



# A Reading of Alec in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* from Eysenck's Personality Theory

Lijie Hou

School of Foreign Languages, Xinjiang University, Urumqi 830049, Xinjiang, China.

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\***Corresponding author:** Lijie Hou, School of Foreign Languages, Xinjiang University, Urumqi 830049, Xinjiang, China.

## Abstract

Thomas Hardy, a renowned English novelist, is a literary master who spans multiple centuries. Among Hardy's many works, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is one of his most important representative works. The novel tells the tragic story of a beautiful rural girl named Tess. From the age of 16, Tess went to the house of Alec d'Urberville as a worker and was seduced by the ill-intentioned Alec, which opened the prelude to Tess's tragedy. As one of the main factors leading to the tragedy of the novel, Alec d'Urberville has important research significance. This paper will interpret one of the main characters Alec d'Urberville in *Tess* from a psychological perspective. Based on Eysenck's Personality Theory, this paper will analyze Alec from the following three aspects: extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism. It will mainly analyze Eysenck's specific performance within the novel in terms of the specific performance characteristics of the three dimensions above. At the end of this paper, Alec's main personality characteristics will be summarized.

## Keywords

*Tess of the D'Urbervilles*; Alec D'Urberville; Psychology; Personality theory

## 1. Introduction

Alec is one of the main characters in the novel. At the beginning of the novel, Tess's family makes her have no choice but to go to the d'Urbervilles to ask for help. Alec was attracted to the beautiful Tess at first sight and promised to give Tess a job. After that, with the help of Alec, Tess had a job in the management of the poultry farm of Mrs d'Urbervilles. Despite his many failures to get close to Tess, he still didn't give up and tried to conquer Tess, the country girl. From the very beginning, he despised Tess's poor family. The initiative of his pursuit of Tess over and over again came down to conquering her rather than falling in love with her. On an ordinary weekend, he finally found his chance. Tess was on her way back to the manor with a friend, and Alec took advantage of the situation to ask Tess to go with him. He took Tess to a sparsely populated forest and raped her while she slept.

After that, she met her true love Clare on a farm, but unfortunately, Clare knew what had happened to her and abandoned her, traveling to Brazil. By this time, Alec had become a priest. They met again. Although he appeared to be a changed man, he continued to pester Tess, shamelessly attempting to let Tess move in with him. Meanwhile, the death of Tess's father put Tess's family in danger of starvation. Alec took advantage of her dilemma and lured Tess into living with him. Clare regretted abandoning Tess after his ordeal life in Brazil and returned to try to mend their love. Alec, who already knew about Clare's recurrence, sneered at Tess. Finally, he was killed by the desperate Tess, ending his life.

Therefore, this essay will use Eysenck's personality theory to analyze Alec in the novel, through the description of the plot of the novel, and ultimately summarize his main personality traits to gain a basic and clear understanding of his personality.

## 2. Personality Analysis

The famous poet Xu Zhimo had been the first to translate Hardy's poetry, and Hardy was the poet he translated the most (Geng Jing, 2021, p. 40). This shows that Hardy's work is highly influential and culturally valuable. Therefore, the portrayal of Alec in *Tess* is well worth interpreting. Eysenck developed the theoretical framework and contributed to the empirical foundations supporting the dimensional structure of personality defined by three 'super factors': extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism (PEN). The three super factors are also known as the three factors of personality (Eysenck, 2021, p. 109974). They are Extraversion (introverted or extraverted), Neuroticism (emotionally stable or unstable), and Psychoticism (friendly or aggressive). Therefore, this essay will use Eysenck's personality theory to analyze Alec in the novel.

### 2.1 Extraversion

This chapter focuses on a detailed analysis of the traits Alec exhibits on extraversion. "Typical extraverted people are sociable, enjoy parties, and have many friends. At the same time, they are talkative, like to seek excitement, are eager to get things done, and are generally impulsive. In addition, this type of person likes to joke with others, answer questions off the cuff, and be aggressive. They are irritable. In short, they do not always have good control over his emotions and, as a result, he is often not a trustworthy person" (Hai Hui, 1982, pp. 8-10).

#### 2.1.1 A Talkative and Sociable Person

Alec mainly appears in the novel in the first and sixth phases. In the first phase, after meeting Tess for the first time, his words and behaviors present the different personality traits in him. When Alec first met the unfamiliar Tess, he took the initiative to walk forward and greeted Tess warmly. When Tess was too embarrassed to make her intentions known, he asked several questions in succession, encouraged Tess to express her intentions several times, and eventually offered to help Tess and decided to offer her a job.

"Well, my Beauty, what can I do for you?" "I am Mr d'Urberville. Have you come to see me or my mother?" "Cannot I answer your purpose? What is the business you wish to see her about?" "Pleasure?" "Never mind; I like foolish things. Try again, my dear," "Where do you live?" "Supposing we walk round the grounds to pass the time, my pretty Coz?" "Do you mind my smoking?" (Hardy, 2016, pp. 37-39).

This is the first meeting between Tess and Alec when Tess turns to the d'Urbervilles for help and wants to claim kinship with the family. Although Tess is beautiful and kind, she is also naive and does not understand the sinister nature of human nature (Su Shimin, 2020, p. 65). When they first meet as strangers, Alec addresses Tess as "my beauty", which is not supposed to happen between strangers. At the same time, he introduces himself as "Mr. D'Urbervilles" to show off his status as an important member of the grand family—the D'Urbervilles family. Then, his address to Tess changes to "my dear". It shows that, on the one hand, he is coaxing Tess to tell him the purpose of her visit; on the other hand, he tries to draw distance between him and Tess closer. At last, he addresses Tess as "my pretty Coz." "Coz" is the colloquial version of "cousin" in the place where the two speakers live. It seems to show that Alec has acknowledged his "poor relations" (Cao Zhongkai, 2015, pp. 252-253).

Even with strangers, he is able to take the initiative to communicate with others in a very natural and unobtrusive way. When Tess was afraid to show her intention, he first addressed her kindly and asked some questions that could be answered without thinking which eased Tess's nervousness. When Tess was no longer nervous, he began to ask Tess's name and identity. He took the initiative to address Tess as a cousin when he learned that she might be a relative, which can draw a close distance from Tess. At the same time, he invited her to walk around. It can be inferred from his verbal behavior that he is a sociable and talkative person.

After he insulted Tess last time, they met again in the poultry-farm, and he affectionately called Tess a beautiful woman, as if he was not the one who insulted Tess last time. This tone and address relaxed Tess's vigilance, after which he took the initiative to teach Tess how to whistle, and took the opportunity to approach Tess many times. Gradually, the distance between them gets closer. It must be said that Alec is well-versed in how to get along with people.

"Upon my honor!" cried he, "there was never before such a beautiful thing in Nature or Art as you look," (Hardy, 2016, p. 60). A familiarity with Alec d'Urberville's presence—which that young man carefully cultivated in her by playful dialogue, and by jestingly calling her his cousin when they were alone. (Hardy, 2016, p. 62).

### 2.1.2 A Thrill-seeking and Impulsive Person

When Alec and Tess met for the second time, he drove Tess in his carriage down the slope at a fast gallop. What appears to be very exciting is dangerous and frightening to Tess, and he does not care in the slightest when Tess asks him to slow down. He mentioned in the novel that he is always speeding down the road, showing that he is a thrill seeker. Time is not urgent. A slow walk can also reach the destination. However, he thought of excitement and did not think that danger might happen, nor that it would upset Tess. If Tess had been injured or died because of his impulsive behavior, he would not have felt guilty. It can be speculated that he acted impulsively.

“You will go down slow, sir, I suppose?” she said with attempted unconcern. D'Urberville looked round upon her, nipped his cigar with the tips of his large white centre-teeth, and allowed his lips to smile slowly of themselves. “Why, Tess,” he answered, after another whiff or two, “Why, I always go down at full gallop. There's nothing like it for raising your spirits.” (Hardy, 2016, p. 52).

When they encountered the second slope, he once again disregarded Tess's request and sped down the slope. He communicated with Tess in a joking tone and took advantage of Tess's fear to blackmail her into letting him kiss her. He made unreasonable demands on the unfamiliar Tess, whom he met for only the second time, even without knowing Tess's character. It can be seen that he never thinks things through and does as he pleases. To put it in popular terms in today's society, he has no sense of boundaries between people. When it comes to things that cannot be done, even in the wrong way, he wants to gain his ends.

“Now then, again!” said d'Urberville. “No, no!” said Tess. “Show more sense, do, please.” He loosened rein, and away they went a second time. D'Urberville turned his face to her as they rocked, and said, in playful raillery: “Now then, put your arms round my waist again, as you did before, my Beauty.” “Never!” said Tess independently. “Let me put one little kiss on those holmberry lips, Tess, or even on that warmed cheek, and I'll stop—on my honour, I will!” (Hardy, 2016, p. 54).

### 2.1.3 Irritability

Under his compulsion, he kissed Tess. Tess wiped the place where he kissed her with her handkerchief. However, Tess's unconscious behavior angered him again. He said sarcastically that Tess, a girl from the countryside, is very sensitive, even though it was due to his rude and impolite behavior that the incident happened. He did not take Tess's wishes into consideration at all. It is as if Tess's behavior has hurt his pride. What's more, he angrily warned Tess and asked to kiss her again. Alec's rude behavior shows his impulsive and untrustworthy character. Alec is a manipulative, sinister young man who does everything he can to seduce the inexperienced Tess (Lu Yuanbin, 2015, pp. 176-177).

“But I don't want anybody to kiss me, sir!” she implored. “And I wouldn't have come if I had known!” He was inexorable, and she sat still, and d'Urberville gave her the kiss of mastery. No sooner had he done so than she flushed with shame, took out her handkerchief, and wiped the spot on her cheek that had been touched by his lips. His ardor was nettled at the sight, for the act on her part had been unconsciously done. “You are mighty sensitive for a cottage girl!” said the young man. (Hardy, 2016, pp. 54-55).

### 2.1.4 Aggressiveness

After the first meeting, Alec's true nature is revealed as he waits until Tess has gone and then begins to describe Tess in rude terms. Judging from this, he thought Tess was a country girl that he looked down on from the start, and he even made fun of Tess's affairs.

When d'Urberville got back to the tent he sat down astride on a chair reflecting, with a pleased gleam in his face. Then he broke into a loud laugh. “Well, I'm damned! What a funny thing! Ha-ha-ha! And what a crummy girl!” (Hardy, 2016, p. 41).

After Tess gets out of the carriage on the pretext of picking up her hat, he realizes that Tess did it on purpose. Therefore, this made him even more angry and he began to curse her with rude words, cursing Tess with everything he could think of. He even blocked her way with the horse, even though it was dangerous and could even cause Tess to get hurt. He didn't care at all. This creates a stark contrast to the image of him when he first meets Tess. Prior to this, the reader may have been given the impression that he was a soft-spoken gentleman. However, the rapidity of

the image change makes the reader quickly realize that Alec is not a good person. From the above points, it is assumed that he is not only irritable but his words and behavior are aggressive. Once something happens that makes him angry, he does not control his words and behavior. Rude words and behavior are a turn-off.

“You artful hussy!” Her strategic silence confirmed his suspicion. Then d'Urberville cursed and swore at her, and called her everything he could think of for the trick. Turning the horse suddenly he tried to drive back upon her, and so hem her in between the gig and the hedge. But he could not do this short of injuring her. (Hardy, 2016, p. 55-56).

When he met Tess at the poultry-farm, he spoke to Tess in a sarcastic tone again. It appears that he is addressing her affectionately, but he is actually mocking Tess.

“There was never before such a beautiful thing in Nature or Art as you look, ‘Cousin’ Tess (‘Cousin’ had a faint ring of mockery). (Hardy, 2016, p. 60).

In short, he is a hideous, evil specter who is the key to Tess’s misery (Hardy 2016). One such scene in the novel is impressive. When Tess was arguing with a fellow girl, Alec came and took Tess away. It is as if Tess has been rescued from a difficult situation. Unexpectedly, after they left, the people just around them started bursting into laughter. Dark Car’s mother said that Tess fell into the fire. From the implied meaning of this statement, Tess falls from this one predicament into Alec’s trap. This shows that Alec’s image is extremely evil in the eyes of the workers around him. It can be said that he is not a trustworthy man and is aggressive in the minds of the people. This also sets the stage for Alec to hurt Tess in the later section. Tess’s encounter is sympathetic. We cling lovingly to Tess throughout her story. We know her, psychologically and physically, in all her particularity and follow every extenuating detail of her fate (Brigid, 2009, p. 56-60). Many details also suggest that Alec’s words and behaviors are key factors in Tess's tragedy.

“Ho-ho-ho!” laughed dark Car. “Hee-hee-hee!” laughed the tipling bride, as she steadied herself on the arm of her fond husband. “Heu-heu-heu!” laughed dark Car's mother, stroking her moustache as she explained laconically: “Out of the frying pan into the fire!” (Hardy, 2016, p. 71).

## 2.2 Neuroticism

With regard to the dimension of neuroticism, which focuses on emotional stability or instability, people with higher levels of neuroticism are emotionally unstable. Eysenck wrote: “people who are emotionally unstable show high anxiety, moodiness, and agitation. They tend to react too strongly to various stimuli. It is difficult to calm down after emotional impulses. Because their judgment of things is often influenced by emotional impulses, their behavior sometimes seems unreasonable and sometimes rigid and paranoid. In contrast, emotionally stable people, whose emotional reactions are slow and mild, can easily regain their composure. Moreover, they are often steady, mild-natured, good at self-control, and less prone to anxiety.” (Hai Hui, 1982, p. 8-10).

### 2.2.1 Mercurial Mood

Alec’s emotions are shown to be varied throughout the novel. For the most part, his emotions seem to be relatively stable, which makes his several mood changes seem more obvious. Therefore, in order to make the judgment more accurate, this thesis has been conducted by taking a look at his mood changes as well as inferring the degree of emotional stability from the performance of an emotionally stable person in turn.

From the point of view of the second time they met, Alec forcibly kissed Tess and then Tess wiped her cheek, which made him suddenly angry. Although it was a knee-jerk act of Tess, he did not control his emotions and said to Tess in sarcastic terms. After Tess got out of the car to pick up the hat, he recognized that Tess had done it on purpose. As a result, he curses her and even acts in a way that might endanger Tess’s life. And when Tess expressed her idea of going home in desperation, and even said something about hating Alec, the common thought would be that he would be angrier than before. But surprisingly, he then cracked a smile because of it. It can be inferred that his mood changes are varied.

“You artful hussy!” “You ought to be ashamed of yourself for using such wicked words!” “I don’t like it at all! I hate and detest you! I’ll go back to mother, I will!” D'Urberville's bad temper cleared up at sight of hers; and he laughed heartily. “Well, I like you all the better,” he said. (Hardy, 2016, p. 56).

The number of emotional changes about Alec in the novel is limited, however, we can also speculate from the opposite point of view. According to Eysenck, emotionally stable people have slow emotional responses. However, according to his emotional response in the novel, his emotional response is rapid. For example, Tess wiped her face which hurt his pride. He insulted Tess. He insulted the old Mr. Clare when he tried to guide him; when Tess's employer, Groby, yelled at Tess and upset him, he would immediately reprimand him; He yelled back when he was challenged about not preaching anymore; and when he saw that Tess was upset about Clare's second departure, he made a mockery of Tess, and so on, he was not an emotional slow person, and it was obvious that he was not a gentleman either.

"You are mighty sensitive for a cottage girl!" (Hardy, 2016, p. 55), "and I, wretched fellow that I was, insulted him when, in his disinterestedness, he tried to reason with me and show me the way." (Hardy, 2016, p. 334). "What the devil are you doing away y from your work at this time o' day?" Farmer Groby had espied the two figures from the distance and had inquisitively ridden across, to learn what it was their business in his field. "Don't speak like that to her!" said d'Urberville, his face blackening with something that was not Christianity (Hardy, 2016, p. 345). Just at the corner of the street, he met the man with the paint-pot, who asked him if he had deserted the brethren. "You go to the devil!" said d'Urberville (Hardy, 2016, p. 387). There were more and sharper words from the man. (Hardy, 2016, p. 416).

## 2.3 Psychoticism

A person with a high level of neuroticism is "withdrawn and indifferent to others. They are often annoying and have poor relations with others. They usually lack of love and empathy for others and are indifferent to everything. They often have malice towards others, even their own family members and close friends. They often show aggression, even towards their loved ones. They often have quirks or unusual hobbies. At the same time, they are not afraid of danger and like to play tricks on others" (Hai Hui, 1982, pp. 8-10).

### 2.3.1 Poor Relationship

Alec's behavior regarding psychoticism in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is more evident in the way he treats his mother as well as the way he treats strangers. One speculation can be identified that he has a poorer relationship with other people. In addition, he shows a great deal of indifference towards his own mother. His relationship with his mother is broken, judging from the only previous plots in the novel in which he and his mother were involved.

The first time is when Tess arrives at the poultry-farm and Mrs d'Urberville hears someone talking about Alec. She made a sound of disgust accompanied by a look of disgust on her face. When Alec is puzzled by his blind mother's request that Tess teach the animals to whistle, he describes his mother in derogatory terms such as selfish. The second time is when Tess left the poultry-farm. During his separation from Tess, he added that he was about to leave Trantridge for London. His reason is that he cannot stand his mother.

"Mr d'Urberville whistled to 'em in this morning, ma'am," said Elizabeth. "He! Pooh!" The old lady's face creased into furrows of repugnance. (Hardy, 2016, p.60). "My mother wants you to carry on their musical education. How selfish of her!" (Hardy, 2016, p. 61). "I am going to London for a time—I can't stand the old woman." (Hardy, 2016, p. 83).

More than one plot in the novel shows that he does not get along well with the people around him. Judging from the fact that he took Tess away after she had a conflict with a fellow woman and then the attitude of the others towards this act, the workers on the farm are well-known for Alec's terrible behavior. The use of FIRE to describe Alec in the text shows that Alec has an extremely harsh image in the minds of the workers. Confronted with the kind persuasion of the old Mr. Clare, he came right out with insulting words despite the fact that Mr Clare is an elder. Faced with a stranger's questioning, he directly scared him off with profanity. He does not care to be on good terms with people, judging by his attitude towards the common people. When something happens that upsets him, he retaliates with harsh words and behavior. It's not hard to imagine that his relationships with other people are also extremely awful.

"Ho-ho-ho!" laughed dark Car. "Hee-hee-hee!" laughed the tipping bride, "Heu-heu-heu!" laughed dark Car's mother, stroking her moustache as she explained laconically: "Out of the frying pan into the fire!" (Hardy, 2016, p. 71). "He (old Mr. Clare) came to Trantridge; and I, insulted him when" (Hardy, 2016, p. 334). Just at the corner of the street, he met the man with the paint-pot, who asked him if he had deserted the brethren. "You go to the devil!" said d'Urberville. (Hardy, 2016, p. 387).

### 2.3.2 Lack of Compassion

Two episodes in the novel clearly indicate his lack of empathy for Tess. The first one occurred in the first phase. When Tess reluctantly accepted his unreasonable request in tears, he still kissed her coldly without caring about what Tess thought; the second one occurred in the second phase. When Tess left the poultry-farm, he showed his indifference without the slightest hint of heartfelt sympathy for Tess when she was in tears at the sight of the village of Marlott. Even though it was because of him that Tess lost her virginity and then left the poultry-farm. Regarding the death of Tess's father and the fact that her family had nowhere to live, even though he claimed that he loved Tess, he did not show any heartache or sympathy for Tess. What's more, he used it as an opportunity to blackmail Tess into living with him. It is assumed that he also lacks empathy for the heartbreaking and despairing loss of a loved one.

A big tear beginning to roll down her face, and the corners of her mouth trembling in her attempts not to cry. "And I wouldn't have come if I had known!" He was inexorable, and she sat still, and d'Urberville gave her the kiss of mastery. (Hardy, 2016, p. 55). "What are you crying for?" he coldly asked. (Hardy, 2016, p. 81).

### 2.3.3 Strange Hobbies

Two episodes in the book confirm that Alec has strange hobbies. The first is when he picks up Tess to go to the poultry-farm. He claimed that he often sped down the road. He used this life-threatening behavior to scare Tess. It is as if he didn't care about such dangers in the slightest. The second occurs when he hides behind the bed curtains and teases Tess as she teaches the bird singing. He didn't give up on this nasty behavior until Tess noticed this fearsome action.

"I always go down at full gallop. There's nothing like it for raising your spirits." (Hardy, 2016, p. 52). Tess was at the window where the cages were ranged. The old lady was not present, and turning round the girl had an impression that the toes of a pair of boots were visible below the fringe of the curtains. She searched the curtains every morning after that but never found anybody within them. Alec d'Urberville had evidently thought better of his freak to terrify her by an ambush of that kind. (Hardy, 2016, p. 62).

## 3. Conclusion

This thesis specifically analyzes Alec's major appearances in the novel and ultimately concludes his personality traits by applying the main characteristics of Eysenck's personality theory. Alec's specific manifestations in the three dimensions of Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Psychoticism are presented, ultimately leading to his main personality traits in the novel.

In terms of Extroversion, he is mainly characterized as an extroverted person. Alec is mainly characterized by the extraverted personality traits of sociability, thrill-seeking, irritability, and aggressiveness, which are mainly summarized from the analysis of his specific words and actions. Ultimately, based on the above characteristics, it can be judged that Alec is an extroverted person. In terms of neuroticism, neuroticism is mainly characterized by emotional instability or stability. It is concluded that Alec is an emotionally unstable person, which means that his characteristics manifest themselves in a higher level of neuroticism. When it comes to psychoticism, the main manifestations are friendliness and aggressiveness. His personality traits are more evident in this dimension compared to the first two dimensions. From the three specific manifestations of his poor interpersonal relationships, lack of empathy, and strange hobbies, it can be concluded that he has an aggressive personality, which means that he has a high level of psychoticism manifestations.

In a word, with the help of psychology, there is a more thorough knowledge and understanding of the characters. A more accurate perception of the inner and essential nature of the character can be obtained. Therefore, an awareness of the character's personality is essential.

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