

Space Narrative Structure and Crisis Ups and Downs On Tess of the D'Urbervilles

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Abstract

Thomas Hardy is an important realistic writer in the history of world literature. His work *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is a landmark masterpiece, which describes the tragic life of the protagonist Tess. From the perspective of spatial narrative, this paper attempts to analyze the relationship between narrative space transformation and Tess's fate crisis. The transformation of space makes Tess gradually fall into the abyss of fate, which makes Tess suffer from loss of virginity, love, soul and eventually life. Through the combined analysis of space and crisis, this paper explains the fate track of the heroine Tess, so as to reveal the unique space aesthetic thought in Hardy's novel and explore Hardy's creative ideas.

Keywords

Tess, Spatial Narrative, Crisis, Fate.

1. Introduction

Marxist philosophy holds that space and time are the basic forms of material existence, which is also true in literature. As the French scholar Jean Yves Tadié said: "novel is both a spatial structure and a temporal structure. It is said that it is a spatial structure because there is a static form organization and system under our eyes in its expanded pages; it is said that it is a temporal structure because there is no instantaneous reading, because life experiences are always unfolded in time(224)". Time and space are the basic dimensions of narrative existence. However, the field of literary research always pays attention to time and ignores the importance of space.

The arrangement of time has always been a research focus in the field of Narratology. With the efforts of many scholars, there have been some systematic research methods of narrative time. Meanwhile, literary scholars' thinking on space research is also increasing day by day, and as a new direction of Narratology in recent years, spatial narrative has become an indispensable part of literary theory. The narrative function of space can not be underestimated. It can not only bear the role of physical scenes, but also vaguely express the characters' psychology and emotion, which has great research value.

Thomas Hardy is a famous British critical realist writer in the 19th century. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is Hardy's most influential masterpiece. The research at home and abroad has been fruitful: the discussion of tragic thought, feminism and religious view has yielded affluent results. But the spatial narrative techniques in Hardy's works have not been studied in detail. At the same time, we believe that Hardy has a more far-reaching treatment of space, that is, the spatial narrative and crisis in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* are actually closely connected. There are a variety of risks and crises that lurk around Tess, bringing danger and turbulence. Therefore, this paper will reveal the ups and downs of the crisis from the perspective of spatial narrative, and deeply explore Hardy's unique way of crisis observation and narrative.

2. Spatial Narrative and Crisis Ups and Downs

2.1. From the Vale of Blakemore to Trantridge: Loss of Virginity

As a link between traditional novels and modernism, Hardy's creative techniques and thoughts are full of frontiers and cutting-edge in literary circle. And he is good at using space to show the theme of his works. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is one of the most famous representatives of Hardy's many "character and environment" novels, which is full of a large number of descriptions of the natural environment. The spatial image in the novel is naturally intertwined and inseparable with the fate of the protagonist. Moreover, each transformation of space indicates the crisis Tess is about to face. In his works, Wessex's beautiful natural scenery is closely related to the fate of different characters. Thomas Hardy spent a large amount of ink to describe all kinds of narrative space, which blends with Tess's suffering and setbacks during her life. "Hardy describes not only the distribution and combination of geographical space on Wessex, but also the traditional British rural civilization and the tragedies staged on this land" (Jiang 55). This paper divides the main space transformation into four times which trigger one crisis after another. The first time is from the Vale of Blakemore to Trantridge: loss of virginity; The second time is from the Valley of the Great Dairies to the Marlott village: loss of love; The third time is from Flintcomb-Ash farm to Tess's hometown: loss of soul; The fourth time is from the city of Sandbourne to the Temple of the Winds: loss of life. The change of living space does not bring any substantive help to Tess, indicating that Tess could not obtain happiness in this evil society. This fact vividly shows Hardy's view of destiny. Tess has no choice but could only go into the abyss of fate step by step, so the corruption and wickedness of the bourgeoisie are prominently displayed in front of everyone.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles tells the tragic life of the protagonist Tess. At the beginning, Hardy introduces to us a prosperous scene in the Vale of Blakemore, where Tess was raised:

The atmosphere beneath is languorous, and is so tinged with azure that what artists call the middle distance partakes also of that hue, while the horizon beyond is of the deepest ultramarine. Arable lands are few and limited; with but slight exceptions the prospect is a broad rich mass of grass and trees, mantling minor hills and dales within the major. Such is the Vale of Blackmoor. (37)

Hardy creates a youthful and pleasant sense of comfort with beautiful scenery and brisk style, suggesting Tess's beauty and flawless, which is related to the subtitle from the beginning. In spring, everything recovers and the whole world is lush, symbolizing Tess's budding life. Like this small and unknown niche, pure Tess is also inexperienced. Hardy's description of the Blakemore Vale is yearning and fascinating, so from another point of view, it strengthens the suffering and has a stronger impact on Tess's tragedy.

Later, the spatial narrative of the novel shifts for the first time, that is, Tess sets out to Trantridge to claim kinship with fake one. Tess, as a new comer recent arrival, observes the almost brand-new red brick building. And there is a primitive forest behind the house, but she never thinks that her fate would be completely rewritten in a similar dark forest. "She felt almost ready to faint, so vivid was her sense of the crisis" (96). The crisis quietly left seeds from the moment the horse Prince died, and gradually sprouted, which dealt a fatal blow to Tess who came to the outside world for the first time in this dark and gloomy space. The disillusionment of all good things is always heartbreaking.

Tess is defiled and her calm life is broken. Even so, Alec, the originator, does not assume any responsibility. On the contrary, after losing her innocence, Tess raises her child alone and is judged by her villagers. Being raped is Tess's first fatal crisis which even changes Tess's fate and implies that Tess is determined to had a bad end from that moment on. In the novel, crisis is linked one by one, and Tess can't get rid of the shackles of fate. Hardy reflects the living

conditions of all human beings from poor Tess. In addition, the difficult and cruel test of fate falls on every people at the bottom inevitably.

2.2. From the Valley of the Great Dairies to Marlott Village: Loss of Love

When Tess lost her child, she is determined to start looking for a new life and work at the Valley of the Great Dairies, "the valley in which milk and butter grew to rankness, and were produced more profusely"(131). Tess comes to a new world with great courage and hope, but fate never gives up the opportunity to torture her, and another crisis is quietly coming. Even though the prolific and beautiful dairy farm gives Tess a wonderful new feeling, what happened here is even more destructive to her. Angel Clare begins to pursue Tess, and the love in Tess's heart also sprouts quietly. In Chapter nineteen, when Tess walks on the verge of a deserted garden, she is attracted by Angel's harp-playing. "Tess was conscious of neither time nor space"(150). It is encouraging and gratifying for kind Tess to meet love. "However, their love lacks mutual understanding and spiritual fit from the beginning"(Ding 91). Clare falls in love with Tess, on the one hand, because Tess is really beautiful and attractive; on the other hand, because Tess's composure and ability meet his requirements for a wife. Hardy was at the end of the reign of Queen Victoria. At that time, the dominant gender ideology was that "women belongs to family and private space, while men belongs to commercial and public space"(Arseneau 10). Tess's hard work on the dairy farm, which shows she has all the skills that a farmer's wife should have, actually belongs to family space.

So Tess begins a hard but unforgettable love story in the dairy, in which she is humble to the bottom. As a symbol of a family, the dairy also implies Tess's pure and warm love towards Clare. Obviously she has devoted all her life to Clare. On the wedding night, she confides all her past to her husband to show fairness and honesty, but her confession finally breaks her beautiful reverie. Tess is abandoned and rejected by Clare himself and his family. The dejected Tess could only return to the village of Marlott: "As she drove on through Blackmoor Vale, and the landscape of her youth began to open around her, Tess aroused herself from her stupor. Her first thought was how would she be able to face her parents?"(280).

At this moment, Tess, who has lost her love, has obviously lost her previous vitality as well, and even the scenery has become depressive and strange. It is not difficult to see that Tess has the feeling of helplessness and suffering of nothing is the same as before. If Alec's rape is a physical attack on Tess, then the collapse of love with Clare causes spiritual torture to Tess. Through the detailed interpretation of space, Tess's mood changes also show up. Up to here, Tess has experienced enough twists and turns. The second crisis is obviously more painful and uncomfortable than the first one. The attack on Tess is superimposed layer by layer, which is one of the climaxes of the ups and downs of the novel.

2.3. From Flintcomb-Ash Farm to Tess's Hometown: Loss of Soul

Then Tess drifts from her hometown to the cold and snowy Flintcomb-Ash farm, where the condition is troublesome and even desolate to dead. "She comes here as if she had been destined in her previous life. When she looks at the barren soil around her, she knows immediately that the work here must be the hardest"(Liu 5). Tess appears in a humble manner, seeming to make atonement for her own fault. Tess blames Clare's abandonment totally on herself, thinking that she could try to recover Clare's cold heart by suffering in this bad environment. The cold winter of the lifeless plateau also demonstrates that Tess's hope is actually impossible.

Clare is far away in Brazil and in two different spaces with Tess at the moment, which not only makes Tess deeply in the mire of self blame, but also gives another villain an opportunity. When Alec and Tess meet for the second time, he had already changed his identity. The madman who takes pleasure in tarnishing girls turns into a believer of the church and then preaches all around. Hardy's satire on the church can be easily seen. Alec's appearance ignites the crisis

again. He keeps pestering, cajoling and intimidating Tess. It happened that Tess's father was critically ill. Tess had no choice but to fall into the swamp again.

Indeed, "Tess is an agent of both life and death in this drama directed by nature. It also indicates that the law and logic of the animal world—the stronger killing the weaker is undeniable" (Zhang 124). Returning to her hometown from Flintcomb-Ash farm to take care of her family, Tess is once again controlled by Alec, a scoundrel who is the first perpetrator on Tess's tortuous life. But unfortunately Tess can only take refuge from this bully. The crisis never disappears, but one after another disrupts Tess's uneasy life, adding to her already flawed life. The experience of Flintcomb-Ash farm represents Tess's loss of soul. It can be said that Tess, as Alec's mistress, is like a puppet.

2.4. From the City of Sandbourne to the Temple of the Winds: Loss of Life

The last transformation of space in the novel takes place at the end. Tess, who appeared as Alec's mistress, has moved her family to a new city called Sandbourne. "It was a city of detached mansions; a Mediterranean lounging-place on the English Channel; and as seen now by night it seemed even more imposing than it was" (398).

Behind the prosperity and noise, what hides is indifference and ruthlessness, depriving Tess of her right to happiness. "Compared with the ancient Egdon, Sandbourne looks flashy and pompous, which reflects Alec's hypocrisy towards Tess" (Zeng 26). In this luxurious space, Tess is more like a hostage than ever before. The tease of fate has made Tess lose her youthful vitality, and her beautiful face is shrouded in an indisputable shadow. When Tess knows that Alec deceived her, she shoots and kills Alec the demon, fleeing to the Temple of the Winds with her beloved Clare, and is unfortunately hanged at last.

"Hardy chose to bring Tess's story to a climax at a heathen place that was and is linked with paganism and sacrifice in the popular imagination: Stonehenge" (Terzise 141). The Stonehenge of the Temple of the Winds, as the final spatial narrative of the novel, raises the crisis to a peak. Furthermore, Hardy chose to end Tess's tragic life at Stonehenge for a profound purpose. Tess ends her miserable life here and becomes a victim of traditional morality. Up to here, Tess's life full of crisis comes to an imperfect end.

3. Hardy's Space Aesthetics

Hardy's Wessex novels are set in the southwest of England where he grew up and lived, full of strong local color. The countryside is "sparsely populated, relatively isolated, with agricultural production as the main economic basis. And people's lives in countryside are basically similar, but different from other parts of society, especially cities" (Wang 35). Countryside in Hardy's novels is poetic, serene and simple, containing his praise for rural life. It also enables countless readers and scholars to see a completely different local world. The rapid development of British capitalism, the bankruptcy of small-scale peasant economy and the poverty of farmers' life are clearly reflected in Hardy's works as well, which makes Hardy's contradictory psychology in the alternation of the old and new times vividly show on the paper.

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Hardy meticulously depicts the beautiful Vale of Blakemore, the rich and prolific Valley of the Great Dairies, the cold and bitter Flintcomb-Ash farm, and the indifferent and ruthless city of Sandbourne. Each space is vividly presented in the novel and is closely related to Tess's fate. Every spatial movement in Tess's life brings her more and more powerful blow, making her lose everything constantly, and finally ends her whole life. It does relate to the hypocritical and cruel social space reality. Even in the enjoyable and picturesque space, Tess is still inescapably hit by fate, which shows the fact that in the society led by capitalism, the bottom farmers like Tess could not control their own destiny. Like flowing clouds, they are wandering and have no habitat anywhere.

Hardy's description of space is real, specific, detailed and vivid. Every thing in the world including plants and animals is poured with Hardy's emotion and thought. Therefore, it can be said that Hardy creates a fatalism map in his eyes with space, condensing his unique tragedy foreordination. "The Egdon Heath, which gave birth to Tess, has always taken an indifferent attitude to examine the tragic life of Tess, the daughter of nature, and laid the general tone of Tess's Tragedy" (Liu 38). Such a tragedy cannot be easily changed. The life of the humble people at the bottom is full of doomed shackles. The trauma brought by the industrial revolution is also obvious, and Hardy, as a keen observer, focuses on the unfortunate life of the lower class with his pen. Hardy presents a bird's-eye view of society at the end of the 19th century in different spaces, showing the indifference of the bourgeoisie as well as the hardships of the peasant class. His observation is of great significance to the present and even the future.

4. Conclusion

In 1967, Michelle Foucault predicted that "we know that people indulged in history in the 19th century. But our era may first be an era of space" (22-27). Hardy puts Tess in different space. In each process of space turn, Tess falls into the dilemma brought by fate. The transformation of space makes Tess indulge step by step in the abyss of eternal disaster, followed by loss of virginity, love, soul and life. Hardy uses painting techniques to write the natural values of various rural space such as the Vale of Blakemore and highlight the indifference of cities. These spatial descriptions not only decorate the beauty of the natural world, but also emphasize the ruthlessness of human society in comparison. Hardy criticizes the hypocritical morality and ethics of the British society in the period of the transition between the old and the new society delicately and profoundly and gives strong sympathy to the people at the bottom.

Through the discussion of the space transformation in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, this paper analyzes the significance of the work, links the spatial narrative with the crisis ups and downs, and explores the narrative art of the work. It can be seen that the expression of the theme and artistic skills of the work are closely related to the spatial narrative. The handle of spatial narrative makes Tess's fate fluctuate and reflects on the shortcomings of the society. Spatial narrative is also one of the important factors for *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* to become an enduring classic.

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