kindness, willingness to sacrifice and so on. Then, the sentences reflecting Tess's personality characteristics are counted and the content analysis is carried out by combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. Finally, it is concluded that high self-esteem and sentimentality are the main personality characteristics of the heroine Tess, whose proportion is much higher than other personality characteristics. The result of

this rational analysis is not accidental, and the inevitability of it has aroused our deep thinking.

2.2.2 Text Analysis

Text analysis refers to the expansion and extension of the superficial meaning through intensive reading of the work itself, thereby discovering the deep connotation that cannot be grasped by ordinary reading. This research focuses on the analysis of Tess's personality traits in the context of urban-rural conflict. In the investigation of the text, we try to make an in-depth analysis of *Tess* from descriptive techniques such as language, behavior and psychology, and infer the hidden profound meaning from the represented words and sentences. In content analysis, we avoid subjective color of individuals, and integrate the extracted information into an organic whole and conduct a comprehensive and systematic study of the material.

Hardy wrote in *Tess*: “The young man got out of the car, and seemed to urge her to take his. She turned her face down the hill towards her family and looked at the tiny cluster from a distance. Something seemed to have excited her and made her decide that it was likely that she had killed the prince.”^[3] This passage describes Tess, who was hesitant to go to the d'Urbervilles to help was even more worried in the face of acrylic's gracious invitation. However, the unexpected death of an important labor force in her family made the originally poor family worse. Her good nature made Tess choose to follow her parents' advice to help her rich relatives, which became the beginning of her tragedy. From the deep interpretation of this text, we can see that the industrial revolution led to the gradual decline of rural production and lifestyle, and the gap between urban and rural areas was further increased. The people at the bottom were wantonly squeezed by capitalists, so that they had to try every means to survive, thus Tess became a victim of the era and her family. With guilt for her family, Tess chose to follow her parents' wishes to work in D'Urbervilles. However, she was seduced and raped by Alec, the son of the D'Urbervilles aristocracy, and exchanged her purity and kindness for the financial handouts of the D'Urbervilles family, but she herself ended up in a miserable fate for the rest of her life.

2.2.3 Literature Research Method

Literature research method is a method to obtain information by collecting relevant documents according to a certain research purpose or object, so as to ensure that we can objectively understand and master the issues to be studied from various angles. Through extensive literature browsing, we can not only quickly form a general impression of the object of study, but also understand the overall picture of the subject.

Through reading the relevant literature of *Tess*, we find that the previous studies of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* mainly discuss Tess and the works from the perspectives of ecocriticism, feminism, or make comparison with other literary works, focusing on the tragic fate of the protagonist under the oppression of religion and ethics. Moreover, most of the research papers on Tess analyze her personality from the subjective perspective of the author. Based on the feasibility of these studies, the innovation of this survey is found the literary research method of mathematical analysis that combines qualitative analysis with quantitative research according to MAXQDA. Starting from the multiple images of the object of study, this paper systematically codes Tess's traits of character in the text, arranges their occurrence times in descending order, then demonstrates Tess's character from a rational and objective point of view, so as to make this research subject more scientific.

3. Character Analysis of Main Characters

3.1 Application of Qualitative Software MAXQDA in Tess's Character Analysis

Qualitative analysis is developed by using MAXQDA12 to analyze and summarize the personality characteristics of Tess. The analysis mainly goes through three stages. The first is to import the original novel into MAXQDA software and start to read the full text. Second is to establish the code of Tess's main personality. To be specific, to insert a new code named after the personality trait in the left interface, and drop it down to continue building subcodes. The third is that in the process of reading, the sentences or paragraphs that accord with different personality characteristics are included in the corresponding character code. Different characters can be distinguished by different color labels.

In the process of coding, we need to drag the corresponding statements into the character code with the help of the mouse to make it the text in the code. After coding, you can see all the personality codes and their total number of occurrences in the code list on the left, as shown in Figure 1. At the same time, the specific text and its location in different personality codes can be viewed which is convenient for subsequent supplement and reference, as shown in Figure 2. Through the application of the software above, the qualitative and quantitative analysis are promoted together, which greatly reduces the subjective degree of Tess's character analysis.



Fig.1 List of Character Codes and Corresponding Texts in Tess.

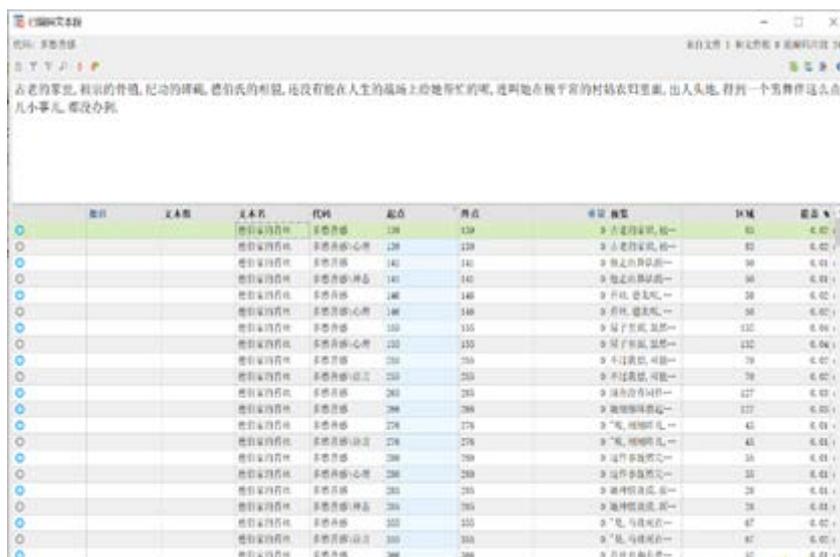


Fig.2 Summary List of Character Code Text in Tess.

Based on the multidimensional mathematical analysis of the qualitative analysis software

MAXQDA, it can be concluded that high self-esteem and sentimentality are the most two prominent characterizing dimensions of Tess's personality, and their proportions are much higher than other personality characteristics. The results are shown in Table 1 and Figure 3, and it can be concluded that these two personality are the most important characterizing characteristics of Tess. And we can analyze the root cause of the heroine's character.

Table 1 Weight Table Of Tess's Personality Data.

Classification	All encoded text segments	Weight	Rank
High self-esteem	158	33.98%	1
Sentimentality	116	24.95%	2
Simplicity	47	10.11%	3
Strong Character	46	9.89%	4
Willingness to sacrifice	37	7.96%	5
Kindness	22	4.73%	6
Stubbornness	16	3.44%	7
Diligence	15	3.23%	8
Rebellious spirit	8	1.72%	9



Fig.3 Radar Chart of Tess's Personality Data.

The transformation of the mode of production brought about by the industrial revolution has fundamentally changed the face of the city. The large-scale production brought by textile machine greatly improves the production efficiency; The invention of the steam engine has given new impetus to the transportation and built a bridge between the city and the countryside. The second industrial revolution brought electric lights and cars, and quietly triggered the conflict between the city and the countryside. The conflict between urban and rural areas is not only the difference of region and living standard, but also the fierce clash between rural civilization and urban civilization caused by the binary opposition structure of society. In this conflict, Britain has gradually transformed from an agricultural society to an industrial society, and the gap between the peasantry and the bourgeoisie has become deeper and deeper. The originally quiet countryside has also been forced to be involved in the process of industrial production [4]. Among them, the peasant class, represented by the Tess's family, went from poverty to extreme poverty in the revolution. As an individual, Tess has not been able to adapt to the intense conflict between the city and the countryside. She still maintains her pure fantasy of the world and her strong self-esteem, which eventually leads to her tragic fate.

Social transformation and the conflict between urban and rural areas have caused countless pains and persecutions for people of all classes, mainly agricultural laborers and also set the tone of social environment for the formation of Tess's strong self-esteem and sentimental character.

3.2 Multiple Reasons Behind Tess's Strong Self-Esteem

3.2.1 Family Pressure -- Origin of Tess's Strong Self-Esteem

It is easy to see from the novel that Tess's mother is powerful and her father is ignorant. And there are several younger siblings waiting for her to take care of. In addition to the poverty of her family, Tess not only needs to shoulder the burden of her family, but also lacks the love and care from her parents in the process of growing up^[5]. She has no sense of security, and suffers from a lack of belonging, so there is a seed of inferiority buried deep in her heart. She longs for the respect from others, so she uses a strong self-esteem to cover up the inferiority brought by the family. However, the development of industrialization has made her family poorer and she becomes more concerned about her dignity. Therefore, she is not willing to depend on the d'Urberville family--their rich relative, yield to Alec's coercion and inducement, nor mention her unbearable past to Angel.



Fig.4 Tess Bears the Burden of Her Family.

3.2.2 Social Changes -- Root of Tess's Strong Self-Esteem

At the beginning of the novel, Tess and other young girls were dancing happily on the hillside, but in the course of the story, Tess became a woman in rough linen to earn money for her family. In the old days, the countryside was beautiful, but the gap between urban and rural areas made the countryside poorer. Every villager struggled to make a living, and Tess's family was no exception. When Tess's parents learned that they were the descendant of a fallen nobleman, they excitedly arranged for Tess to go up to the d'Urbervilles. They believed that their daughter's beauty would impress relatives they had never met, so that they could naturally get financial support from their relatives. However, Tess's visit completely changed her own destiny. The pure and kind-hearted Tess was seduced by the aristocratic son Alec. When she was heartbroken, she was still suffering from the condemnation of patriarchy and feudal religious thoughts against her^[6]. The fatal blow of reality to Tess triggered her psychological defense mechanism, which was embodied in her strong self-esteem. She hid all her emotions at the bottom of her heart and chose to bear them alone. However, she could not fully accept the cruel reality and her inner helplessness, which caused strong anxiety and guilt in her heart. Such anxiety unconsciously activated a series of defense mechanisms, which led to her strong self-consciousness but also strong inferiority^[7].

A person who has his/her self-esteem to the extreme, must be humbled deep into the bones, with an inferiority complex that he/she can't let go of. Self-esteem and inferiority always accompanied Tess. In the face of the noble young master Alec, she would rather work half to death every day than

accept Alec's hospitality; In the face of Angel, Tess cared too much about her bad past, so she did not dare to tell the whole story of how she was seduced. Tess, pure and kind, once had her own ideas and yearning for beautiful love, but now her fantasy has been fragmented, leaving only her poor self-esteem.



Fig.5 Parents Forced Tess to Claim Kinship with the D'urberville Family.

3.3 Multiple Interpretations of Tess's Sentimentality

3.3.1 Material Barrenness -- Origin of Tess's Sentimentality

The large-scale machine production method has brought great impact to the traditional rural economy. The sudden death of Tess's father's old horse meant that Tess's family, who sold honey for a living, would lose their livelihood, and the poor life was even more in an abyss. Out of the need to bear the heavy burden of the family and her guilt of negligence which led to the death of the old horse, Tess, a pure and kind-hearted girl had to go to Alec's family to claim kinship, and was later seduced by Alec, which officially opened Tess's tragic life. Almost in an instant, Tess changed from an innocent girl to a complicated woman. The extreme poverty of the family directly caused Tess to make the most wrong choice in her life, and step by step, she was dragged into the contradictory vortex of getting rid of poverty and losing her virginity^[8]. Tess, who was delicate and sensitive in heart, was sinking deeper and deeper into the pain of hard life and secular criticism, unable to extricate herself. After her child died in childbirth, Tess, forced to make a living and support her family, separated herself from the grief of losing her son and the coldness of others in the society and went out to work alone, but never let go of criticizing herself. Under the strong shell of earning a living was a vulnerable heart, and her inner sentimentality continued to deepen. Then her father died, her mother became weak, the younger siblings were out of school, the rent expired, the family was kicked out of the village and had nowhere to stay, the material situation was extremely embarrassing. Tess tried her best to support the whole family, and was forced to become Alec's mistress in infinite despair to obtain material help. At this time, Tess seemed to have only a body, idling away her time in infinite sadness. Social transformation and urban-rural conflict caused the agricultural workers represented by Tess to endure an extremely difficult life, so they were forced to make many decisions that should not be made just to survive. Tess is not wrong. What is wrong is that the families who are open-minded to money, the villages with backward economy and the times with serious unbalanced development, all of which had a profound impact on Tess and shaped her sentimentality^[9]. In the passivity forced by life time, Tess's sentimentality continued to deepen, and eventually she tended to despair.



Fig.6 Tess Went out to Work to Support Her Family.

3.3.2 Hypocritical Social Morality -- Internal Cause of Tess's Sentimentality

The domination of men over women is perfectly interpreted by Alec in the patriarchal society. He unscrupulously seduced and raped Tess without being punished by the law. He had no guilt, and even felt that he could use money to make up for the harm Tess had suffered ^[10]. Such behavior was outrageous. The simple and kind-hearted Tess suffered both the harm and denial of social concepts after being sexually assaulted. Hypocritical religious thoughts and public opinions cast a haze over Tess's world. Tess was no longer the innocent girl but one carrying a heavy burden of thought forward. After meeting Angel, who was shining like an angel, her heart was more worried and sad. She believed that she was not worthy of the perfect Angel, and she was not sure whether the seemingly open-minded Angel's love for her would be able to transcend conventional thinking and discipline. She was sentimental and miserable, and the influence of secular moral concepts became the shackles of Tess's thoughts, which aggravated her susceptibility and low self-esteem, making her unable to devote herself to the beautiful love she imagined with Angel. Just as she worked so hard to overcome the obstacles of her thoughts and married Angel, thinking that her happiness finally arrived, her brave confession dragged her into the infinite abyss again. Under the appearance of Angel's open-minded thought, he hypocritically believed that premarital sex represented unchastity and this traditional moral concept gave Tess a fatal blow ^[11]. After Angel left, Tess was in a trance and her sentimentality reached its peak. She constantly suffered from self-torture, and there was no light in her world.



Fig.7 Angie Thought Tess Was Unfaithful.

4. Conclusion

Tess's fate was tragic, but this was the epitome of the tragic life of most people in the countryside under the background of the Industrial Revolution. In the fierce clash between the city and the countryside caused by the social binary opposition structure, the claws of the city gradually extended to the countryside. The large-scale mechanized production buried the countryside in the rumbling sound, and the exploitation of the bourgeoisie plunged the peasants into darkness. The good old days in the countryside disappeared with the roar of the machines. On the one hand, the social transformation brought great impact to the traditional rural economy, and the increasingly poor family became the heavy burden on Tess, which caused her inferiority and sentimentality, activated her inner defense mechanism and urged her strong self-esteem. On the other hand, the invasion of cities into the countryside did not bring real enlightened culture and thought, but cast a veil of hypocrisy on the traditional social morality. As a victim of hypocritical religious thoughts and public opinion, even though Tess boldly tried to fight against traditional morality and pursue happiness, she still failed to get rid of the fetters of traditional morality in identifying her virginity which reflected the weakness of her character. Under the influence of secular and religious public opinion, her self-esteem became stronger and her sentimentality became deeper because of inferiority.

For Tess, she was eager to fight against the capitalist system, but she succumbed to society deeply. The formation of Tess's contradictory character was inevitably affected by the times, society and culture, which would inevitably lead to a tragic ending in Tess's internal self-torture and condemnation.

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