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Two Versions of Regional Romance:
Scott’s *The Bride of Lammermoor*
and Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*

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Thomas Hardy knew and admired *The Bride of Lammermoor*, praising it in “The Profitable Reading of Fiction,” his *Forum* article of March 1888, for its structural coherence. Insisting that “a well-rounded tale” must be “an organism,” he declined to subscribe to the general estimate of the formal superiority of *Tom Jones* and declared his own preference for the *Bride* as “an almost perfect specimen of form, which is the more remarkable in that Scott, as a rule, depends more upon episode, dialogue, and description, for exciting interest, than upon the well-knit interdependence of parts.” ¹ Not long after making this comment Hardy began work on *Tess of the d’Urbervilles,²* and close examination of the two novels reveals that the affinities between them, both direct and ironic, are more numerous than might at first be supposed and relate to many aspects of plot, setting, theme, imagery, and characterization. It seems worth considering what light these relationships throw on the two novels and whether, in view of Hardy’s specific comment, *The Bride of Lammermoor* has any particular relevance to the structure of *Tess*.

Some of the connections between the two novels seem at first sight fairly superficial, part of the general stock-in-trade of ballad and romance which Hardy—as ironist as well as “ballad novelist”—was ready to use both directly and contrastively for his own fictional ends. They have in common, for example, semi-allegorical names, omens and prophecies, and a deliberately patterned color symbolism—all used to point up the narrative design. But as the analogies pile up it is hard to resist the conclusion that Hardy is drawing in some special way on *The Bride of Lammermoor*, the Scott novel which employs most continuously—indeed, almost exclusively—the conventions of romance. Old blind women are not uncommon in romantic fiction,

¹Harold Orel, ed., *Thomas Hardy’s Personal Writings* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1966), pp. 120, 121.
nor absent lovers kept away by illness and unreachable by letter; ancestral vaults and family portraits also figure elsewhere. In this instance, however, the accumulation of such coincidences is reinforced by more fundamental similarities of character, situation, and theme. Edgar Ravenswood and Angel Clare share a crippling rigidity at crucial moments, a failure of compassion and understanding in their response to the heroine, which determines the subsequent movement of the action in the direction of death rather than of life. Sir William Ashton and Joan Durleyfield, so different in social status, are alike in their culpable unconcern for the consequences their marriage schemes will bring upon beloved daughters. Above all, personal tragedy is, in both novels, associated with and intensified by a more general concern with the fall of ancient houses.

If *The Bride of Lammermoor* provided Hardy with a romance paradigm, it did so in specifically regional terms. For Hardy, as for many other nineteenth-century writers, the Waverley novels made Scott the great representative of the regional artist, his achievement at the beginning of the century constituting both precedent and challenge for any potential follower. The earlier Wessex novels, especially *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, show clearly that Hardy had long absorbed that realist aspect of Scott’s regionalism which was a major influence on the treatment of place by many of the great Victorian novelists and which seems at first glance to lie behind the passionate concreteness of Hardy’s own presentation of individual Wessex locales and particular rural activities in a novel like *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. But the influence stemming from *The Bride of Lammermoor* was of a somewhat different kind. Because of its romance mode it contains little of that direct evocation of the surface detail of everyday life which distinguishes, say, the description of Dandy Dimmott’s Liddesdale farm in *Guy Mannering*; instead, it treats setting in a much more stylized manner, making the places function as part of a patterned design. The depictions of the castle of Wolf’s Crag, the woods around Ravenswood Castle, the Mermaid’s fountain, the graveyard, the quicksands of the Kelpie’s Flow, have a stillness, an idealization, an insistence on the emblematic, which makes them comparable to motifs in a tapestry. And when the stillness turns to motion in the hunting episode or the race between the carriages of the Marquis and Lady Ashton, it is the shift in the narrative pattern which counts as much as the action itself: the hunt, for example, brings Lucy and Ravenswood together for the second time, marking this meeting with a more ritualized version of the pursuit, violence, and blood which had accompanied their first encounter. The
landscape of the *Bride* belongs, indeed, as much to Spenserian romance as to Scotland at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and against these half-allegorized settings Scott plays out his scenes, arranging them in a pattern of repetition and contrast which heightens the novel's sense of entrapping unity: the journeying of Edgar Ravenswood to and from the ruined tower of his ancestors thus becomes an image of the inescapability of his fate.

What Hardy seems to have recognized is that the intensification of meaning inherent in such romance treatment of place need not be incompatible with that much more realistic presentation of setting which he had already learned from Scott's other novels. The solidity of the Wessex landscape across which Tess Durbeyfield pursues her fate does not prevent such locations as the Chase and Flintcomb-Ash from having powerful symbolic significances; indeed, the symbolism gains additional power from being grounded so firmly in the actual. For all the apparent differences in surface technique, Hardy retains for the realistic novel the kind of emblematic patterning which Scott, in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, had transferred to fiction from the Renaissance epic and Romantic poetry.

The shift from the coast of a romanticized historical Scotland to the dairy country of late-nineteenth-century Dorset, though striking in itself, is only part of a general process of transposition—from the highest ranks of society to the relatively low, from long ago and far away to very nearly here and now, from romance to realism. But in each of these instances something of the original is retained. The Dorset of the 1880's is a very different place from Scotland in the first decade of the eighteenth century—the milk from its dairies is on London breakfast tables the next morning—but it nevertheless remains a separate world whose essential difference from the world of the urban reader is stressed in the authorial commentary and further underlined by the use of pastoral language and motifs. The depiction of the countryside, of Tess's family, and of her daily life, is realistic and particularized, but an effect very close to that of romance is achieved by the frequent heightening of the individual and local almost to the level of the symbolic. The ironies which flow from this echoing of romance elements are far from simple. When the fall of an ancient house is embodied not in an aristocratic hero from the past but in a plebian heroine from the contemporary countryside the effect is at first to strip away some of the potential tragedy—but then to reinforce it with all the additional poignancy which comes from the fully realized presentation of Tess Durbeyfield herself. She is known to us as we know someone in life. We see and feel with her as well as for her, and though her fate is representative, as indicated by such
section headings as "The Woman Pays," its representativeness depends upon individuation rather than stylization.

Comparison of Tess with Lucy Ashton brings out more clearly the echoing yet contrastive relationship between the two novels. It is not so much a matter of Hardy deliberately reworking elements from Scott as of his using the earlier novel as a kind of grid against which he can plot the design of his own. Tess is a dairy maid with remote aristocratic origins, Lucy a lady who, in her simplicity and lack of dynastic ambition, has been called the "Lammermoor Shepherdess."  But both heroines long for some kind of richer life beyond the limitations of their everyday existence. Lucy aspires to a dream-world composed of the stuff of ballad and old romance: "Her secret delight was in the old legendary tales of ardent devotion and unalterable affection, chequered as they so often are with strange adventures and supernatural horrors. This was her favoured fairy realm, and here she erected her aerial palaces" (13, 299). She takes on the part of Una or Miranda, or that of the patroness of some fanciful tournament "raining down influence from her eyes on the valiant combatants" (13, 299), and "the ideal picture of chivalrous excellence which [she] had pictured to herself in the Master of Ravenswood" (13, 335) can be all too easily assimilated to this vision. So strong is her impulse to wish-fulfilment that it quite overcomes Ravenswood’s attempts to escape his fatal dream-world by clinging to his own sense of family loyalty and political reality. Tess, on the other hand, deliberately struggles against the opiates of daydream and fantasy in which her parents indulge. Her mother’s visions of wealthy marriages and her father’s delusions based on his d’Urberville ancestry take on for her a grotesque, nightmarish quality: "examining the mesh of events in her own life, she seemed to see the vanity of her father’s pride; the gentlemanly suitor awaiting herself in her mother’s fancy; to see him as a grimacing personage, laughing at her poverty, and her shrouded knightly ancestry." 4 Half-liberated by her National School education, she has sufficiently advanced from the Jacobean world of her mother to the Victorian to be able to recognize the inadequacies of her

5The Bride of Lammermoor, Waverley Novels, Vol. 13 (Edinburgh, 1850), 300. This edition, usually known as the "magnum opus" edition, was corrected by Scott at the end of his life and supplied by him with new introductions and notes. The Bride of Lammermoor occupies the second part of Volume 13 and the whole of Volume 14. Subsequent references are given within parentheses in the text and can be distinguished from those to Tess of the d’Urbervilles by the presence of volume as well as page numbers.

6Tess of the d’Urbervilles (London, 1912), p. 35. Subsequent references to this, the Wessex edition, are given within parentheses in the text.
social, economic, and family situation; but her schooling supplies no answers to the larger questions about existence which she can only half formulate, no clear focus for the yearnings for something beyond the parental world she rejects, no means of escape from that world. Such solutions cannot be found in books or stories from the past: "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, that's all" (162). She would like to know "why the sun do shine on the just and the unjust alike... But that's what books will not tell me" (162). She is compelled to formulate the spiritual liberation she seeks as a separation of the soul from the body, the experience that comes when you "lie on the grass at night and look straight up at some big bright star; and, by fixing your mind upon it, you will soon find that you are hundreds and hundreds o' miles away from your body, which you don't seem to want at all" (154-155).

Both heroines are victims, their fates the result of powerful external forces working in combination with aspects of their own personalities. Lucy can involve Ravenswood in the dream she yearns to live, but she is too weak a figure to stand against her mother's strength and energy, and can only hold out for a time through negative endurance. Tess, too, is capable of periods of passivity and acquiescence, but she is quite unlike Scott's pale heroine in her fundamental vitality and health, her possession of an instinct for life which at once impels her to reach out for happiness and fulfilment and enables her to struggle vigorously for survival in ways that contrast sharply with Lucy's inactivity in similar situations. Yet it is this very vitality which helps to betray Tess that night on the Chase, and it works together with her yearning for finer forms of experience to draw her into the marriage with Angel against which reason and conscience so strongly argue. For both heroines, resistance, active or passive, proves finally vain. Lucy's surrender to the terrible psychological force of her awesome Douglas mother is surrounded by the trappings of a great house and associated with fine clothes and the signing of marriage contracts. When Tess submits and returns to Alec and a life of tawdry luxury in a seaside boarding-house, the no less inexorable family pressures are generated not by dynastic pride and political ambition but by economic necessity: Mrs. Durbeyfield's weapon is not her power but her helplessness.

The precise nature of the oblique connection between the two novels can be examined at the detailed level of scene and image by looking at two passages whose essential materials are very close indeed. Each occurs as the heroine is about to undergo the final stage
in the reductive ordeal which produces surrender. Under intolerable
pressure from her mother Lucy Ashton has agreed that, whether or
not she has heard from the absent Ravenswood, she will be ready in
twenty days’ time to sign and seal the deed of marriage with Bucklaw.
The brief scene of affectionate interchange with her young brother
Henry which immediately follows is the only occasion in the final
section of the novel in which Lucy is seen behaving naturally rather
than as the half-dumb and eventually half-crazed victim of her
mother’s terrorization. Henry, childishly absorbed in his own finery,
has come to Lucy in search of red ribbons for his garter knots and
silver wire for the jesses of his hawk, and his disappointment with the
latter becomes for Lucy the stuff of parable:

“And yet the new falcon’s not worth them neither, for do you
know, after all the plague we had to get her from an eyry, all
the way at Posso, in Mannor Water, she’s going to prove, after
all, nothing better than a rifler—she just wets her singles in
the blood of the partridge, and then breaks away, and lets her
fly; and what good can the poor bird do after that, you know,
except pine and die in the first heather-cow or quin-bush she
can crawl into?”

“Right, Henry—right, very right,” said Lucy, mournfully,
holding the boy fast by the hand, after she had given him the
wire he wanted; “but there are more riflers in the world than
your falcon, and more wounded birds that seek but to die in
quiet, that can find neither brake nor quin-bush to hide their
heads in.”

“Ah! that’s some speech out of your romances,” said the
boy; “and Sholto says they have turned your head. But I hear
Norman whistling to the hawk—I must go fasten on the
jesses.”

And he scampered away with the thoughtless gaiety of
boyhood, leaving his sister to the bitterness of her own
reflections.

“It is decreed,” she said, “that every living creature, even
those who owe me most kindness, are to shun me, and leave
me to those by whom I am beset. It is just it should be thus.
Alone and uncounseled, I involve myself in these perils—
alone and uncounseled, I must extricate myself or die.”

(14, 303-303)

There are many points of similarity with Tess. Henry’s red ribbons
provide a minor element in a pattern of color imagery—its key
elements red, white, and black—which pervades the Bride and finds
its counterpart in the blood-dominated color imagery of Tess.\(^5\) The

\(^5\) See, for example, Tony Tanner, “Colour and Movement in Hardy’s Tess of the
d’Urbervilles,” Critical Quarterly, 10 (1968), 219-239.
relationship between Tess and her younger brother Abraham is not unlike that between Lucy and Henry, and the famous exchange about the world as a blighted apple shows an even greater readiness in Tess than in Lucy to moralize experience, although in the later novel it is the boy who has the romantic dreams and the heroine who dismisses them. But the strongest link between the passages lies, of course, in the imagery of the wounded birds, and it is hard not to see Hardy’s account of the night Tess spends in the plantation among the wounded and dying pheasants as in some sense an expanded variation on Scott’s motif.

Like Lucy, Tess is being pushed to the limits of her endurance, but where Lucy’s sufferings are psychological Tess’s involve physical danger from the man who has accosted her on the road. As though taking his cue from this distinction, Hardy makes actual what in Scott has been parabolic. It is a perfect instance of that special quality of literal-mindedness in Hardy which is the source of some of his most powerful concrete effects, if also of occasional moments of bathos. The episode realizes in specific detail the plight of the bird that can only “pine and die in the first heather-cow or whin-bush she can crawl into,” and it is necessary for compassion to take a correspondingly active form. Tess’s night has been disturbed by “a palpitation, sometimes a flutter; sometimes it was a sort of gasp or gurgle” (353); in the morning she finds the sounds have come from pheasants wounded by a shooting party: “some were dead, some feebly twitching a wing, some staring up at the sky, some pulsating quickly, some contorted, some stretched out—all of them writhing in agony, except the fortunate ones whose tortures had ended during the night by the inability of nature to bear more” (354). She does the only thing possible: “with her own hands she broke the necks of as many as she could find” (355). When, like Lucy, Tess reads a personal lesson from the episode, it significantly involves a distinction between herself and the birds rather than an indulgence in the self-pity of identification: “Poor darlings—to suppose myself the most miserable being on earth in the sight of such misery as yours! . . . And not a twinge of bodily pain about me! I be not mangled, and I be not bleeding, and I have two hands to feed and clothe me” (355). The irony is that, for all her admirable and active courage, Tess will eventually be crushed, no less surely than Lucy Ashton, by forces other than physical suffering.

Lucy’s role is restricted to that of heroine-victim, but Tess is something more: in his redeployment of Scott’s materials, and in line with that technique of intensification so characteristic of this novel, Hardy also makes her the focus of the fall-of-ancient-houses theme
which Scott had centered on Edgar Ravenswood. The relationship seems deliberately ironic, for Tess has none of Ravenswood’s pride of ancestry or bitter anger at loss of rank and Hardy is concerned to stress the vitality and power of endurance she derives from the peasant side of her ancestry. But as Tess stands homeless beside the tombs of her d’Urberville forebears in Kingsbere church the sense of the destructive processes of time and change is as powerfully evoked as when Ravenswood enters the castle of his fathers to find the family portraits usurped by those of the new owners. By giving Tess this dual role, and then allowing her to occupy the foreground of the novel in all her documented individuality, Hardy engages us directly in her sufferings in ways quite foreign to Scott’s deliberately distanced and almost ritualized dramatization of Lucy’s plight and the fall of the House of Ravenswood. But what is more important is that in presenting a heroine who continues to struggle against her fate until its violent culmination, and then deliberately accedes to the consequences of her own action, Hardy gives an entirely different turn to the final stages of the plot and supplies the pre-existing pattern with fresh sources both of energy and anguish.

For Lucy Ashton the lateness of Ravenswood’s return is absolute; their last meeting consists of his recriminations. Her bloody stabbing of Bucklaw buys no interlude of reconciliation, however brief, and she does not survive to examine her own actions or contemplate the nature of the universe she inhabits. In Hardy’s novel the transposition of the details of the stabbing seem almost crudely anti-romantic when set against the Scott paradigm: the weapon a bread-knife rather than a dagger, the scene a lodging house rather than a castle, the whole episode the stuff of melodrama and newspaper sensation rather than of ballad and legend. But striking as these dislocations are, it is not in them but in the subsequent journey beyond violence that the most significant development of the pattern inheres. For Tess the journey to Stonehenge, the home of her peasant ancestors, “Older than the centuries; older than the d’Urbervilles” (502), is a journey to calmness, to acceptance of herself and the universe, so that it matters little that Angel cannot promise a reunion in the life to come. As she lies on the altar stone help no longer asks why the sun shines on just and unjust alike: “I like very much to be here... It is so solemn and lonely—after my great happiness—with nothing but the sky above my face” (502). By allowing her the “great happiness” of the interlude with Angel in the deserted house it may seem at first sight that Hardy betrays Tess into the dream-world of wish-fulfilment she has resisted
so long. But Tess is always aware of what she has done and of the price she must pay; she knows that there can be only respite, not final escape: it is Angel who refuses to believe in the act of blood. As in the idyll of Talbotheys, but now much more briefly and poignantlv, Hardy dares to depict in all its intensity and transience the happiness whose loss is the novel's great and lasting pain. And it is the dramatization of loss which dictates the concluding action, as Angel and 'Liza-Lu move off into an uncertain future. The openness of the ending marks a significant departure from the sharp finalities of the Scott pattern—Ravenswood's disappearance into the quicksand, the death-bound memories of his old servant, and the heriless future of Bucklaw and the Ashtons. Lucy's brother will never marry or have children, and his only memory is of the coldness of his sister's hand on the ride to her wedding. Those who loved Tess have their future less clearly prescribed, and the memory they carry forward is of that special quality of her voice which "will never be forgotten by those who knew her" (120).

In *The Return of the Native* Hardy had deployed the devices of Greek tragedy in a deliberate attempt to infuse with greater significance his story of the inhabitants of Egdon Heath. The attempt is impressive but not completely successful: the narrative material and the ambitious technique fail to coalesce in a sufficiently organic manner, and the reader is left in some doubt whether the rather portentous frame of reference is being invoked directly or ironically. Hardy continued to search for a technique capable of embodying his conviction that, as he put it in *The Woodlanders*, Wessex nooks were sometimes the setting for events of truly Sophoclean grandeur; and in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* the example of Scott fused with the locally-derived idea of the decline of the d'Urbervilles to provide the necessary bridge to a literary mode of greater antiquity, elevation, and resonance. Now, however, the mode was not that of tragedy but that of romance, whose formulae had been revitalized by their historicization and localization in the Waverley novels at the beginning of the century. Hardy's exploitation of romance apparatus in *Tess* is direct and unashamed: symbolic imagery, emblematic episodes, paired characters and incidents, highly patterned plotting, all contribute to a formal shapeliness such as he had admired in *The Bride of Lammermoor* at the same time as they extend the scope and implications of Tess's story and intensify its force. What is unique in

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*The Woodlanders* (London, 1912), p. 4

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Hardy, and at the heart of his success in so powerfully sustaining both the representativeness and the individuality of his heroine's fate, is his no less unambiguous use of a transforming irony capable of generating new passion and energy from the transposed elements of romance without undermining the echoing poignancies created by such non-ironic connections as survive.

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