

# On the Similarity of Symbolism and Tragedy in Tess of the D'Urbervilles and The Scarlet Letter

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## Abstract

**Tess of the d'Urbervilles and The Scarlet Letter are two great novels in English and American literature. The two great novelists, Thomas Hardy and Nathaniel Hawthorne portrayed respectively two tragic female characters in their books, Tess and Hester. In portraying these tragic women and the development of their miserable fates, the two authors reflected successfully the social reality of the 19th century by attacking the cruelty and injustice of society, the hypocrisy of religion, and the bourgeoisie's morality, and thus expressed their praise to the pure and kind but star-crossed women like Tess and Hester. Starting from the social background of the two works, this paper combs the tragic destinies of the two heroines and tries to analyze the similarities between them. Secondly, the symbolism, the most distinctive technique of artistic expression in the two works, is contrasted to try to analyze their similarities. Finally, the paper focuses on the cause of their tragedy based on the analysis of the tragic fate of the two heroines and symbolism. To reveal female figures in the two great masterpieces..**

## Keywords

**Tess of the d'Urbervilles, The Scarlet Letter, tragedy, symbolism.**

## 1. Introduction

Tess of the d'Urbervilles (hereinafter referred to as Tess) and The Scarlet Letter are two monumental works in the history of English and American literature. Although the countries of the two works are different, and the specific time is different, it is found that the two works are similar in some ways. Thomas Hardy, the author of Tess, was an outstanding English novelist and poet and an important representative among Victorian writers. Most of his middle works are novels, full of a strong sense of tragedy. Tess is one of Hardy's Wessex novels which mainly described the scenery of the British countryside in the second half of the 19th century and the decline of the rural society brought about by social progress, vividly showing the tragic fate of the rural people of the lower class. It was written by Hardy in 1891 when Britain was at the climax of the Industrial Revolution and became the world's leading industrial country. However, the rapid development of the Industrial Revolution disrupted the original lifestyle of rural people and sent shock waves of industrialization and urbanization through Wessex. Then the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie showed itself. People were facing tremendous changes while enduring the oppression of society and the exploitation of capitalism. By characterizing Tess, a tragic woman, Hardy revealed the social problems of that era and showed compassion for the poor people at the bottom of society.

The author of The Scarlet Letter is Nathaniel Hawthorne, a highly influential romantic novelist in the 19th century in the United States. Influenced by the theory of "original sin" in Calvinism, Hawthorne's works mostly describe the dark side of society and human nature.[1] Because his forefathers had held an office position and persecuted unarmed civilians, Hawthorne believed that he, too, bore the guilt and shame of his forebears. He wrote The Scarlet Letter in the hope that he would take on his ancestors' humiliation and clean off their sins. The publication of The

Scarlet Letter in 1850 brought Hawthorne great fame and made him a representative American writer. The first Women's Conference was being held in New York when he wrote The Scarlet Letter, along with feminists proposing equality between men and women. This work was based on the tragic love stories of the North American colonies in the 17th century to convey the author's respect for women and to expose the cruelty and hypocrisy of society at that time.

Both of the two works which portray the images of tragic women are narrated through the stories of the protagonists, and they share great similarities in both the story plot and the artistic expression techniques. For example, in Tess, Tess's tragic fate began with the deception and seduction of Alec. Even though she met her beloved Clare, they still failed to stay together in the end. In The Scarlet Letter, Hester married Chillingworth, whom she didn't love, and then met her true love, Dimmesdale. But it was also a tragedy in the end. One was the critical realist writer Hardy, and the other was the romantic writer Hawthorne. In these two books, they used symbolism in the same way. They exposed the dark side of society through symbolization which implied the tragic fate of the heroines from different perspectives, and glorified the moral excellence of the heroines, striking a chord with readers.

## 2. The Similarity between the two Protagonists' Fate

In Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Hardy created a kind, beautiful and pure woman, which can be glimpsed from the subtitle, A Pure Woman. Tess lived with her parents in a poor village in Wessex. One day, her father was told that the d'Urbervilles were descended from the famous English warriors d'Urbervilles, so to live a prosperous life, her mother sent her to go to another family of wealthy d'Urbervilles for help. Tess had no choice but to agree. Unexpectedly, the son, Alec, of the rich relative was struck by Tess's beauty. He seduced her by coaxing and deception and, making Tess pregnant. Alec, the evil seducer, ushered Tess to a path of tragic fate. Tess had to give birth to the baby, but the baby died shortly after birth. In the social prejudice and male-dominated ethnicity of that era, no one thought it was Alec's fault, and instead blamed Tess for being degraded and basebred. The death of her baby and the unwarranted charge caused Tess so much pain and suffering that she went to work to keep on living on a dairy farm on which she met her love, Angle Clare. The two quickly fell in love and decided to tie the knot later, but Tess couldn't hide her past from Clare. Feeling guilty, she told Clare sincerely about her previous misfortune on their wedding night. However, the former lover turned into an indifferent stranger and left Tess without forgiveness. Misfortunes never come singly. A few days later, the death of Tess's father brought her another strike and the whole burden of the family was on her shoulder. Desperate, Tess was forced to be with Alec again in the face of the situation that her family was dislodged out of the house, struggling with life. Later, Clare returned from Brazil, coming to Tess and telling her how his selfishness had caused her so much pain that he hoped Tess would forgive him. Tess was furious at the prospect of having her lover again while she fell into the abyss. She blamed Alec for his wickedness. Her strong will and pursuit of love gave her the courage to fight against injustice at that time, and she ruthlessly killed Alec. She spent the last five days of her life with her beloved Clare, and under the suppression of abnormal social morality, her tragic life was ended by the gallows.

The Scarlet Letter is based on the harsh colonial rule of religious authority. It is about a woman, Hester Prynne, who violated the Puritan (Calvinian) code and was punished for life by wearing the red letter "A" on her chest because of the crime of adultery, as well as her tragic love story. [2] Hester was a beautiful young woman, who married an old and sickly man Chillingworth due to poor family circumstances. She received no care from Chillingworth. When they got separated in Boston, Hester met Dimmesdale, a wise young pastor. They fell in love secretly, and Hester became pregnant and gave birth to a daughter, Pearl. But she was condemned to adultery by the Puritans and was condemned to wear the red letter "A" on her breast for

“Adultery” forever. Hester, who was unusually resolute in her nature, did not reveal the father of the child, Dimmesdale, under the Puritan’s torture. She bore all the charges and punishment for saving her beloved and then she led Pearl to live by her embroidery skills until Pearl was growing up. When Chillingworth, the aloof husband, came back, he found a clue in Hester’s daily communication with Dimmesdale. Chillingworth sneaked into Dimmesdale’s room one night after he was asleep and exulted at the find of the same red letter “A” on Dimmesdale’s chest, so he began to plot his revenge against the pastor. Even when Hester cried out to Chillingworth to spare the pastor, he could not contain the fury of revenge within him. He moved closer and closer to Dimmesdale’s heart, becoming his friend, listening to the priest’s insecurity and guilt. Day by day, under Chillingworth’s purposeful provocation, the pastor grew more tormented within himself. But with Hester’s encouragement, the pastor took heart and promised Hester to leave the place with her to start a new life. Before the final leaving, Dimmesdale’s speech won a lot of praise. Unable to bear both the glory and the pain of deception, he confessed himself to being Pearl’s father in front of the crowd. Amid the exclamations of the crowd, Dimmesdale fell on the stage. Chillingworth died soon after. Pearl left the place, but Hester chose to come back and remained by the pastor’s grave.

From the tragic life process of Tess and Hester, it can be seen that the tragedies both began with a relationship that was not from true love, and they were marginalized and disregarded by the world under the restriction of unfair social morality at that time. But they both had the courage, firm perseverance in their bodies, and the virtue of kindness and purity to fight against the injustice of the real world. They reject all negative voices with the tenacity of life. When they desperately pursued true love in the heart, they would preserve their beloved ones even if they bore notoriety and shame, or even sacrificed their own life. But in the end, their lives still ended in tragedy because of the darkness of society. To discuss the similarity between them, we can divide their tragic fates into beginnings, processes, and results for comparison.

At the beginning of the story, the two works created two young and pretty women in good shape. Hardy described Tess like this: “She was a fine and handsome girl” “her mobile peony mouth and large innocent eyes added eloquence to color and shape” and “As she walked along today, for all her bouncing handsome womanliness, you could sometimes see her twelfth year in her cheeks, or her ninth sparkling from her eyes; and even her fifth would flit over the curves of her mouth now and then.”[3] Hester was described in *The Scarlet Letter* as follows: “The young woman was tall, with a figure of perfect elegance on a large scale. She had dark and abundant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam; and a face which, besides being beautiful from regularity of feature and richness of complexion, had the impressiveness belonging to a marked brow and deep black eyes.”[4] Such beautiful girls like Tess and Hester were inevitably adored by other men, and they could have had a wonderful relationship, but in that era, reality and ideals always ran counter to each other. In Tess, though Tess was reluctant, she went to Alec’s home to claim kinship with his family. In such a pure and good age, Tess was not aware of men’s evil, even if her companions’ tease would blush her neck, so how could she see through Alec’s obscenity? When she was exhausted and fell asleep, Alec hurt her mercilessly and forced her to set foot in a tragic life. From the first time she met Alec, Alec began his repugnant plan. As Hardy put it: “One who stood fair to be the blood-red ray in the spectrum of her young life” [3] After being hurt by Alec, Tess returned home with a broken heart and gave birth to the baby. Public opinion, social pressure, and the death of her baby all took their toll on Tess. Who would have thought that one year ago she was just a little girl? In a short time, “Symbols of reflectiveness passed into her face, and a note of tragedy at times into her voice.”[3] She changed from a pure and simple little girl into a mature woman. In *The Scarlet Letter*, the marriage of Hester and Chillingworth was destined to be a tragedy. In prison, the author used the dialogue between Chillingworth and Hester to reveal the unbridgeable gap between them. The age gap and Chillingworth’s devotion to knowledge lead to a lack of affection between them,

which made Hester live in depression and loneliness in her youth. For Tess, Alec's seduction was the first tragic step in her life, and for Hester, an unhappy marriage was the beginning of her tragic fate.

In the development stage of the story, it can be seen that Tess and Hester did not lose faith and hope in life after they experienced an unsatisfactory relationship in their beautiful youth. Instead, they used their diligence, strength, and kindness to actively face the difficulties and setbacks in life. However, the real world had struck them forcibly. Tess went to work in a dairy far from home to start a new life where she met Clare and they slowly fell in love. But when Tess revealed her terrible past to Clare on their wedding night, she was brutally abandoned. For Tess, the contempt from her loved one was more devastating than the humiliation of Alec. She thought she could start to have real happiness, but instead, she found endless despair. As for Hester, after she was separated from her husband and lived alone for many years, she met Dimmesdale, a scholarly and mature pastor. During the inquest, Hester would not name the father of her child, even with the eternal stigma of notoriety. Tess and Hester both dared to pursue love, but in that era, the real world gave them different setbacks, which deepened their tragedy.

Both novels ended with a climax. Through the entanglement of the protagonist's contradictions and the ups and downs of the plot, the tragic fate of the heroines was pushed to the extreme. Facing the death of her father and the departure of her loved one, Tess had completely lost all hope and vitality in her life. Life was in trouble, and she had no choice but to live with the man once again who caused her to step into misfortune. So that when she held again the man she loved, she could no longer suppress her anger and killed the real sinner, but paid for it with her own life as well. Alone in the face of the shame and ridicule of the public, Hester lived with Pearl through her embroidery skills and won respect from the world with her kindness and simplicity. In the end, Hester and Dimmesdale might soon leave and start a new life, but Dimmesdale was unable to overcome the dread of Chillingworth's long-term psychological revenge. After he died, Hester refused to leave and stayed by his grave until she died. The love story of the two heroines ended in tragedy, but they showed extraordinary perseverance in the process of pursuing love and did not allow the love in their hearts to be tarnished even if they pay their own lives. In that hypocritical secular age, it is because of their tragedies that created their distinctions.

When the two authors described the whole stories, in addition, they set sights on star-crossed women, they also took the theme of love as the starting point and revealed the tragic fates of the heroines step by step through the emotional contradictions between the characters. The subject of love also tends to be more evocative, "Since love is the most intense expression of human's desire for happiness, it is in love that the conflict between the efforts of human beings and the relentless force of the Immanent Will is most acute."

### 3. The Similarity of Symbolism

#### 3.1. Symbolism in Persons' Names

In these two works, symbolism was used to the extreme by the authors. The first is symbolism in persons' names. In Tess, the name of Tess is Durbeyfield. The first three letters of Durbeyfield are just like one of the English words "durable" which comes from Middle English, deriving from Old French "dūrābilis" and Old Latin "dūrābilis" meaning "lasting, permanent, harden, make hard", symbolizing the tenacity of the heroine's perseverance and hard work. Meanwhile, the word "field" in "Durbeyfield" means that Tess, grew up in a rural field, with simplicity, purity, and kindness, just like the daughter of the earth. Another character, Tess's love, was named "Angle Clare" by the author. Angle means "angel", and "Clare" is very similar in sound and shape to the English word "clear". The two words together mean "one who is as clear as an angel", yet this "angel" is highly ironic. Instead of an angel making Tess happy, he was the devil who pushed

her further into the abyss. At the same time, Angle Clare despised religion. Hardy also symbolized the spiritual torture brought to Tess by Christianity from another perspective, reflecting his satire and criticism of religion. The third character is Alec, the cause of Tess's tragedy. The etymology of Alec's name was the Latin "alec", meaning herring, which comes from Old English "herring". And "herring" comes from Old English "har", which is similar in etymology to "hoar". And "hoar" comes from Middle English "hore" which is similar in etymology to German "hehr" and "Herr", meaning "noble, sublime, sir, gentleman". It can be seen that Hardy satirized Alec, who was a hypocrite with an evil heart and false identity, not a "noble" or "gentleman" at all. In addition to the symbolism in the names of the three main characters, there are other characters whose names also carry symbolism. Such as Alec's father, his name was "Simon Stokes" before he changed his name, which "stoke" means "to add fuel to a fire, etc". Hardy implicitly symbolized the social phenomenon of money supremacy in the Victorian era and also mentioned that wealthy businessmen can buy the status and reputation of a prominent family with their money in the novel. If the old aristocracy had no money and powers in the Victorian era, they would face the same end of decline. In response to this quote from Hardy: "So much for Norman blood unaided by Victorian lucre."

The symbolism in persons' names also appears in *The Scarlet Letter*. Firstly, the word "Prynne" in the heroine's name Hester Prynne looks like the word "prune", which can be understood that Hester redeemed her sins through her efforts in this tragedy, and it also reflects Hester's courage to face the dilemma positively. Secondly, "Hester" looks like "Hestier". Hestier, a kind, and beautiful goddess is the sister of Zeus in Greek mythology who was in charge of the stove and brought warmth to people, symbolizing the beautiful appearance and good quality of Hester. At the same time, "Hester" is a homonym for the word "hastier", which means hasty, symbolizing Hester's hasty marriage to Doctor Chillingworth, and foreshadowing her tragedy. [5] The pastor's name Arthur Dimmesdale, from "Dimmesdale", we can see the word "dim" which symbolized his pessimistic and gloomy character and also implies his dark life. And Arthur Dimmesdale's initial "ad", which is the same as the first two letters "ad" for "Adultery", suggests that the man that committed adultery with Hester was the pastor. Some scholars believe that "ad" stands for Adam, which symbolizes the relationship between Hester and Dimmesdale, just as Adam and Eve, who had to be punished for eating the forbidden fruit. "Chilling" coming from Hester's husband Roger Chillingworth, means chilling, which symbolizes Chillingworth's indifferent and malicious character. We can see it from the way he retaliated against Dimmesdale. Pearl, Hester's daughter, also carries some symbolic meaning like immaculate whiteness. Pearl's identity in that era represented all the sins that the Puritans abhorred. However, in the author's writing, Pearl is a symbol of purity and beauty, which also reflects the author's criticism of religion.

### 3.2. Symbolism in Colors

Colors often have different effects on literature. The color itself is not the matter, but when we put it in the environment of human beings, we give it a different meaning. [6] Color symbolism in *Tess* is dominated by red and white. Different from Eastern culture, red symbolizes danger, bad luck, and evil in Western culture. Red is used many times in the novel to symbolize the development direction of the heroine's tragic fate. For example, in *Tess*'s first appearance, all the women were dressed the same, but *Tess*'s hair was marked by a red ribbon, which hinted at her different fate; *Tess* was splattered with blood when the old horse Prince died; When she first went to Alec's house, she saw the bright red house, like a gaping demon ready to swallow her up; Alec feeds *Tess* the red strawberries; *Tess* saw bright red scriptures on her way home after being seduced, etc. All these descriptions of the color red are subtly foreshadowing *Tess*'s tragedy. In sharp contrast to red is white, which symbolizes *Tess*'s purity, simplicity, and elegance. There are plenty of descriptions of white in *Tess*'s appearance, white dresses, white

flowers, and her white silhouette which are repeatedly mentioned in the novel. Finally, after Tess killed Alec, she looked at the red dots on the white ceiling. The sharp contrast between white and red indicated that Tess from “white” was slowly turning into “red”, which not only reflected the psychological change of the character but also implied the end of Tess’s tragedy. The color symbols in *The Scarlet Letter* are mainly red and black. For Hester, red symbolized passion, lust, and recklessness, as well as the derogatory connotations of filth and shame.[7] She married the doctor showing how hasty she was about her marriage. She still chose to stay with the pastor under the strict rules of the Puritan religion, which reflected her desire for love but also brought her a corresponding stigma and guilt. As for the color black, in Western culture, it is a symbol of seriousness, mystery, sadness, despair, and terror. The description of black was mentioned from the beginning to the end of the novel. The author used “black flower” to introduce the prison. The “black rose” here highlights the black color and symbolizes darkness and evil. It not only represents the ugliness and dirt of the prison but also reflects the dark society at that time. The author also used black to describe other characters, contributing to the somber tone of the whole novel. In the description of officials: “With a black feather in his hat and black velvet tights”, “It looked like a dark woodcut portrait.” The whole narrative atmosphere of the novel is low and gloomy, and the black color highlights the darkness and corruption of society at that time.

### 3.3. Symbolism in Environmental Description

Hardy, who was famous for his environmental description, applied symbolism to his environmental description in *Tess*. First, on the night Tess was sullied by Alec, the twilight was as dark as possible and surrounded by fog. The environment symbolized that Tess was extremely dangerous and the dark forces represented by Alec. The fog surrounding Tess symbolized her tragic life that was about to be overshadowed by the shadows. The scene on the night when Tess confessed to Clare also hinted at their relationship and Tess’s fate. Second, the symbol of the changing seasons of the novel are always combined with Tess’s location shifts, with her two new departures both in the spring. Spring is the season of recovery, the grass growing and the warblers flying, when everything is full of vitality, symbolizing the good life that Tess is about to begin; as the seasons moved from autumn to winter, the author revealed Tess and Clare’s deteriorating relationship; Tess worked in a harsh environment after being abandoned by Clare, and the desolate and dilapidated village also suggested Tess’s desperate state of mind.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, the scaffold appears several times, respectively at the beginning, middle, and end of the novel. At the beginning of the novel, Hester was standing on the scaffold with Pearl in her arms, being interrogated by Puritans and humiliated by the public; the second time was when reverend Dimmesdale went to the scaffold at night to repent; the third time, when Dimmesdale revealed the truth, he stood on stage and held up the scarlet letter A on his chest. The scaffold here symbolized the place of the emancipation of the soul, where Dimmesdale repented and sought liberation. It also symbolized Hester’s unyielding spirit of resistance to realistic society. Hawthorne also criticized the cruelty of Puritan torture represented by the scaffold in the novel: “Like the gallows used by the French terrorists”, is “more terrible outrage against the universal nature of man.” There are also many references to prisons. Prison imprisons prisoners just as Puritan thought oppressing people’s thoughts, which is heavy and firm with the ruling class.[8] In addition, it can be seen that forests appear repeatedly in *The Scarlet Letter*. In the forest, Hester could pick off the scarlet letter “A” and Pearl could possess happiness. In the story, the forest is like the refuge of Hester and Pearl, which symbolized the refuge of the Puritans and also the refuge of all the oppressed hard-working people. Along with the appearance of the forest, the stream is also a symbolic carrier in the novel. The brook

separated Hester and her daughter, suggesting that Hester and Pearl have two completely different worlds. Pearl's future is bright and hopeful, while Hester's future is unfortunate.

#### **4. The Similarity in the Causes of Tragedy**

The first two parts of this paper discussed the similarity in the tragic fate of two heroines and the symbolism in the two works. The following part will be based on the two aspects above to analyze the tragic causes of the two heroines and their similarities.

##### **4.1. Economic Poverty**

Both novels focus on women of low social status at the time. Tess and Hester both came from poor families, and their poor lives forced them to take their first tragic steps. Tess's family is descended from the once powerful Sir D'Urberville, but they had not made a good living out of their titles. In the Victorian era, money was paramount in society. Without the support of money and capital, even the old aristocracy would also face the end of the decline. Because of the family's difficult situation and the identity of the eldest daughter in the family, Tess could only help her parents take on the heavy responsibility of the family and went to Alec's family for benefits. The second time she lived with Alec again was due to the same poverty. With the major workforce father dead and her family banished, Tess had no choice but to sacrifice herself for the safety of her family.

Hester, like Tess, was descended from an ancient aristocrat. However, the decline of the family and estates as well as the poor economic conditions made Hester dare not have too many extravagant expectations and better choices of marriage. Attracted by the wealth and knowledge of the old Chillingworth, Hester married him. But they did not have any feelings for each other, which led her to an unhappy married life and spent her youth alone.

Both heroines were at the bottom of society due to poor economic conditions. They had no choice in love and even after being hurt there is no place to appeal for justice for themselves. Facing the survival pressure of the family and themselves, they had no choice but to stay with someone they didn't like. They had to choose a road full of frustrations, which led to a tragic life. The perspective of the disadvantaged woman can make the reader have a strong resonance with the protagonists. This also shows the two authors' sympathy and also reflects the author's criticism of the unfair social class at that time.

##### **4.2. Inequality between Women and Men**

Tess and Hester lived in a capitalist society where there was serious gender inequality, which is embodied in the fact that men are superior to women. Deformed social morality made women receive extremely unfair treatment, but men can abuse the weak woman at will, and be free to vent their desires without being punished. Everything a woman does will be magnified infinitely and even raised to the point of having a wrong character. Tess and Hester were just examples of the tragic women of that period, many of whom had been accused of infidelity and impurity. This means that in a patriarchal society, women are often unable to get rid of tragic fate.[9]

In Tess when Tess was assaulted by Alec, it was Tess who was punished, not Alec. In the age when truth was disregarded, however, she was regarded as an impure woman and was blamed ever since. Not only did Alec bring Tess physical pain, but he also left an irreparable shadow on Tess's mind, but he was still able to be unrestrained, unfettered to live his rich life. Clare didn't directly harm Tess the way Alec did, but he indirectly pushed Tess into the abyss. On the surface, Clare was protecting and caring for Tess like an angel, but in fact, there was a false chauvinism in Clare's heart. He and Tess confessed to each other, and Tess could forgive him for his entanglements with some women, but he couldn't forgive Tess's past. If he could truly

understand Tess without being influenced by the social values of male superiority, Tess would not have such a tragic ending.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Chillingworth married Hester not because of his true love for Hester, but to satisfy his inner loneliness. He knew this combination was wrong, but he still made this choice. After being informed of his wife's infidelity, he tried all means to retaliate against the back and maim their psychology. He was too cowardly to admit his relationship with Hester, and he couldn't understand that he too had a part in the tragedy. Dimmesdale, the young pastor, was not really in love with Hester either, perhaps saying that between God and Hester, he had chosen God. When he saw Hester being convicted of adultery, he did not stand up and take the consequences with her but chose to continue to wear the light and honor that God had bestowed on him. Why could Hester be found guilty of adultery but he could hide his identity and continue to preach? Perhaps because Hester had given birth to Pearl. After intense love, a man can leave, but a woman may have to devote the rest of her life to it. This also reflects the physical and psychological nature of the gap between men and women. As we can see, women are often the victims in such an unequal society. The social value that men are superior to women is one of the reasons for women's tragedies at that time.

### 4.3. Social Causes

In addition to the two factors mentioned above, the surrounding social environment is also one of the causes of the tragedy of Tess and Hester. The setting of Tess was the heyday of the Victorian period and the rapid development of the Industrial Revolution. Clare was an intellectual produced at this stage. Compared with Alec, he was gentle, polite, and studious. However, he could not tolerate Tess with a broad mind when facing Tess's confession. His selfishness exposed the moral hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie firmly engraved on him. At that time, the so-called marriage monogamy was destroyed at will by the powerful bourgeoisie, just as Alec could abuse Tess optionally and get the marriage certificate behind Tess's back. When Alec returned the second time, he turned into a sanctimonious priest. Tess couldn't understand why such a dirty and sinister person became a priest instead of being punished. Tess learned that God did not protect those who believed in Him when they were hurt, not only to turn a blind eye but to allow bad people to go on with their lives. From the perspective of Tess, the author criticized the hypocrisy and unfair moral laws of Christianity at that time.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne also created several images of the upper bourgeoisie for us. Chillingworth was an intellectual, but his behavior was the opposite of that of an intellectual. In revenge, he used all means to maim the mind of the priest and Hester, causing endless spiritual harm and oppression to them. Through this character, we can see that the upper bourgeoisie intellectuals of that era are just wearing a false and bright coat outside, but they are dirty and ugly inside. The pastor was a representative of Puritans in the text. He wanted to share happiness with Hester, but he was afraid of blasphemy at the same time. Compared with brave and strong Hester, he was cowardly and timid. He was no different from the Puritan officials, who believed in religious law and social morality on the surface, but did mean and ugly things stealthily. Even after Hester was released from prison, they still required her to bear the scarlet letter "A", so that she could continue to suffer endless pain.

It can be seen that the religious hypocrisy in that society blinds people's eyes, distorts black and white, wrongly defines justice and evil, and brings harm and pain to good and pure people like Tess and Hester, while the moral hypocrisy of capitalism is the devil that further pushes them into the abyss of tragedy.



## 5. Conclusion

Through the comparative analysis of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *The Scarlet Letter*, this paper finds that the heroines of the two works share similar tragic fates. This paper further analyzes the symbolic meaning of the two works, including the symbol of the name, the symbol of the color, and the symbol of the natural environment, and finds that the cause of the heroine's tragedy is also similar to some extent. It can be seen that while portraying tragic female images, the two great novelists, Hardy and Hawthorne, used symbolism to profoundly expose and attack the unfair legal rules of society at that time, satirizing the hypocrisy of religion and the hypocritical bourgeois morality and praising Tess and Hester this kind and industrious, strong and brave woman of the time. But Hardy and Hawthorne have different priorities in the process of revealing the themes of the novel. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is a powerful indictment of the hypocrisy and deceit of Christian morality. *The Scarlet Letter*, on the other hand, deeply criticizes the cruelty of Puritan morality and exposes its repression and destruction of human nature.

Although the two authors brought us two great works which occupy an important position in the history of British and American literature, under the specific background, the authors themselves were also affected by some social morality at that time, which limited their cognition and ideas. These influences will inevitably be carried over into the works of the authors. Maybe some ideas in the novel can't resonate with modern people, and some ideas can't be accepted. Hawthorne, for example, was still heavily influenced by Puritanism, and Hardy had some limitations in his worldview. However, we can't deny the literary talent and creative and criticized spirit of the two authors.

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