

## CHAPTER 6

### *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891)

*Tess of the d'Urbervilles* marks a particularly important moment in Hardy's representations of women in sexual and marital relationships. It takes up many of the concerns and narrative modes of his earlier novels: it picks up the ideological tragic polarities of *The Return of the Native*, for example, and that use of the female body to explore contradictory views of nature that I have already discussed in the case of Grace Melbury. These concerns are developed in a number of new ways, however. No novel of Hardy's – not even *The Mayor of Casterbridge* – focuses more exclusively on its central character; and that character is, of course, a woman. Tess brings together for the first time the 'types' of woman that have frequently been counterposed in the earlier work – the woman compromised and doomed by her own sexuality, either as victim or as *femme fatale* (Fanny Robin, for instance, or Lucetta Le Sueur), and the young woman poised at the moment of marriageability (Paula Power, or Elizabeth-Jane Newson). Gregor has noted this change, particularly in relation to *The Woodlanders*:

The novel finds a single person capable of revealing the conflict [between a divided human consciousness and its environment] which, in the earlier novel, had been widely dispersed. The temptations of Su[k]e, the endurance of Marty, the troubled consciousness of Grace, come together and find a fresh definition in Tess.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, the components of Tess's complex class-position (decayed aristocratic lineage, economic membership of the newly-forming rural proletariat, modified by an education that provides her with a degree of access to the culture of the bourgeoisie) enables Hardy at once to evoke and invert his recurring 'Poor Man and the Lady' motif, as Bayley has remarked:

She was an ideal of the peasant girl, the sort of girl who in his earlier novels would have been regarded sympathetically but without personal senti-

ment, but who has now become the kind of *princesse lointaine* whom the girl in the grand house once represented. His first conception of Tess stopped there, but the ingenuity of reverie then provided her with an under-image of the distinction – even the hauteur – possessed by his early aristocratic heroines.<sup>2</sup>

Tess, then, has no need of shadowy contrasts or parallels to point up or ironise its central character: it is structured entirely by the sexual and marital history of Tess Durbeyfield.

It is also at this period that Hardy's elaborately constructed, resolutely non-controversial public persona begins to break down. Repeatedly during his career, Hardy was careful to distinguish between his private views and those expressed in his novels, and, indeed, to disclaim any personal views at all on their more controversial subjects. Indeed, he never ceased to feel that certain things simply could not be said publicly, such as that 'Fitzpiers goes on all his life in his bad way, and that in returning to him Grace meets her retribution "for not sticking to Giles"'; or that Sue Bridehead wishes throughout their relationship to restrict herself to only 'occasional' intimacies with Jude.<sup>3</sup> He was, furthermore, among those who, in 1910, advocated suppression of a translation of Sudermann's *Das hohe Lied*, on the grounds that 'its unflinching study of a woman's character . . . of a somewhat ignoble type' required more in the way of 'good literary taste' to make it acceptable.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, it was during the 1890s that he also began to make more forthright and challenging statements in his own right. The essay 'Candour in English Fiction' records with great bitterness and force the shifts and trimmings to which the 'undescribably unreal and meretricious' narrative conventions of the family serial condemned him (or, rather, to which his insistence on publishing his novels in that form condemned him). Later, he contributed to a symposium on the need for sex education, and expressed his progressive views quite emphatically.<sup>5</sup> These are essays, however, and remain wholly separate from his fiction. His Preface to *The Woodlanders* uses an oblique and distancing irony to imply his real views on the subject of divorce, but it is only with the Explanatory Note to the First Edition of *Tess* that he makes the unusually straightforward and challenging claim to have represented in his novel 'what everybody nowadays thinks and feels' (p. 25). A subsequent Preface will temper this

uncompromising account, claiming that 'the novel was intended to be neither didactic nor aggressive' (p. 27), but the tone of the original Note helps to explain why it was with *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* that Hardy came to be thought of as a writer with a philosophical-cum-moral axe to grind. 'Let the truth be told' (p. 133) has almost the air of a manifesto.

It has been claimed that '*Tess* immediately preceded the New Woman fiction',<sup>6</sup> but, as my account of the New Fiction has shown, novels dealing with sex and the New Woman were already no longer a novelty. Some of the attacks on *Tess* – which was greeted with a moral furore and a degree of partisanship that must have made most of the earlier criticisms of his work seem trivial – were surely induced by the fact that Hardy appeared to be lending the weight of his position as a well-established (if slightly controversial) author to the more recent developments of the New Fiction. The early reviews abound in references to French realism (the term being at the time virtually synonymous with 'naturalism'), to Zola, and to Ibsen, and the work is repeatedly characterised as a 'novel with a purpose' or a 'Tendenz-Roman'.<sup>7</sup> What made *Tess* so controversial was not the relatively harmless plot (after all, many another young girl in fiction had 'fallen' to a man more powerful and experienced than herself, and either come to a bad end, like Eliot's Hetty Sorrell, or redeemed herself by a lifetime of self-sacrifice and maternal devotion, like Gaskell's Ruth), but this new element of polemic. A number of factors interacted to ensure that the novel would be read primarily in this light, whatever Hardy's intentions. There was, first, the context of an increasing questioning, both in fiction and in public discussion, of sex roles and of the double standard. There were elements of the plot: the ambivalence of Tess's feeling for her child, and the failure of motherhood in itself to determine the subsequent course of her experience; the fact that sexual and marital relationships are presented in such direct relation to economic pressures and to work; Tess's concealment of her past from Angel; and, of course, that second 'fall' of the more mature and experienced Tess that so scandalised Margaret Oliphant.<sup>8</sup> But above all, there were the sense (reinforced by that aggressive afterthought of a sub-title, 'A Pure Woman') that Hardy was presuming to offer a moral argument in the shape of a structured

defence of his central character, and the passionate commitment to Tess herself.

Tess presses the problem of what I have earlier called Hardy's urge towards narrative androgyny to the point where a break becomes necessary. John Bayley claims that 'Tess is the most striking embodiment in literature of the woman realised both as object and as consciousness, to herself and to others'.<sup>9</sup> But this even-handed statement of the case smooths out the tension inherent in this androgynous mode of narration, which has as its project to present woman, 'pure woman', as known from within and without, explicated and rendered transparent. In short, she is not merely spoken by the narrator, but also spoken *for*. To realise Tess as consciousness, with all that that entails of representation and display, inevitably renders her all the more the object of gaze and of knowledge for reader and narrator. John Goode has drawn attention to the erotic dimension of this interplay between reader and character:

Tess is the subject of the novel: that makes her inevitably an object of the reader's consumption (no novel has ever produced so much of what Sontag required in place of hermeneutics, namely, an erotics of art).<sup>10</sup>

And so it is that all the passionate commitment to exhibiting Tess as the subject of her own experience evokes an unusually overt maleness in the narrative voice. The narrator's erotic fantasies of penetration and engulfment enact a pursuit, violation and persecution of Tess in parallel with those she suffers at the hands of her two lovers. Time and again the narrator seeks to enter Tess, through her eyes – 'his [eyes] plumbed the deepness of the ever-varying pupils, with their radiating fibrils of blue, and black, and gray, and violet' (p. 198) – through her mouth – 'he saw the red interior of her mouth as if it had been a snake's' (p. 198) – and through her flesh – 'as the day wears on its feminine smoothness is scarified by the stubble, and bleeds' (p. 117). The phallic imagery of pricking, piercing and penetration which has repeatedly been noted,<sup>11</sup> serves not only to create an image-chain linking Tess's experiences from the death of Prince to her final penetrative act of retaliation, but also to satisfy the narrator's fascination with the interiority of her sexuality, and his desire to take possession of her. Similarly, the repeated evocations of a recumbent or somnolent Tess awaken-

ing to violence, and the continual interweaving of red and white, blood and flesh, sex and death, provide structuring images for the violence Tess suffers, but also repeat that violence. It has even been suggested that the novel takes the form it does in part because the narrator's jealous inability to relinquish his sole possession of her causes both the editing out of her seduction by Alec, and the denial to her of consummated marriage or lasting relationship.<sup>12</sup>

But this narrative appropriation is resisted by the very thing that the narrator seeks above all to capture in Tess: her sexuality, which remains unknowable and unrepresentable. There is a sense here in which James' comment that 'The pretence of "sexuality" is only equalled by the absence of it' could be justified.<sup>13</sup> It is as if Tess's sexuality resides quite literally *within* her body, and must be wrested from her by violence. The most telling passage in this respect is Angel Clare's early morning sight of Tess:

She had not heard him enter and hardly realised his presence there. She was yawning, and he saw the red interior of her mouth as if it had been a snake's. She had stretched one arm so high above her coiled-up cable of hair that he could see its satin delicacy above the sunburn; her face was flushed with sleep, and her eyelids hung heavy over their pupils. The brim-fulness of her nature breathed from her. It was a moment when a woman's soul is more incarnate than at any other time; when the most spiritual beauty bespeaks itself flesh; and sex takes the outside place in the presentation (p. 198).

It is most revealing here that, as Mary Jacobus has remarked, the language of incarnation is destabilised by the physicality and interiority of the 'woman's soul', co-extensive with the 'brim-fulness of her nature', that it seeks to represent. Jacobus has also significantly noted that 'The incarnate state of Tess's soul appears to be as close to sleep – to unconsciousness – as is compatible with going about her work.'<sup>14</sup> Here, as elsewhere, and particularly at moments of such erotic response, consciousness is all but edited out. Tess is asleep, or in reverie, at almost every crucial turn of the plot: at Prince's death, at the time of her seduction by Alec, when the sleep-walking Angel buries his image of her, at his return to find her at the Herons, and when the police take her at Stonehenge. Important moments of speech are absent, too – her wedding-night account of her past life, for example, or the 'merciless polemical syllogism', learnt

from Angel, with which she transforms Alec from evangelical preacher to sexual suitor once more (p. 345). Tess is most herself – and that is, most woman – at points where she is dumb and semi-conscious. The tragedy of Tess Durbeyfield, like that in *The Return of the Native*, turns upon an ideological basis, projecting a polarity of sex and intellect, body and mind, upon an equally fixed polarity of gender. In this schema, sex and nature are assigned to the female, intellect and culture to the male. That this is so would have been even more clearly the case had Hardy retained the Ur-*Tess* version of the relation between Tess and Angel. The relatively crude feminist point made by Angel's flagrant application of a double standard of sexual morality replaces what might have been a rather subtler counterpointing of the varieties of heterodoxy available to (intellectual) man and (sexual) woman: there is some evidence that his original wedding-night 'confession' was to have been primarily of lost faith.<sup>15</sup> Angel Clare's dilemma is compounded primarily of elements given a historical and social location: the difficulties of class transition, the confrontation of liberal education and Christian faith, the establishment of a standard of morality in the absence of transcendently ratified principles. Tess's situation, unlike that of Eustacia Vye, calls upon similar elements: her entrapment in mutually reinforcing economic and sexual oppression, for example, and the characteristically Victorian morality of the double standard. But still, the source of what is specifically *tragic* in her story remains at the level of nature. Tess is identified with nature – or, more accurately, constructed as an instance of the natural – in a number of ways. She is, for instance, particularly associated with instinct and intuition, those 'natural' modes of knowledge which Clare too will ascribe to her, and which form part of a collision in the novel between formal and heuristic education. So, the 'invincible instinct towards self-delight' (p. 128) sends her to Talbothays in relatively good heart; her 'instincts' tell her that she must not play hard to get with Angel Clare, 'since it must in its very nature carry with it a suspicion of art' (p. 221); and the 'appetite for joy' moves her to accept Clare's proposal of marriage (p. 218). It is noticeable, too, that Tess is often bound doubly to her sex and to intuition or instinct by a generalising commentary: 'the woman's instinct to hide' (p. 224), 'it would

have denoted deficiency of womanhood if she had not instinctively known what an argument lies in propinquity' (p. 269), 'the intuitive heart of woman knoweth not only its own bitterness, but its husband's' (p. 269). Then, too, there is her explicitly remarked continuity with the natural world: she (again in common with other members of her sex) is 'part and parcel of outdoor nature . . . a portion of the field' (p. 116); images of animals and birds, hunting and traps, cluster around her; and in the latter part of the novel she becomes increasingly 'like . . . a lesser creature than a woman' (p. 418). Kathleen Rogers has remarked that 'Tess herself is almost less a personality than a beautiful portion of nature violated by human selfishness and over-intellectualizing. She is the least flawed of Hardy's protagonists, but also the least human.'<sup>16</sup> But what might otherwise be simply a process of diminution is modified by the new degree of consciousness with which Tess's assimilation to nature is evoked. The ideological elision of woman, sex, and nature remains a structuring element of the tragedy, but at the same time presses 'the vulgarism of the "natural woman"'<sup>17</sup> to a point where it becomes disruptively visible. Angel Clare, who is patently implicated in Hardy's continuing dialogue with both Shelley and Arnold, is also the bearer of the vestiges of certain Romantic and Christian views of nature in his responses to Tess. For him, Tess is 'a mate from unconstrained Nature, and not from the abodes of Art' (p. 202); during their courtship, he creates for himself a pastoral in which the farm life is 'bucolic' and Tess herself 'idyllic' (p. 232); her wedding-night confession transforms her, for him, from "'a child of nature'" (p. 259) to an instance of 'Nature, in her fantastic trickery' (p. 263). It is through Clare, through the obvious contradictions and inadequacies of his response to Tess, that the novel throws into question the ideological bases of its own tragic polarities.

At the same time there is a remarkable shift in the balance of sympathies since *The Return of the Native*. In *Tess*, the tragic claims of an ironised intellect are subordinated to those of sexuality. The intellectual drama of the male is not itself tragic, but functions rather as a component of the sexual tragedy of Tess. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, as one contemporary reviewer remarked, is 'peculiarly the Woman's Tragedy'.<sup>18</sup> If Tess can be said to have a tragic 'flaw', it is her sexuality, which is, in this

novel, her 'nature' as a woman. Her sexuality is above all provocative: she is a temptress to the convert Alec, an Eve to Angel Clare. Such are her sexual attractions that she is obliged to travesty herself into "'a mommet of a maid'" in order to protect herself from 'aggressive admiration' (p. 304). Her sexuality is constructed above all through the erotic response of the narrator, and it was surely this that gave rise to Mowbray Morris' sneering objections:

Poor Tess's sensual qualifications for the part of heroine are paraded over and over again with a persistence like that of a horse-dealer egging on some wavering customer to a deal, or a slave-dealer appraising his wares to some full-blooded pasha.<sup>19</sup>

Morris had evidently not realised how far he is implicating himself, as a male reader, in that image of the 'wavering customer'. It is interesting to note, by the way, that Edmund Gosse drew a clear distinction between the responses of male and female readers to the novel; he contrasted the 'ape-leading and shrivelled spinster' who had reviewed *Tess* for the *Saturday Review* with the 'serious male public' who appreciated its qualities.<sup>20</sup>

Set against this provocative sexual quality is a lack of calculation, essential if Tess is not to become a posing and self-dramatising *femme fatale* in the style of Felice Charmond. She never declares herself as either virginal or sexually available, and yet her experience is bounded by the power that both these images exercise. Hardy tries to preserve a narrow balance between her awareness of this sexual force (for if she remains wholly unaware, she is merely a passive and stupid victim) and her refusal deliberately to exploit it (for that would involve her too actively as a temptress). The problem becomes acute at the point of her break from Angel:

Tess's feminine hope – shall we confess it – had been so obstinately recuperative as to revive in her surreptitious visions of a domiciliary intimacy continued long enough to break down his coldness even against his judgment. Though unsophisticated in the usual sense, she was not incomplete; and it would have denoted deficiency of womanhood if she had not instinctively known what an argument lies in propinquity. Nothing else would serve her, she knew, if this failed. It was wrong to hope in what was of the nature of strategy, she said to herself: yet that sort of hope she could not extinguish (p. 269).

The archness of that parenthetical 'shall we confess it' and the elaborately distancing abstract and Latinate vocabulary testify to the difficulty of negotiating this area of a consciousness that must not become too conscious. The shared pronoun ('shall we confess it') hovers awkwardly between implying a suddenly female narrator and pulling the implied male reader into a conspiratorial secret (woman and their little ways) that remains concealed from Tess. He is obliged to fall back on the old standby of instinct (and, on the next page, intuition) for an explanation of a knowledge that Tess must have, in order not to be deficient in womanhood, and must not have, in order to avoid falling into anything 'of the nature of strategy'. 'Purity' is, in a sense, enforced upon Tess by the difficulty of representing for her a self-aware mode of sexuality.

For Tess is doomed by her sexuality in a quite different way from Felice Charmond or Eustacia Vye. She does not share their urgency of desire to be desired, nor their restless dissatisfaction with the actual relationships in which that desire is partially satisfied. Both of those women are complicit in the circumscribing of their identity by their sexuality, and of their experience by their relationships with men. Tess, on the other hand, is trapped by a sexuality which seems at times almost irrelevant to her own experience and sense of her own identity. She is doomed by her 'exceptional physical nature' (p. 269) and by the inevitability of an erotic response from men. That response binds her to male images and fantasies: to the pink cheeks and rustic innocence of Angel's patronising pastoralism (p. 264), and to the proud indifference that Alec finds so piquantly challenging. Her sexuality, provocative without intent, seems inherently guilty by virtue of the reactions it arouses in others: 'And there was revived in her the wretched sentiment which had often come to her before, that in inhabiting the fleshly tabernacle with which Nature had endowed her she was somehow doing wrong' (p. 334). 'Liza-Lu, the 'spiritualized image of Tess' (p. 419), is spiritualised by the execution of Tess, expunging the wrong-doing and expiating the guilt of her woman's sexuality. 'Liza-Lu and Angel Clare give an openly fantasy ending to the novel, in a de-erotized relationship that nevertheless contravenes socially constituted moral law far more clearly than any of Tess's, since a man's

marriage with his sister-in-law remained not only illegal but also tainted with the stigma of incest until the passing of the controversial Deceased Wife's Sister Act (after several previous failed attempts), in 1907. The echo of *Paradise Lost* in the last sentence of *Tess* has often been remarked, but it is notable that the novel in fact offers a curiously inverted image of Milton's fallen world. The post-lapsarian world of *Tess* is attenuated ('Liza-Lu is only 'half girl, half woman', and both she and Clare seem to have 'shrunk' facially (p. 419)) by expulsion from sexuality, and not by the loss of a pre-sexual innocence. In *Tess* are imaged both a Paradise of sexuality (abundant, fecund, succulent) and the guilt of knowledge that inheres within it.

For *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* draws an illusion of cohesion from its single-minded concentration on the figure of Tess herself – an illusion that is rapidly dissipated by attention to the detail of the text. The text is divided not into a series of chapters adding up to a more or less continuous narrative, but into discontinuous Phases which repeatedly edit out the most crucial episodes of the plot. Mowbray Morris, in his rejection of *Tess* for *Macmillan's Magazine*, noted accurately enough that 'All the first part therefore is a sort of prologue to the girl's seduction, which is hardly ever and can hardly ever be out of the reader's mind'.<sup>21</sup> It is all the more noticeable, then, that after this build-up, the seduction itself is given only obliquely and by implication. The physical particularities of the incident, as Allan Brick has remarked, are transposed graphically enough on to the episode in which Alec persuades Tess to take into her mouth a strawberry – forced and out of season – that she only half resists.<sup>22</sup> But at the point when access to Tess's consciousness would do most to 'fix' the text into a particular significance, it is abruptly withdrawn. The same can be said of other crucial narrative moments – Tess's account of her past on her wedding night,<sup>23</sup> her return to Alec, and her murder of him. It has frequently been remarked, and usually deplored, that these moments fall into a hiatus between Phases. Stanzel, for example, has argued that such gaps in the reader's knowledge are a kind of pre-censorship whose effect is to prevent the formation of an independent opinion or interpretation that might act against Hardy's vindication of his heroine.<sup>24</sup> But it seems, rather, that they at once sharply indicate the way in which Tess's

sexuality eludes the circumscribing narrative voice, and point up the disturbing discontinuities of tone and point of view which undermine the stability of Tess as a focal character and which, John Bayley has argued, give the novel its form.<sup>25</sup>

These discontinuities, incidentally, have enabled a critical dismembering of Tess. For some, concentrating on such scenes as the Lady-Day move and the threshing-machine, she is the representative of an order of rural society threatened by urbanism, mechanisation, and the destruction of stable working communities. Thus, for Kettle, she typifies the proletarianisation of the peasantry; for the agrarian traditionalist Douglas Brown, she embodies 'the agricultural community in its moment of ruin'; for the Weberian Lucille Herbert, she marks the moment of transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*; and John Holloway finds in her evidence of Hardy's increasing awareness of flaws within the traditional rural order that has hitherto functioned to establish a moral norm.<sup>26</sup> For all of these, the significance of Tess's womanhood is negligible, except insofar as it provides an appropriate image of passivity and victimisation. Others, seizing on the way in which Tess is singled out from her community, both by her own outstanding qualities and by her aristocratic descent with its encumbering heritage of omens and legends, have followed Lawrence to find in 'the deeper-passioned Tess' (p. 164) who can assert that "'I am only a peasant by position, not by nature!'" (p. 258) a natural aristocrat, the suitable subject of a tragedy.<sup>27</sup> Alternatively, by taking up the novel's allusions to, or recapitulations of, Biblical and literary plots (Eden and Fall, *Paradise Lost*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and so on), or by following through the chains of imagery centring upon altars, druids and sacrifices, it is possible to find in Tess the shadow of innumerable cultural archetypes (Patient Griselda, the scapegoat, the highborn lady in disguise).<sup>28</sup> That each of these views finds its point of departure in the detail of the text indicates how complex and contradictory Tess is, viewed in the light of a critical practice that demands a stable and coherent consolidation of character.

And there is more to the discontinuity than this. The narrator shifts brusquely between dispassionate, long-distance observation (Tess as 'a fly on a billiard-table of indefinite length, and of no more consequence to the surroundings than that fly' (p. 133))

and a lingering closeness of view that particularises the grain of her skin, the texture of her hair. The transparency of her consciousness is punctuated by the distancing reflections of a meditative moralist who can generalise ('women whose chief companions are the forms and forces of outdoor Nature retain in their souls far more of the Pagan fantasy of their remote forefathers than of the systematised religion taught their race at later date' (p. 132)), allude ('But, might some say, where was Tess's guardian angel? . . . Perhaps, like that other god of whom the ironical Tishbite spoke, he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was in a journey, or he was sleeping and not to be awaked' (p. 101)), and abstract ('But for the world's opinion those experiences would have been simply a liberal education' (p. 127)). Equally, the narrator's analytic omniscience is threatened both by his erotic commitment to Tess, and by the elusiveness of her sexuality. The novel's ideological project, the circumscribing of the consciousness and experience of its heroine by a scientifically dispassionate mode of narration, is undermined by the instability of its 'placing' of Tess through genre and point of view. Structured primarily as tragedy, the novel draws also on a number of other genres and modes of writing: on realism, certainly, but also on a melodrama that itself reaches into balladry, and, of course, on polemic.

The polemic itself also exhibits a series of radical discontinuities. As many of the novel's more recent critics have remarked, what van Ghent has dismissively called the 'bits of philosophic adhesive tape'<sup>29</sup> do not in any sense link together into a consistent or logical argument, and it would be a frustrating and futile exercise to seek in the generalisations and interpretations of the narrator any 'position' on extra-marital sex, or on the question of 'natural' versus 'artificial' morality, that could confidently be ascribed to Hardy as an individual or posited as a structuring imperative of the text. The 'confusion of many standards' of which Paris has written,<sup>30</sup> the overlapping of contradictory and conflictual points of view, probably results in part from Hardy's successive modifications of his manuscript in the face of repeated rejections. The serial bowdlerisations, irritating though they may be, are insignificant compared to the changes which Hardy made in order to secure publication. There was, for example, a major shift of emphasis,

which involved superimposing upon a tragedy of the ordinary (in which Tess is representative by virtue of being like many other girls in her position) a mythic tragedy of the exceptional (in which she is marked out from these other girls by a superior sensibility that assimilates her to prototypes in legend and literature).<sup>31</sup> Further, although some of the 'philosophical' comments on Tess's experience are present from the earliest stages of composition, others (including the idea that Tess remains innocent according to natural morality) are added in later revision.<sup>32</sup> The 'argument' that seeks, contradictorily, both to exonerate Tess and to secure forgiveness for her is partly an attempt to rescue her for a conventionally-realised purity; as Jacobus has remarked, 'Tess's purity . . . is "stuck on" in retrospect like the sub-title to meet objections which the novel had encountered even before its publication in 1891.'<sup>33</sup> By a series of modifications, both to the original conception of the story and to those parts of the text that had been written first, Tess is rendered innocent in a revealingly double sense: that is, lacking in knowledge and lacking in guilt. A number of revisions, for example, emphasise chastity and reticence at the expense of passion and spontaneity; so, a passage suggesting that Tess would have been willing to live unmarried with Angel Clare is cancelled in manuscript. There is evidence, too, in the earlier versions of the text, that Tess's relationship with Alec was to have been far more that of equals, and certainly it is only when she must be retrieved from sexual guilt that any suggestion that "'A little more than persuading had to do wi' the coming o't'" (p. 118) is added (the phrase being inserted in the 1892 revisions). As Tess is purified, so there is also a far-reaching and wholesale blackening of Alec and Angel that transforms them unequivocally into rake and hypocrite.<sup>34</sup>

The contradictions in the defence of Tess, however, cannot all be ascribed straightforwardly to textual revision. They are also closely related to the diverse and conflicting accounts of nature that inhabit the text. Tess, like Grace Melbury before her, acts as the site for the exploration of a number of ideologies of nature that find their focus in her sexuality. The Darwinist nature of amoral instinct and the 'inherent will to enjoy' (p. 310) runs close to a naturalist version of sexuality, which posits an organicist continuity between the human and the non-human.<sup>35</sup>

The broody hens and farrowing pigs of Talbothays, the 'stir of germination' (p. 127) and the 'hiss of fertilization' (p. 176), give a context of impersonal biological process to the equally impersonal instinct that torments the women dairy-workers:

The air of the sleeping-chamber seemed to palpitate with the hopeless passion of the girls. They writhed feverishly under the oppressiveness of an emotion thrust on them by cruel Nature's law – an emotion which they had neither expected nor desired. . . . The difference which distinguished them as individuals were abstracted by this passion, and each was but portion of one organism called sex (p. 174).

Yet, even as the 'naturalness' of the sexual instinct is proclaimed, it is simultaneously perceived as 'cruel' and 'oppressive', by virtue of its extinction of difference and its imperiousness to circumstance. Here, almost implicitly, there dwells a hint of the tragic potential of sexuality in this novel: individual consciousness, or consciousness of individuality ('She was not an existence, an experience, a passion, a structure of sensations, to anybody but herself' (p. 119)), in conflict with non-human biological process, instinct.

But, further, Romantic ideologies of nature, themselves divergent, are also invoked through the philosophical commentary. There is a strain of Rousseau-ism, positing nature as moral norm: 'She was ashamed of herself for her gloom of the night, based on nothing more tangible than a sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society which had no foundation in Nature' (p. 303). There is also a version of the pathetic fallacy:

At times her whimsical fancy would intensify natural processes around her till they seemed a part of her own story. Rather they became a part of it; for the world is only a psychological phenomenon, and what they seemed they were.

But this encompassment of her own characterization, based on shreds of convention, peopled by phantoms and voices antipathetic to her, was a sorry and mistaken creation of Tess's fancy – a cloud of moral hobgoblins by which she was terrified without reason. It was they that were out of harmony with the actual world, not she (p. 114).

Here there is a quite openly paradoxical argument, confronting two views (the world as a 'psychological phenomenon' and the 'actual world') which clearly cannot be reconciled. There is, again, an intensely ironised evocation of the benevolent Words-

worthian nature, akin to the Christian providence, which works out a "holy plan" through individual lives (p. 49). Christian nature, 'fallen' along with Tess, is implicit in the allusions to the *Paradise Lost* motif, and is tellingly drawn upon in the description of Tess in the rank but fertile garden of her sexual response to Angel. Clearly, there can be no synthesis into a philosophically or logically coherent argument of such contradictory and paradoxical fragments of commentary. It has been claimed that these 'recognisably limited perspectives – partial insights', and the multiplicity of 'explanations' offered for Tess's tragedy, form part of the novel's onslaught on moral dogma and absolutism, and that they have as their primary effect to undermine the authority of the whole notion of explanation.<sup>36</sup> And it is true that they deter the reader from repeating Alec d'Urberville's act of appropriation or Angel Clare's moment of repudiation, by highlighting the partiality of such views. For both of these male characters, Tess is representative of her sex. For Alec, she says what all women say, but does what all women do:

"I didn't understand your meaning till it was too late."

"That's what every woman says."

"How can you dare to use such words!" she cried . . .

"My God! I could knock you out of the gig! Did it never strike your mind that what every woman says some women feel?" (p. 106).

For Angel, on the other hand, she represents a spiritualised version of her sex:

She was no longer the milkmaid, but a visionary essence of woman – a whole sex condensed into one typical form. He called her Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names half teasingly, which she did not like because she did not understand them.

"Call me Tess," she would say askance; and he did (p. 158).

Tess, it should be noted, resists both of these representative roles. And, of course, they are not the opposites that they might at first appear; they are precisely complementary, as is emphasised, not only by Alec's temporary conversion to evangelicism and Angel's momentary transformation into a rake with Izz, but also by the similarities between their ways of gaining Tess's acquiescence. It is not only Alec who is associated with the gigs and traps that, on occasion, literally run away with Tess;<sup>37</sup> it is



during a journey in a wagon driven by Angel that he finally secures Tess's acceptance of his proposal. Equally, the two ride to their wedding in a sinister, funereal carriage, and when Angel makes his proposition to Izz, she is riding in his gig. It is noticeable, too, that during their wagon-ride, Angel feeds Tess with berries that he has pulled from the trees with a whip, recalling the scene at The Slopes when Alec feeds her with strawberries.

Clearly, then the novel's narrative method in a sense enacts the relativism of its structuring argument. But there is more to the discontinuities than this. They also mark Hardy's increasing interrogation of his own modes of narration. The disjunctions in narrative voice, the contradictions of logic, the abrupt shifts of point of view, form what Bayley has called 'a stylisation . . . of the more natural hiatus between plot and person, description and emotion';<sup>38</sup> they disintegrate the stability of character as a cohering force; they threaten the dominance of the dispassionate and omniscient narrator, and so push to its limit the androgynous narrative mode that seeks to represent and explain the woman from within and without. The formal characteristics of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, its increasingly overt confrontation of subjectivity and subjection,<sup>39</sup> will enable the radical break in the relation of female character to narrative voice that intervenes between the violated subjectivity of Tess Durbeyfield and the resistant opacity of Sue Bridehead.

### NOTES

- 1 Ian Gregor, *The Great Web: The Form of Hardy's Fiction* (London, 1974), p. 178.
- 2 John Bayley, *An Essay on Hardy* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 167–8.
- 3 See, respectively, Carl J. Weber, 'Hardy and *The Woodlanders*,' *Review of English Studies*, 15 (1939), 332; and *Later Years*, pp. 41–2.
- 4 Hardy's letter is reprinted in the Publisher's Note of Hermann Sudermann, *The Song of Songs: A New Translation by Beatrice Marshall* (London, 1913), p. x. For an account of the whole affair, see Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (London, 1968), pp. 273–9.
- 5 'Candour in English Fiction,' in *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings*, ed. Harold Orel (London, 1967), p. 130; and 'The Tree of Knowledge,' *New Review*, 10 (1894), 675–90.
- 6 Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (London, 1978), p. 103.

- 7 French realism is mentioned by, among others, 'Sylvanus Urban,' 'Table Talk,' *Gentleman's Magazine*, ns 49 (1892), 321; [Thomas Nelson Page], 'Editor's Study, I,' *Harper's*, 85 (1892), 152–3; and Richard Le Gallienne, rev. of *Tess*, in *Retrospective Reviews: A Literary Log* (London, 1896), I, 14. Zola is mentioned in 'Mr. Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* [sic],' *Review of Reviews*, 5 (1892), 19; and by D. F. Hannigan, 'The Latest Development of English Fiction,' *Westminster Review*, 138 (1892), 657. Hannigan, p. 659, also mentions Ibsen, as does Charles Morton Payne, rev. of *Tess, Dial*, 12 (1892), 424. Harriet Waters Preston, in 'Thomas Hardy,' *Century Magazine*, ns 24 (1893), 358, talks of a 'Tendenz-Roman,' while Andrew Lang, in 'At the Sign of the Ship,' *Longman's*, 21 (1892), 106, prefers 'tendenz story'. W. P. Trent, in 'The Novels of Thomas Hardy,' *Sewanee Review*, 1 (1892), 19, describes *Tess* as a 'novel with a purpose'.
- 8 [Margaret O. W. Oliphant], 'The Old Saloon,' *Blackwood's*, 151 (1892), 474.
- 9 Bayley, *Essay*, p. 189.
- 10 John Goode, 'Sue Bridehead and the New Woman,' in *Women Writing and Writing about Women*, ed. Mary Jacobus (London, 1979), p. 102.
- 11 E.g. by Tony Tanner, 'Colour and Movement in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*,' *Critical Quarterly*, 10 (1968), 219–39.
- 12 Bayley, *Essay*, p. 183.
- 13 'To Robert Louis Stevenson,' 17 February 1893, *Letters of Henry James*, ed. Percy Lubbock (London, 1920), I, 205.
- 14 Mary Jacobus, 'The Difference of View,' in *Women Writing*, ed. Jacobus, p. 13.
- 15 See Mary Jacobus, 'Tess: The Making of a Pure Woman,' in *Tearing the Veil: Essays on Femininity*, ed. Susan Lipshitz (London, 1978), p. 87.
- 16 Kathleen Rogers, 'Women in Thomas Hardy,' *Centennial Review*, 19 (1975), 249–50.
- 17 Bayley, *Essay*, p. 176.
- 18 'Mr. Thomas Hardy's New Novel,' *Pall Mall Gazette*, 31 December, 1891, p. 3.
- 19 Mowbray Morris, 'Culture and Anarchy,' *Quarterly Review*, 174 (1892), 325.
- 20 'To Thomas Hardy,' 19 January 1892, *Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse*, by Hon. Evan Charteris (London, 1931), p. 226. In his reply, Hardy repudiated the distinction: 'I hardly think the writer in the *Saturday* can be a woman – the sex having caught on with enthusiasm;' 'To Edmund Gosse,' 20 January 1892, *Collected Letters*, p. 255.
- 21 'To Thomas Hardy,' 25 November 1889, Dorset County Museum. See Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist* (London, 1971), pp. 284–6.
- 22 Allan Brick, 'Paradise and Consciousness in Hardy's *Tess*,' *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 17 (1962), 118.
- 23 Though two versions of this by Hardy can be found in '*Tess in the Theatre: Two Dramatizations of "Tess of the d'Urbervilles" by Thomas Hardy, One by Lorimer Stoddard*,' ed. Marguerite Roberts (Toronto, 1950), pp. 49 and 182.
- 24 Franz Stanzel, 'Thomas Hardy: *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*,' in *Der Moderne*

- Englische Roman: Interpretationen*, ed. Horst Oppel (Berlin, 1963), pp. 38–40. Cf. Laurence Lerner, *The Truth-tellers* (London, 1967), pp. 113–31. For an interesting but sharply contrasting view of this aspect of the novel, see Joseph Hillis Miller, 'Fiction and Repetition: *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*,' in *Forms of Modern British Fiction*, ed. Alan Warren Friedman (London, 1975), pp. 43–71.
- 25 Bayley, *Essay*, p. 189.
- 26 See, respectively, Arnold Kettle, Introduction, *Tess*, rpt. in *Twentieth Century Interpretation of 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles'*, ed. Albert J. LaValley (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1969), pp. 14–29; Douglas Brown, *Thomas Hardy, Men and Books* (London, 1954), p. 91; Lucille Herbert, 'Hardy's Views in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*,' *ELH*, 37 (1970), 77–94; and John Holloway, 'Hardy's Major Fiction,' in *The Charted Mirror: Literary and Critical Essays* (London, 1960), pp. 94–107.
- 27 D. H. Lawrence, 'Study of Thomas Hardy,' in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Edward D. McDonald (London, 1936; rpt. 1961), pp. 482–8.
- 28 Myth critics include Jean Brooks, *Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure* (London, 1971), pp. 233–53; Henry Kozicki, 'Myths of Redemption in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*,' *Papers on Language and Literature*, 10 (1974), 150–8; and James Hazen, 'The Tragedy of Tess Durbeyfield,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 11 (1969), 779–94.
- 29 Dorothy van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function* (1953; rpt. New York, 1960), p. 196.
- 30 Bernard J. Paris, '"A Confusion of Many Standards": Conflicting Value Systems in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*,' *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 24 (1969), 57–79. Cf. David Lodge, 'Tess, Nature, and the Voices of Hardy,' in *Language of Fiction: Essays in Criticism and Verbal Analysis of the English Novel* (London, 1966), pp. 164–88.
- 31 Cf. Jacobus, 'Pure Woman,' pp. 81–2.
- 32 According to the invaluable account of textual revision by J. T. Laird, *The Shaping of 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles'* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 190–2.
- 33 Jacobus, 'Pure Woman,' p. 78.
- 34 See Jacobus, 'Pure Woman,' pp. 83–4.
- 35 For a detailed discussion of *Tess*'s relation to Darwinist theory, see Peter R. Morton, '*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*: A Neo-Darwinian Reading,' *Southern Review* (Adelaide), 7 (1974), 38–50; J. R. Ebbatson, 'The Darwinian View of *Tess*: A Reply,' *Southern Review*, 8 (1975), 247–53; and Morton, '*Tess* and August Weismann: Unholy Alliance?,' *Southern Review*, 8 (1975), 254–6.
- 36 Robert C. Schweik, 'Moral Perspective in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*,' *College English*, 24 (1962), 18.
- 37 See Jacobus, 'Pure Woman,' pp. 82–3.
- 38 Bayley, *Essay*, p. 189.
- 39 Cf. John Goode, 'Woman and the Literary Text,' in *The Rights and Wrongs of Woman*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (Harmondsworth, 1976), p. 255.

Penny Boumelha's shrewd, subtle reading of Hardy makes her book one of the most valuable and original studies of the novels to have appeared for some time. Keenly historical, theoretically sophisticated and critically acute, Boumelha's book contains, alongside its probing assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of Hardy's presentation of women, an absorbing account of the 'New Woman' fiction of the time which is a genuinely new contribution to feminist literary studies.>>> (Terry Eagleton). Penny Boumelha's shrewd, subtle reading of Hardy makes her boo