

## Postmodern Tess: Recent Readings of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

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No Hardy heroine has divided critical opinion more radically than Tess of the D'Urbervilles.<sup>1</sup> Hardy's defiant sub-title, 'A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented', challenges the moral preconceptions of his Victorian readership, insisting that Tess's sexual violation is no bar to her moral purity.<sup>2</sup> The history of the novel's rewritings reflects not only Hardy's negotiation with contemporary sexual mores, but also his own complex feelings about Tess: 'I have not been able to put on paper all that she is, or was, to me.'<sup>3</sup> 'In the light of a critical practice that demands a stable and coherent consolidation of character', Penny Boumelha writes, Tess can only be read as 'complex and contradictory.'<sup>4</sup> Peter Widdowson, postmodernizing Tess, has left behind him any such critical practice, and even perhaps his own modernist reading in which juxtaposed multiple registers of Tess's character fracture, in Cubist mode, the plane of vision.<sup>5</sup> His up-to-the-minute Tess is one whose inconsistencies make her 'unknowable' in a way that explodes the whole notion of character as 'a humanist-realist mystification'.<sup>6</sup>

Instability of meaning, as Terry Eagleton remarks, is the doctrinal obsession of postmodernism.<sup>7</sup> But postmodernism, like modernism, has its peculiar ache. There seems to linger, especially among those postmodernists committed to a particular ideological position, a feeling that undecidability and instability need to be reconciled with some kind of 'design'. For the materialist critic John Goode the design is 'polemical':

we should try to become the reader the book demands. If there is no comfort in coherence (we cannot put the book down, and say amen) it is no more merely an exhilarating exercise. We must acknowledge the novel's disjunctions as a particular strategy ... I will stress a polemical design in which the discontinuities are seen as properties of the intellectual discourses the text articulates.<sup>8</sup>

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And so Goode's project is to reconcile 'discontinuities' and 'incoherence' with design, and in this case the design is Marxist-derived.

What productive value does undecidability have for the late twentieth-century reader of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*? Does postmodernist critical practice provide a useful way of looking at a text and a heroine so often felt to be full of contradiction? According to Widdowson, it is feminist and new historicist critics, rather than materialists, who have made the major contribution to the postmodernist 'retooling' of this novel. My discussion will consider some recent feminist and new historicist essays in relation to the decisive events of Phase the First: the 'rape/seduction' of Tess and the birth of her child. In exploring the intersections between the interpretative uncertainties caused by Hardy's textual revisions and the current obsession with undecidability, I will look first at editorial policy and secondly at interpretative issues more generally.

1998 saw the publication of two paperback editions of the novel: the Penguin, edited by Tim Dolin and introduced by Margaret Higonet, and John Riquelme's edition for the Bedford Books Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism. Each contains an updated bibliography; Higonet's introduction situates her reading within the context of post-modernist approaches to the novel; Riquelme follows the Bedford Books policy of including representative essays which will provide readers with 'an entree into the current critical and theoretical ferment in literary studies.'<sup>9</sup> Riquelme's choice of copy text is based on the 1912 Wessex edition, on the grounds that it represents Hardy's final sense of the novel. Tim Dolin chooses for his Penguin copy text the first edition of 1891, on the grounds that 'it presents *Tess* in a state of overt incompleteness, evidenced by the missing Chaseborough dance sequence, at a significant moment in the history of its conception and reading'. This process of textual flux is honoured because it 'calls into question any principles of authorial origination or final intentions.'<sup>10</sup> The missing episode of the Chaseborough

dance (Riquelme, Chapter X), in both its versions (as a short story for the *National Observer* in 1891, and in its final version in 1912) is reprinted as Appendix V.

Hardy's 'intentions' in excising the episode may perhaps be gauged from the fact that W.E. Henley's *National Observer*, to which Hardy submitted a rewritten version as a separate story, was a magazine which refused to cater to middle class notions of respectability. As Dolin himself points out, Hardy had become an expert self-bowdlerizer, not surprisingly in the case of this novel, which was rejected for serial publication by three successive publishers because of its 'frequent and detailed references to immoral situations.'<sup>11</sup> It seems worth asking, then, whether the Hardy of 1912, freed from such constraints, might be a voice worth attending to on the question of 'original' and 'final' intentions. Even if we prefer to think in terms of 'textual' rather than 'authorial' intentions, I would argue that the Chaseborough dance episode takes its place in a sequence of scenes that even postmodernists have been disposed to read as indicative of significant 'design'.

The case for including the episode must rest partly on the ways in which it echoes the early sequence of the May-Day Dance, in Chapter 2, with its fateful, if failed encounter between Tess and Angel Clare. As the narrator informs us, the custom has an ancient origin, deriving from the Cerealia, or celebration of Ceres, Roman goddess of the harvest. From the Cerealia flows the imagery of husbandry and harvest that dominates this first phase of the novel. The 'engirdled and secluded region' of the Vale of Blakemore offers itself as a space at once fertile and vulnerable to the predator. The legend of the slaying of a beautiful white hart by a certain Thomas de la Lynd has given the place its ancient name of the Forest of the White Hart. (Run down by the King, Henry III, but spared by

him, the hart prefigures Tess, quarried and at length destroyed by her hunters.) In the annual procession of the village girls, dressed in their virginal white, carrying the peeled willow wands that signify renewing nature and the white flowers that signify matrimony, the legend is annually renewed and given individual and communal meaning. The writing draws attention to a poignant element of self display in the ceremony: all the girls have prepared with care their dress and accoutrements, but Tess, in particular, is distinguished from the rest by her red ribbon. As walking gives way to dancing, self-offering declares itself as a prelude to mating. The scene is festive, but also purposeful: making vivid the recognition that on the annual sacrifice of virginity depends the fruitfulness and continuity of the community.

In the legend of the white hart, however, sacrifice takes the aspect not of fruition, but of destruction, and herein lies the most troubling apparent indeterminacy in any reading of Tess's fate. Representing the predator in this scene come 'three young men of a superior class', the Clare brothers on their walking tour. The youngest of them, mesmerized by the 'white frocked maids', is much inclined to 'have a fling with them' before they are joined by their expected partners, the male work-folk. His elder brother is quick to point out the class transgression: 'Dancing in public with a troop of country hoydens—suppose we should be seen ... besides, we must get through another chapter of *A Counterblast to Agnosticism* before we turn in.' (p. 40)

What this scene does is to juxtapose the serious purposes of 'the old custom' with its trivialization by the 'onlookers'. The eldest Clare is satirized for the myopic bookishness of his religion and the youngest, at his very first appearance, gives voice to impulses that ally him with Alec d'Urberville's casual using of village girls. Tess's 'faint air of

reproach' that Angel does not choose her as his dancing partner, is met by Angel's noticing, too late, her 'modest ... expressive ... soft' appearance. The feminist reader's question of whether Hardy constructs Tess as 'object of the male gaze' or as 'desiring subject' comes to sharp, preliminary focus here, where she is surely presented as both.

The Chaseborough dance episode provides not only an echo of this scene, but a further elaboration of the questions it raises. Summer has given way to Autumn and Tess's search for livelihood has taken her from Marlott to 'claim kin' with the wealthy 'junior branch' of d'Urbervilles at Trantridge. It is the custom of the Trantridge work folk to adjourn to the nearby market town on Saturdays. On the night of Tess's encounter with Alec d'Urberville in the Chase, fair and market have coincided: vestiges of harvest are evoked in the powdery clouds of 'scroff', or residue of peat and other stored produce stirred by the dancing feet of the hay-trussers:

Through this floating, fusty *débris* of peat and hay, mixed with the perspiration and warmth of the dancers, and forming together a sort of vegeto-human pollen, the muted fiddles feebly pushed their notes, in marked contrast to the spirit with which the measure was trodden out. They coughed as they danced, and laughed as they coughed. Of the rushing couples there could barely be discerned more than the high lights—the indistinctness shaping them to satyres clasping nymphs—a multiplicity of Pans whirling a multiplicity of Syrinxes; Lotis attempting to elude Priapus, and always failing. (p. 84)

The opening up to fruitfulness celebrated in the May club walking is here succeeded by dancing that celebrates a more lustful moment in the seasonal cycle. The human figures mingle with the fruits of their labours in the kind of sexual dance, which, as the classical references suggest, recurs in human history with unmistakable purpose.

Matched by experiment and inclination, the dancers are thrall to 'the ecstasy and the dream ... in which emotion was the matter of the universe':

Suddenly there was a dull thump on the ground: a couple had fallen, and lay in a mixed heap. The next couple, unable to check its progress, came toppling over the obstacle. An inner cloud of dust rose around the prostrate figures amid the general one of the room, in which a twitching entanglement of arms and legs was discernible. (p. 85)

As in classical and biblical story, the male-female encounter culminates in a fall. The rough levelling and physical entanglement of happenstance here is a preface to the fall of Tess, first on the homeward road and then in the significantly named Chase. From this communal fall, moreover, Hardy plots for Tess an individual fall that is causally as well as metaphorically related. The toppling avalanche of dancers into their piled bundles and baskets provides an explanation for the stream of treacle that begins to ooze from the basket Car Darch bears on her head: 'the dark girl found that the vessel containing the syrup had been smashed within' (p. 87). Tess, who has throughout the dancing been a reluctant onlooker only waiting for company on the dark road home, joins in the general merriment as Car flings herself down on the grass and spins horizontally to wipe her gown clean. The result is an ugly scene of female rivalry. It becomes plain that Car, dubbed the Queen of Spades, and her sister Nancy, nicknamed the Queen of Diamonds (a naming that underlines Joan Durbeyfield's reference to Tess's face as her 'trump card', perhaps), have each had their 'fling' with Alec d'Urberville: 'Ah, th'st think th'beest everybody, dostn't, because th'beest first favourite with He just now. But stop a bit, my lady, stop a bit! I'm as good as two of such! Look here—here's at 'ee!' (p. 88) The stripping off of Car's bodice not only relieves her of its sticky burden and prepares her

for a physical attack on Tess. It lays bare 'the faultless rotundities of a lusty country girl', making palpable the erotic and emotional energies unleashed by Alec's casual sexual exploits. (Angel Clare's more subtle seductiveness has a similarly intense and divisive effect on the trio of Tess, Izzy and Marion.) As palpable as Car's bared rotundities is the stream of treacle, imaging bodily secretions Yeats was to call 'honey of generation.'

From this fall, Tess is scooped up by the hovering Alec. That she is reluctant to accept his invitation is underlined by her having refused, back in Chaseborough, his offer of a ride home. Driven by physical peril, she must now accept not the promised 'hired trap' (she knows from her first journey to Trantridge what getting into a cart with Alec might entail), but the close physical proximity of scrambling onto the saddle behind him and clinging to his body. The sexual knowingness of the Darch sisters and their mother ('out of the frying-pan into the fire') completes the irony of Tess's being drawn into the sexual dance despite her resolution. But whereas the other dancers continue on their way, each with a halo of moonlight and a sense of being at one with nature, Tess is gathered into a darkness in which geographic and moral directions are lost.

It seems clear, then, that the text seeks to establish a pattern and a sequence in which Tess's fate is bound up with, and partly to be interpreted by, her implication in the cycle of fertility celebrated in the ancient customs of the folk. What follows will confirm that role, even while it separates Tess significantly from the other dancers. The crucial scene in the Chase, however, is, like the protagonists, shrouded in darkness. Alec d'Urberville, riding at random to prolong the journey, loses first his bearings, and then the sleeping Tess, until a slight movement of the

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horse and the 'pale nebulousness' of her gown reveals 'the white muslin figure he had left upon the dead leaves':

Everything else was blackness alike. D'Urberville stooped and heard a gentle regular breathing. He knelt and bent lower, till her breath warmed his face, and in a moment his cheek was in contact with hers. She was sleeping soundly, and upon her eyelashes there lingered tears.

Darkness and silence ruled everywhere around. Above them rose the primeval yews and oaks of The Chase, in which were poised gentle roosting birds in their last nap; and about them stole the hopping rabbits and hares. But, might some say, where was Tess's guardian angel? where was the providence of her simple faith? Perhaps, like that other god of whom the ironical Tishbite spoke, he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was on a journey, or he was sleeping and not to be awaked.

Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman the man, many thousand years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order. One may, indeed, admit the possibility of a retribution lurking in the present catastrophe. Doubtless some of Tess d'Urberville's mailed ancestors rollicking ruthlessly home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time. But though to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children may be a morality good enough for divinities, it is scorned by average human nature; and it therefore does not mend the matter.

As Tess's own people down in those retreats are never tired of saying among each other in their fatalistic way: 'It was to be.' There lay the pity of it. An immeasurable social chasm was to divide our heroine's personality thereafter from that previous self of hers who stepped from her mother's door to try her fortune at Trantridge poultry-farm. (p. 94)

Once again, textual revisions compound the difficulties critics have had in interpreting this scene. Omitted altogether from serialization in *The Graphic*, it was reintroduced for the somewhat more liberal readership of



*Harper's Bazaar* in the form of a confession by Tess to her mother, but the manuscript version, in which Alec gives Tess alcohol from a druggist's bottle, was only reinstated in the edition of 1891. This is the only edition which contains a phrase from the Book of Judges, referring to 'the hands of the spoiler'. By 1892 the druggist's bottle and the Judges reference are removed. A dialogue between the field women in Chapter XIV, watching Tess with her baby, reflects that 'a little more than persuading had to do wi' the coming o't, I reckon. There were they that heard a sobbing one night last year in The Chase: and it mid ha' gone hard wi' a certain party if folks had come along.' (p. 109) Changes between 1892 and 1912 see Tess succumbing to Alec's persuasions in some measure, and by the 1912 version it is clear that Tess has remained at Trantridge as Alec's lover, despite her inner resistance to him: 'if I had ever sincerely loved you, if I loved you still, I should not so loathe and hate myself for my weakness as I do now! ... My eyes were dazed by you for a little, and that was all.' (p. 97) Here we seem to have a Tess who admits to sexual responsiveness, albeit against her better judgement. Mary Jacobus has argued that Tess's purity is a 'literary construct ... stuck on in retrospect to meet objections the novel had encountered even before its publication in 1891.'<sup>12</sup>

The 1912 Chase scene quoted above dwells on a dimension of Tess's purity so fundamental that it can surely not be seen simply as a later construct. The white muslin of her dress, recalling the May walking, images and draws the eye to what is later described as the 'beautiful feminine tissue sensitive as gossamer'. The vulnerability of the sleeping body is indicated in the comparison with 'the gentle roosting birds in their last nap' but there is human consciousness delicately suggested in the tears that linger on the eyelashes. Nevertheless, in the evocation of the creatures whose home this is, and in the gentleness of Alec's approach and the comforting closeness of

physical proximity in the dark and sequestered bower of leaves, there seems to be an acceptance of the moment as a consummation that seems scarcely different from that of the creatures themselves. 'Tis nature', as Joan Durbeyfield later declares. If the sleeping Tess is unspotted, it is because like the maid of whom her mother sings in the ancient folk song 'The Spotted Cow', she is about to yield to the destruction of her sexual innocence by a man with no concern for the social consequences of the coupling, and because she lacks all power to foresee or determine the pattern that will develop from the encounter.

Two issues complicate the question of whether the post-Chase, sexually experienced Tess can still be considered pure: first Hardy's difficulty in enlisting Victorian sympathies for a sexually responsive Tess (to which I shall return), and secondly the dual, and potentially conflicting mythic interpretations of the sacrifice of Tess's virginity suggested by the Cerealia on the one hand, and by the legend of the white hart on the other. The intrusive narratorial questions that so abruptly and confusingly conclude this scene are indicative of the cultural cross-currents to which Hardy attempts to respond. This kind of disjunction between dramatic or imagistic creation and narratorial reflection is of course habitual in Hardy's writing.

Among post-modernist critics who find the pattern established by the Cerealia significant in the plotting and interpretation of the novel is Catherine Gallagher, in an essay written for the Riquelme edition.<sup>13</sup> Her new historicist reading situates the novel, and this scene in particular, within the context of 1890s debate between comparative mythologists. Noting congruences between three works of 1889, J.G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, William Robertson Smith's *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Gallagher sees them as parallel texts (though she also speculates that Hardy may have read Frazer and Smith). Hardy is seen as one of a group of authors who undertook 'to primitivize the ancient and

sexualize the primitive'. Gallagher argues, however, that Hardy's concentration on ritual action and the interpretation of mythic source is problematized by his imagining organic memory traces of ritual behaviour within the individual, as well as in the culture generally. This explains 'isolated repetitive, agonistic moments', moments with 'multiple explanations or failed explanations that conjure ritual possibilities without naming them ... (which) acquire their power from the fact that they seem to exist at the vanishing point of representation, as if they were naturally occult.'<sup>14</sup> Gallagher's reading then, offers an explanation of the multi-explanatory possibilities Hillis Miller, the first of the novel's deconstructive critics, finds in the passage.<sup>15</sup> Gallagher, employing close reading of a traditional kind, notes the abrupt shift in point of view in the passage, from Alec's to that of an impersonal 'godlike vision,' and the sliding across the scene of 'a screen of biblical allusions which show faith in a benevolent providence to be as ill-founded as that of Baal's priests' ('that other god of whom the Tishbite spoke'). The scene referred to in 1 Kings, as she points out, is a *contest* between sacrifices, the failed sacrifice to Baal and Elijah's successful sacrifice to Jehovah, both supplicating for rain to fertilize the earth. Tess's defloration could be located in either the pagan or the Hebrew tradition, as the bloodletting of Baal's priests self-cutting or the retributions of the Hebrew god of vengeance set in motion by Tess's 'mailed ancestors'.<sup>16</sup> Baal, according to Frazer, was the name applied to numerous local fertility deities and is also the word for 'husband' in several semitic languages: he who fertilizes or 'tills' his wife.

The second of the 1899 anthropologists, Robertson Smith, notes that the shedding of blood in Baal lore is an act of communion with, rather than subjection to, the fertility god. He mentions two forms of nonfatal blood sacrifice: the sacrifice of

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maidenhead, and tattooing—a more satisfying explanation of that image of the coarse pattern traced on Tess's skin, perhaps, than Hillis Miller's location of it within a chain of metaphors about writing.<sup>17</sup>

In the light of these sources, Gallagher finds a text 'at cross purposes with itself'. Within the pagan context to which Hardy is so explicitly alluding, then,

Tess's agony in the primeval grove would have been an ennobling initiation, a rite of renewal and marriage to the godhead. But under the monotheistic regime initiated by the Hebrews and made even more pernicious by a Christianity that insists that the ultimate sacrifice—Christ's—has already been made, Tess's sacrificial tattoo can only become a stain of blood on her flimsy, white frock, the coarse pattern of a plot that will be increasingly obsessed with sin and punishment.<sup>18</sup>

This account, persuasive as it is about some of the tensions in the novel's thinking about the sacrifice enacted in the Chase (and finally in the shadow of Stonehenge), relegates Tess's 'agonistic moments' to the status of the 'barely narratable' and the unintelligible. In other words, it shifts the emphasis from the 'active subject' generations of readers have enjoyed in Tess to her role of victim merely.<sup>19</sup>

To what extent Hardy allows Tess to be an active or 'speaking' subject is the question most at issue in the feminist debate about whether the scene in the Chase is to be seen as rape or as seduction. Does the text present Tess as a spokeswoman for a distinctively female self-assertion or as victim of a patriarchal society? Like the materialist John Goode, feminist readers too are apt to explain the text's discontinuities, elisions, gaps, silences, as evidence, if not of 'polemical design', then at least of a textual 'political unconsciousness'. Margaret Higonet, introducing the new Penguin edition, argues that despite 'the narrative silence at the major junctures

of Tess's life', Hardy manages to 'conjure a living heroine', one of whose manifold forms of self-expression includes the tension between the experience of violation and a physical compliance.<sup>20</sup> Ellen Rooney, on the other hand, in an essay chosen for the Riquelme edition to represent 'Feminist and Gender Criticism', argues for a Tess disempowered by Hardy's self-bowdlerizings. She argues that the very terms 'rape' and 'seduction', as the binaries of phallogocentric discourse, collapse into one another, each supposing the female subject as victim, barred from desire:

Hardy is unable to represent the *meaning* of the encounter in the Chase from Tess's point of view because to present Tess as a speaking subject is to risk the possibility that she may appear as the subject of desire. Yet a figure with no potential as a desiring subject can only formally be said to refuse desire, to testify to the absence of desire; the possibilities of action lie elsewhere. Hardy is blocked in both directions. To preserve Tess's purity, he must insist on her passivity, situating her firmly in the problematic of consent: a 'subject' who does not speak, her silence guarantees our sympathy.<sup>21</sup>

The 'problematic of consent' returns us to the question at the heart of the novel's defiant sub-title. For surely, as Laura Claridge points out,<sup>22</sup> Tess's very value must depend on the moral purity with which she experiences her sexual nature.

As well as the cross currents set up in the writing by the bowdlerizing effect of Victorian Judeo-Christian culture, there are other reasons why, in the decisive moment in the Chase, Tess's voice is silenced.<sup>23</sup> That silence effectively dramatizes the way in which Tess is overwhelmed by the sequence of events to which I have been drawing attention, in which her femaleness, that luxuriance of aspect and individuality that distinguishes her from the other village girls and attracts male attention, engages with the impersonal cycle celebrated in the Cerealia, 'the eternal succession of birth and death, of verdure

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and decay, of reaping and sowing, of destruction for the purpose of reproduction.<sup>24</sup> Hardy's habit of moving the individual subject in and out of impersonality is not limited to the female subject, as some feminist readers seem to feel,<sup>25</sup> nor is it peculiar to this novel. It is habitual in Hardy's writing that a figure individualizes itself out of the landscape for long enough for that individuality to be fully registered, while its representative status is never lost from view. Tess emerges out of the crowd of girls, is chosen by Destiny and Parson Tringham as a d'Urberville, d'rawn to the attention of Alec d'Urberville, struggles to voice her sense of independence, is temporarily silenced by Alec in the foggy darkness of the Chase, and then reduced to the anonymity of a field girl once again, in Chapter 14.

This scene of harvesting completes the opening sequence that flows from the Cerealia. A hazy August sunrise dispells 'the denser nocturnal vapours'. The 'old-time heliolatries' of sun worship are recalled by a narrative voice that responds by d'rawing a sexualized landscape: 'the sun, on account of the mist, had a curious, sentient, personal look, demanding the masculine pronoun for its adequate expression.' This 'God-like creature', asserting 'that a saner religion had never prevailed under the sky', gazes down 'upon an earth that was brimming with interest for him.' (p. 105) The sun presides over a Breughellesque harvest scene within which Tess's story of impregnation and parturition takes its place. What is called into productivity are the harvesters and the broad arms of the reaping-machine. The opening up of the furrows to its arms 'ticking like the mating of a grasshopper', gathers together impregnation and fruitation; the divergent groups of 'men and lads' and 'women', 'like dancers in a quadrille' tread out the measure of the harvest in a way that recalls the earlier dancing

sequences. Once again, Tess seems pulled into the anonymity of the rural cycle:

But those of the other sex were the most interesting of this company of binders, by reason of the charm which is acquired by woman when she becomes part and parcel of outdoor nature, and is not merely an object set down there as at ordinary times. A field man is a personality afield; a field-woman is a portion of the field; she has somehow lost her own margin, imbibed the essence of her surroundings, and assimilated herself within it. (p.107)

To this generalizing, Tess's individuality provides a strong counter-pull. Despite her efforts to be part of the non-aggressive, non-attention seeking rhythms of stooping and gathering and holding the corn 'in an embrace like that of a lover' (p. 107) and her chastened obscuring of her natural attractiveness, Tess 'seduces casual attention' the more because 'she never courts it'. She is further distinguished by the presence of her suckling child, public evidence of the social fall which is the subject of the field women's gossip.

Sorrow, her own harvest, makes the occasion for Tess's changing from 'simple girl' to 'complex woman'. It is in her baptism of her dying child and her confrontation with the Vicar that the questions unanswered by the child's conception are most fully explored and dramatized. All the pressures bearing on Tess's consciousness, her struggle to 'come out into the fields', to 'look people calmly in the face ... even when holding her baby in her arms'; from the workfolks' good-natured teasing to her father's locking the door against her shame and her own settled conviction that she is destined to burn for her transgression, drive her to seek for her child some acknowledgement of his acceptance and value. Tess asks:

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‘...can you tell me this—will it be just the same for him as if you had baptized him?’

Having the natural feelings of a tradesman at finding that a job he should have been called in for had been unskillfully botched by his customers among themselves, he was disposed to say no. Yet the dignity of the girl, the strange tenderness of her voice, combined to affect his nobler impulses—or rather those that he had left in him after ten years of endeavour to graft technical belief on actual scepticism. The man and the ecclesiastic fought within him, and the victory fell to the man.

‘My dear girl,’ he said, ‘it will be just the same.’

‘Then will you give him a Christian burial?’ she asked quickly.

The vicar felt himself cornered ...

‘Ah—that’s another matter,’ he said.

‘Another matter—why?’ asked Tess, rather warmly.

‘Well\_I would willingly do so if only we two were concerned. But I must not—for certain reasons,’

‘Just for once, sir!’

‘Really I must not.’

‘O sir!’ She seized his hand as she spoke.

He withdrew it, shaking his head.

‘Then I don’t like you!’ she burst out, ‘and I’ll never come to your church no more!’

‘Don’t talk so rashly.’

‘Perhaps it will be just the same to him if you don’t? ∴ Will it be just the same? Don’t for God’s sake speak as saint to sinner, but as you yourself to me myself—Poor me!’ (p. 115)

It is remarkable how little weight of self-pity that ‘poor me’ carries. Tess’s efforts are all for the child she has passionately loved and with whom she has wished to die. In this exchange,



the terms 'innocent', 'pure', 'violation', find new meanings. Tess now defies the weight of masculine and class authority. The patronizingly withheld 'certain reasons' that prevent the Vicar from giving this spotless child 'a Christian burial' are seen, by the light of Tess's child-like but tenacious logic, as sheer hypocrisy. Piety may hope that 'it will be the same' in the sight of God, but Sorrow is buried in darkness 'in that shabby corner of God's allotment where He lets the nettles grow, and where all unbaptized infants, notorious drunkards, suicides, and others of the conjecturally damned are laid.' (p. 116) There could be no more graphic illustration of violated innocence than this societal solution to the complex moral and theological issues raised by the conception and birth of Sorrow. But what stands out is the purity with which Tess asserts the counter-case: first in her midnight baptism of the dying baby, and then in the assertion of her own questioning selfhood. It is a selfhood marked by the contradictoriness of deep feeling and lived experience, and it distinguishes her from the roosting birds and from the anonymous, repetitive victimization of primitive ceremony. Her kinship with such victims is evoked as much for the purposes of distinguishing her, as it is to reiterate the patterns of a-moral nature, or the rituals through which humankind attempts to order and to propitiate. Within the context of such determinate and determining meanings, Hardy's Tess has a distinctive voice as desiring subject, as well as subject of desire. For what remains memorable and moving about *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is the attractiveness of Tess as the novel's prevailing consciousness, the individuality of what she has to think and feel and say, as it struggles to make sense of the gift and the burden of her physical attractiveness.

Essential to Tess's struggle are her inconsistencies: the contradictory impulses that make her respond to Alec in the Chase and then come to see that response as a loss of her own

integrity and her power to control her future, and that make her by turns defiantly self-assertive and miserably alienated. To see Tess's contradictoriness as Widdowson does, as a 'dismantling' of the notion of the 'unified or unitary (patriarchal and realist) human subject' is to make large assumptions about 'liberal humanist' views of the subject. It is also, I believe, to elide an important distinction between the contradictions the text locates in the person of Tess, and the contradictions inherent in the process of Victorian textuality. The conflicts Hardy experiences, as narrator and editor, in mediating the attractiveness of Tess to the Victorian reader are incontrovertible. The conflicts and contradictions the text locates in Tess's experience have the aspect not of indeterminacy but of paradox: Tess's violation is also her consummation.

<sup>1</sup> 'She is both the betrayed maid and the fallen woman, both the scapegoat and the tragic heroine complicitous in her own downfall': thus Kristen Brady, 'Tess and Alec: Rape or Seduction?' in R.P. Draper, ed., *Hardy: The Tragic Novels* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p.161.

<sup>2</sup> The feminist Clementina Black, reviewing the novel, claims Hardy as 'one of that brave and clear-sighted minority' who have drawn a distinction between 'moral worth' and simple chastity in women: *Illustrated London News*, 9 Jan. 1892, in R.G. Cox, ed., *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 186.

<sup>3</sup> *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, ed. R. L. Purdy and Michael Millgate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978-88), Vol. 1, p. 245.

<sup>4</sup> *Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form* (Harvester: Brighton: 1982), p. 127.

<sup>5</sup> Introduction to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles: Macmillan New Casebooks* (Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1983), p.146.

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Hardy: *The Offensive Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 111.

<sup>9</sup> *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, ed. John Riquelme (Boston and New York: Bedford Books, 1998), p. v. All page references to the text will cite this edition.

<sup>10</sup> *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, ed. Tim Dolin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), p. liii.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Arnold, of *Murray's Magazine*, quoted in Penguin, p. xlviii.

<sup>12</sup> 'Tess: the Making of a Pure Woman' in *Tearing the Veil: Essays on Femininity*, ed. Susan Lipshitz (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 78.

<sup>13</sup> 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles: Hardy's Anthropology of the Novel', Riquelme, pp. 422-39.

<sup>14</sup> Riquelme, p. 430.

<sup>15</sup> Miller provides the following explanations: that Tess's story is another version of the tale of the death of the white hart; that she is part of the general, a-moral fecundity of nature; a theological explanation prompted by the desertion of her 'guardian angel' and the ironic reading of the Old Testament story of the prophets of Baal; the appeal to analytic philosophy, in particular to the failure to reclaim her Platonic missing half until the point of death; and the conventional notion of Destiny: 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles: Repetition as Immanent Design' in *Thomas Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, ed. Harold Bloom (N. Y.: Chelsea House, 1987), p. 72.

<sup>16</sup> As Hillis Miller was the first to notice (*ibid.*), the narrator thus inverts the usual reading of the 1 Kings passage.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>18</sup> Riquelme, p. 434.

<sup>19</sup> In a neat turn of argument, Gallagher sees Tess calling attention to this very problem, a tacit recognition of the text's uncertainty about its own self-anthropologizing: 'What's the use of learning that I am one of a long row only- finding out that there is set down in some old book somebody just like me, and to know that I shall only act her part, making me sad, but that's all' (Riquelme, p. 438).

<sup>20</sup> Penguin, p. xxxviii.

<sup>21</sup> 'Tess and the Subject of of Sexual Violence: Reading, Rape, Seduction', Riquelme, p. 466.

<sup>22</sup> 'Tess: A Less than Pure Woman Ambivalently Presented' in *New Casebooks*, p. 67.

<sup>23</sup> Margaret R. Higgonet, 'A Woman's Story: Tess and the Problem of Voice' in *The Sense of Sex: Feminist Perspectives on Hardy*, ed. Higgonet (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 27, argues that the silence 'symbolically renders the tearing of flesh that it literally does not describe; such a gap is a pure literary convention for the socially taboo or the unspeakable.'

<sup>24</sup> Gallagher, paraphrasing Frazer, Riquelme, p. 439.

<sup>25</sup> In *New Casebooks* see Ingham, p. 83, Thompson, p. 118, Silverman, p. 133.

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