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## The Exploration of the Horse in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

LIU Hongxia<sup>[a],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>Literature College, China West Normal University, Nanchong, China.

\*Corresponding author.

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### Abstract

Image was a kind of common method that the author expressed their inner meaning. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the horses and the related images were on the scene from the beginning to end, which also played an important role in the understanding of the text. This paper attempts to analyze the horses and carriages that presented in different times, and interpret their symbolic meanings and potential functions in multiple angles, which provides the readers some new perspectives and contemplation to comprehend the works deeply.

**Key words:** *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*; Horse; Function; Tragedy

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### INTRODUCTION

The horse has never been absent in the western art, and it covered multiple meanings in symbol. "There were vivid horses in the Lascaus murals about ten thousand years ago." (Zhang, 2014) And there were also many deities associated with horses in the Greek mythology, such as the unicorn who had only one horn in the forehead, Pegasus who had long wings and the Charon who was a centaur. Distinctly, horses here had some divinity to a certain extent. Plato compared the soul of a man with two horses in the Phaedrus, and one was tractable white horse, while the other one was naughty dark horse. Freud linked

the horse to sex. And Calvin Hauer also mentioned that "Horse was the natural symbol of wild animals, which were powerful, vigorous and impulsive, so it was often revealed to the sexual desire of the man." (Zhu, 2009, p.111) Although different people in different periods have different opinions on horse, the understanding in multiple perspective provides the readers an opportunity to think variously.

*Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was one of the masterpieces of Thomas Hardy who was a realistic writer in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the novel has an enduring artistic charm. It was based on Wessex, and told a tragic story that a rural girl was raped by a rich man and then abandoned by the lover. This work attracted a large number of researchers' attention since its publication. The scholars have analyzed the text in many aspects, such as the character images, the reasons of tragedy, the feminism and the moral principles. Actually, horse and carriages were also an important part of the novel, their multiple symbolic significance was very useful in the understanding of plot and the author's intention. So it is necessary to have a deeper cognition of these images, which Hardy had elaborately set.

### 1. HIDDEN CLUES RUN THROUGH THE HORSE

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century's British, horse was an important vehicle in the rural areas, and this phenomenon had a highly embodiment in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* as well. In the text, horse appeared 48 times, carriage (all kinds of vehicles carried by horse) appeared 41 times and the knight appeared 3 times. So it could say that the horse and its related images have extended all over the fiction, which promoted the development of the plot. In the beginning of the story, Jack Durbeyfield encountered Parson Tringham, who "astride on a gray mare, who, as he rode, hummed a wandering tune." (Hardy, 2013, p.387) The pastor told

Tess's father that the Durbeyfield was the lineal descendant of an ancient and knightly family, however, the arbitrary words broke the peaceful family quickly, and changed Tess's fate easily, which made people could not help thinking of the gray mare that the parson rode. Both of them had to held the weight of the parson, and their fates were changed by him ultimately, so the gray mare had indicated the tragedy of Tess potentially.

The Prince was the only tool to earn money in the family, and its accidental death led to Tess's tragedy unconsciously. Because of the guilt and the need for household expenses, Tess had to step on the journey that claimed kin with the so called rich relation, which was a crucial step for the destiny of her. Then she was constantly molested by Alec d'Urberville on the dogcart that carrying her to the Trantridge cottage. Yet another time, on the way back to workplace after a fair, Tess argued with another lady named Car, and Alec took advantage of the occasion to trick Tess going with him, and then seduced her. It seemed that horse had been present, whenever Alec did his misdemeanor, and they were not only the witnesses of the evil, but also the accomplices of it.

Later, Tess met Angel Clare when she was away from home to work in a milk factory. Although they admired each other, she could not accept Angel's proposal, for she thought herself an impure person who did not deserve Angel's pure love. However, she finally agreed to marry to Angel one night, when they delivered milk together to the train station through one carriage. But on their wedding day, Hardy inserted the legend of the d'Urberville Coach. Although Alec did not tell it specifically, he implied that it was a gruesome story. On all accounts, it seemed that the legend would bring their marriage a layer of tragedy, indeed, Angel went to Brazil alone, when he heard that Tess had been raped by someone. Later the author told Tess the end of that legend through the mouth of Alec additionally. And when Angel came back to Tess, he didn't ride his father's old mare, but hired a trap instead, which correlated Angel's fugitive life after he found Tess a few days later. Then Tess killed Alec when she met Angel again, which reminded Angel of the legend of the d'Urberville Coach once more. It is observed that the legend was a classic foreshadowing of the novel, which appeared four times in all, and always presented critically. There was no doubt that it was an elaborate arrangement, which promoted and suggested the development of the story.

Horse and the related images appeared again and again in the story, hence, it could say that the novel was a composition of multiple stories associated with horses. Setting those images, Hardy not only regarded them as means of transport, but also suggested the status of Tess and her miserable fate as well. So the images of horse were a necessary part of the text, which increased the readability of it and also provided important perspectives to understand it.

## 2. THE SYMBOLIC INTERPRETATION OF THE HORSE

### 2.1 The Portrayal of Tess

Horses in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* were portrayals of Tess, the horse images that appeared in different periods expressed different characters and fates of her. In addition, these images shown her gradual growth and the personal changes.

At beginning, Tess was the gray mare that the parson rode, although living a poor life, she was happy. She could dance lightheartedly with partners that grew up together and attend the club-walking pleasurably. Tess had to hold heavy burdens after the parson told Tess's father that they were the descendants of an ancient and knightly family, and then her life became gray totally. The Tib that Alec rode when carrying Tess to Trantridge cottage were a reflection of her character. Alec told Tess that Tib's temper was strange, and "she has killed one chap; and just after he bought her she nearly killed him. And then, take his word for it, he nearly killed her. But she's touchy still, very touchy." (Hardy, 2013, p.441) Tess and Tib were alike, her father was incapable and her mother was also a "child", so the burden of the family undoubtedly rested on her. However, this unique environment made her more stronger and braver than any other girls. Coincidentally, she had the same experiences with Tib. Before meeting Alec, Tess killed Prince. And after meeting him, she was seduced by him, which made her life worse than death. While Tess also tortured Alec for a long time and killed him finally. The highly similarity between Tess and Tib connected their fates together, and people could see Tess's destiny from Tib, which sow the seeds of Tess's tragedy.

The night that Alec saved Tess from a quarrel on the way back to the cottage. She found the horse that Alec riding was the quietest one in his family. While Tess lost her stubbornness and alertness because of fatigue and gratefulness to Alec that night, and was raped by Alec without much resistance, liking the peaceful horse. There also have some horses appeared after Tess left Alec, however, they were usually used to do work, which was a real portrayal of the state of Tess at that time, when she had a toilsome but fulfilling life. Then the legend of the d'Urberville Coach appeared on the day that Tess and Angel got married, and the legend was a grim story. Actually, Tess and the d'Urberville Coach were alike, while wearing the beautiful luxury wedding dress, she had to bear some horrific things in heart, which dared not tell to Angel. Later, Alec told Tess the legend again, "One of the family is said to have abducted some beautiful woman, who tried to escape from the coach in which he was carrying her off, and in the struggle he killed her... or she killed him." (Hardy, 2013, pp.785-786) It could see from the legend that the story was much similar to Tess's experience. Tess was abducted by Alec d'Urberville with

dogcart, and she wanted to “escape” from him all the time. However, she was back into Alec’s trap again after going around in circles till she killed him. Up to now, what had happened to Tess was verified perfectly from the legend of the d’Urberville Coach. In fact, she had been living in the prophecy all through, and she was the “beautiful woman” in some degree.

All the horses and the related images were carefully scheduled in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, which represented the characters of Tess in different periods, and implied the result of her life. Her killing to Alec was not abrupt, because the author had suggested her fate in the d’Urberville Coach already.

## 2.2 The Representation of the Society

The works of Hardy were a historical epic of Wessex society. They reappeared the states of Wessex in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century vividly, including the living standards of peasants, the impacts that the capitalistic economy had brought to the rural areas and the contradictions and conflicts between farmers and other things. Actually, many of them could be seen in the horse-images that appeared in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

Horse Prince carried many significance in the text. Firstly, the ancient nobilities began to decay and seceded gradually from the arena of history in the Victorian era. So as the last property of the d’Urbervilles, the old and weak Prince just symbolized the circumstance that the impoverished aristocrats were hanging by a thread. Secondly, as the sole tool to earn money in the Durbeyfield, Prince was an exhausted old horse, which formed a sharp contrast to Alec’s strong horses. Prince was the symbol of poor peasants, while the horse of Alec was the representation of rich peasants. Obviously, there was a large gap between the poor and the riches, which was the ultimate root that the contradictions occurred. Tess had to claim kin with the so called rich relation just because she cut off the source of income, but she seemed not know that reconciling the gap between the poor and the riches must pay price, indeed, she payed a heavy price for it finally. Thirdly, Prince was killed by a morning mail-cart which was uninjured in the accident. The mail-cart that drove into Prince was a production of the industrialization, and it represented that the urbanization was spreading fast in the rural areas. The death of Prince hinted that the rural economic system was strongly impacted by the urbanization at the end of the 19th century, and the peasants were helpless and caught off guard about it.

In addition, the wedding carriage that Tess and Angel used also reflected the social ideology. They ordered a close carriage, which was a relic of the old days of post-chaise traveling. Old carriage represented the old ideas here, although the capitalistic economy had reached into the countryside, the traditional artistic standards and thinking patterns were still deep-rooted in heart. It was

these old ideas that could forgive Angel’s debauchery and absurdity, but could not accept Tess’s losing of virginity, which was an authentic depiction of the patriarchal society in England. Angel was a rebel of religion, but he still couldn’t give up the patriarchal thought when referring to female’s virginity, similarly, their marriage was defeated by the mundanity ultimately.

## 3. THE TRAGIC EXPRESSION FROM THE HORSE

Hardy often reinvested some important images with symbolic meanings to express the information that inconvenient to say, which was also applicable in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Hardy connected Tess’s fate with the horse closely, and the horse images were always appearing in an important moment with some kind of tragedy, which should not be ignored.

Parson Tringham told Tess’s father that he became interested in the vicissitudes of the d’Urberville family when he saw the Durbeyfield’s name on the waggon. It could only bring the sense of dilapidated and unfortunate if one linked a dilapidated waggon with a decaying family, which would lay a tragic tone for the whole novel. The d’Urberville Coach was an important image to express tragedy. On their wedding day, Angel mentioned it in the wedding carriage. He told Tess that a son of the d’Urbervilles committed a terrible crime in the family coach, although he was unintentional to talk about that legend, it was not a good sign to refer to such a gruesome story on the wedding day, which sowed seeds for their unfortunate marriage. Indeed, their marriage broke up that night after they exchanged their secrets. Then Alec mentioned that story again and told Tess that only the descendants of d’Urberville could hear the coach and it was very bad for those who heard it. It had been said in the text that Tess had seen such a coach, so Tess killed Alec in the end was inevitable. It can be seen from the analysis above that the plot of the d’Urberville Coach became more clear with the increasingly abomination that Tess had to Alec, furthermore, Tess became nearer to the tragedy with the coach’s appearance, until it happened finally. So the d’Urberville Coach has been suggesting the inevitable tragedy from the beginning to end.

In addition, the death of Prince was an implication to Tess’s tragedy as well. “Seeing the blood was spouting, Tess sprang forward in her despair and put her hand upon the hole, with the result that she became splashed from face to skirt with the crimson drops.” (Ibid., p.417) In fact, Tess’s fate had been tied with Prince closely, it was its sacrifice that ignited the fuse of Tess’s tragedy. And her peaceful death on the ancient altar corresponded distinctly to the death of Prince. All in all, these horses and the coach had been closely linked to Tess and her fate, which expressed and intensified the tragedy of the story.

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## CONCLUSION

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Hardy settled many images in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, such as the horse, the strawberry, the bird and the rooster. However, the horse and its related images were particularly important. Not only because they were appeared numerously, but also because they provided a certain background for the story and connected each story together through the d'Urberville Coach, which formed a hidden clue to understand the story. Horse was a multiple image in the text, which would strengthen the internal tension of the plot, and could provide different thoughts to interpret the text as well. The horse images in *Tess of*

*the D'Urbervilles* was arranged appropriately, they were uncomplicated but meaningful, which made it a unique works.

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