The Tragic Fate of the Protagonist Behind the Change of the Space of Faith in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

Jing YAN and Ling-qing ZHANG*

Sichuan Agricultural University, Du Jiangyan, Chengdu, 611830, China

*Corresponding author

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**Abstract.** Thomas Hardy is an outstanding British writer of critical realism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, whose works focused on the profound influence of the capitalist industrial revolution on the traditional rural society of Britain and the life of peasant class living in the countryside for generations. This paper will take Hardy’s most important novel, his masterpiece from the series of character and the environment novels, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* as the research object which aims to reveal the influence of the change of the space of faith on the tragic fate of the protagonist Tess through the layered analysis of geospatial elements from the perspective of literary geography. Taking the life track of Tess, a typical figure as an example, this paper concerns the pain that the British countryside experienced from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, from the self-sufficient, idyllic agricultural society to the technological innovation-led industrial society with large-scale machine-based production during a period of change.

**Introduction**

Thomas Hardy was the most outstanding British writer of critical realism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He was born in Upper Berkhampton, on the outskirts of Dorchester, Dorset, in the southwest of England, a remote, far-off and typical farming society, full of strong local atmosphere. Hardy's most important type of works, “Character and Environment” series novels are mainly based on the Dorset countryside where he lived. “Character and Environment” series novels mainly contain six novels, marking the peak of Hardy's realistic creation and is also recognized as the highest achievement of Hardy’s works. As these novels all take place in the "Wessex" area, centered on Hardy's native Dorset, they are often referred to as the "Wessex Fiction" series. [1] By portraying his familiar rural society and vividly depicting the living conditions of the peasant class in desperate situation, Hardy aims to expose the violent impact of the rapid development of capitalist industrialization in the middle and late 19th century on the remote patriarchal countryside in the south of England. “The narrow lane of stubble encompassing the field grew wider with each circuit, and the standing corn was reduced to smaller area as the morning wore on. Rabbits, hares, snakes, rats, mice, retreated inwards as into a fastness, unaware of the ephemeral nature of their refuge, and of the doom that awaited them later in the day…”[9] By vividly depicting the scene of the harvest season, when the machine is working to harvest the wheat field, the innocent little animals on the farm have nowhere to escape, and are doomed to be killed, Hardy aimed at profoundly reflecting the miserable life of the British rural peasant class who lost their stable life in the middle and late 19th century, and how they were forced to leave their hometown, falling victim to the capitalist industrial production. From the idyllic quiet rural life to the boring and busy industrial production full of the rumbling sound of machines, the ordinary peasant class has experienced the pain of social change. Hardy deeply analyzed how the cruel selfishness of capitalism and the hypocrisy and ruthlessness of bourgeois morality and law destroyed human nature.

Among his many works, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is recognized as the most representative work. Hardy depicted a tragic story of a beautiful, kind, simple country girl who was unfortunately raped,
later abandoned by her husband, and eventually killed his enemy and bravely died. With the
development of the large-scale production of capitalist machines and the gradual disintegration of the
old order of rural social economy in the process of industrialization in Britain, Hardy profoundly
reveal the tragic fate of the rural people who lost the opportunity of stable agricultural work, and were
forced to leave their hometown and become agricultural workers to support their families, subjecting
to endless oppression and bullying. [3]

Through the study of Hardy and his “Character and Environment” series novels, especially his
delicate depiction in Tess, his most outstanding representative work, we can deeply feel the sharp
conflict between the emerging industrial civilization and the traditional agricultural civilization
experienced by British society at the end of the 19th century, experience the heavy blow brought to the
backward economic structure, conservative social order [4] and simple local life in the rural areas of
the southwestern part of the UK due to the transformation and change of the society. By portraying
Tess's tenacity and bravery to life, her loyalty to love, the careful guardianship of her family, the
indignation of her enemy, and her unremitting pursuit of the ideal of life, Hardy has created the image
of the ideal female protagonist in his heart, "Tess, A pure woman." By portraying Tess's short but
resonant life, the reader sees Hardy's love of the old local life that has passed away, his worries about
the invasion of new capitalism, and the infinite anthems of the beautiful and kind rural people.

Research Method

In recent years, the criticism of literary geography, which explores the relationship between literature
and geography, has gradually become a new highlight in literary research that opens up a new path for
the new interpretation of classic literary works. The criticism of literary geography, referred to as
"geographical criticism", is the practice of literary criticism based on text analysis and taking into
account the geographical environment of the creation and dissemination of works through the theory
and method of literary geography. The criticism of literary geography is the relationship between
literature and the entire geographical environment, including both natural and human geographical
environment. The criticism of literary geography takes both internal and external research into
consideration. On the one hand, it emphasizes the fine reading of the text and the interpretation of the
information contained in each geographic element in the text; On the other hand, after a detailed
reading of the geographical elements in the text, attention paid to combine the information behind
these geographic elements with the natural and human geography outside the text to reveal the
relationship between the character's fate and the environment in the text. [10]

In his Introduction to Literary Geography, Zeng Daxing explores the method of spatial analysis,
and points out that the study of literary geography focuses on the geographical space of the activities
of the characters, the position, rights, words and deeds of the characters in different geographical
spaces. The purpose of spatial analysis is to accurately grasp the different characteristics and
manifestations of literary characters in different geographical spaces. Emphasis is placed on analyzing
and interpreting the spatial forms based on geographic objects, geographical events, and geographical
landscapes (landscapes) that exist in the text, such as mountain space, plain space, rural space, and
urban space, thus expressing people's thoughts and feelings, portraying the character of people and
reveal the destiny of man. [10]

Tess of the D'Urbervilles is the masterpiece of Hardy's “Character and Environment” novel series
in the late period. It is also the most accomplished work. The novel succeeds in shaping the image of
Tess, a rural girl, the incarnation of nature. her close relationship with nature is reflected in the
harmonious relationship with the land and animals. Tess is beautiful, hard-working, innocent, strong
and full of rebellious spirit. She is the symbol of pure and beautiful woman. Based on this, this paper
aims to take Hardy's representative work Tess of the D'Urberville as the object of research, from the
perspective of literary geography, through the layered analysis of many geographical elements such as
Tess's birth and growth, working life, love and marriage, migration and escape, this paper intends to
explore the change of the space of faith behind the geographical environment, and reveals how the space of faith has an impact on the tragic fate of Tess. Thus, revealing the strong impact of the capitalist industrial revolution on the traditional British agricultural society in Britain.

With the invasion of capitalism, especially the emergence of industrial production, agricultural mechanization gradually became popular, which eventually led to the gradual disintegration of the British small-scale peasant society, the peasants going bankrupt, being forced to become agricultural hiring workers, leaving their homes, being helpless, and ruining the tragic fate. With the invasion of capitalism, especially the emergence of large-scale industrial production, agricultural mechanization gradually became popular, which eventually led to the gradual disintegration of the British small-scale peasant society. The farmers who went bankrupt, were forced to become agricultural hiring workers, leaving their homes, being helpless, and experiencing tragic fate.

From the perspective of literary geography, through the changes in the natural environment, family environment and social environment of Tess life, we can see the changes in the belief space behind it. This change is the collapse of the spiritual world. Thus, Tess's fate is an inevitable result, a tragedy of faith, and a social tragedy.

From the perspective of literary geography, we can see the change of the belief space behind Tess's natural environment, family environment and social environment, which is the collapse of the spiritual world. Thus, Tess's fate is the inevitable result, the tragedy of faith, but also the tragedy of society. From the perspective of literary geography, we can see the changes of the space of faith through the changes in the natural environment, family environment and social environment of Tess's life. This change is the collapse of people's spiritual world. Thus, Tess's fate is an inevitable result, a tragedy of faith, and also a social tragedy. Looking at the classic literary works Tess through the perspective of literary geography, we hope to expand the research direction and open up a new theoretical perspective for the study of Hardy's novels.

Research Findings

Faith is the ultimate appeal of life and the highest aspiration for the pursuit of spiritual home. It is a spiritual phenomenon that develops together with the social and spiritual life of mankind. [6]

In Victorian Britain, people's faiths came from three main sources, dependence on material production, inheritance of family glory and pursuit of religious belief.

The natural environment, cultivated land, and agricultural production tools are the basis of material production and the foundation of production and life, especially for ordinary rural people living in rural areas. These basic means of production is the source of livelihood and happiness, so material production has also become an important basis for people's faith.

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The 19th century Britain was in a feudal society, and its feudal system was a feudal aristocracy based on the aristocracy. [7] The warriors who had made outstanding service in the battle were honored by the king, who not only received the title, acquired noble blood, but also enjoyed a series of economic and political privileges. Aristocratic title inherited from generation to generations have enabled them to enjoy a sense of spiritual superiority and the great social prestige has made the aristocratic class an object of admiration in economic, political and cultural respects. The noble status, the one that everyone aspires to have makes the title of nobility a follow-up goal of society, and has gradually become the orientation of social fashion. To highlight honor, surnames have also become a symbol of their status. [8]

The noble status of the aristocrats and the prominent position of the family highlight the glory of the ancestors. This is inextricably linked with the cultural background of British society. Britain is a
country that values traditional culture and has a deep sense of family. The glorious past of the ancestors and the historical glory of the family have become the spiritual support for the British to have a stable social status, enhance their living conditions, and gain recognition, admiration and love from the surrounding people. Thus the worship of family glory has become an important foundation of faith for the British.

In addition, the faith in religion is also an important part of the daily life of the British people. The 19th-century Britain was shrouded in the aura of the Christian faith. Daily prayer, weekend worship, church choirs, readings of holy classics and various ceremonial activities all help religion to play an irreplaceable role in people's lives. People live in strict accordance with Christian teachings, which is taken as the spiritual source of religious believers. [4]

The above are the three aspects that constitute people’s faiths in Hardy's novel Tess. The production and living materials are the necessary guarantee to maintain livelihood, the prominent status of the family and the glorious history of the ancestors are the important basis for obtaining social identity, and the unswerving belief is the core connotation of the search for spiritual support. The significance of faith lies in the determination of the operational direction of life and the direction of practice. It becomes the inexhaustible driving force of human spiritual pursuit and the foundation of dependence and finally make people find their own hope of destiny and ultimate goal in care. However, with the influence of the capitalist industrial revolution in the 19th century, from the city to the countryside, bringing unprecedented impact to the closed and backward English countryside. These changes are deeply reflected in the disappearance of geographical elements and the change of geospatial space in the works. The decline of natural environment of the pastoral countryside, self-sufficient farming production, and the once prestigious family manor house, as well as the ruin of solemn and sacred religious sites symbolize the gradual loss of the space of faith in people's hearts. [11] The absence of the foundation of material production, the loss of the glory of family heritage and the lack of God's blessing and love, all put people in the condition where their faiths have nowhere to pin. The loss of the heroine’s space of faith behind the changes in geospatial space, has also foreshadowed Tess's tragic fate.

The following will reveal the changes of the protagonist Tess's space of faith from the changes of the geographical elements that characterize the changes of the natural environment, the changes of the family environment and the changes of the social environment. The point is that the gradual loss of the space of faith is the root of Tess's tragic fate.

Changes in the Natural Environment-the Foreshadow of the Loss of the Space of Faith

The description of the natural environment plays an irreplaceable role in Hardy's novels, which is not only the background of the story, but also represents the material production and livelihood status of the characters. [5] The change of natural environment and its related mode of material production is metaphorical to the change of the space of faith and the fate of characters.

At the beginning of the story of Tess of the D'Urbervilles (hereafter referred to as Tess), Hardy traced the history of Vale of Blackmoor and talked about the magical legend of how the place was known as the Forest of White Hart because King Henry III could not bear to kill a white deer. “In those days, and till comparatively recent times, the country was densely wooded.”[9] This kind of geographical landscape depicts a lush and prosperous scene at that time indicating a harmonious relationship between people and nature. Those who live in such a flourishing environment have a firm life creed and live an optimistic and fulfilling life. “Even now, traces of its earlier condition are to be found in the old oak copse and irregular belts of timber that yet survive upon its slopes, and the hollow-trunked trees that shade so many of its pastures.” [9] Although it is still a little visible today the lush, leafy natural environment and imaginable the well-spaced and the towering beauty of the ancient trees, but after all, everything has faded. “oak copse and belts of timber that survive, irregular timber and hollow-trunked trees”. Such a geographical landscape shows that the environment in which Tess lives in today is a scene of depression and decay. All these natural environments are withering and
dying, and the people living here have lost their spiritual dependence on the natural environment. As a result, the faith in nature has declined. The confusion of spiritual beliefs, and the loss of faith have foreshadowed Tess's tragic fate.

In addition to the natural environment itself, changes in the tools of agricultural production, which are closely related to material production, also represent changes in the space of faith.

At the beginning of the story, Tess lived in a poor family, with many brothers and sisters, and her life was difficult, but the family could barely make their living largely due to a horse called "Prince" in the family. The significance of the horse for the Tess family is to make a living, but also the road to a better life. When the parson informed Tess's father of the glory of his ancestry, old John mentioned the horse, a very important geographical image. "Well, I have heard once or twice, `tis true, that my family had seen better days afore they came to Blackmoor. But I took no notice o't, thinking it to mean that we had once kept two horses where we now keep only one."[9] In his view, the existence of horse means the hope of life, representing a good day, is a kind of aspiration for a happy life, and the meaning behind it is the space of faith. For hawkers, horses are the tools of agricultural production and means of transport on which they depend for their livelihood, an important hub for connecting villages and towns, and an indispensable rural geographical landscape.

When the old horse died, Hardy pointed out "The haggling business, which had mainly depended on the horse, became disorganized forthwith."[9] The horse is an irreplaceable agricultural production tool for Tess's family and a source of hope for a good life of the family. The death of the old horse "Prince" brought a fatal blow to this poor family who lacked food and clothing. This kind of blow made the Tess family lose their basic source of life. In a deeper sense, it was the loss of faith. In the process of finding faith, Tess was forced to leave her homeland because of her guilt for the family, her parents' pleas, and the helplessness of her life. She embarked on the dilemma of constantly losing her faith and never regaining it.

Before the Industrial Revolution, people's beliefs were closely related to the natural environment, especially in the countryside. People living in the countryside for generations lived a quiet and self-sufficient life, leisurely and full of vigor. All the livelihood of rural residents depends on the supply of natural environment, which together with basic agricultural production material is an important dependence of people's spirit.

With the development of capitalism, the industrial revolution has spread from the city to the countryside. Behind the original geographical space where people and nature coexist harmoniously and peacefully is people's attachment to nature and a joy in the countryside. However, today, such beliefs are swallowed up by the geographical space of the machine-based mass production brought about by the Industrial Revolution.

"A panting ache ran through the rick. The man who fed was weary, and Tess could see that the red nape of his neck was encrusted with dirt and husks. She still stood at her post, her flushed and perspiring face coated with the corn-dust, and her white bonnet embrowned by it" … "The incessant quivering, in which every fibre of her frame participated, had thrown her into a stupefied reverie in which her arms worked on independently of her consciousness. She hardly knew where she was, and did not hear Izz Huett tell her from below that her hair was tumbling down."[9] Tess has no fun in the field full of machine-based mass production, The man’s face is covered with dirt and sweat, Tess’s bonnet was embrowned by corn-dust, and the machine is incessant quivering. Such geographical elements depict the suffocating madness of machine-based mass production. It is not only the heavy mechanical work that makes Tess exhausted, but also the inner numbness caused by the lack of space where the faith can be placed. Only when the machine finishes its work, Tess can stop to get a moment of rest. She had no dependence, no hope and was controlled by the machine.

**Changes in Family Environment-the Indication of the Loss of the Space of Faith**

In the novel, the author has arranged the main clues of space for Tess to leave the homeland, go to the unfamiliar environment outside the homeland, and eventually be killed, that is, the change of the
family environment brings the confusion of spiritual sustenance. In the process of looking for the glory of the ancestors, re-seeking the identity but failed, people lost their space of faith.

At the beginning of the story, the authoritative Parson Tringham told Tess’s father, a poverty-stricken man an unexpected news that his ancestors came from famous nightly family of the d'Urbervilles of whom, Sir Pagan d'Urberville, came from Normandy with William the Conqueror. “Your ancestor was one of the twelve knights who assisted the Lord of Estremavilla in Normandy in his conquest of Glamorganshire. Branches of your family held manors over all this part of England…”[9] From the outstanding service made by the warriors in Normandy all the way to Britain, to the high praise of the battle heroes, and then to the noble award to the heroes, through the heroic feats represented by these geographical names, we seem to be pulled back to the era of the glorious history of the d'Urbervilles. The glory of the aristocratic life of the ancestors and the prominent position of the ancestors made John d'Urbervilles blood boiling and the boring and depressed life he used to live seemed to have a new direction. John, a down-and-out, alcoholic and irresponsible hawker tried to seize the life-saving straw and see the illusion of a better life. However, the glory of such an illusory ancestry has gradually faded away from the past with the changes of the times. The old parson’s words, “You don't live anywhere. You are extinct - as a county family,' When old John asked, “And where be our family mansions and estates?’ The parson answered, “You haven't any.”[9]The absence of an old house means that in the spiritual world, John becomes a helpless tramp, losing the blessings of the ancestors; without the honor of the descendants of the nobles, the faith of the old John is nowhere to be placed. There is no goal and direction, and he is in the darkness, nowhere to find the exit. This seems to herald the collapse of the spiritual pillar of the hawker, behind which is the loss of his space of faith and his nostalgia for the good old days. His pursuit of the ancestral glory is nothing more than the illusion of seeing the flowers in the fog and watching the moon in the water.

Tess’s father’s hopes of restoring the glory of the family were shattered and his space of faith was dashed. The glory of the ancestors remained in the past. He was still a down-and-out country hawker, which also prompted him to send his daughter to meet and marry their rich relative desperately, which eventually resulted in Tess’s tragedy.

After losing the child, Tess made up her mind to go to the Talbothays Dairy. Apart from being a strange place that would cheer her up and start living again, the new place “was lying near her forefathers' country”, this place “stood not remotely from some of the former estates of the d'Urbervilles, near the great family vaults of her granddames and their powerful husbands.”[9] The light of hope that was reborn in Tess's heart was partly due to the reason that the place was close to her ancestors and it was part of her faith. She had a spirit in her heart, and “wondered if any strange good thing might come of her being in her ancestral land.” “It was unexpended youth, surging up anew after its temporary check, and bringing with it hope, and the invincible instinct towards self-delight.”[9] But the cruel reality is “think not only that d'Urberville, like Babylon, had fallen, but that the individual innocence of a humble descendant could lapse as silently.”[9] It was really the place where her ancestors were buried, and the place where they should have been fascinated, Tess had no longer a bit of admiration. Instead, she was deeply resentful because of being humiliated and raped. All of this stems from the loss of chastity that she deeply understands that the glory of her ancestors is gone forever. She is just a poor and humble rural girl. Tess once again lost her direction in the process of constantly searching for the space of faith.

**Changes in the Social environment-the Indication of the Loss of Space of Faith**

Another important geographic image that indicates the gradual loss of faith is the change of church in Tess’s life. The church is the place where the parishioners go to every week to show respect to the God. It is the place where the faith of the Tess family is placed. The words of the parson represent the will of God and are the prophets of the Holy Spirit. After Tess's tragic experience, she returned home and went to the church alone, trying to find her lost faith. “She took a back seat under the gallery, close
to the lumber, where only old men and women came, and where the bier stood on end among the churchyard tools." The seats in the back row are relatively unobtrusive, and the place where things are stored is also the most inconspicuous corner. The description of these geographical elements highlights the inner panic of the heroine Tess and she needs to be careful to find a space where she can hide herself. She is lonely, helpless and has lost the only faith to rely on. She was cautious and afraid that others would read the fear and loss in her heart. She is sensitive to the whispering conversation of others, and deliberately chose the inconspicuous corner to sit and eventually dare not come to the church. What is behind the change of living environment is the gradual loss of the space of faith.

Eventually, as the little baby died, she implored the parson to bury his beloved son in accordance with the church's ritual but was rejected. Suddenly, she became very emotional and said painfully “I'll never come to your church no more!” [9] Tess's grief stems from the collapse of the tower of faith in her heart, and her tragic fate stems from the fact that there is no God in her heart.

**Summary**

From the perspective of literary geography, we can see that with the changes in the natural environment which can be seen from the change of the ways of material production, the changes of the family environment from the glory to the decline and the changes in the social environment after the shaking of religious beliefs, Tess’s space of faith has also experienced a drastic change. Thus, we can come to the conclusion that the change of the space of faith behind the geographical environment was the root cause of Tess's tragic fate.

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