



Tess of the
D'Urbervilles

Thomas
Hardy

TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

THOMAS HARDY was born in a cottage in Higher Bockhampton, near Dorchester, on 2 June 1840. He was educated locally and at sixteen was articled to a Dorchester architect, John Hicks. In 1862 he moved to London, found employment with another architect, Arthur Blomfield, began to write poetry and published an essay. By 1867 he had returned to Dorset to work as Hicks's assistant and began his first (unpublished) novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*.

On an architectural visit to St Juliot in Cornwall in 1870 he met his first wife, Emma Gifford. Before their marriage in 1874 he had published four novels and was earning his living as a writer. More novels followed and in 1878 the Hardys moved from Dorset to the London literary scene. But in 1885, after building his house at Max Gate near Dorchester, Hardy again returned to Dorset. He then produced most of his major novels: *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *The Woodlanders* (1887), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* (1892) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). Amidst the controversy caused by *Jude the Obscure*, he turned to the poetry he had been writing all his life. In the next thirty years he published over nine hundred poems and his epic drama in verse, *The Dynasts*.

After a long and bitter estrangement, Emma Hardy died at Max Gate in 1912. Paradoxically, the event triggered some of Hardy's finest love poetry. In 1914, however, he married Florence Dugdale, a close friend for several years. In 1910 he had been awarded the Order of Merit and was recognized, even revered, as the major literary figure of the time. He died on 11 January 1928. His ashes were buried in Westminster Abbey and his heart at Stinsford in Dorset.

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THOMAS HARDY

Tess of the D'Urbervilles

Edited with Notes by

TIM DOLIN

with an Introduction by

MARGARET R. HIGONNET

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Tim Dolin

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

This edition uses, with one exception, the first edition in *volume* form of each of Hardy's novels and therefore offers something not generally available. Their dates range from 1871 to 1897. The purpose behind this choice is to present each novel as the creation of its own period and without revisions of later times, since these versions have an integrity and value of their own. The outline of textual history that follows is designed to expand on this statement.

All of Hardy's fourteen novels, except *Jude the Obscure* (1895) which first appeared as a volume in the Wessex Novels, were published individually as he wrote them (from 1871 onwards). Apart from *Desperate Remedies* (1871) and *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), all were published first as serials in periodicals, where they were subjected to varying degrees of editorial interference and censorship. *Desperate Remedies* and *Under the Greenwood Tree* appeared directly in volume form from Tinsley Brothers. By 1895 ten more novels had been published in volumes by six different publishers.

By 1895 Hardy was sufficiently well-established to negotiate with Osgood, McIlvaine a collected edition of all earlier novels and short story collections plus the volume edition of *Jude the Obscure*. *The Well-Beloved* (radically changed from its serialized version) was added in 1897, completing the appearance of all Hardy's novels in volume form. Significantly this collection was called the 'Wessex Novels' and contained a map of 'The Wessex of the Novels' and authorial prefaces, as well as frontispieces by Macbeth-Raeburn of a scene from the novel sketched 'on the spot'. The texts were heavily revised by Hardy, amongst other things, in relation to topography, to strengthen the 'Wessex' element so as to suggest that this half-real half-imagined location had been coherently conceived from the beginning, though of course he knew that this was not so. In practice 'Wessex' had an uncertain and ambiguous development in the earlier editions. To trace the growth of Wessex in the novels as they appeared it is necessary to read them in their original pre-1895 form. For the 1895-6 edition represents a substantial layer of reworking.

Similarly, in the last fully revised and collected edition of 1912–13, the Wessex Edition, further alterations were made to topographical detail and photographs of Dorset were included. In the more open climate of opinion then prevailing, sexual and religious references were sometimes (though not always) made bolder. In both collected editions there were also many changes of other kinds. In addition, novels and short story volumes were grouped thematically as ‘Novels of Character and Environment’, ‘Romances and Fantasies’ and ‘Novels of Ingenuity’ in a way suggesting a unifying master plan underlying all texts. A few revisions were made for the Mellstock Edition of 1919 – 20, but to only some texts.

It is various versions of the 1912–13 edition which are generally available today, incorporating these layers of alteration and shaped in part by the critical climate when the alterations were made. Therefore the present edition offers the texts as Hardy’s readers first encountered them, in a form of which he in general approved, the version that his early critics reacted to. It reveals Hardy as he first dawned upon the public and shows how his writing (including the creation of Wessex) developed, partly in response to differing climates of opinion in the 1870s, 1880s and early 1890s. In keeping with these general aims, the edition will reproduce all contemporary illustrations where the originals were line drawings. In addition for all texts which were illustrated, individual volumes will provide an appendix discussing the artist and the illustrations.

The exception to the use of the first volume editions is *Far From the Madding Crowd*, for which Hardy’s holograph manuscript will be used. That edition will demonstrate in detail just how the text is ‘the creation of its own period’: by relating the manuscript to the serial version and to the first volume edition. The heavy editorial censoring by Leslie Stephen for the serial and the subsequent revision for the volume provide an extreme example of the processes that in many cases precede and produce the first book versions. In addition, the complete serial version (1892) of *The Well-Beloved* will be printed alongside the volume edition, since it is arguably a different novel from the latter.

To complete the picture of how the texts developed later, editors trace in their Notes on the History of the Text the major changes in 1895–6 and 1912–13. They quote significant alterations in their explanatory notes and include the authorial prefaces of 1895–6 and 1912–13. They also indicate something of the pre-history of the texts in manuscripts where these are

available. The editing of the short stories will be separately dealt with in the two volumes containing them.

Patricia Ingham
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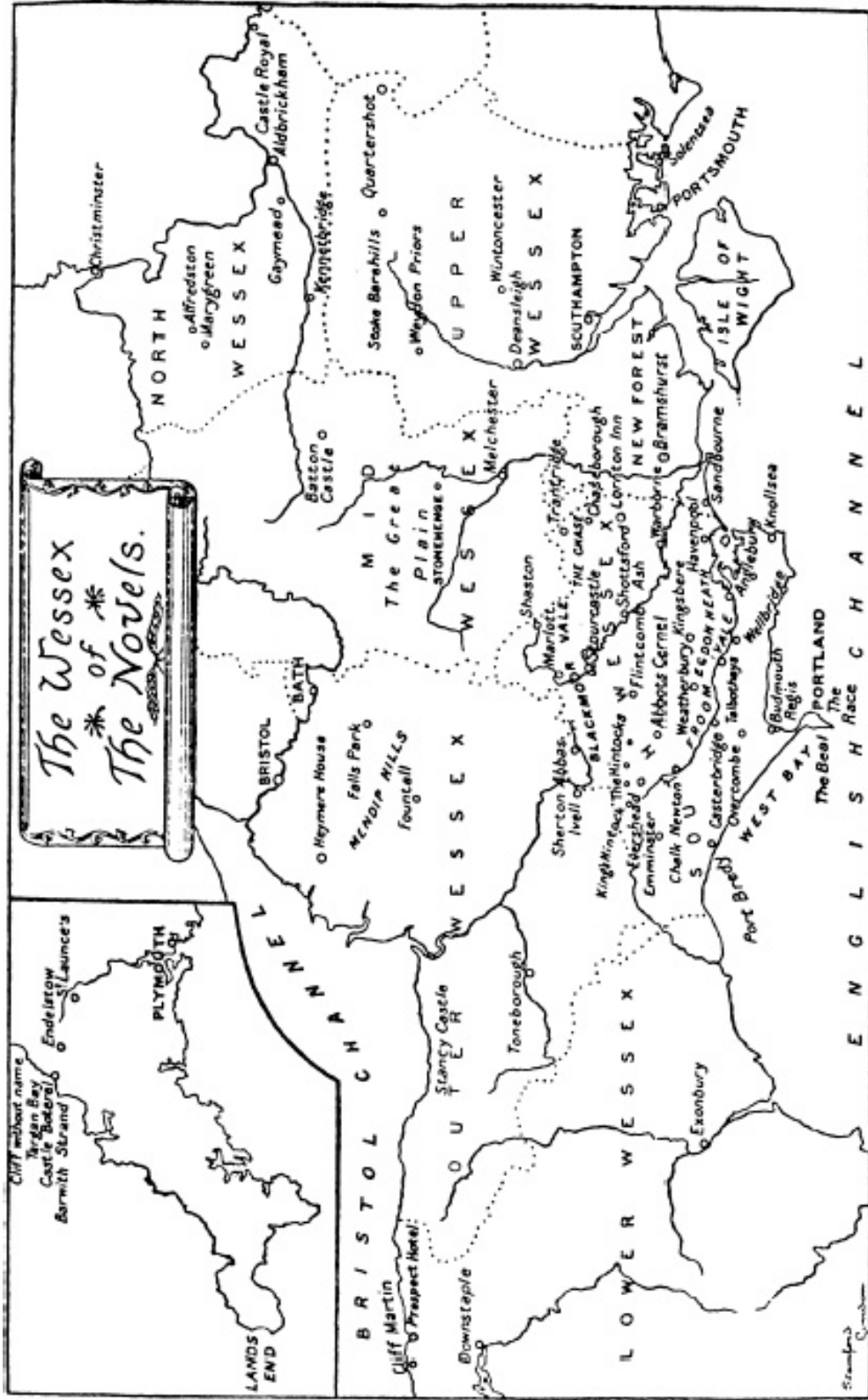
CHRONOLOGY: HARDY'S LIFE AND WORKS

- 1840 2 June: Thomas Hardy born, Higher Bockhampton, Dorset, eldest child of a builder, Thomas Hardy, and Jemima Hand, who had been married for less than six months. Younger siblings: Mary, Henry, Katharine (Kate), to whom he remained close.
- 1848–56 Schooling in Dorset.
- 1856 Hardy watched the hanging of Martha Browne for the murder of her husband. (Thought to be remembered in the death of Tess Durbeyfield.)
- 1856–60 Articled to Dorchester architect, John Hicks; later his assistant.
- late 1850s Important friendship with Horace Moule (eight years older, middle-class and well-educated), who became his intellectual mentor and encouraged his self-education.
- 1862 London architect, Arthur Blomfield, employed him as a draughtsman. Self-education continued.
- 1867 Returned to Dorset as a jobbing architect. He worked for Hicks on church restoration.
- 1868 Completed his first novel *The Poor Man and the Lady* but it was rejected for publication (see 1878).
- 1869 Worked for the architect Crickmay in Weymouth, again on church restoration.
- 1870 After many youthful infatuations thought to be referred to in early poems, met his first wife, Emma Lavinia Gifford, on a professional visit to St Juliot in north Cornwall.
- 1871 *Desperate Remedies* published in volume form by Tinsley Brothers.
- 1872 *Under the Greenwood Tree* published in volume form by Tinsley Brothers.
- 1873 *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (previously serialized in *Tinsleys' Magazine*). Horace Moule committed suicide.

- 1874 *Far from the Madding Crowd* (previously serialized in the *Cornhill Magazine*). Hardy married Emma and set up house in London (Surbiton). They had no children, to Hardy's regret; and she never got on with his family.
- 1875 The Hardys returned to Dorset (Swanage).
- 1876 *The Hand of Ethelberta* (previously serialized in the *Cornhill Magazine*).
- 1878 *The Return of the Native* (previously serialized in *Belgravia*). The Hardys moved back to London (Tooting). Serialized version of part of first unpublished novel appeared in *Harper's Weekly* in New York as *An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress*. It was never included in his collected works.
- 1880 *The Trumpet-Major* (previously serialized in *Good Words*). Hardy ill for many months.
- 1881 *A Laodicean* (previously serialized in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*). The Hardys returned to Dorset.
- 1882 *Two on a Tower* (previously serialized in the *Atlantic Monthly*).
- 1885 The Hardys moved for the last time to a house, Max Gate, outside Dorchester, designed by Hardy and built by his brother.
- 1886 *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (previously serialized in the *Graphic*).
- 1887 *The Woodlanders* (previously serialized in *Macmillan's Magazine*).
- 1888 *Wessex Tales*.
- 1891 *A Group of Noble Dames* (tales). *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (previously serialized in censored form in the *Graphic*). It simultaneously enhanced his reputation as a novelist and caused a scandal because of its advanced views on sexual conduct.
- 1892 Hardy's father, Thomas, died. Serialized version of *The Well-Beloved*, entitled *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved*, in the *Illustrated London News*. Growing estrangement from Emma.
- 1892–3 *Our Exploits at West Poley*, a long tale for boys, published in an American periodical, the *Household*.
- 1893 Met Florence Henniker, one of several society women with

- whom he had intense friendships. Collaborated with her on *The Spectre of the Real* (published 1894).
- 1894 *Life's Little Ironies* (tales).
- 1895 *Jude the Obscure*, a savage attack on marriage which worsened relations with Emma. Serialized previously in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. It received both eulogistic and vitriolic reviews. The latter were a factor in his ceasing to write novels.
- 1895–6 First Collected Edition of novels: Wessex Novels (16 volumes), published by Osgood, McIlvaine. This included the first book edition of *Jude the Obscure*.
- 1897 *The Well-Beloved* (rewritten) published as a book; added to the Wessex Novels as vol. XVII. From now on he published only the poetry he had been writing since the 1860s. No more novels.
- 1898 *Wessex Poems and Other Verses*. Hardy and Emma continued to live at Max Gate but were now estranged and 'kept separate'.
- 1901 *Poems of the Past and the Present*.
- 1902 Macmillan became his publishers.
- 1904 Part of *The Dynasts* (epic-drama in verse on Napoleon). Hardy's mother, Jemima, 'the single most important influence in his life', died.
- 1905 Met Florence Emily Dugdale, his future second wife, then aged 26. Soon a friend and secretary.
- 1906 Part 2 of *The Dynasts*.
- 1908 Part 3 of *The Dynasts*.
- 1909 *Time's Laughingstock and Other Verses*.
- 1910 Awarded Order of Merit, having previously refused a knighthood.
- 191–13 Major collected edition of novels and verse, revised by Hardy: The Wessex Edition (24 volumes). 27 November: Emma died still estranged. This triggered the writing of Hardy's finest love-lyrics about their early time in Cornwall.
- 1913 *A Changed Man and Other Tales*.

- 1914 10 February: married Florence Dugdale (already hurt by his poetic reaction to Emma's death). *Satires of Circumstance. The Dynasts: Prologue and Epilogue.*
- 1915 Mary, Hardy's sister, died. His distant young cousin, Frank, killed at Gallipoli.
- 1916 *Selected Poems.*
- 1917 *Moments of Vision and Miscellaneous Verses.*
- 1919–20 Mellstock Edition of novels and verse (37 volumes).
- 1922 *Late Lyrics and Earlier with Many Other Verses.*
- 1923 *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall* (drama).
- 1924 Dramatized *Tess* performed at Dorchester. Hardy infatuated with the local woman, Gertrude Bugler, who played Tess.
- 1925 *Human Shows, Far Phantasies, Songs and Trifles.*
- 1928 Hardy died on 11 January. His heart was buried in Emma's grave at Stinsford, his ashes in Westminster Abbey. *Winter Words in Various Moods and Metres* published posthumously. Hardy's brother, Henry, died.
- 1928–30 Hardy's autobiography published (on his instructions) under his second wife's name.
- 1937 Florence Hardy (his second wife) died.
- 1940 Hardy's last sibling, Kate, died.



This map is from the Wessex Novels Edition, 1895–6

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The following abbreviations are used for texts frequently cited in this edition.

- Biography* Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography* (Oxford and Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1982)
- Collected Letters* Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate (eds.), *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978–88)
- Cox R. G. Cox (ed.), *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970)
- Firor Ruth A. Firor, *Folkways in Thomas Hardy* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1962)
- Gatrell Simon Gatrell, *Hardy the Creator: A Textual Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988)
- Grindle and Gatrell Juliet Grindle and Simon Gatrell (eds.), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983)
- Laird J. T. Laird, *The Shaping of 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975)
- Life* Thomas Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Michael Millgate (London: Macmillan, 1984)
- Literary Notebooks* Lennart Björk (ed.), *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1985)
- Mitchell Sally Mitchell (ed.), *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopaedia* (New York: Garland, 1988)
- OED* James A. H. Murray *et al.* (eds.), *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, 10 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1884±1928)
- Personal Notebooks* Richard H. Taylor (ed.), *The Personal Notebooks of*

Thomas Hardy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979)

Personal Writings

Harold Orel (ed.), *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings: Prefaces, Literary Opinions, Reminiscences* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1966)

Purdy

Richard Little Purdy, *Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954)

INTRODUCTION

(New readers are advised that this Introduction makes the detail of the plot explicit.)

When *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* appeared in early December 1891, its 'scandalous notoriety' among some readers and impassioned popularity among others made Hardy financially secure and confirmed his stature as one of the major writers of the nineteenth century.¹ The passage of the United States Copyright Bill had guaranteed an income from the American serialization in *Harper's Bazar* and from the subsequent book publication without risk of piracy, and Hardy's publishers scrambled to reprint the novel. Readers, reviewers and the author himself responded to the heroine as if she were a real person capable of change through time. To one correspondent who wrote in her praise, he answered: 'I am so truly glad that Tess the Woman has won your affections. I, too, lost my heart to her as I went on with her history.'² The sharply divided reactions to the book focused on the heroine and on the claim made by Hardy's 'exasperating' (and exasperated) subtitle (*A Pure Woman*), which he had added at the last minute to proofs of the three-volume first edition. In his autobiography, Hardy reported that the Duchess of Abercorn's dinner guests had been 'almost fighting across her dinner-table over Tess's character'. Those who thought the 'little harlot' deserved hanging were put in one group; those who pitied her as a 'poor wronged innocent' sat in another, together with the Duchess.³

Even before the novel was printed, the rejection of the manuscript on moral grounds by three publishers in a row guaranteed that it would be born into controversy. Accepted in censored form by the *Graphic*, a family magazine, *Tess* was dismembered, with three key episodes removed and published separately in two sketches (see [Appendix V](#)). These changes necessitated further bowdlerization; and in one scene the heroine's modesty was rescued at the last minute by the *Graphic* editor, who insisted that she be transported in a wheelbarrow along a flooded lane, rather than carried in Angel's arms. Having been forced earlier by publishers to adapt *The*

Woodlanders and *A Group of Noble Dames*, and frustrated by this ‘piecemeal mode of parturition’, Hardy reacted by turning *Tess* into a vehicle for attack on ‘the censorship of prudery’. Already in his 1890 article on ‘Candour in English Fiction’, he condemned popular magazines and lending libraries for excluding subjects (especially sexuality and childbirth) deemed incompatible with ‘social forms and ordinances’.⁴ In the serial version of *Tess*, which ran from July to December 1891, and yet more so in the subtly revised volume editions, Hardy deliberately and combatively obscured the question of Tess’s purity. As can be seen in Tim Dolin’s history of the text, through successive revisions Hardy complicated motives and compounded contradictions in Tess’s relation to her ‘cousin’ Alec D’Urberville. He complained repeatedly about the mangling of the plot to satisfy ‘the Young Girl’ reader of the *Graphic*, which obliged him to substitute a mock marriage for ‘the seduction pure & simple of the original MS’.⁵ The serial version none the less described Tess not as a simple victim, but as a girl made ‘pliable’ by her economic dependence on Alec. The textual evidence indicates that throughout his revisions Hardy intended the tension between Alec’s violation of Tess and her physical compliance to remain unresolved.⁶ Hardy inserted many traces pointing to Tess’s involvement: she confesses she ‘ought to have seen sooner’ the import of Alec’s attentions; she has stayed on at his estate perhaps a month before deciding she would not become his ‘creature’ any longer (XII). In letters Hardy named her ‘mistake’ a ‘fall’, yet he maintained the ‘paradoxical morality’ that Tess was ‘essentially pure – purer than many a so-called unsullied virgin’.⁷

Conservative readers were not convinced by his claim. Mowbray Morris, who had already rejected the manuscript for serial publication by *Macmillan’s Magazine* as having ‘rather too much succulence’, returned to the attack in the *Quarterly Review*; there he mocked Tess’s behaviour as implausible and immoral, compared Hardy’s descriptions of Tess to ‘a slave-dealer appraising his wares’ (an insight that coincides with more recent accusations of voyeurism), and concluded that he had told ‘a coarse and disagreeable story in a coarse and disagreeable manner’.⁸ Similarly, R. H. Hutton in the *Spectator*, although he declared *Tess* to be perhaps the most powerful of Hardy’s novels, found the heroine’s case weak in those moments of her life when she might be supposed to have had control: her

failure to tell Angel of her past, her reluctance to persist in seeking aid from his parents and her surrender to Alec's importunities and offers of aid to her family at the end. 'Though pure in instinct, she was not faithful to her pure instinct', he concluded.⁹ To such readers, Tess was a text like the vermilion letters painted by a Methodist enthusiast on blank walls around the countryside: too 'hot' for comfort.

Once Hardy had reintegrated into the book the censored scene in which Alec carries Tess off into the wood of The Chase and the sequence depicting the baptism and death of Tess's infant, the structural implications of the debate over Tess's purity became more apparent in the narrative. Paradoxically, by describing the dismemberment and reassembly of his manuscript in terms that suggested the violation of a body, Hardy's 'Explanatory Note' conveyed the impression that the frankly sexual elements of his novel had been the victim of an atrocity, thus reinforcing the implication that Tess herself had been violently assaulted. When Hardy had restored the 'true sequence of things', defenders of Tess's purity could experience the powerful chain of images to which Tess is linked as yet another victim. The restored scene in [Chapter XI](#), where Tess sleeps amid the leaves of the woods, while the narrator reflects on her 'feminine tissue ... doomed to receive' the 'coarse pattern' of Alec's lust, and the image in [Chapter LVIII](#) of her sleeping body stretched out for sacrifice on the altar at Stonehenge now clearly bracketed recognizable parallels: the horse Prince pierced at night on the road, the legend of the white hart first spared then killed in the forest, the field animals cornered and killed at harvest, the wounded pheasants left to die in a wood and the peasant girls to whom mailed knights of old 'had dealt the same wrong'.¹⁰ The scenes selected for illustration in the serial (about half of which were printed in *Harper's Bazar* and the U S edition of the novel) had included three of these moments; they had already highlighted moments of Alec's aggression, such as their first encounter, when he forces a strawberry into her mouth. The drug Alec pours down Tess's throat making her sputter and gasp in the 1891 edition also implies that he then rapes her in her sleep. The narrator meditates that the cottagers just awakening at that hour had not 'the least inkling that their sister was in the hands of the spoiler' (XI).¹¹ Alec himself admits 'I did wrong' and offers to 'pay to the uttermost farthing' (XII). Such imagery and language have provided the foundation for readers' defences of Tess's

purity of intention and the perception that ‘the Woman’s Tragedy’ is due to ‘the tyranny of man ... and of social circumstance’.¹²

Tess has provoked and tantalized readers then and now, in part perhaps because she seems to exceed the boundaries of the language that describes her. In an often-quoted comment, Hardy wrote on 29 October 1891: ‘I am glad you like Tess, though I have not been able to put on paper all that she is, or was, to me.’¹³ From Tess as naive teenager subject to economic blackmail by her shiftless parents and by an unscrupulous rake; to the proud, angry child-mother of a sickly infant; the reserved yet sensuous woman whose passion for a minister’s son sweeps away her resolve not to marry; the abject, self-mutilating sufferer of her husband’s prudish rejection; and finally the murderess whose passions break through in a brief moment of fulfilment – the seven phases of Tess’s life shape a figure who seems to defy any classification. Physically as well, she conjoins different ‘phases’ of her childhood with ‘bouncing’ womanliness. This heterogeneity was precisely the objection raised by Ellen Moers, who in a 1960s review misguidedly complained that Tess is a patchwork of ‘cultural stereotypes’: ‘Earth goddess, modern woman, doomed bride of balladry, prostitute, Victorian daughter, unwedmother, murderess, and princess in disguise: Hardy’s Tess is surely the all-purpose heroine.’¹⁴

The complexity of Tess and of the determining event in her brief life exemplify some of Hardy’s most powerful strategies in the novel: ambiguous definition and multi-layered characterization, the highlighting of interpreters as those who shape meaning, and resistance to narrative conventions about the relationship between events and endings. Each of these strategies is centred on the representation of Tess herself, but each also proliferates into other aspects of the novel. In the winter of 1890, probably when he was thinking about the ‘phases’ through which his heroine passed, Hardy reflected that he was ‘more than ever convinced that persons are successively various persons, according as each special strand in their characters is brought uppermost by circumstances’.¹⁵ No doubt Angel overvalues his own flawed vision when he harshly proclaims to Tess after her wedding-night confession why he cannot forgive her: ‘You were one person; now you are another’ (XXXV). Yet in a larger sense that Tess explains in her eloquent letter pleading for his return to her from Brazil, ‘What was the past to me as soon as I met you? It was a dead thing

altogether. I became another woman, filled full of new life from you' (XLVIII). Hardy's focus on this principle of growth informs his resistance to insular categories and many of his breaks with established plot conventions.

The same drive toward ambiguity and complication visible in Hardy's treatment of Tess's violation announces itself even in minor issues of naming. From the first sentence, the narrator offers two names for Tess's birthplace – the Vale of Blakemore or Blackmoor; in the same scene, the antiquarian Parson Tringham salutes Jack Durbeyfield with an ironic second appellation, 'Sir John D'Urberville'. In turn, we learn that Alec's family has usurped the D'Urberville name and crest to displace their original name of Stoke, which might be too well remembered in association with his father's profits in a dubious trade (and which may remind us of his glowing cigar, or of the steam-driven threshing machinery that forces Tess to work ceaselessly). A forger of his mother's signature and a self-conscious performer, Alec appears unannounced in a farmhand's smock amid the burning couch-grass of the Marlott vegetable plots to work with a pitchfork next to Tess, to whom he leeringly names himself the 'old Other One'; ever generous, even toward the man who represents the 'tragic mischief in her life, Tess replies, 'I never said you were Satan' (L).

Above all Tess herself eludes naming, though she courageously assumes her own identity, the 'poor wounded name' of the epigraph from Shakespeare. Hardy actually considered giving her his own name – in which case the novel would have been entitled 'Tess of the Hardys'. Mocking, teasing or benighted, the men in her life insistently rebaptize her with names such as 'Coz', 'my pretty' (like the names of two cows), 'Artemis' or 'maidy'. She steadily replies, 'Call me Tess.' Having become Mrs Angel Clare in name only, and forced to rely on arduous field labour at a starve-acre farm, she sheds her husband's surname, reverting to simple 'Tess' in order to protect his reputation. In the end Angel (whom his father considers 'misnamed') finds her only after a postman hits upon the link between Durbeyfield and D'Urberville, and only after he himself has become simply 'Angel'.

This difficulty of naming has for Hardy epistemological significance. In the period when he was drafting *Tess*, Hardy read Plato's *Cratylus* and noted somewhat optimistically: 'A very good way of looking at things would be to regard everything as having an actual or false name, and an intrinsic or true name, to ascertain which all endeavour should be made ...

The fact is that nearly all things are falsely, or rather inadequately, named.’¹⁶ It is not surprising therefore that he refers to the idealist philosopher Immanuel Kant when addressing the question raised by the ‘faithfully presented’ on the title-page: ‘We don’t always remember as we should that in getting at the truth we get only at the true nature of the impression that an object, etc., produces on us, the true thing in itself being still beyond our knowledge, as Kant shows.’¹⁷ Appearances and impressions deceive: ‘Nature is an arch-dissembler ... *nothing is* as it appears.’¹⁸

The inadequacy of labels and the uncertainty of ‘intrinsic’ meaning provoke a proliferation of interpretations. If the blind Mrs D’Urberville reads with assurance the bodies of her birds to discern their names, diet and state of health, other readings are far less secure. Of the stone pillar at Cross-in-Hand, the narrator notes coolly that it marks ‘the site of a miracle, or murder, or both’, then twice returns to the ‘differing accounts’ given of its ‘history and purport’ (XLIV–XLV); Tess shivers with the ‘*petite mort*’ at a shepherd’s account of an execution there. Similarly, when the cock crows on Tess’s wedding day straight in the face of Angel, it appears to different dairy-folk to identify him as a cuckold (though the dairyman does not say so outright), to augur the suicidal despair of the milkmaids who loved him in vain or more prosaically to indicate a change of weather. Readers may find an augury that Angel will deny Tess repeatedly, as Peter does Christ.

Equal uncertainty surrounds one of the most threatening omens to foreshadow the destiny of Hardy’s heroine, the legend of the D’Urberville coach.¹⁹ Tess’s mother Joan introduces the motif in a wishful aphorism, ‘‘tis well to be kin to a coach, even if you don’t ride in en’ (iv). The legendary coach, in which an abduction and a murder were supposed to have taken place, parodically becomes the fashionable dog-cart in which Alec forces his kisses on Tess. A few years later, with a shiver of fear Tess seems to recognize the dilapidated conveyance in which the bridal couple go to church as an uncanny echo from her past, but Angel does not explain to her the legend, or whether seeing the coach signifies death or commission of a crime (or both). On the eve of the Durbeyfield household’s removal from Marlott, Alec appears as a pale rider in a white mackintosh at the very moment when Tess ‘fancied it was a carriage and horses’. Like the fourth horseman of the Apocalypse, he announces the beginning of the end