Title: Tess of the d'Urbervilles
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[essay date 1964] In the following essay, Carpenter offers an overview of Tess of the d'Urbervilles, calling it a story of a peasant girl transformed into universal tragedy.

The basic myth of The Woodlanders is reiterated, with some differences, in Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891), which was published four years later: an essentially good and natural character is destroyed by the combined powers of society and circumstance. The differences are that the primitivist, anthropological ambience of Tess is more concentrated on the protagonist and is made more a matter of analogy than allusion. Giles Winterborne is only one of the principal figures in The Woodlanders, whereas Tess Durbeyfield is undeniably the central character in the novel named after her. We are saddened when Giles dies, but there are others to carry on; when Tess is executed, we are desolated and left only with the unsatisfactory solace of a possible rebirth of her love in the persons of her sister and Angel Clare. By focusing all our sympathies on his heroine, Hardy redoubles the emphasis of his scapegoat myth.

Tess is, however, less obviously an anthropological figure than Giles. The archetypal nature of her situation lies in its pattern and process rather than in its allusions. Hardy does, to be sure, equate Tess with Eve, as we shall see later; but, in general, it is what happens to her that brings out the basic mythic significance. Nearly as much a child of the soil as Giles or Marty, Tess is more complex, more human, and no Demeter to Giles' Dionysus. Yet she is more powerfully symbolic in her femininity than either Giles or Marty are as wood god or wood nymph. Her unconscious sexual attractiveness--her lush figure and "peony mouth"--relates her to the archetypal fertility principle symbolized by the goddesses of myth from Ishtar to Venus. In addition, her story is an archetypal folk tale of the wronged maiden who cannot escape from her past, who finally turns on her seducer to destroy him, and who loses her own life as a result. Together, these qualities of the elemental feminine character and the paradigmatic folk tale serve to make Tess of the d'Urbervilles one of Hardy's most forceful novels.

Tess Durbeyfield's story begins with the notion of her poor, foolish father that he is a descendant of one of the ancient Norman families of Wessex, and his drunken celebration of this apocryphal situation,
which prevents him from carrying to market the beehives on which the family depends for its living. Tess takes the job, falls asleep on the way, and their horse is killed, impaled by the shaft of a speeding mailcart. As a consequence of this irreparable loss, Tess seeks the assistance of the d'Urbervilles, her supposed kin, and a wealthy family. In due time she is seduced by Alec d'Urberville, and bears a child, which dies in infancy. After this she leaves the vicinity of her home to work as a dairymaid in the rich farming section of Talbothays. There she meets Angel Clare, son of a clergyman, and a gentleman who is learning the dairy business; eventually they fall in love and get married. Tess never having been able to muster up the courage or find the opportunity to tell Angel about her past life. She confesses to him on their wedding night; despite the fact that he has been guilty of a brief affair himself, his concept of Tess's maiden innocence is utterly shattered, and blind to her real innocence and purity of spirit he insists on a separation. He goes abroad; Tess, not realizing that he does not mean really to abandon her, becomes an itinerant farm laborer.

At the "starve-acre" place where she works Tess is harried and overburdened by the owner and almost distracted with her sense of being abandoned by Angel. At this crucial juncture Alec d'Urberville reappears, this time apparently converted into a fanatical evangelist. His new personality is not, however, firmly enough established for him to resist his worse side when he once again encounters Tess. His pursuit of her, combined with her desperation, finally brings her back into his power. But when she discovers that Angel had never intended to abandon her and that her letters had not reached him until too late, she murders Alec in a frenzy of grief and torment. She flees with Angel, but is eventually apprehended and executed. As Hardy says in a much-deplored final sentence, "the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess."

This grandiloquent metaphysical implication is not the primary reason that Tess [Tess of the d'Urbervilles] raised such a storm at its publication. More important in this respect was its social criticism. Although in The Woodlanders Hardy attacked the stupidity of a marriage law that tied Grace to Fitzpier's despite his infidelity, the novel did not really get at the social prejudices that gave sanction to such laws. In Tess, however, basic moral assumptions of the Victorian age come in for barbed criticism: the cruelty of a "moral" code which condemns the innocent victim of a seducer (perhaps a rapist) to ostracism while he goes scot free; the double standard that enabled Angel to palliate his own sins while condemning Tess. Although its "message" is comprised in dramatic situations rather than in tractarian statement, Tess of the d'Urbervilles is a frontal attack on some of the bastions of Victorian mores, and was recognized as such. In addition, Hardy emphasized his point by subtitled his novel A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented, thus virtually guaranteeing a storm of protest. For Tess is not only once but twice fallen from the point of view of Victorian respectabilities. No matter that she is subjected to intolerable pressure: she has been seduced; she has borne an illegitimate child; she has married, been deserted by her husband, and lived with her seducer. Even Henry James thought that such a novel was "vile." Hardy drew blood when he tried to write a serious story about a basic moral issue.

Hardy did not intend his novel to be a social tract, but he did want to treat social problems in a mature way. In doing so, he did not confine himself only to the question of moral standards but also considered the effect on ordinary people of economic instability and social climbing. Tess's father initiates the tragic course his daughter pursues by his illusion that he is a somebody because his ancestors were noble Normans. A chain of circumstance is linked together from this notion, the most important link being Tess's going to her "kinfolk," the d'Urbervilles (who are actually nouveaux riches) for help. The constant need for steady income to support the family later takes Tess far away from home, and turns her into an itinerant farm laborer, thus setting the stage for the reappearance of Alec. Part of Hardy's social criticism is thus aimed at the agricultural situation in which poor people lacked even a modicum of
security and were subject to any chill economic wind that might blow along. Moreover, the pernicious idea that the members of the "better classes" were really better than the simple country folk is subjected to sharp analysis. Tess is by far the most admirable person in the novel, and the two men in her life--both presumably above her in the social scale--are shown as the victims of false ideas of human interrelationships coming from their background. Not only Tess's father labors under the illusion that social classes have some intrinsic value in them (like Mr. Melbury), but Alec thinks he can play the seigneur to the peasant girl and Angel believes that there is some mystic purity native to the maid of lower classes, necessary to her desirability. Both of these are destructive notions because they replace individual human values with false concepts about society. As Hardy had done in such widely differing novels as *The Hand of Ethelberta* and *The Woodlanders*, he demonstrated in *Tess* the problems that arise from social prejudices and illusions.

Hardy also includes in his social critique his usual theme of the invasion of the pastoral world by alien forces, here symbolized by the threshing machine, that "buzzing red glutton" with its tender "a creature from Tophet, who had strayed into the pelucid smokelessness of this region of yellow grain and pale soil," a throbbing mechanical monster on which Tess works her heart out. But more pervasive, and evidently more striking because so many readers have been impressed by it, is the metaphysical theme which is, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, more patent than in any previous novel. Hardy shows Tess the helpless victim not only of society but also of principalities and powers for which no human agency can be held responsible. We saw in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and in *The Return of the Native* that these powers might provide situations which character could then exploit, but in *Tess* they operate without regard to character. Hardy unwisely puts into Tess's mouth early in the novel the portentous remark that we live in a "blighted world," and throughout his novel he seems determined to prove the point. When the rats are slaughtered at the base of the grain rick or when Tess puts the wounded pheasants out of their misery, it is pretty clear what Hardy is about. The final deplored comment that "Justice' was done," rounds out this philosophical aspect of the novel, emphasizing the idea that Tess was not only beset by society but also by the very nature of the universe.

When all is said and done, however, the *quality* of the novel comes from its characters and setting rather than its more conspicuous themes. Tess is outstanding among Hardy's heroines because she is the only good woman who has the role of a protagonist. She has none of the caprice and egotism of a Eustacia or a Sue Bridehead; she is instead the ideal ingenu--Tamsin Yeobright, Marty South--brought centerstage. Unlike these others, however, she is more vitally alive; specifically, she is more female, more sexual, more passionate. In combination with her innocence, her gentleness, and her worshipful loyalty, this sexuality makes her indeed a memorable character. It is as if the voluptuousness of the luxurious Felice had been purified and combined with the virtue of the guileless Tamsin. Tess is also better educated and more intelligent than the ingenues of the earlier novels; and she has greater moral and physical endurance than any of Hardy's other heroines. Most notable of all is what we might somewhat lamely call her genuineness. She has the straightforward sincerity, the natural simplicity of those who live close to nature. No tiresome paragon of virtue, she also has a dash of recklessness in her character (coming, Hardy implies, from her knightly Norman ancestors) that enables her at long last to turn on her tormentor and slay him. Like the peasantry from which she comes, Tess knows nothing of deceit; like Billy Budd, she can only strike out when its evil is fully revealed to her. Beautiful with a full-bodied femininity, staunch in character, passionate in emotion, Tess is Hardy's vision of an ideal woman.

In contrast to her are the two men in her life, who lack not only her genuineness but also her simplicity and passion. Alec d'Urberville is the less interesting of these men, but he has unexpected qualities which come out in the course of the novel. In the beginning he is the typical seducer of melodrama, with his
fla.shy clothes, high-stepping horses, his bold and roving eye, and his "badly moulded" mouth. Only a bit less theatrical than Manston of Desperate Remedies or William Dare of A Laodicean, Alec acts his stereotyped role so mechanically that we almost feel like hissing him when he strokes his mustache and calls Tess, "My Beauty." Later, in response to an ill-defined motive, he becomes an evangelist, and then gives this up for a new pursuit of Tess, the first shift being less believable than the second. Yet there is something in Alec which goes beyond the mere stock seducer, for he does seem torn between his better and his worser selves, and his yielding to the latter indicates the strength of Tess's appeal. Despite his careless immorality and his habit of exaggeration, Alec speaks at least part of truth when he says, "And why have you tempted me? I was as firm as a man could be till I saw those eyes and that mouth again—surely there never was such a maddening mouth since Eve's!" (411) [all page references from The Works of Thomas Hardy in Prose and Verse. The Wessex Edition (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1912-31)]. Firm is something Alec never was, but his fall from precarious grace is brought about by Tess; he is a weak man who might have been good enough but for the presence of her innocent allurement.

Angel Clare is similarly a man who is pulled in different directions by conflicting motives, and he is in some ways the most interesting character in the novel—not the most imaginative creation nor yet the most profound personality, but the most intriguing because of his problems. Angel is as obsessed with the idea of "feminine purity" as any of his namesakes might be, but he is at the same time a rationalistic skeptic lacking in compassion and tolerance. This ambivalence is compounded by his desire to break free of his social and religious background, to strike out on his own intellectually and economically. This desire is not, however, strong enough to withstand his early conditioning. When Tess confesses her past to him, he is too blinded by his prejudices to see the reality before him—her fundamental purity and innocence; instead he allows himself to be controlled by his barren notions.

Yet Angel has a genuine love for Tess which lies beneath his conscious self. In one of Hardy's most bizarre scenes Angel walks in his sleep a few nights after the confession and carries Tess across the Froom River to place her in a stone coffin, obviously the act of love and despair. Although contrived (and often censored), this scene is powerfully imaginative in its grotesque distortion of the ordinary, and prepares the reader for Angel's eventual realization of his true feeling for Tess. Like his successor, Jude, Angel is a more "modern" character than other Hardy men; for he has ambiguous and contradictory motives—some overt, others so hidden under layers of ideas that they can come out only at night. His wavering, his rationalizations, his sophistries, his naïve self-deceptions, and his neurotic self-torments ally him to such figures as Stephen Dedalus and Quentin Compson rather than to the typical Victorian hero. Both the sleepwalking and the intensity with which he reacts to Tess's confession may well indicate a hidden sense of sexual guilt, as the emphasis on feminine "purity" usually indicates an obsession with sexuality as something to be feared.

Angel is notably inconsistent, too. He is later tempted to take Liz Huett with him to Brazil as his mistress because he feels cynical about women and would be "revenged on society." The irony of such a double standard, as well as its patent falsity, Angel cannot perceive. He complains about the social ordinances of marriage as restrictive, when his own concept of "purity" in his wife binds him more securely than the law. Not self-destructive like Henchard, Angel is similarly self-­alienated; in this respect he is also like Clym and Jude. Except for Jude he is the most complex and contradictory of Hardy's men.

Angel and Tess first meet at Talbothays Dairy, where she has gone to work after the death of Sorrow, her baby. Talbothays is certainly one of Hardy's supreme accomplishments in setting, a superbly realized place and a rich, complex symbol at the same time. It is of the essence pastoral, with its red and white
cows, its verdant "water-meads," and its immemorial rhythms of milking, skimming, and churning. Hardy shows it to us through its most fertile seasons of spring and summer, establishing an equation between its serenity and the restoration to Tess of an interest in life after her harrowing experiences. For Talbothays is a means of stressing the integral relationship between man and nature which Hardy so often presents. This setting is, within the properly respectable limits of Victorian fiction, about as much a Dionysia as one could expect. The passions of men and women are not only stimulated by the burgeoning fecundity of nature but are a reflection of it. "Amid the oozing fatness and warm ferments of the Var Vale," says Hardy, "at a season when the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fertilization, it was impossible that the most fanciful love should not grow passionate" (190). To mix a figure, it is a pagan paradise where Angel, for instance, experiences an "aesthetic, sensuous, pagan pleasure in natural life and lust womanhood," a land so fecund that it is described in an erotic imagery which should have outraged Hardy's audience if it had been alert to the implications of such comparisons: "The season developed and matured. ... Rays from the sunrise drew forth the buds and stretched them into long stalks, lifted up sap in noiseless streams, opened petals, and sucked out scents in invisible jets and breathings" (203, 165). If the reader of today did not know that this was Hardy, he might momentarily think it was D. H. Lawrence; for it celebrates the life-giving powers of sex in a similar fashion.

The Talbothays setting, as Hardy indicates, is both mirror and lamp, for it brings about a corresponding sexuality in the characters. Angel, returning to the farm after a journey to his home, finds Tess just awakened from an afternoon nap, "the brim-fullness of her nature breath[ing] from her." When she stretches her arm above her head, he can see "its satin delicacy above the sunburn. ... 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" (217). The sun shines in the window "upon her inclining face, upon the blue veins of her temple, upon her naked arm, and her neck, and into the depths of her hair." Angel clasps her close to him; and, while she will not at first look up, "her eyes soon lifted, and his plumbed the deepness of the ever-varying pupils, with their radiating fibrils of blue, and black, and gray, and violet, while she regarded him as Eve at her second waking might have regarded Adam" (218). While Tess's love for Angel is of utmost purity, a worshipful devotion, it still is rooted in her vibrant sexual nature, the corollary to the rich fertility of the land of the "great dairies."

A paradise like Talbothays might reasonably be expected to have within it an Adam and Eve, as Hardy implies in the above episode, and perhaps a Satan lurking in the outer darkness. Indeed it is so, although Hardy gives us less an allegory than a complex of symbolic suggestions. Tess is more clearly a kind of Eve than Angel is an Adam. In her innocence and simplicity, as well as in her worship of him as a "godlike" being; in her naturalness and passion; and in her fall from innocence into the knowledge of good and evil, she is closer to the primordial mother of men than Angel is to the first man. Angel is too much the intellectual and skeptic to fulfill the role of Adam, although Hardy twice refers to him in this way. His name indicates better the ambiguities of his position, for it is partly fitting and partly ironic. He is a rather saintly man who knows little of the real world, but he is also rather inhuman. If angels are not only better than men morally but also superior in their understanding and compassion for erring humanity, Angel is somewhat wide of the mark. It takes much suffering to humanize his "angelic" character and to bring him back to Tess to share in the last unhappy days. Prior to this conversion, his role in paradise, while not overtly destructive like Alec's at Flintcomb-Ash, is damaging enough. A splendid scene in which Angel strums a secondhand harp in the weedy garden at Talbothays most effectively symbolizes the part he is to play in this paradise. As Tess listens to the "thin notes," she is fascinated and draws near to him through the fringe of the garden, which "uncultivated for some years ... was now damp and rank with juicy grass which sent up mists of pollen at a touch; and with tall blooming weeds emitting offensive smells." Stealthily approaching, Tess gathers "cuckoospittle on her skirts,"
steps on snails, and gets stains on her arms and hands from "thistle-milk and slug-slime" and from the "sticky blights" of trees. Quite plainly these images imply the corrupting influence on Tess's life of this angel in an unweeded Eden; the physical stains and blights are symbolic of the spiritual stains and blights which will eventuate from her contact with him. It certainly was a bold imaginative stroke on Hardy's part to convey his meaning by having a man named "Angel" play a harp in a garden.

The Devil does not appear in the paradisal Talbothays, but he certainly shows up later on. After the marriage of Tess and Angel, the confession, and the desertion, Tess goes to Flintcomb-Ash, the "starve-acre" farm where she labors like a serf. When Alec appears, she is at the end of her strength and hope, so that his temptation effectively takes advantage of her woman's weakness. Significantly enough, Alec is in the guise of an evangelist, for who can quote Scripture better for his own ends than the Devil? Later, Hardy makes the allusion more specific, having Alec pop up out of an atmosphere of smoke and fire, disguised as a laborer, when Tess is burning grass at Marlott. Alec's joke--"a jester might say that this is just like Paradise. You are Eve and I am the old Other One, come to tempt you in the disguise of an inferior animal"--is perfectly apropos, despite Tess's protestation that she does not think of him in that way at all. His relentless pursuit, his ability to take advantage of every circumstance which brings her more within his power, and his sinister appearance all conspire to making him more than the stock melodramatic villain as the novel proceeds--as well as making him something less, because he becomes less human as he becomes more symbolic. His actions stamp him ever more clearly as a "Mephistophelean visitant," as he poses as an effigy atop a tomb, frightening Tess, or as he tells her the story of the phantom d'Urberville coach. When his blood seeps with preternatural facility through mattress, floor, and ceiling, we should be less astonished than many critics have been; for Alec's blood is no ordinary fluid, but an ichor suited to his symbolic role of Satan.

Not only is Alec's pursuit of Tess symbolic of the temptation of Eve but it also is more broadly related to the entire complex of scapegoat myths in which an innocent victim becomes the sacrifice for the sins of society. At Talbothays Hardy shows his heroine as sometimes much more impressive than a simple country lass ought by rights to be:

At this dim inceptive stage of the day Tess seemed to Clare to exhibit a dignified largeness both of disposition and physique, an almost regnant power, possibly because he knew that at that preternatural time hardly any woman so well endowed in person as she was likely to be walking in the open air within the boundaries of the horizon; very few in all England. ... It was then ... that she impressed him most deeply. 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. (168)

In her naturalness, in her unsophisticated simplicity, and in her innocence, as well as in her deep-bosomed figure, the peasant girl is at this point as complete an image of the archetypal earth goddess as modern literature can show. True it is that Hardy does not permit her to remain such for long. "Call me Tess," she would say askance, when Angel used the names of goddesses for her. "Then it would grow lighter, and her features would become simply feminine; they had changed from those of a divinity who could confer bliss to those of a being who craved it" (168). Hardy does not want to allegorize, but he does wish to gain the advantage of mythical overtones to lend significance to his folklore.

These overtones are given strength by the movement of the latter part of the novel. When Tess goes from Talbothays to Flintcomb-Ash, with its sterile name and its winter weather, she journeys not only across
the landscape but also moves in the direction of her fated sacrifice. The triumph of winter over the
fecundity of Talbothays is the prophetic triumph of death over Tess's life; the dominance of the threshing
machine is the triumph of mechanism over the vital qualities represented by life close to nature. We hear
no more references to Tess as a goddess, but she becomes ever more clearly the victim of the world's
inexorable vengeance, the archetypal scapegoat. Like other gods and goddesses, she is made to suffer for
the mistakes and misdeeds of her world.

When she and Angel finally leave their temporary hiding place at Bramshurst, after she kills Alec, they
proceed aimlessly across the countryside in a naïve attempt to escape, and come at night to Stonehenge,
which at first they do not recognize. Hardy derives full advantage from this magnificent setting for the
climax of his tragedy: the wind playing upon the huge pillars, "like the notes of some gigantic
one-stringed harp"; the look and feel of the great stones against the night sky; the associations with the
immense past, for as Angel says, it is a heathen temple, "older than the centuries; older than the
d'Urbervilles." Tess asks him if the heathens sacrificed to God in this place, and he replies that he thinks
they sacrificed to the sun. But that they did sacrifice and that Tess is the modern equivalent of those
barbaric ceremonial victims are only too clear. She sleeps on one of the stones; and, when morning
comes, so do the police:

In a minute or two her breathing became more regular, her clasp of his hand relaxed, and
she fell asleep. The band of silver paleness along the eastern horizon made even the
distant parts of the Great Plain appear dark and near; and the whole enormous landscape
bore that impress of reserve, taciturnity, and hesitation which is usual just before day.
The eastward pillars and their architraves stood up blackly against the light, and the great
flame-shaped Sun-stone beyond them; and the Stone of Sacrifice midway. Presently the
night wind died out, and the quivering little pools in the cup-like hollows of the stones
lay still. At the same time something seemed to move on the verge of the dip eastward—a
mere dot. It was the head of a man approaching them from the hollow beyond the
Sun-Stone.(504)

Tess is allowed to wake naturally; seeing the police she says, "It is almost as it should be," because the
happiness of the last few days with Angel could not have lasted. "She stood up, shook herself, and went
forward, neither of the men having moved. 'I am ready,' she said quietly" (505).

Without a doubt this is one of the most moving scenes Hardy ever wrote, and it shows him at the peak of
his talent. The blending of symbol and reality, the mythic meaning combined with the human meaning, the
superbly realized description of action and setting match anything in the English novel. Here the folktale
of the ruined maid takes on the aspect of universal tragedy. Whatever faults Tess of the d'Urbervilles
may have--and they are no doubt many--they are redeemed in this scene at Stonehenge.

The novel is, however, not entirely done with myth at this point, for the painful scene at the denouement
when Angel and Tess's sister Liza-Lu leave the prison just before Tess's execution brings to our attention
a theme of rebirth. It would be too grim, even for Hardy, to have his beautiful heroine sacrificed entirely
in vain. We are thus allowed to feel that through her husband and her sister, who is significantly
described as a "spiritualized image of Tess," there will eventually come about a new order of life. As
the two leave Wintoneester, "the drooping of their heads is that of Giotto's 'Two Apostles';" and, with
this plain implication of their task, Hardy tells us that Tess will, in a way, live on.

Myth is, of course, not the rich body of the tale, but rather its soul or spirit. Tess of the d'Urbervilles is
a fine novel from the realistic point of view as well as from the symbolic (although too narrow a
construction of that realism has often left critics unable to cope with its symbolism). There is more than a little humor in the illusions of Tess's drunken father with his notions about his social status; in the breathless infatuation of the dairymaids for Angel (rather reminiscent of the love of the dairymaids in the Bhagavad Gita for Krishna, the divine cowherd)³; and in the character of Angel's brothers. A subordinate theme of much interest is involved in the question of inheritance in all three of the major characters, especially as it affects Tess through the "decay" of ancient families. Hardy even implies some warped kind of retribution when Alec seduces, or rapes, Tess as her "mailed ancestors rollicking home from a fray" may have "dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time" (91). He does qualify this idea with some objections to its validity as a principle, but throughout the novel he harps on the idea of heredity and its influence on Tess's life. The novel also emphasizes the effect of abstract concepts on conduct, both with Angel and his family, basically good and tolerant people whose natural feelings are overlaid with the incrustations of a narrow theology. Mr. Clare is a character who demonstrates clearly Hardy's idea that life-denying ideas, no matter how ethical, are destructive.

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Social realism of this sort is not, however, what gives the novel its power. The myth does that. When the letter which Tess has written telling Angel about her past slips under the carpet so that he does not see it before the marriage, we know that Chance has made its mystic and malign influence felt once again. We feel, as Frederick Karl puts it, that Hardy is using Chance as his "weapon to strike through surface reality to areas where the poetry of man offers resistance to the drab starkness of a malevolent universe."⁴ When the shaft of the mailcart runs poor old Prince through the breast and his life spills out through the hole in his chest, and when the blood-red motif haunts us through the rest of the novel, from the thorns scratching Tess's chin from Alec's roses, to the texts in vermilion letters that tell Tess her "damnation slumbereth not," to the scarlet of the threshing machine, to Alec's blood on the ceiling—when Hardy so boldly uses this symbolism, we know that we are reading a great mythopoeic writer. The ineluctable sense of the earth over which men move and on which they act out their fates is ever before us, from the pearly moonlight of The Chase where Tess becomes a symbol of fallen humanity, to lush Talbothays and stony Flintcomb-Ash, and finally to Stonehenge itself. Hardy wrote in Tess of the d'Urbervilles one of the finest novels of the nineteenth century because he lifted the story of a wronged peasant girl into the realm of tragedy through his use of these universal qualities; it became not only the tale of Tess Durbeyfield but also the story of wronged and suffering humanity. The Mayor of Casterbridge is more austere, The Return of the Native more passionate, but Tess remains Hardy's most moving dramatization of a pure soul struggling with the inscrutable evils of existence.

Notes

1. This interpretation of Talbothays and of the Adam and Eve myth was written before I had the opportunity of reading Allan Brink's more detailed and ingenious analysis of this pattern (see bibliography). Mr. Brink and I do not exactly see eye to eye on the role of Angel as Adam and the extensiveness of the parallels to Paradise Lost, but he makes abundantly clear that the Paradise paradigm is of great importance in the novel.

3. I am indebted for this idea to Professor Frank Baldanza of Bowling Green State University.


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