

Re-exploration of the Mythological Archetype of Tess and Its Tragic Origin

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Abstract: Tess is the protagonist in Thomas Hardy's work *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, which tells the story of a pure and kind girl whose life experience is full of tragedies. Considering the educational background of Thomas Hardy, especially since he once followed a mentor at Oxford University who was a master of classics, it is a great possibility that Tess was created based on an archetype in Greek mythology. Typically, Tess is compared with Medea, who killed Jason because of his betrayal and disloyalty. However, after analyzing the motivation for murder, Tess shares more similarities with Clytemnestra and Penelope, and this paper will give a detailed analysis of Tess and the characters in Greek mythology. The comparison will reveal the root of Tess's tragedy—a thousand years of taming and scrutinizing females.

1. Introduction

The book *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is one of the typical works of Thomas Hardy. It introduced the tragic story of a beautiful, kind maiden named Tess. She was raped by Alec d'Urberville, an heir of fortune, and deserted by Angel Clare, a son of a provincial person. In the end, Tess murdered Alec and eloped with Angel but was sentenced to death. The author, Thomas Hardy, is called the last novelist of the Victorian Era. He is dedicated to disclosing the dark side of the Victorian period, especially exposing the sufferings and inequality women and people from the lower classes face. In style, both *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* show the acerbic tone employed by Thomas Hardy. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* has become a heatedly discussed work for its sympathy with women and the symbolic motif of women's antagonism and rebellious castigation towards a prudish era and a patriarchal society.

Victorian-era authors imitated and created their characters based on Greek mythology and tragedies under the influence of Classicism and Neoclassicism and employed archetypes from the myths. Thomas Hardy is one of them. He read Greek tragedies like *Agamemnon* and *Oresteia* by Aeschylus and *Medea* by Sophocles when he was at Oxford University, under the guidance of his mentor Horace Moule, a scholar of classics [1].

Throughout the history of the study of Thomas Hardy, many scholars have published papers or books concerning Thomas Hardy's life and a detailed analysis of Hardy's works, including novels and poems. In the twentieth century, research on Hardy was more about Hardy's writing style and the

features of Wessex dialects employed in Hardy’s works. With the flourishing of literary theories, new criticism is used in analyzing Hardy’s works. As for the deliberate negligence towards the connection between works and society advocated by new criticism, Marxism criticism takes hold of mainstream analysis. Douglas Brown does deep research into the reflection of industrialization and the loss of countryside scenes in Hardy’s novels [2]. From the 1960s to the 1980s, feminism was employed in Hardy's analysis and, most importantly, Tess's figure and femininity. Also, the political body and Hellenism are discussed in James Hazen and Jules Law’s papers [3, 4]. Among different criticisms, archetypal criticism towards *Tess the D’urbervilles* is employed in the study of Tess. Some Chinese scholars, like Zeng Lingfu, have analyzed the synchronized changes in the environment and the destiny of Tess, which belongs to the scope of archetypal criticism forwarded by Frey [5]. The comparison of Tess and characters in mythology varies. Primarily, Tess is compared with Medea as Medea is renowned for repelling Jason and her awareness of herself. Some papers also agree that Tess shares similarities with Persephone [6]. However, this thesis will discuss the misinterpretation of Tess as a 19th-century Medea and her similarity to Clytemnestra and Penelope [7]. By connecting feminism and archetypal criticism, Tess’s similarities with Penelope show the character as an “angel in the house” and the scrutinizing of females in the late, prudish Victorian period, and her similarities with Clytemnestra show the stigmatized character as a “witch” and her rebellion and protest against the patriarchal society. This double archetype is a condensation of collective unconsciousness proposed by Jung.

2. The Misinterpretation of Tess as Medea

Medea is a character in Greek mythology who originally appeared in Hesiod’s *Theogony* and is known as a sorceress. She is most known for the depiction in Euripides’ tragedy *Medea*. She helped Jason fetch the golden fleece yet was further deserted by Jason. Then, she killed Jason and fled to Athens, getting married to King Aegeus.

If there is any similarity between Tess and Medea, they killed the one who allured and mistreated them. Their lineage, social status, love experience, and motivation to kill differ greatly. However, it is imprudent to rush to the conclusion that Medea is the archetype of Tess. Here is a chart that shows the differences between Medea and Tess.

<i>Incident</i> \ <i>Character</i>	<i>Medea</i>	<i>Tess</i>
<i>Social Status</i>	A princess of Colchis	A country girl
<i>Husband</i>	Jason	Angel Clare
<i>Finally, Kill</i>	Jason and children	Alec d’Urberville
<i>Labor a Lot</i>	×	√
<i>Raped by Someone</i>	×	√
<i>Elope</i>	√	×
<i>Have Child</i>	√	√
<i>Kill Someone</i>	√	√
<i>Kill the one She Once Loved</i>	√	×
<i>Child Alive</i>	×	×
<i>Live Till the End</i>	√	×

From this chart, Tess lives in a lower-class family, utterly different from Medea, a princess of an aristocratic and affluent family. Though old John Durbeyfield was informed that their family were the descendants of a noble family, the family never flourished like it used to. So, the family couldn’t provide any shelter like Medea’s. Medea can willfully pursue her love and provide help for Jason. Tess went to Alec out of her parents’ will and her sense of responsibility to raise the family. Medea never has to consider this as she acts under her emotions and does labors to sustain a family. Further,

Tess pursued her love with much diffidence and humility, which shows that Tess is not a dauntless girl like Medea; rather, she is timid and sometimes too strict with herself. These are the differences in their personality.

Their personality offers grounds for their behavior and endings. They both had children. However, Medea gave birth to children as she loved Jason, yet Tess once anticipated the child, the fruit of a rape. Medea killed her children out of hatred towards Jason, so she did that as revenge, yet Tess's child died of fever and was heartbroken. Medea doesn't bear maternity like Tess. Medea's murdering Jason is out of a motivation that she couldn't tolerate Jason's betrayal in this relationship. Tess killed Alec as she couldn't bother to be tortured by Alec's discourse and cognitive control. Tess would like to live blissfully with Angel and forgive his affair in London with a lady. Medea would never tolerate that.

Medea's selfishness and courage, sometimes insanity, ensure her living peacefully after killing Jason. She finally married a king. Tess is oppressed by morality subjectively and objectively. She sets the moral standard for herself and desperately faces death at a local trial. She was eventually prosecuted.

The deduction to combining Tess with Medea is fundamentally based on Tess's antagonism towards Alec and her murder. Some scholars describe this action as an awareness of women's independence. However, the deduction ignores the regulations and dual moralities imposed on women by the patriarchal society. It is groundless to conclude that Medea and Tess are symbols of feminism as their rebellious action is due to different motivations. Medea is more willful, while Tess does everything under pressure and oppression, so she is more passive [8].

Some scholars infer that Tess represents the spirit of Artemis and Persephone. Nevertheless, Tess is only coherent with Artemis in their purity and Tess's will to keep chastity like a maiden. Tess is traded by her parents to a dark side, and Persephone is traded by Zeus and Hades. However, Persephone seldom shows her antagonism towards Hades. She indifferently accepts the title of Queen of the Underworld. It is partial to conclude that some goddesses and princesses in mythology were the archetypes of Tess of the d'Urbervilles. From the traits and experiences of Tess, after comparing Penelope and Clytemnestra with Tess, there appear to be more similarities. The two Greco characters are like the two sides of a scale—Penelope represents the general anticipation and moral standards towards a female. Yet, Clytemnestra represents the consequences after females encounter too much oppression and start to fight against it.

3. Analogy and Comparison between Tess and Penelope and Clytemnestra

As show in table 1, laboring, such as weaving, is an inevitable duty from the perspective of women's responsibility. Weaving was women's primary domestic economic activity in ancient Greece and was a way to demonstrate women's skills. Men are responsible for working on the land or making some trades. That is the initial social division of labor. Homer's two epics depict the weaving of three women, Helen, Andromache, and Penelope, in great detail. Aeschylus describes the scene of Clytemnestra when she is weaving as well. There exists no chance for them to participate in any other events dominated by males, such as politics and warfare. Weaving shows that women are domestically compliant and have to obey different rules set by males. In the Victorian Era, manual weaving was replaced by machines due to the Industrial Revolution. Then, as Tess did, women had to do other laborious jobs, such as raising horses for a landlord or milking the cows.

What males pursue is reputation and the *kleos* (a word in Greek mythology that describes possessions and material achievements). Women are also deemed as *kleos*, during which women are entirely objectified. They must also keep chaste as a symbol of their loyalty to their husbands even if their husbands never stay loyal to them. Odysseus had an affair with Circe and Calypso, Agamemnon

returned home with Antigone, Alec was dandy and insouciant, and Angel Clare had intercourse with a London lady. All three female characters obeyed the male protagonists and showed no rebellious emotions [9]. Clytemnestra hopelessly saw Iphigenia sacrifice for Agamemnon’s bragging, Telemachus told his mother never to interfere in males’ discourses, and Tess could do nothing when Alec requested her intimacy.

Table 1: The deeds of the three characters

Incident	Character	Penelope	Tess	Clytemnestra
Husband		Odysseus	Alec d’Urberville	Agamemnon
The one She Loves		Odysseus	Angel Clare	Aegisthus
Keep Fidel		√	partly	×
Have Child		Son: Telemachus	Once had, but dead	Son: Orestes Daughter: Iphigenia, Electra, Chrysothemis
Child Alive		√	×	√(partly, Iphigenia was sacrificed)
Labor		√(Weave)	√(Milk...)	√(Weave)
Keep Chaste		√	×	×
High Moral Standards		√	√	×
Once Obey Male Roles		√	√	√
Still, Obey Male Roles		√	×	×
Kill Husband		×	√	√
Live Till End		√	×	×

Penelope is the meek and mild part of Tess. She and Tess both hold high moral standards towards themselves. Clytemnestra is Tess's rebellious and struggling part as the two decided to murder out of hatred—their husband were the obstacles in their pursuit of a free life. Considering the transformation in their attitudes towards their husbands (Agamemnon and Alec), Tess shares more similarities with Clytemnestra. In *Oresteia*, Aeschylus shows the resistance of Clytemnestra and her even more tragic ending. The goddesses of vengeance, representing matriarchal ethics, held that Clytemnestra was not guilty of killing her non-native, unrelated husband, while Orestes was guilty of matricide. But Apollo and Athena considered the patriarchal ethic: a foreign woman who kills her husband deserves to be avenged by her son, who inherits the paternal line. Athena voted for patriarchy, acquitting Orestes and declaring a victory for patriarchy.

The trial’s outcome showed that an old, archaic matriarchy had been condemned to death, and a new, powerful patriarchy had been born. Engels noted, “The overthrow of matriarchy was a worldwide failure of women.” The falling of matriarchal society seems like a destined trend. Those against patriarchal society will encounter prosecution, and those who follow the patriarchal society are doomed to lose their voices in history. Impeccable as Penelope is, readers never witness any personal proclamation she proposes. Both endings represent the tragedy and ignorance about females’ common rights to speak for themselves. The deeply rooted cause of women’s miserable endings never changed from the time when Greek mythology and tragedies were flourishing, which was also an ancient time with few work opportunities, to the time when industries were rampant and booming—nearly three thousand years.

4. Regulations and Antagonism—The Value of Tragedy Narration

Schopenhauer says that the world is man’s appearance, and the essence of the world is the will to live. Everything in the universe is a manifestation and externalization of the will to live. However, in

human civilization, which is fighting for survival, women's bodies have become the place, means, and purpose of men's desires, and they cannot escape the fate of being objectified. According to Simone Beauvoir, human gender is inextricably linked to society's social and cultural construction, which places women in a marginal or suppressed "other" position concerning the dominant male discourse. If women want to fight for their right to speak and gain equal cultural status and development rights, they must first confront and deconstruct the dominant discourse.

The situation of women is the result of the interplay of economic, political, religious, and other cultural factors. Penelope, Clytemnestra, and Tess are the tortuous reflections of human childhood's natural and social views in literature and art and have been repeatedly interpreted, reconstructed, and reproduced. Tess becomes a perfect combination of a most impeccable woman depicted by males and a most controversial woman slurred by males. The more regulations imposed on them, the more touching and valuable their antagonism will be, and the more inhumane the patriarchal society seems to readers. She is also a projection of males' view towards females in the prosperous Victorian Era, during which the prostitution of girls was extremely tremendous. More studies touch on modernization when it comes to Victorian novels, and recently, more are touching on the hardship faced by women. It is not a trend to blemish the era but a re-discovery of more people's lives, especially women. Randall Collins, an American socialist, said in his book *The Discovery of Society* that one sign that an era is over is that it begins to be romanticized [10]. When one is to boast about a glorious time, it is always dangerous as one may ignore the dark side. It was the fortune of the Victorian Era to have a master like Thomas Hardy, who touched on the dark sides and disclosed them. Tess the Maiden will always be remembered and appreciated by more and more feminists, leading to sympathy and empathy among the trend to discover women's unheard voices.

5. Conclusion

Tess the d'Urbervilles is a work that depicts the picturesque of Victorian England and social mores of the late period of a prosperous society, which tends to be more prudish than previously. Thomas Hardy brought his attention to the kind and miserable female character Tess and evoked readers' sympathy. From the perspective of archetypal criticism, the tame and timid part of Tess comes from Penelope, a modeled character who harvested welcome and applause since Homer's and Aeschylus' depiction. However, this kind of character still exists in many male writings as a symbol of the "Angel in the house." In a patriarchal society, it is hard for characters like Penelope to have their own voices, and they will also encounter gaze from the outside world. People tend to accolade their purity and loyalty towards their husbands and sacrifice even though maintaining loyalty is a prudish law exceptionally set for females. These characters appear in many works till now, and they are widely ignored as a kind of collective unconsciousness [11]. For another thing, Tess's rebellion and protest towards Alec represents the archetype of Clytemnestra, who was originally loyal to marriage but finally killed her husband Agamemnon to avenge the sacrifice of her daughter Iphigenia. She possesses a rebellious consciousness of her spirit, which gives her a voice that belongs to females. Such an archetype is a projection of motherhood and self-awareness. Tess also partially realized a sense of awakening in the end. This process demonstrates resistance to patriarchal consciousness and a patriarchal society where patriarchal authority is no longer a rule. Hardy ironically subtitled Tess as a pure woman, which is precisely the resistance to patriarchal consciousness. Another form of collective unconsciousness gradually occupies discourse power; although it was not yet apparent in the late Victorian period, it is not uncommon in the literary field of the 20th century. Witch and angel coming to one character, a true female is fully portrayed.

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