Moral Implications of Madness: Female Sexuality and Violence in Sir Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

Hana Bahiyyih Liebman
Clemson, South Carolina

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Stephen Arata
Susan Fraiman

In an article published in March of 1888, Thomas Hardy expressed his admiration for Sir Walter Scott's novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*, which he commended as "an almost perfect specimen of form" (*Personal Writings* 121). Achieving a "sense of entrapping unity," Scott's tragic romance employs a pervasive and potent symbolism that consistently presages the hero's fate and his inability to escape it (Millgate 731). Adopting the same technique, Hardy attempted a similar structural cohesion in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the work that he began shortly after publishing his praise of *The Bride*. As several scholars have noted, a "close examination of the two novels reveals the … [multiple] affinities between them" at the level of setting and plot as well as characterization and theme (729).[1] Both novels rely upon legends and omens to emphasize an inevitable destiny and advance the story toward a tragic conclusion. Either in a Gothic or a pastoral manner, both authors draw on the pagan to illustrate the rural landscape and transform it into an active force that shapes the characters' identities and development. Most importantly, both works involve a climax in which an innocent young woman is condemned by her lover for lack of virtuous firmness. Devastated by his rejection, she commits an act of extreme violence that, considered unnatural to her gender and tender personality, is categorized as madness. Despite such striking similarities, however, *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) deliver remarkably divergent views regarding female sexuality and violence. Though indulging in several descriptions of feminine beauty, Scott deprives it of eroticism by painting an angelic, even childish portrait of his heroine. Hardy, on the other hand, reveals his appreciation for female sexuality in his sensual descriptions of the feminine form and the fertile landscape in which it flourishes. While Scott's fears of female rebellion and violence lead him to contain it through an indisputable attribution of madness, Hardy vindicates his

[1] See also Farrell and Pinion.

heroine's fierce assertion of will and desire, an act of desperation rather than insanity. Scott tacitly acknowledges the failure of patriarchal society to protect the women who depend upon it for security and honor; Hardy condemns it. In a profoundly radical gesture, Hardy denounces the injustice of his professedly Christian society and argues for an alternative moral code, based on the natural world, in which female sexuality and virtue coexist.

Formal Overlap: Scott's Gothic Destiny and Hardy's Determinism

> "But there is a fate on me, and I must go,
> or I shall add the ruin of others
> to my own."
> (Scott, *The Bride* 206)

Due to Walter Scott's extraordinary popularity, John Henry Raleigh has made the impressive claim that to "have been alive and literate in the nineteenth century was to have been affected in some way by the Waverley novels" (10). Among them, John Farrell identifies *The Bride of Lammermoor* as perhaps the most impactful on Victorian writers. A "seminal text for Victorian literary history," this tragic romance served as "a major source for three of the most powerful and radically disturbing works of the period: Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Tennyson's *Maud*, and Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*"—which, like *The Bride*, all reflect a "brooding projection of crises in the worlds they explore" (53-54). In other words, to best illustrate the great changes, concerns, and doubts of their age, the three Victorian authors "imitate not the Walter Scott who gave so much comfort to their contemporaries, but *The Bride of Lammermoor* which is Scott's own dark, reneging codicil to the text of historical progress constructed so elaborately and resourcefully in the other Waverley novels" (60).[2] Rather than perpetuating the narrative of personal and political resolution and advancement that characterizes most of his novels, *The Bride* offers a bleak account of history in which its characters are the

[2] See also Kerr 85-86.

"victims of their inheritance": their fortunes are "emblematic of inevitable and 'natural' social and historical change leading to personal tragedy for those who are the destined victims of the hatreds and rivalries thus engendered" (Hollingworth 97, 101).[3] It is this conception of fate as the "inevitable consummation of the forces of history working upon the individual" that, I argue, so intrigued Thomas Hardy (100). In the same March 1888 article, Hardy goes on to articulate a deterministic philosophy, claiming that the novels possessing the greatest educational merit are those "which impress the reader with the inevitableness of character and environment in working out destiny, whether that destiny be just or unjust, enviable or cruel" (*Personal Writings* 118). He focuses on contemporary rather than historical sociopolitical dynamics, but Hardy, like Scott, weaves a tale that demonstrates the formidable command of such impersonal forces over the individual. Certainly, their methods differ according to period and genre: Scott's depiction of fate, foretold by prophecy and potentially influenced by witchcraft, is profoundly romantic, whereas Hardy's belief in destiny stems from his conviction that human life is fundamentally tragic—a cynicism that is distinctly Victorian.[4] Yet the two works are united by their portrayal of actions and events as predictable, due to individual character, and unavoidable, due to social conventions and constraints.

The tragedy in both *The Bride of Lammermoor* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* culminates in the painful early death of the heroine, whose youthful inexperience leads to her victimization and destruction. She is exploited by an avaricious aristocratic authority, whereupon she faces condemnation from family, religion, and the law—the very resources that should protect her,

[3] See also Waswo. While Waverley is saved by circumstances instead of his own efforts, Lucy and Ravenswood are doomed by fate (i.e., the insurmountable conditions of society and the thrust of history) despite their attempts to evade it (318-20). This "subordination" of the hero to "the narrative action of historical events" is, Waswo argues, Scott's "main structural and semantic modification of traditional romance" (316).

[4] In an interview Hardy remarked, "I hate the optimistic grin which ends a story happily, merely to suit conventional ideas. It raises a far greater horror in me than the honest sadness that comes after tragedy" (*Tess* 388).

rather than punish her once it has failed to do so. In Walter Scott's novel, Lucy Ashton is a sweet "girl of seventeen" (31)—not quite a woman—whose "secret delight was in the old legendary tales of ardent devotion and unalterable affection" (40). Her romantic imagination precipitates her attachment to Edgar Ravenswood, a dispossessed heir and political enemy of her father who strikes her as a brooding noble hero. Nurtured by tales of chivalry, Lucy dreams of marrying him; but such a hope, the product of a childish heart and unworldly mind, is completely divorced from her sociopolitical reality and proves to be merely an "enchanted web of fairy tissue, as beautiful and transient as the film of the gossamer" (65). Her vow of love and fidelity to Edgar is discovered by her mother, who, as a descendent of a distinguished Scottish family, rejects their intended union out of pride and ambition. Lady Ashton intends to marry Lucy to a man who will facilitate her son's career, and she denies the legitimacy of her daughter's secret pledge based on its violation of holy scripture and British law. Employing psychological and emotional warfare, Lady Ashton gradually weakens Lucy's reason and resolve, which are ultimately obliterated by the Master of Ravenswood's rash and bitter denunciation.

Though a practical girl unencumbered by romantic dreams, Tess Durbeyfield is as innocent and pure of heart as Lucy Ashton. She, too, is on the threshold of womanhood and lacks an adult understanding of the world. Described as a "mere vessel of emotion untinctured by experience," Tess does not understand the intentions of Alec, the seducer posing as her kinsman, until it is too late (8). Berating her mother's decision to keep her in ignorance, she asks in an agonized voice, "How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house four months ago. Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn't you warn me?" (64). Though Joan suspects that the new d'Urberville cousin may take advantage of her daughter, she comforts herself by imagining that Tess would then coax him into marrying her;

when Tess scorns to do so, motivated by a pride and set of principles incomprehensible to her mother, Joan is angry not with Alec, who has compromised her daughter, but with Tess, who has failed to raise herself and her family through a connection with him (38, 63-64). John Durbeyfield also assigns blames to Tess, bemoaning the disgrace that her premarital pregnancy casts on his illustrious d'Urberville lineage. Rather than protecting their daughter's safety and honor, they have put her in harm's way for the sake of ambition, in a manner similar to Lady Ashton's sacrifice of her daughter's happiness and use of her as an instrument of social and political gain. Like Lucy, Tess is wrongly and catastrophically renounced by her beloved Angel, who, like Ravenswood, interprets evidence of exploitation as proof of moral weakness. However, unlike Lucy, Tess comes to repudiate the world that has condemned her. Based on her experience with professed Christians, Tess rejects the Old Testament God who would punish victims for their persecutors' sins, believing that a more forgiving and humane system of ethics must exist since her reason and emotions rebel against the one she has been taught. She resiliently survives the scorn of society and overcomes the internalization of guilt until she is broken by the man in whom she has placed all her trust and love. Despite his more progressive aspirations, Angel's adherence to traditional and punitive views on female sexuality lead him to abandon Tess and cause her true fall, in which she becomes the mistress and murderer of Alec. Ultimately, Tess is executed by society's notion of justice, yet she accepts her sentence with sublime composure as the consequence of her crime—the taking of his life—which she considers the almost inevitable conclusion to the path her life has taken since Alec set that fatal "trap" for her in her "simple youth" (303).

The tragedy of both novels is heralded by their titles, which are rather unexpected ones. Neither heroine is explicitly referred to by the titular words, yet they call attention to key

elements of the story. *The Bride of Lammermoor* is actually a combination of terms. First, it recalls Lady Ashton's derisive nickname for her daughter, whom she calls the Lammermoor Shepherdess since Lucy's mildness and "want of spirit" appear to her "as a decided mark, that the more plebeian blood of her father predominated in Lucy's veins" (41). Yet the prominent word "Bride" primarily echoes the prophecy that foretells the doom of the Ravenswood family: "When the last Laird of Ravenswood to Ravenswood shall ride, / And woo a dead maiden to be his bride, / He shall stable his steed in the Kelpie's flow, / And his name shall be lost for evermoe!" (185). Rather than merely indicating Lucy, the title establishes her fatal connection to Ravenswood and defines the work as one thoroughly Gothic.

More so than *The Bride*, the title of *Tess* emphasizes the issue of degraded bloodlines: Tess is not merely a Durbeyfield but also, and more importantly, an obscure descendent of the d'Urbervilles. Significantly, it is the discovery of her aristocratic lineage that begins Tess's tragic journey. Upon her parents' request, she seeks out others with the d'Urberville name and comes into contact with Alec, who initiates her into a world of shame, sorrow, and suffering that eventually crushes her. The relationship is essentially a causal one, as Hardy establishes "a structural parallelism … in the very first pages between Tess's parentage and her parenthood, between her aristocratic blood and her ruin" (Garson 132). Tess is thus doubly "a woman with a past" (132): she has been an unwed mother and descends from a Norman family, whose blood Angel views as corrupted and corruptive—the cause of what he sees as Tess's fallen character.

Throughout the two novels, the inescapability of fate as an inherited or anticipated destiny—the result of individual character, family lineage, sociopolitical forces, and historical movement—is illustrated by the recurrent appearance of legends and omens.[5] In *The Bride of*

[5] Hart cleverly describes such a method as "formal momentum" (66).

Lammermoor, two fables surround the Ravenswood family. The first is the prophecy that foretells the doom of "the last Laird of Ravenswood," suggesting that the Master will be the final possessor of that title; his death effects the extinction of his family and, symbolically, that of feudalism. The second myth surrounds the Mermaiden's Fountain, where dashing Edgar first exchanges words with sweet Lucy. Considered a fatal spot for one of his family, the fountain purportedly witnessed "the fate of a beautiful maid of plebeian rank," the mistress of one of his ancestors, "whom he slew in a fit of jealousy, and whose blood was mingled with the waters of the locked fountain, as it was commonly called" (58-59). Though Ravenswood does not physically injure Lucy, his brutal words of condemnation serve as the fatal blow that eradicates the last traces of hope and rationality from her mind. This legend of gendered violence is mirrored in *Tess* by the infamous story of the d'Urberville coach. At first reluctant to speak of such a "dismal" tale, Alec vaguely mentions that the "sound of a non-existent coach can only be heard by one of d'Urberville blood, and it is held to be of ill-omen to the one who hears it. It has to do with a murder, committed by one of the family, centuries ago" (279). When Tess, who has been hearing such ominous phantom noises, tells him to elaborate, Alec carelessly explains, "One of the family is said to have abducted some beautiful woman, who tried to escape from the coach in which he was carrying her off, and in the struggle he killed her—or she killed him—I forget which" (279). The fact that Alec does not remember the crucial action exposes his lack of compassion as a man who, having committed a similar crime, cannot comprehend its gravity. His ignorance of the story's details and implications mirrors his ignorance of his fate, his inability to anticipate his death at the hands of the one he has wronged. In a reenactment of the legend, Tess, the maiden unwillingly deflowered, turns her abductor's violence against him, murdering him in self-defense and in vengeance. Thus she evolves from vulnerable victim into

formidable agent, who defends her will and her body through the only means available—her own conviction and strength.

In addition to these legends, both *The Bride* and *Tess* are memorable for their striking use of omens. Such signs frequently appear from the natural world, which at key moments reflects the characters' circumstances and intensifies their emotions. In Scott's Gothic novel, as Lucy and Edgar "arose to leave the fountain which had been witness of their mutual engagement, an arrow whistled through the air, and struck a raven perched on the sere branch of an old oak, near to where they had been seated. The bird fluttered a few yards, and dropped at the feet of Lucy, whose dress was stained with some spots of its blood" (209). While Lucy is alarmed, the Master is furious. He asks the hunter, "Do you know the ravens are all under the protection of the Lords of Ravenswood, and, to kill one in their presence, is such bad luck that it deserves the stab?" (210). Far from subtle, this scene convinces the reader of the lovers' unavoidable tragic ending: the birth of their attachment is marred by the death of an animal that represents the fortunes of the Ravenswood family, already doomed by prophecy. Likewise, the day of Tess's marriage to Angel Clare is overshadowed by an avian omen. As the pair bids farewell to their friends, the dairy's "white [cock] with the rose comb"—marked by the colors of the marriage bed—emits a call that "thrilled their ears through, dwindling away like echoes down a valley of rocks" (169). Uttering this trumpet-call of a warning "straight towards Clare" (169), the rooster announces that Angel has been cuckolded, beginning to expose the past which will soon destroy their present and future (Parker 276).

Lastly, old and unsightly family portraits haunt each pair of lovers, as if their ancestors were observing and undermining their attempts to build a future free of past grievances. With regard to physical features, the Master so closely resembles his vengeful forebear, the aptly

named Malise Ravenswood, that Lucy's younger brother believes he has come to their home with bloodshed rather than reconciliation on his mind (195). As it turns out, Edgar and his ancestor do return to the Ashton manor and inflict severe distress upon its inhabitants: the Master disrupts Lucy's signing of the marriage papers and seals her madness, while the portrait of Sir Malise, which mysteriously reappears during Lucy's wedding celebration, seems to "frown wrath and vengeance upon the party assembled below" (336). In both instances, Malise's portrait serves as a warning to the onlookers, proclaiming their impotence to escape the personal and political feuds of earlier generations. As a result, Brian Hollingworth argues that rather than supplying "the romantic 'horrors' of the Gothic tale," such portents perform a narrative function: "the supernatural—in the form of omen, prophecy or legend—intervenes like a Greek chorus at those moments when Lucy and Ravenswood seem most likely to escape their tragic destiny as a means to remind the reader of the inevitability of their destruction" (100). Moreover, since these prophetic moments are often grounded in "plainly observable phenomena"—that is, they are informed by the characters' personalities and situations—they "suggest the close correlation between destiny and historical inevitability" (101). Though its Gothic elements should not be dismissed, Hollingworth fruitfully calls attention to the fact that the novel is more than a fanciful romance. Dramatizing momentous historical events of the seventeenth century, *The Bride of Lammermoor* is as much Scott's retelling of a thrilling legend as his literary exploration of the messy transition between feudalism and capitalism, the divine right of kings and constitutional monarchy (Arata).[6] Both "antiquarian scholar and national minstrel," Scott revived but also revised romance: in addition to granting it a national and masculine identity, he historicized it (Duncan 4, 13-15). Lucy and Edgar's romance is fated to end in failure due to prophecies and

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[6] See also Hart 50.

portents but also because reconciliation is impossible between old blood and new money, "the declining feudal aristocracy and the rising bourgeoisie" (Kerr 95-96).

While the Ashtons are haunted by Ravenswood portraits, Tess and Angel's romance is hindered by grim paintings of female d'Urberville ancestors. As Angel regards these portraits, installed in the walls of a mansion that was previously the d'Urberville seat, he is unsettled by the subtle yet unmistakable physical resemblance between his beloved and these rather monstrous figures, whose sharp features seem to reveal a "merciless treachery" and "arrogance to the point of ferocity" (170). These paintings prove Tess's lineage to Angel but also confirm his prejudice against ancient families as inherently dissolute, passing down moral flaws as well as physical traits. Voicing nineteenth-century theories of degeneration, Angel views Tess's early loss of chastity as an ethical failing indicative of her degraded aristocratic lineage (Nunan 290). "I cannot help associating your decline as a family with this other fact—of your want of firmness," he tells her. "Decrepit families imply decrepit wills, decrepit conduct. Heaven, why did you give me a handle for despising you more by informing me of your descent! Here was I thinking you a new-sprung child of nature; there were you, the belated seedling of an effete aristocracy!" (182). Unlike in *The Bride*, however, the d'Urberville portraits are instrumental as well as symbolic. When Angel is tempted to forgive Tess and lie with her as his wife, he again catches sight of the paintings, in which he reads a "[s]inister design," a "concentrated purpose of revenge on the other sex—so it seemed to him then. The Caroline bodice of the portrait was low—precisely as Tess's had been when he tucked it in to show the necklace; and again he experienced the distressing sensation of a resemblance between them. The check was sufficient. He resumed his retreat and descended" (184). Perceiving a malevolent depravity in the painted

features—a threat both disturbing and seductively sexual—Angel erroneously conflates ancestor and descendent and turns his back on Tess.

***The Bride of Lammermoor*: A Feudal Scotland and Romantic Heroine**

> "When did a Ravenswood seek the house of his enemy,
> but with the purpose of revenge?—and hither you are come,
> Edgar Ravenswood, either in fatal anger,
> or in still more fatal love."
>
> (Scott, *The Bride* 200)

In *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel*, Ian Duncan explains that "[a]ntiquarian scholars and poets"—of whom Scott is a most noteworthy example—"redefined romance as the scattered relics of an ancestral culture that was disintegrating under the pressures of modernization. Its strangeness—its difference from modern experience—was the effect of this loss: and thus the aura of its authenticity" (4). In order to capture this world fading beyond memory, the "romance revival" acted as the "recovery of an archaic native culture, popular as well as literary, felt to be vanishing into the past" (14). Such was Walter Scott's authorial inspiration and vision, as he reveals in his general preface to the 1829 edition of *Waverley*. Speaking of the Scottish Highlanders, he recalls, "It naturally occurred to me, that the ancient traditions and high spirit of a people, who, living in a civilized age and country, retained so strong a tincture of manners belonging to an early period of society, must afford a subject favourable for romance" (387). His motive, however, was political as well as artistic. Citing the novelist Maria Edgeworth as his literary model, he claims that her "Irish characters have gone so far to make the English familiar with the character of their gay and kind-hearted neighbours of Ireland, that she may be truly said to have done more towards completing the Union, than perhaps all the legislative enactments by which it has been followed up" (388). After assuring us of his humility, he explains, "I felt that something might be attempted for my own country, of the

same kind with that which Miss Edgeworth so fortunately achieved for Ireland—something which might introduce [Scotland's] natives to those of the sister kingdom [England], in a more favourable light than they had been placed hitherto, and tend to procure sympathy for their virtues and indulgence for their foibles" (388). Scott thus defines his project in terms of restoration and preservation but also social understanding and political cooperation. Hoping to attach readers to characters and reconcile the English with the Scottish, his literary endeavor is essentially one of sympathy.

The Gothic mode, with its foreshadowed and foregone conclusion, may seem unlikely to further this end since readers may remain detached precisely because the characters are clearly doomed. Scott himself was well aware of the genre's failings. He begins *Waverley* by satirizing Gothic romances' defining qualities, as hackneyed as they are melodramatic, and in the preface remarks that his readers "may bless their stars at the narrow escape they have made" since he decided not to realize his youthful "ambitious desire of composing a tale of chivalry, which was to be in the style of the Castle of Otranto, with plenty of Border characters, and supernatural incident" (387). Yet in the same novel he does introduce a diverse cast of Highlanders, the leader of whom sees a specter the night before the decisive battle—though Waverley rejects the apparition as "the operation of an exhausted frame, and depressed spirits, working upon the belief common to all Highlanders in such superstitions" (306). Of course, Scott also went on to write *The Bride of Lammermoor*—unmistakably Gothic in its use of phantoms and fate, pathetic fallacy and decaying castles—revealing his debt to a genre that he overtly rejects. As James Kerr observes, just as "Jane Austen had done in *Northanger Abbey,* Scott defined his position as a novelist within and against the Gothic mode" (5). Even for the literary historian, the genre held potential. Not only does Gothic destiny put the irresistible thrust of history in romantic terms—

granting the "effect of supernatural fatality" to "the necessity of the feudal aristocracy's demise" (90)—but it also hearkens back to a pre-modern time: the Gothic mode captures the "archaic and obsolete consciousness of the past" that believed in ghosts, "omens and prophecies, [and] legends of usurpation and revenge" (6-7).

With regard to *The Bride*, the Gothic style not only conveys the feudal consciousness but also best suits the type of story that Scott has to tell—one of forbidden passion, virtue under siege, and psychological torment culminating in the madness and premature death of a beautiful young lady. As Scott explains in the 1830 introduction, the novel is based on a legend he learned "from connexions of his own, who lived very near the period, and were closely related to the family of the Bride" (1). Thus does he intend to establish the credibility of his account as closest to the original, for multiple versions had been passed down. According to Coleman Parsons, the first version explained the bride's early death as the result of the *husband* being seized by madness and attacking her, which completely reverses the action of the fatal wedding night (51-52). Scott mentions this form of the story, but he discredits it and all others as inaccurate reports circulated by those who did not have access to the family and their history (*The Bride* 5). However, despite his claims to accuracy, Scott's own telling crucially departs from what he presents as the original. As the story goes, "the young lady imprecated dreadful evils on herself should she break her plighted faith," marking the *maiden* as the figure connected to the supernatural who falls prey to her own curse (2); only according to "popular belief" did the mother possess diabolical associations (1). Yet in *The Bride*, Scott chooses to cleanse his heroine of all willing contact with dark forces and draws on such "popular belief" to emphasize Lucy's innocent victimhood as well as to infuse his story with the eerie, doom-laden atmosphere of *Macbeth*. "Although he realized the absurdity in which the exercise of sorcery by [Lady

Ashton] would involve the story," Parsons conjectures, "Scott was unwilling to abandon the theme altogether, because of its wild effectiveness as a background to the heroine's madness" (58). For Lucy's loss of sanity is another artistic choice: Scott decided to adhere to the story he was told and make madness a female malady, just as he opted to diverge from it and portray Lady Ashton as the one linked to the supernatural and the devil. As a novelist, Scott "openly [took] liberties with historical tradition" according to his political sympathies and aesthetic vision (Kerr 52). He exercised the freedom of making history conform to art in the same way that he used art to elucidate history.

Kerr also points out that Scott exploits rather than embraces the Gothic mode. For example, he proves "the inadequacy of romance as a way of perceiving reality" through his characterization of Lucy, who learns to her detriment that life does not operate according to ballad conventions (139). Additionally, Scott juxtaposes the characters' faith in the supernatural with narratorial skepticism and psychological explanation, generating Kerr's argument that the novel operates according to two conflicting representational modes: the Gothic/superstitious versus the historical/rational, the latter of which is ultimately privileged over the former (86-88, 93-95).[7] However, I would challenge the claim that the Gothic perspective is subordinated to the historical in this particular text. Even though the narrator discourages belief in apparitions and witchcraft, *The Bride of Lammermoor* invites the reader to believe in the characters' certain demise due to the profusion of foreshadowing incidents, pathetic fallacy, and prophetic fulfillment. History lends a setting to a world that is convincingly Gothic because it obeys Gothic laws.

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[7] See also Parsons 58.

Though his relationship to the genre is complex, Scott fully embraced the romantic tradition's heightened attention to setting. Duncan points out that the "gathering of oral ballads nourished not only modern imitation but a literalizing attention to *place*, to local countrysides seen as haunted by their passing historical difference" (14). Scott lavishes detail upon Wolf's Crag, Ravenswood's gloomy home and the last decrepit remnant of his ancestors' holdings, situated on the margins of their former land and the town belonging to it. Reflecting the Master's social and economic decline, Wolf's Crag is also the site of the novel's most visually striking event—Ravenswood's formal introduction to Lucy, a moment so momentous and representative that it appears like a tableau:

> Their cheeks had touched and were withdrawn from each other—Ravenswood had not quitted the hand which he had taken in kindly courtesy—a blush, which attached more consequence by far than was usual to such ceremony, still mantled on Lucy Ashton's beautiful cheek, when the apartment was suddenly illuminated by a flash of lightning, which seemed absolutely to swallow the darkness of the hall. Every object might have been for an instant seen distinctly. The slight and half-sinking form of Lucy Ashton, the well-proportioned and stately figure of Ravenswood, his dark features, and the fiery, yet irresolute expression of his eyes,—the old arms and scutcheons which hung on the walls of the apartment, were for an instant distinctly visible to the Keeper by a strong red brilliant glare of light. Its disappearance was almost instantly followed by a burst of thunder, for the storm-cloud was very near the castle; and the peal was so sudden and dreadful, that the old tower rocked to its foundation, and every inmate concluded it was falling upon them…. It might seem as if the ancient founder of the castle were bestriding

> the thunder-storm, and proclaiming his displeasure at the reconciliation of his descendant with the enemy of his house. (125-6)

This passage, like Dick Tinto's painting, reveals the entire story through a single scene. We learn from Lucy's "slight and half-sinking form" that she is delicate and susceptible to collapse. Her blush reveals her attraction to the brooding, regal Ravenswood, whose "fiery, yet irresolute" eyes disclose his contending passions—fascination with Miss Ashton and resentment towards her father, the usurper of his family estate. The weapons and shields ornamenting the walls symbolize Edgar's noble blood and the loss of feudal power, as well as indicate his desire for vengeance and capacity for violence. The decay and dangerous instability of Wolf's Crag reveal the vulnerability of his position, which fills him with shame and resentment and exacerbates his flaws. Intimately attached to lineage and rank, Ravenswood's sensitive and wounded pride perceives the storm as the work of a disapproving ancestor, "proclaiming his displeasure" and warning his descendant. The lightning literally illuminates the figures of Edgar and Lucy, whose mutual attraction is made apparent to the Lord Keeper, while the thunder shakes the foundation of Wolf's Crag just as Lucy begins to weaken the Master's resolve to pursue revenge. In true Gothic fashion, natural forces thus unveil the characters' emotions and signal that their choices will bring consequences as bleak as the storm-rattled fortress.

In this romance that dwells on romance, Lucy appears like the ballad maiden of her beloved tales of chivalry. We first meet her when she is playing a lute and singing verses whose

> words … seemed particularly adapted to her character; for Lucy Ashton's exquisitely beautiful, yet somewhat girlish features, were formed to express peace of mind, serenity, and indifference to the tinsel of worldly pleasure. Her locks, which were of shadowy gold, divided on a brow of exquisite whiteness, like a gleam of broken and pallid

> sunshine upon a hill of snow. The expression of the countenance was in the last degree gentle, soft, timid, and feminine, and seemed rather to shrink from the most casual look of a stranger, than to court his admiration. Something there was of a Madonna cast, perhaps the result of delicate health, and of residence in a family, where the dispositions of the inmates were fiercer, more active, and energetic, than her own. (39-40)

Her innocence and virtue are doubly impressed upon the reader by features both adolescent and angelic. Indeed, her physical and moral qualities are inseparable: her fair beauty reflects her purity of heart, just as her delicacy of form is linked to her modesty and rather spiritual detachment from worldly ambition. Edgar envisions Lucy as "an angel who descended to my assistance" because her loveliness not only captivates him but also inspires in him the more noble impulses of affection and forgiveness (93). "It was for your sake that I abjured these purposes of vengeance," he confesses, "though I scarce knew that such was the argument by which I was conquered, until I saw you once more, and became conscious of the influence you possessed over me" (208). Even as Ravenswood voices his attraction to Lucy, he articulates it as a love that subdues his baser desires. She is described in terms approaching the sensual only once—when the Master has rescued her from the charging bull (perhaps explaining his reason for doing so). After he carries her to that "ominous spot," the Mermaiden's Fountain, Lucy awakens from "her long and almost deadly swoon. Beautiful and pale as the fabulous Naiad in the last agony of separation from her lover, she was seated so as to rest with her back against a part of the ruined wall, while her mantle, dripping with the water which her protector had used profusely to recall her senses, clung to her slender and beautifully proportioned form" (59). Edgar has used the fountain's water to revive Lucy, but he has also made more visible her elegant figure and the cause of his solicitude for her. Yet this detail is the extent of Scott's

eroticism. In all other instances, her body is mentioned either to demonstrate her physical weakness—as in the claim that the "fine, delicate, fragile form of Lucy Ashton seemed to require the support of the Master's muscular strength and masculine character" (181)—or to elaborate on the unity of her virtue and beauty: "The sweetness of her voice, the delicacy of her expressions, the vivid glow of her filial affection, embittered [Ravenswood's] regret at having repulsed her gratitude with rudeness, while, at the same time, they placed before his imagination a picture of the most seducing sweetness" (96). Her purity and its irresistible charm make him ashamed of his antagonism and even kindle a hope that he at first hardly dares entertain. Rather than a submission to lust, Lucy's "seduction" of Edgar is framed as the enticement to exchange revenge for reconciliation, bloodshed for harmony, hatred for love. Whatever sexual appeal her pale and slender body (in stark contrast to the rosy and curvy Tess) may possess is thus deflected by Scott, who takes pains to emphasize the innocence and integrity of his heroine.

However, despite his insistent portrayal of Lucy as chaste and angelic, she is not without desire. After detailing her locks of "shadowy gold" and the "exquisite whiteness" of her skin, which together with her placid and tender manner grant her "a Madonna cast," Scott immediately qualifies the extent of her mildness. She appears passionless to her family, but "her passiveness of disposition was by no means owing to an indifferent or unfeeling mind. Left to the impulse of her own taste and feelings, Lucy Ashton was peculiarly accessible to those of a romantic cast. Her secret delight was in the old legendary tales of ardent devotion and unalterable affection," the source of "her favoured fairy realm" and "aerial palaces" (40). "In her retired chamber, or in the woodland bower which she had chosen for her own" (40), Lucy privately indulges her fertile imagination and yearning for romance, which makes her capable of "unexpected [i.e., unsuspected] ardour and intensity" of feeling (42).

In conjunction with its role as menacing prophecy, the Mermaiden's fountain functions as a metaphor for Lucy's romantic dreams and desires. From the beginning Lucy has been associated with water imagery. Of "a temper soft and yielding," she tends to be "borne along by the will of others, with as little power of opposition as the flower which is flung into a running stream" (40). Though at first glance an aesthetically pleasing simile, the truth of the comparison is much darker: a blossom fallen into such a current will no doubt be damaged and drowned by the rushing water. In this manner Scott evokes Ophelia, Shakespeare's beautiful madwoman, and suggests the fate that awaits his own heroine. Foreseeing the encounter that will give Lucy's romantic sensibilities a fixed object, the narrator laments, "Her life had hitherto flowed on in a uniform and gentle tenor, and happy for her had not its present smoothness of current resembled that of the stream as it glides downward to the waterfall!" (42). These metaphors establish Lucy's link to flowing water and indicate that the Mermaiden's fountain—the site and source of those fantastic tales of which she is so fond—can be seen as a reflection of her own condition. As the Master lays the swooning Lucy down in front of the "plentiful and pellucid fountain," "the vault which had covered it being broken down and riven, and the Gothic font ruined and demolished, the stream burst forth from the recess of the earth in open day, and winded its way among the broken sculpture and moss-grown stones which lay in confusion around its source" (57). Just as the progress of Lucy's life is likened to a current, the flowing waters of the fountain of the Naiad, of whom she appears to be the reincarnation, suggest the forceful and uninhibited love and desire for Ravenswood that will soon awaken in her breast. (The fact that the water's flow becomes tumultuous and broken by the shattered fragments also presages her mental confusion and collapse.) Of course, it is at this spot—likened by Lucy to "a scene in a romance," "connected with the legendary lore which I love so well"—that Edgar succumbs to his feelings

and confesses them to his enemy's daughter (206). Though Lucy has waited for him to declare his love before voicing her own, as is proper for a woman of her rank and reputation, her evident affection for him compels Ravenswood to pledge his faith when he intended to bid her farewell (207).

Indeed, despite her habitual docility, Lucy's desire to marry for love prompts her to act according to her own wishes and against those of her family. Most scholars have viewed Lucy's passivity as her dominant and disastrous quality, following the narrator's repeated claims to that effect; yet such an understanding of the heroine ignores the cause of the novel's major plot points—including the climactic scene—as well as the subtle complications of her character. Though he makes an insightful argument for the shape that historical necessity gives the novel, Hollingworth is unnecessarily severe in his treatment of Scott's heroine, whose "fatal flaw of personality"—her "beautiful ineffectualness and passive suffering"—"makes the final madness and death of Lucy deserved and inevitable" (95). Locating a key source of the tragedy in the characters' personal shortcomings, Hollingworth asserts that Lucy is complicit in and therefore merits her cruel and painful death, apparently forgetting the formidable force exerted by historical circumstance and the ideologies of class and gender that make resistance so difficult to practice, let alone conceive of, for a woman in her position. And yet fragile Lucy Ashton does conceive of it. Though his flower and stream metaphor describes Lucy as having "little power of opposition," the narrator goes on to state in the same paragraph that "Lucy *willingly* received the ruling impulse from those around her" because the "alternative was, in general, too indifferent to her to render resistance *desirable*" (40; my emphasis). Here, Scott indicates that his gentle maiden is capable of resistance but opts for obedience—a different matter entirely. Along with an easy-going temper and a desire to please, a lack of motivation to assert herself has rendered

Lucy so submissive—until Ravenswood appears, and her will emerges. She chooses Edgar as her lover and engages herself to him, though she likely knows her mother's intention to wed her to a man whose fortune equals his rank. She readily enters into an engagement without her parents' knowledge or consent and, aware that it defies their authority, begs the Master to conceal it (207). Even after their secret is exposed, her lover shamed, and her mother furious, Lucy remains faithful to Edgar. She clings to her resolution since she considers their vows as a sacred contract, a breach of which would be "a heavy sin in the sight of God and man" (299). However, cornered by the relentless Lady Ashton, who has betrothed her to Bucklaw, Lucy eventually agrees to marry him "upon one condition"—if Ravenswood decides to dissolve their engagement (299). Lucy's application to her lover may appear as a step toward capitulation but is actually the reverse: she trusts that he will have the strength of heart and mind to honor his promise, and she knows that a man's word holds more power than a woman's. If the Master confirms their engagement, she cannot be forced to wed another.

Consequently, Hollingworth's claim that Lucy "is unable to assert herself against a domineering mother" overlooks the fact that she quietly but steadily does just that (95): it is her refusal to end her engagement and submit to Lady Ashton's wishes that compels the latter to descend to psychological warfare; and though Lucy eventually falls prey to the torture inflicted upon her, it is a testament not to her lack of resistance but rather to the extent of it. Finding Lucy stubborn in her purpose, Lady Ashton becomes even more determined and diabolical in hers. Laying "every other wish aside," she

> bent the whole efforts of her powerful mind to break her daughter's contract with Ravenswood, and to place a perpetual bar between the lovers, by effecting Lucy's union with Bucklaw. Far more deeply skilled than her husband in the recesses of the human

> heart, she was aware, that in this way she might strike a blow of deep and decisive vengeance upon one, whom she esteemed as her mortal enemy; nor did she hesitate at raising her arm, although she knew that the wound must be dealt through the bosom of her daughter. With this stern and fixed purpose, she sounded every deep and shallow of her daughter's soul, assumed alternately every disguise of manner which could serve her object, and prepared at leisure every species of dire machinery, by which the human mind can be wrenched from its settled determination. (305-6)

In order to break her daughter's spirit, Lady Ashton makes "all intercourse betwixt the lovers" impossible, sequestering Lucy in her home to the extent that "no leaguered fortress was ever more completely blockaded" (306). The productive imagination that used to be her source of pleasure and hope becomes, in her isolation, an instrument of torment: "The fairy wand, with which in her solitude she had delighted to raise visions of enchantment, became now the rod of a magician, the bond slave of evil genii, serving only to invoke spectres at which the exorcist trembled" (308). Bereft of Edgar's presence and support, and feeling "herself the object of suspicion, of scorn, of dislike at least, if not of hatred, to her own family," Lucy frets "that she was abandoned by the very person on whose account she was exposed to the enmity of all around her" (308). Thus harassed, she becomes convinced that what began as a bright and promising romance will end in dismal tragedy. "It is decreed," she says to herself, "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 uncounselled, I involved myself in these perils—alone and uncounselled, I must extricate myself or die" (302). Lucy has interpreted the persecution of her mother, the disgust of her family, and the absence of Ravenswood as proof that fate is against her, yet she remains true to her promise. Even as she views herself as a

victim, she acknowledges her own responsibility. She resolves to risk everything for Edgar or die in the attempt—a sentiment that simultaneously reveals her weakness and her strength.

In addition to revealing the protagonists' emotions and foretelling their misfortune, the Gothic landscape takes an almost active part in destroying them: it furnishes the "blind sibyl" who cautions them, the "witch" who tortures Lucy to the brink of madness, and ultimately the quicksand that swallows the Master of Ravenswood. Old Alice, whose loss of sight grants her "some way of looking into your very heart" (45), not only appears after death as an apparition that foreshadows Lucy's demise, but also when alive warns Ravenswood that his romance can never prosper—thereby discouraging an already depressed and pessimistic temperament (245-6). Discovering the limits of her entreaties and threats, Lady Ashton engages the reputed witch Ailsie Gourlay "in order to attain the absolute subjugation" of her daughter's mind (311). Though her name may be a typical Scottish one, the reader cannot but notice the word "ail" that prefaces this "old Sycorax" (312), who "had acquired a considerable reputation among the ignorant by the pretended cures which she performed, especially in *oncomes*, as the Scotch call them, or mysterious diseases, which baffle the regular physician. Her pharmacopeia consisted partly of herbs selected in planetary hours, partly of words, signs, and charms, which sometimes, perhaps"—Scott is very careful to qualify this statement—"produced a favourable influence upon the imagination of her patients" (310). Such intimate knowledge of plants and planets, combined with the ability to heal inexplicable illness and predict the future, was considered evidence of "a compact with the Evil One" (312). Though Scott disparages such "witches" and the superstition that made them possible, his portrait of Dame Gourlay emphasizes the considerable power of belief and the skill of such practitioners in interpreting and manipulating human nature. Without Lady Ashton having to explain what services she requires, the "beldam

caught her cue readily and by innuendo," attesting to her shrewd perception, and proves herself expertly capable of weakening Lucy's mind and spirits due to her intimate "knowledge of the human heart and passions" (311). She readily perceives her victim's vulnerability—her isolation, anxiety, and naive attachment to fairytales—and finishes the work that Lucy began by filling her mind with stories of illicit passions and cruel violence, ancient curses and wronged women. In particular, Ailsie narrates the legend surrounding the Mermaiden's fountain in which Edgar's ancestor kills his lover, implanting in Lucy's mind the fear that she may suffer at the hands of her own Ravenswood—a fate which, of course, he is doomed to repeat.

In spite of her fanciful imagination and soft nature, Lucy is not prone to superstition or despondency, to which she does not succumb easily. In fact, she

> might have despised these tales, if they had been related concerning another family, or if her own situation had been less despondent. But circumstanced as she was, the idea that an evil fate hung over her attachment, became predominant over her other feelings; and the gloom of superstition darkened a mind, already sufficiently weakened by sorrow, distress, uncertainty, and an oppressive sense of desertion and desolation. (312-3)

Moreover, the "female agent of hell" (314) has "directed Lucy's thoughts to the means of enquiring into futurity,—the surest mode, perhaps, of shaking the understanding and destroying the spirits" (313). This "mysterious visionary traffic had its usual effect, in unsettling Miss Ashton's mind. Her temper became unequal, her health decayed daily, her manners grew moping, melancholy, and uncertain. Her father … made a point of banishing Dame Gourlay from the castle; but the arrow was shot, and was rankling barb-deep in the side of the wounded deer" (313). By convincing Lucy that "heaven and earth and hell had set themselves against her union with Ravenswood," Ailsie has so disturbed her mind that her health begins to reflect the

damage (313-4). Sick at heart, in mind, and finally in body, Lucy begins to lose a secure grip on her sanity.

But she is not mad yet. Even after Dame Gourlay has provoked such agitation and doubt, Lucy still refuses to relinquish her contract with Ravenswood—unless he chooses to end it. "The tone of obstinacy with which this was said, her eyes flashing with unnatural light, and her hands firmly clenched" poignantly testify to the strength of her commitment and resolution, even as her mental instability is unmistakably revealed (314). If Edgar does release her, then she will submit to her mother's will and allow her to "dispose of me as you please, I care not how. When the diamonds are gone, what signifies the casket?" (314). As her language distinctly demonstrates, Lucy has internalized the objectification and commodification of herself that her mother has insistently practiced, having treated her daughter as a tool without needs or desires of her own. Her devastation is the work of Ailsie but also of her realization that she has no power of her own: the vow she has made is dismissed as meaningless by her family, forcing her to rely on Edgar's claim of possession to sustain and protect her. If he withdraws his right to her, then Lucy will no longer have any grounds upon which she can resist the marriage to Bucklaw. The diamond and casket metaphor foreshadows the death to which she will be driven by the Master's misdirected pride and rage, but it also indicates Lucy's present dissociation from her body. Her physical self may be compelled to wed Bucklaw, but her heart and mind will be engaged elsewhere—if not completely "gone," banished by madness.

Though a shadow of her former self, Lucy maintains possession of her senses until her beloved turns upon her in anger and contempt. After many weeks, receiving no answer to the two letters she sends him, Lucy concludes that Edgar's silence expresses his decision to forsake her, and so she abandons herself to her mother's authority "with the calm indifference of despair,

or rather with an apathy arising from the oppressed and stupefied state of her feelings" (317). But just as Lucy is tremulously tracing her signature on the marriage contract, she hears Ravenswood's voice in the hall demanding admission into the room. Instead of weeping with joy and relief, however, she cries, "He is come—he is come!" with "a faint shriek," bespeaking fear and even dread (320). In the act of wedding another, and knowing well the Master's sensitive pride and temper, she is afraid that he will not understand or pardon her. His nature is neither tender nor patient, and he has been unable to extricate his sense of being wronged by her father from his treatment of her. "I would impress on you the price at which I have bought your love—the right I have to expect your constancy," he has told her. "I say not that I have bartered for it the honour of my house, its last remaining possession—but though I say it not, and think it not, I cannot conceal from myself that the world may do both" (208). But he does say it, and against his better inclinations, he does believe it. By imagining that he has sold himself and his family's honor for Lucy's hand in marriage, he, like Lady Ashton, reduces her from person to prize—a prize, moreover, that must meet all expectations in order to justify his sacrifice. Having commodified them both, he makes no allowance for either. The love he feels for Lucy has not prevented him from objectifying her during their courtship or from viewing her mildness and timidity with pity, impatience, and even disdain; at one point he considers her to possess a "softness of … mind, amounting almost to feebleness," and wishes he could "inspire her with a greater degree of firmness and resolution" (216). Believing her "too susceptible of being moulded to any form by those with whom she lived," Ravenswood assumes that Lucy was easily persuaded to give him up and sees her signature as proof of willing betrayal (215). He simply cannot imagine that she staged the long and arduous rebellion that she did.

When Edgar confronts her, the fury and violence with which he entered the room seem to have impressed themselves upon Lucy, for "[t]error, and a yet stronger and more confused feeling, so utterly disturbed her understanding, that she probably scarcely comprehended the question that was put to her" (323). What Lady Ashton and Ailsie Gourlay failed to achieve, Ravenswood accomplishes: fear of his wrath and rejection deprives her of comprehension. Though he began in a softer tone, his impatience soon leads him to raise his voice against her, saying "with increasing vehemence," "I am that Ravenswood, who, for your sake, forgave, nay, clasped hands in friendship with the oppressor and pillager of his house—the traducer and murderer of his father" (325). Petrified with terror, Lucy is only able to murmur with "bloodless lips," "It was my mother"—trying to communicate the extent of her oppression by one so close and formidable, but only convincing the Master that she is as yielding as he thought her (326). When he then denounces her as frivolous and dishonorable,

> Lucy returned the scornful glance of her lover with a gaze, from which perception seemed to have been banished; yet she seemed partly to have understood his meaning, for she raised her hands as if to undo a blue ribbon which she wore around her neck. She was unable to accomplish her purpose, but Lady Ashton cut the ribbon asunder, and detached the broken piece of gold which Miss Ashton had till then worn concealed in her bosom…. (327-8)

Though Edgar has crushed her heart and spirit to the point that we see her mind crumbling, she still attempts to demonstrate her fidelity by showing him the symbol and proof of her continued attachment; but fierce, arrogant, and hasty, he does not give due consideration to this potent sign that she has been coerced against her will. Pride makes him pitiless, and he throws Lucy's letter and the piece of gold into the fire, "stamping upon the coals with the heel of his boot, as if to

insure their destruction"—and hers (328). For his parting words act as an indirect curse: "I have nothing farther to say, except to pray to God that you may not become a world's wonder for this act of wilful and deliberate perjury" (328). Of course, such words in a Gothic novel alert us to danger. Driven to despair and madness, Lucy does become a spectacle, the dramatic source of a story passed down as legend and memorialized in Scott's own narrative.

It is on her wedding night that Lucy enacts her greatest and final rebellion. While guests are celebrating in the hall, a cry "so shrill and piercing" brings the alarmed family to the bridal chamber, where they find Bucklaw's body lying on the threshold in a pool of blood (337). Frantically searching for Lucy, they "discovered something white"—both virginal and spectral—"in the corner of the great old-fashioned chimney." There,

> they found the unfortunate girl, seated, or rather couched like a hare upon its form—her head-gear dishevelled; her night-clothes torn and dabbled with blood,—her eyes glazed, and her features convulsed into a wild paroxysm of insanity. When she saw herself discovered, she gibbered, made mouths, and pointed at them with her bloody fingers, with the frantic gestures of an exulting demoniac. (337-8)

Unlike Ophelia, who is self-destructive but harmless to others, the angelic Lucy has been transformed into a vicious fiend. Pushed beyond endurance, she has struck Bucklaw as he attempted to make her his wife in deed as well as in name. In fact, by penetrating Bucklaw with a knife, she reverses the marriage act and, for a moment, inverts the dynamic of power. She stabs him in desperation and self-protection—shielding herself from a lawful yet nonconsensual violation—but also as an assertion of her love for Ravenswood, to whom she has pledged her heart, hand, and body. Even so, for a young lady of Lucy's blushing purity and gentle sweetness to lash out in such an extreme act of violent defiance is inconceivable to the world she inhabits.

The only explanation is that she has lost her sanity—that her suffering has led to her mental collapse and allowed her desire for Edgar to run rampant, giving license to an unrestrained and thus wanton passion that has turned her feral. Her frenzy is therefore evidence of a psychological as well as a moral breakdown that strips her of dignity and humanity.

Such a portrait of female madness is deeply troubling. As Fiona Robertson points out in her introduction to the novel, critics and feminist scholars "have recently drawn attention to the important and disturbing connections which *The Bride of Lammermoor* makes between insanity and gender, pointing out Lucy's place in a cult of beautiful, victimized madwomen (sentimentalized Ophelias, in particular) which reinforces the association of femininity with emotionalism and irrationality" (xxiii). Exploring this issue, Elaine Showalter explains that at the end of the eighteenth century, "the dialectic of reason and unreason took on specifically sexual meanings, and … the symbolic gender of the insane person shifted from male to female" (8). The "appealing madwoman gradually displaced the repulsive madman" (8) and "became almost a cult figure for the Romantics," a subject of artistic creativity and object of obsession (10). In particular, the "correlation between madness and the wrongs of women became one of the chief fictional conventions of the age": late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century novelists "depicted the madwoman as the victim of parental tyranny and male oppression, and as an object of enlightened sensibility" (10). Though this statement in several ways applies to Lucy, Robertson argues that Scott's portrayal deviates from this pattern due to the narrator's "anxious prevarication about male culpability. He is at pains to emphasize Bucklaw's innocence, presenting him as a rough but right-thinking young man whose social unease makes him unable to interpret Lucy's behaviour," which he reads as bashful modesty instead of apathetic despair (xxvi-vii). Moreover, the "narrator's anger and anxiety at the sexual

exploitation of Lucy is displaced on to the figure of her power-usurping, 'unnatural' mother, avoiding the responsibility of her weak father, her tyrannical lover, and her careless husband" (xxvii). Though the novel does frame Lucy's suffering as primarily the result of her mother's heartless ambition, it is significant that Edgar's intimidation and denunciation prove to be the burden she cannot bear, pushing her from great distress to irrevocable insanity. As Ravenswood himself has perceived, Lucy's devout attachment to and faith in him, in addition to his vow to love and protect her in return, has "made him the arbiter of her fate for weal or woe" (215-6). He is ultimately responsible for her death because he fails to understand and rescue her when she needs him most. In the end, his words—"I am too rude—too rough—too intractable to deal with any being so soft and gentle as you are"—prove only too true (207).

Returning to the issue of female irrationality, Showalter points out that it can possess a more threatening aspect by "also represent[ing] an unknowable and untamable sexual force" (10): in addition to mental instability, the "woman with her hair down indicated an offense against decorum, an improper sensuality" (11). Lucy's indestructible and ungovernable preference for Ravenswood therefore becomes a maddening influence, a primitive impulse and unchaste desire that turns her into the animalistic demon who crouches like a hare and utters "gibbering" noises instead of speech. Significantly, as "the perfection of feminine charm and gentleness" and then as the crazed victim who retaliates with violence, "Lucy is a focus for the novel's sentimentality and also for its fears" that wrongfully-used women will rebel and even attack (Robertson xxvi). Yet the very loss of sanity and humanity that makes her so dangerous simultaneously serves to confine the threat that she poses. As Robertson explains, "Lucy's decline into incoherence and silence are important registers of her social helplessness and, at the same time, the only way that the novel can contain the spectacle of female violence to which it is

inevitably drawn" (xxvii). In other words, madness crucially serves both to explain and undermine her wayward refusal to conform and submit. Lucy's insistence on her right to choose her husband, in opposition to the patriarchal values of male lineage and female obedience, can thus be rejected as the delusional wish of a fevered mind—an individual pathology—rather than a rational objection that justly illuminates and challenges the subjugation of women. Likewise, the dehumanizing attribution of madness frames the violence to which she resorts as the act of a bestial other; the true Lucy—and other sane and sensible women—would never be capable of such horrendous retaliation. If only mad women misbehave, then female rebellion can be defined as irrational and dismissed as unjustified, leaving the patriarchal hegemony intact.

However, could madness be the result of external persecution rather than individual pathology? Claiming that Ravenswood as well as Lucy experiences the collapse of health and will that constitutes insanity, Lakshmi Krishnan argues that *The Bride* challenges the gendered and contained portrait of madness that excuses social responsibility. By "asserting that Ravenswood and Lucy fall ill because they are pushed and oppressed by a cruel society," Scott actually "offers a social critique" (31-32). They "suffer mental and physical collapse and, ultimately, death" because of the powerlessness of their positions—Ravenswood, as a dispossessed relic of feudalism, and Lucy, as a woman and instrument of her parents' ambition (32). As "troublesome and tragic political symbols of disorder," they are reflections of larger issues, not (just) victims of their own flaws (32). Krishnan is certainly right to point out the similarities between Edgar and Lucy's fates, which strikingly parallel one another. Though he is not tortured by the witch-like Lady Ashton and Ailsie Gourlay, the financial, political, and social vulnerability of Ravenswood's position exacerbates a proud and unruly temper preyed upon by a host of indignities and omens. Nor does he long outlive his lover. When Colonel Ashton

confronts the Master as "the murderer of my sister," Edgar answers in the affirmative, with a profound sense of culpability, "in a hollow and tremulous voice" (343). Significantly, the same adjectives were used to describe Lucy's tone when cornered by her mother, revealing the depth of his mental distress and suggesting that his own doom is close at hand (299). Moreover, when he haunts the chamber in Wolf's Crag where his father died and Lucy slept, Ravenswood experiences "paroxysms of uncontrolled agony" (345) that mirror Lucy's deathbed convulsions (338-9). Tormented by guilt, grief, and hopelessness, he, like Lucy, loses the will to live and appears close to the insanity that swallowed his beloved; instead, on his way to perpetrate his own violence, he is swallowed by quicksand. As a result, both he and Lucy are erased. She is buried "in a coffin bearing neither name nor date" (341), and the Master vanishes as though he "melted into the air," with only a single black feather left to mark the spot where he disappeared (347-8). However, despite these parallels, Ravenswood's feverish behavior is never distinctly treated as madness, nor does he lose consciousness or command of himself. While Lucy succumbs as the fallen maiden, he remains the tragic hero whose suffering ends in death but does not deprive him of sanity. She is turned into an animal, but he is always human.

As is fitting for a tragedy, the villain lives on in (relative) triumph. We are told that "Lady Ashton lived to the verge of extreme old age, the only survivor of the group of unhappy persons, whose misfortunes were owing to her implacability" (348). Evincing not "the slightest symptom either of repentance or remorse," she exhibits the "same bold, haughty, unbending character" to the end (348-9). Though her family legacy is not continued through her children—which was her dearest wish and aspiration—her own memory is preserved. Her grave is marked by a "splendid marble monument [that] records her name, titles, and virtues, while her victims remain undistinguished by tomb or epitaph" (349). Yet Lady Ashton, too, is consigned to a dark

feudal past, romanticized by Scott and thus separated from the modern era in which he was writing, even if he makes visible the connecting threads of history. It may appear that the future does not hold great promise since the prime example of the ascendant bourgeoisie, the Lord Keeper, is inferior in character to Ravenswood, who is a man of honor and integrity in spite of his (fatal) flaws (Hollingworth 104). But Edgar clearly and irrevocably belongs to the past: his inability to exact feudal vengeance is partly because it is an outdated form of chivalry in direct conflict with current laws, as Bucklaw points out to him (82). Despite his compassion for the disinherited Master, Walter Scott does not adopt a nostalgic attitude toward a society dominated by the aristocracy, represented in the novel by the haughty, avaricious, and merciless Lady Ashton, whose rule proves disastrous. Indeed, Scott characterizes the villagers of Wolf's-hope, who "so long used to consider the wants of the Baron and his family as having a title to be preferred to their own," as "a man that has been long fettered, who, even at liberty, feels, in imagination, the grasp of the handcuffs still binding his wrists. But the exercise of freedom is quickly followed with the natural consciousness of its immunities, as the enlarged prisoner, by the free use of his limbs, soon dispels the cramped feeling they had acquired when bound" (136-7). Though the villagers continue to treat the Master (as they still call him) with respect, they enjoy a greater prosperity that is an implicit argument for independence.

In addition to his comparative lack of nostalgia (which is the dominant force in *Waverley*), Scott's treatment of Christianity adds another surprising element to *The Bride*. Though he is far from condemning religion or its authority, Scott does imply that those who represent the Christian faith (or who claim to do so) play a part in the tragedy of the novel. Lady Ashton explicitly calls upon the Bible in order to repudiate her daughter's secret engagement as unlawful and void; but since the narrative has already linked her to Lady Macbeth, this appeal to

Christianity appears as further evidence of her perversity (326). But even Reverend Bide-the-Bent, whose religious devotion is sincere, fails to defend Lucy against her mother's persecution due to his belief in "the very strictest order, and the most rigid orthodoxy" (314). Despite his kindness, he sees Lucy's great distress and compromised health under Lady Ashton's pressure as additional reason to conform to her will and respect God's commandment of filial obedience (319). However, since Lucy's demise has long been foreshadowed, Bide-the-Bent's assurance that submission will bring "the promised blessing—length of days in the land here, and a happy portion hereafter in a better country" appears not only tragically ironic but also ignorant and naive, even irresponsibly so (319). His faith in the goodness of God blinds him to the evil before him, just as his faith in the traditional structures of society blinds him to the injustice practiced therein. His judgment augments Lucy's sense of blame and alienation, thereby contributing to the descent into madness initiated by tyrannical aristocratic ambition and sealed by an insensitive lover.

Yet it seems unlikely that Scott intended to present the reverend as a guilty party. Just as the culpability of the Lord Keeper and Bucklaw is evaded, so too is Bide-the-Bent's: he is portrayed as a well-meaning clergyman who listens to Lucy's side of the story and is moved to help her send another letter after the Master—though in the same unpromising terms as the one dictated by her mother. As Robertson argues, the complicity of all three men is overshadowed by the "unnatural" Lady Ashton, whose usurpation of her husband's power is the source of the novel's conflict. Scott thus frames Lucy's suffering as the result not of patriarchal structures but of Lady Ashton's frustration of their regulating influence: they fail to protect her honor and safety because they are too weak, not because they are too strong. Edgar Ravenswood's case is slightly different. Though it is the force of his pitiless denunciation that prompts Lucy's mental

collapse, the failure is an individual rather than a social one—a failing of character, not of position. He does not lose Lucy because he is unable to protect her; after all, his sense of entitlement (both as Lucy's betrothed and as a nobleman), his courage, and his drawn weapons all gain him access to her and force her family to listen to his demands. Instead, he loses Lucy because his proud, impatient temper fails to sympathize with and comprehend his beloved in her critical moment of need. The crux of the calamity can thus be attributed to a deficiency in their interpersonal relationship as much as to external pressures, though the dominating language of destiny, which serves Scott's vision of historical inevitably, encourages a readerly attitude of resignation rather than a probing analysis of the sociopolitical forces at play. In consequence, *The Bride of Lammermoor* is "a tragedy of character" as well as of circumstance (Hollingworth 104).[8] It is an unsettling tale of political instability, a deficient hero, and a victimized maiden; but by relegating such injustice to the past, Sir Walter Scott avoids the question of whether it is perpetuated in the present.

Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Natural Purity and Sexuality

> "Had she perceived this meeting's import
> she might have asked why she was doomed
> to be seen and coveted that day by the wrong man,
> and not by some other man, the right
> and desired one in all respects…."
> (Hardy, *Tess* 30-31)
>
> "There are very few women's lives
> that are not—tremulous."
> (Hardy, *Tess* 144)

At the end of the chapter illustrating Lucy Ashton's descent into pitiful and disturbing madness, Walter Scott interrupts the narrative to comment upon it:

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[8] See also Brookes, whose argument differs from mine by emphasizing the characters' free will and responsibility at the expense of Scott's Gothic fate.

> By many readers this may be deemed overstrained, romantic, and composed by the wild imagination of an author, desirous of gratifying the popular appetite for the horrible; but those who are read in the private family history of Scotland during the period in which the scene is laid, will readily discover, through the disguise of borrowed names and added incidents, the leading particulars of AN OWER TRUE TALE. (340)

Aware that a young woman's oppression and insanity makes for dismal, even gruesome subject matter—in which, perhaps, only the vulgar could derive pleasure—Scott justifies his dramatization of such an incident by emphasizing its truth. To absolve himself of potential charges of sensationalism or moral insensitivity, he points to the legend's foundation in historical fact—implying that however strange or distasteful, chronicled figures and deeds are worthy of and appropriate for literary examination. In his explanatory note to the first edition of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy makes a similar argument:

> I will just add that the story is sent out in all sincerity of purpose, as an attempt to give artistic form to a true sequence of things; and in respect of the book's opinions and sentiments, I would ask any too genteel reader, who cannot endure to have said what everybody [or at least Hardy] nowadays thinks and feels, to remember a well-worn sentence of St. Jerome's: If an offence come out of the truth, better it is that the offence come than that the truth be concealed. (ix)

As a realist novelist rather than a literary historian, Hardy aims to give a fictional representation not to actual people and events but to that general reality which is human nature. By claiming that "domestic emotions have throbbed in Wessex nooks with as much intensity as in the palaces of Europe," and that "there was quite enough human nature in Wessex for one man's literary purpose," Hardy speaks to the ways in which the individual can illustrate the social, the private

the political, and the local the universal (xiii). With regard to *Tess*, the “true sequence of things” that he has chosen to articulate is, as in *The Bride*, a particularly uncomfortable one. Anticipating that readers may be shocked and upset by the content of his novel, which challenges Victorian standards of propriety and morality, Hardy cleverly calls upon the assistance of a religious figure to defend his decision. If neither philosophers nor spiritual teachers avoided confronting mankind’s vices—as true to his nature as virtue—why should novelists not follow suit? From the beginning, therefore, Hardy defines his vision as both aesthetic and ethical.

Yet his commitment to a broader truth does not conflict with his affectionate and detailed depiction of Wessex. Like the Walter Scott of *Waverley*, Thomas Hardy’s literary project is also one of preservation. In the general preface to the 1912 Wessex Edition of his novels, he explains that he attempted “a fairly true record of a vanishing life”—of English “country customs and vocations, obsolete and obsolescent” by the end of the nineteenth century (*Tess* xiv). In “the half-dozen counties here reunited under the old name of Wessex,” Hardy elaborates, “the inhabitants lived in certain ways, engaged in certain occupations, kept alive certain customs, just as they are shown doing in these pages” (xiii). In addition to providing ample material for the sublimities and tragedies of human life, the setting of Wessex thus enables him to pay homage to this antiquated culture and the countryside that fostered it. Indeed, Hardy’s nostalgia for the era prior to industrialization is inseparable from his pastoral imagination: in his fiction he escapes to a beautiful, bountiful, and archaic landscape as well as narrates the disruptions and degradations caused by the infiltration of modernity. Accordingly, the tragedy in *Tess* lies in the ways that the countryside and the novel’s heroine—both of which Hardy envisions as pure and natural bodies—are polluted by modernization: the bucolic tranquility of the rural landscape is violated by mechanized farming, while Tess, according to the society in which she lives, is considered

corrupted by Alec, whose family has bought the d'Urberville name with a fortune amassed in the industrial North.

As the statement above suggests, the purity at the heart of the novel's tragedy possesses several meanings. In his preface to the fifth and later editions, Hardy overtly defines purity in terms of cleanliness and authenticity, which is "the meaning of the word in Nature" as well as "the spiritual interpretation afforded by the finest side of … Christianity"; in fact, the implication of chastity is only "the artificial and derivative meaning which has resulted to it from the ordinances of civilization" (x). He staunchly rejects the latter concept of purity as false and punitive and endeavors in *Tess* to refute the Victorian construction of the fallen woman. Believing that "there was something more to be said in fiction than had been said about the shaded side of a well-known catastrophe," he penned a novel "wherein the great campaign of the heroine begins *after* an event in her experience which has usually been treated as fatal to her part of protagonist, or at least as the virtual ending of her enterprises and hopes" (ix; my emphasis). Just like her virtue, a woman's life is defined by more than her sexual experience; yet questions of sexual knowledge and attraction are undoubtably the primary subject of the novel as well as the compelling forces within it. The reason behind this choice can be inferred from Hardy's contribution to the newspaper forum, "Candour in English Fiction," in which he declared, "Life being a physiological fact, its honest portrayal must be largely concerned with, for one thing, the relations of the sexes, and the … catastrophes based upon sexual relationship as it is" (qtd. in Koehler 218). This bold statement, which defends directness of speech and accuracy of representation, includes another implication: by framing life and love in (post-Darwinian) scientific terms, Hardy provides further justification for his frank treatment of sexuality, which

he places firmly in the natural world in order to separate it from the moral and religious discourses that condemn and conceal it (Boumelha 12).

Due to their mutual association with nature, Hardy's notion of purity and views on sexuality are actually closely related. One would expect that the former, given its meaning of authenticity and attunement with the environment, would match the concept put forth by Victorian feminist Mona Caird, who defined purity not in terms of chastity but rather as a "love of nature" exemplified by a "passionate love of liberty, of health, sunlight, freshness"—a perfect description of the pastoral Tess (qtd. in Goode 118). Distinguished by a remarkable "freshness" (Hardy, *Tess* 8), a rosy "fulness of growth" (30), and a "mobile peony mouth" (7), Tess exemplifies the young woman in bloom. Watching her as she performs her work at the dairy, Angel admires the "unchastened" movements of her body, instinctive to a woman "accustomed to unlimited space" and the invigorating vitality of the countryside (136). Her vibrancy and simplicity lead him to view her as an organic part of the rural landscape, an embodiment of "unconstrained Nature" free from the restrictions of social formalities and the artificiality of culture (136). However, this natural purity—Tess's defining quality—is inseparable from an enticing sexuality due to the male gaze and desire. Unlike Scott's chaste description of Lucy's angelic beauty, Hardy implements "a language of sexuality which is … earthy and physical" to illustrate his appreciation for the female form (Morgan 32). When introducing his heroine, Hardy reveals an unabashed fondness for "those under whose bodices the life throbbed quick and warm"—a statement whose eroticism is as thinly veiled as the girls described (6).[9] His emphasis on and delight in Tess's figure, especially her "pouted-up deep red mouth" (8), is duplicated in

[9] Goode points out that the narrator's sexualization of Tess is, in fact, problematic: though it heightens the reader's attraction to and sympathy for her, it also tacitly perpetuates the male gaze and its possession of the desirable female other—even as Hardy explicitly condemns aggressive male lust that forcefully takes physical possession of its desired object (121-2).

both of her male suitors: Alec begs to kiss "those holmberry lips" (40), while to Angel, "that little upward lift in the middle of her red top lip was distracting, infatuating, maddening. He had never before seen a woman's lips and teeth which forced upon his mind, with such persistent iteration, the old Elizabethan simile of roses filled with snow" (118).

As these metaphors indicate, Tess is eroticized through her identification and intimacy with the natural world. For both Hardy and Angel, love of Tess is inextricable from love of the English countryside: the Var Vale appears paradisal because it affords "aesthetic, sensuous, Pagan pleasure in natural life and lush womanhood" (124). But this pagan world is not an immoral one. Clare perceives Tess's harmony with nature as the cause of her physical appeal as well as her distinctive virtue, attributing both her beauty and decency, her rosy figure and sweet sincerity, to her rural upbringing and employment (103). Angel thus recognizes what Hardy takes great pains to argue—that Tess's natural purity is the source of her moral purity, and her sexuality is the artless and irresistible allure of blossoming youth, unintentional and innocent. Furthermore, since Tess's purity is natural in all meanings of the word, it is also the source of her naiveté. That "pouted-up deep red mouth" may seem coquettish but is actually childish, as her "large innocent eyes" attest (7). Similarly, the red ribbon that she ties in her hair demonstrates a youthful exuberance rather than a deliberate sensuality (7). Hardy repeatedly insists that though her color and vitality mark her as mature and desirable, Tess is still a virgin in body and mind: she may have a woman's form, but she has a child's lack of desire and comprehension of the destructive passions of men. This combination of physical maturity and worldly inexperience makes Tess so alluring to Alec but unable to defend herself against his advances. Both innocent and attractive, she is completely vulnerable.

Alec's exploitation of Tess, and her subsequent knowledge of sex and suffering, mark her abrupt and difficult transition to adulthood; but though she has been physically compromised, Hardy makes the crucial and controversial claim that she remains spiritually unsullied. "Almost at a leap Tess thus changed from simple girl to complex woman," but "a woman whom the turbulent experiences of the last year or two had quite failed to demoralize," for the simple but powerful reason that her moral character remains intact (77). The sexual experience forced upon her fails to corrupt Tess since she adheres to her principles—which, since they contradict those of her parents, she must have gained through intuition rather than instruction. As Alec later realizes, the hands he laid on her body were unable to touch her virtue: she remains "unsmirched in spite of all" because, as he says, "you took yourself off from me so quickly and resolutely when you saw the situation; you did not remain at my pleasure" (253). By declining to remain with him as his mistress, Tess refuses to be placed in a dependent and dishonorable position in which she would be slave to the desires of a man she neither respects nor loves. The strength of her integrity and resolve is further demonstrated by her ability to survive the challenging consequences of her experience. She stoically endures the hardships of social exile and single motherhood, refusing to rely upon Alec or consign her unbaptized baby to damnation. Determined to save his soul, Tess performs her own baptism in a scene that proves both the infant's innocence and the mother's virtue in direct opposition to traditional interpretations of Christian doctrine (74-75). To put it simply, Tess retains her moral purity because it is a spiritual rather than a physical fact; her sexual encounter with Alec is therefore a "passing corporeal blight," not a moral degradation (98). By repudiating the time-honored religious and social principle that identifies purity with chastity, Hardy makes an even more radical move: he fails to recognize chastity as a virtue at all. Viewing sexuality as natural, he argues that there is nothing

inherently shameful or immoral about sex. What is objectionable about Tess's loss of virginity is not that it occurred outside of marriage but that it occurred without her consent; guilt is involved only because Alec took advantage of her innocence. If it were not for "the world's opinion" that scorns her as a tainted woman, Tess's experience "would have been simply a liberal education"—a painful initiation into adulthood, but no sin (77).[10]

Knowing that Christianity condemns her, her parents blame her, and her community gossips about her, Tess cannot help but feel rejected and ashamed. She is tormented by "a cloud of moral hobgoblins," "based on shreds of convention, [and] peopled by phantoms and voices antipathetic to her," that causes her to look "upon herself as a figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence" when she walks along the country fields and lanes (67). Her sense of exile is so intense that she views herself as an outcast even in nature—though of course we know that she is "quite in accord" (67). However, as spring advances and awakens the potential buried in the earth, it also rouses Tess's spirits, which rise within her "automatically as the sap in the twigs" (78). After a period of dismay and grief, her natural purity comes to refresh and reinforce her moral purity: her tried virtue finds renewed strength as she gains energy and encouragement from the bloom around her. Although admirable, Hardy argues that this resilience is actually the usual way of things. He declares, "Let the truth be told—women do as a rule live through such humiliations, and regain their spirits, and again look about them with an interested eye" (82). Elevating Tess's individual experience to a natural law, he again emphasizes the biological nature of sexuality—dismissing its moral and religious associations—and emphatically

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[10] Kramer argues that "neither the regenerated Angel nor the unsparingly besieged Tess categorically and permanently denies the validity of conventional views of chastity," but I distinguish between Hardy's and his characters' views on the matter (115). The fact that after her "liberal education" Tess becomes "a fine creature," with "larger and more eloquent" eyes and a "fair and arresting" aspect, proves that Hardy does not view chastity as a necessary ingredient of a woman's virtue or its loss as inherently damaging (*Tess* 77).

repudiates the concept of the fallen woman, who is damned and destroyed by sexual knowledge. He casts an approving eye on the fact that his heroine begins to imagine what kind of future she can pursue for herself:

> Yet even now Tess felt the pulse of hopeful life still warm within her; she might be happy in some nook which had no memories. To escape the past and all that appertained thereto was to annihilate it; and to do that she would have to get away. Was once lost always lost really true of chastity? she would ask herself. She might prove it false if she could veil bygones. The recuperative power which pervaded organic nature was surely not denied to maidenhood alone. (78)

As these lines suggest, Tess struggles between the guilt-ridden internalization of social notions of purity and the resistance to such standards posed not only by her kind heart, which favors compassion and mercy, but also by her intuition, which is informed by her connection to the natural world and thus honors the laws of healing and regeneration. The latter proves triumphant, and Tess sets off for Talbothays Dairy as a wiser but undaunted woman.

Just as the English countryside has provided a language for Tess's health and beauty, so does it precipitate her recovery and self-realization. The flourishing landscape revives her, enhances her charms, and inspires her with contentment and the hope of an even greater happiness—winning the love of Angel Clare. As the work of the dairy brings the two of them into accord with nature's rhythms and impulses, the lush valley becomes an active force that brings their feelings to fruition:

> Amid the oozing fatness and warm ferments of the Var Vale, 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. The ready bosoms existing there were

> impregnated by their surroundings. July passed over their heads, and the Thermidorean weather which came in its wake seemed an effort on the part of Nature to match the state of hearts at Talbothays Dairy…. And as Clare was oppressed by the outward heats so was he burdened inwardly by a waxing fervour of passion for the soft and silent Tess. (116)

Hardy's delight in the land's fertility is also an unabashed celebration of the erotic attraction between two willing adults. "[C]onverging, under an irresistible law, as surely as two streams in one vale," Tess and Angel demonstrate a natural desire that reflects the rural landscape—simultaneously serene and robust, pure and sexual (101). In addition to nourishing their passion, the Var Vale locates their love in the organic world and thus protects it from the stifling conditions and misguided values of society. Hardy's pastoral vision leads him to consistently characterize civilization and convention as artificial and corrupt and to place them in opposition to nature, which he calls "the actual world"—one that is unpolluted, authentic, and free, in which his lovely Tess thrives in her natural purity (67).

Though the natural world may be the "actual" one, the tragedy of the modern era is that most of us no longer live in it. The couple's Edenic romance comes to an end, and like the original story, knowledge is the cause of their downfall. Yet in a satirical twist on Genesis, the contaminating force is not Tess's sexual experience but Angel's traditional Christianity. Paradise collapses not because of Tess, who is in complete alignment with nature, but because of Angel, the outsider who brings society's corrupted ethics and unforgiving judgments to bear on his devoted wife. Despite his "attempted independence of judgment," this "advanced and well-meaning young man, a sample product of the last five-and-twenty years, was yet the slave to custom and conventionality when surprised back into his early teachings" (208). Clare confesses

his own premarital affair, certain that Tess will pardon him; but his conservative and hypocritical inability to reconcile female sexual knowledge with moral integrity leads to the collapse of their marriage—and of Tess's entire world. Like the Master of Ravenswood, Angel magnifies what he considers the wrongs committed against him and, in his lover's most vulnerable moment, fails to understand and feel compassion for her victimization.

Before we move on, it is necessary to clarify that Tess's relationship with Angel marks a subtle but significant shift in Hardy's portrayal of her natural and moral purity, which are nearly one and the same. For the first phase of the novel, Hardy relies on this concept to prove Tess's innocence and integrity—her sound principles, maidenly freshness, and unintentional sexual appeal—and exonerate her of all blame and degradation. He proclaims purity to be a spiritual rather than a physical truth, and so Tess remains untainted after Alec deflowers her. Yet Hardy's formulation implies that one reason she is absolved of any complicity is her complete lack of desire: Tess has no conception of Alec's lust because she has none of her own. Once she meets Angel, however, that is no longer the case—their attraction is clearly mutual. At this (turning) point in the novel, Hardy describes Tess's experience of love in terms of the natural world in order to argue that she can simultaneously possess moral purity and *conscious* sexuality. This claim—that a woman can feel desire and still be spiritually pure—is perhaps Hardy's most radical. Indeed, Rosemarie Morgan considers that Tess's exemplification of this "combination of sexual vigour and moral rigour … makes her not just one of the greatest but also one of the strongest women in the annals of English literature" (31).

The rural landscape has functioned as artist's palette, agent, and argument, and now it also illustrates Tess's desire. In one of the most vivid scenes of the novel, Angel's playing of a harp at dusk draws her toward him as though she is hypnotized:

> The outskirt of the garden in which Tess found herself had been left uncultivated for some years, and 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—weeds whose red and yellow and purple hues formed a polychrome as dazzling as that of cultivated flowers. She went stealthily as a cat through this profusion of growth, gathering cuckoo-spittle on her skirts, cracking snails that were underfoot, staining her hands with thistle-milk and slug-slime, and rubbing off upon her naked arms sticky blights which, though snow-white on the apple-tree trunks, made madder stains on her skin; thus she drew quite near to Clare, still unobserved of him. (96)

All of these emissions are products of the plants and animals around her, yet Tess's automatic acceptance and absorption of them seem to indicate that they are as much a reflection of nature's fertility as her own. Unlike the rest of Hardy's pastoral imagery, however, this description exhibits a disturbing clash of Edenic vitality and "Darwinian struggle" in which nature appears both alluring and threatening (Goode 117). Tess experiences this moment as a sense of spiritual "exaltation" in which she, Angel, the music, and the organic world are all perfectly in tune (96): "she undulated upon the thin notes of the second-hand harp, and their harmonies passed like breezes through her, bringing tears into her eyes. The floating pollen seemed to be his notes made visible, and the dampness of the garden the weeping of the garden's sensibility" (97). On the other hand, Eithne Henson is right to point out the narrator's apparent "disgust at secretions," an attitude that is "strangely out of place" among Hardy's usual valorization of female sexuality and implementation of a positive "pathetic fallacy of season, place and weather" (196).[11] The striking image of Tess's "naked arms" and hands "stain[ed]" with white slime and blood-red dye

[11] See also Garson 146. She observes that this revulsion is mixed with fascination—which, I will argue, implies that these sentiments belong to Angel rather than to the author.

seems to be nature's unequivocal warning to Angel that she is no virgin, leading me to agree with Henson that this jarring scene anticipates Clare's perception of Tess as "permanently 'blighted'" (196). The suggestion of anxiety and aversion here surrounding Tess's sexuality, as well as its unsettling effect, is remarkably similar to the moment when Angel comes across her yawning and sees "the red interior of her mouth as if it had been a snake's" (133). This perspective is unmistakably Clare's, and the detail accentuates his simultaneous attraction to and fear of female sexuality, in addition to foreshadowing his denunciation of Tess as Eve, the tempted and fallen woman. Once she relates her story to him, Angel views her physical appeal no longer as the expression of her natural purity but rather as the mark of her corruption.

Yet neither her past sexual relationship nor her current desire for Clare prevents Hardy's heroine from manifesting a love pure and sacred in its absolute faith and devotion. In her simplicity and ardor, Tess idolizes him: "There was hardly a touch of earth in her love for Clare. To her sublime trustfulness he was all that goodness could be, knew all that a guide, philosopher, and friend should know…. He would sometimes catch her large worshipful eyes, that had no bottom to them, looking at him from their depths, as if she saw something immortal before her" (151). Indeed, the bliss of receiving Angel's affection, combined with the intensity of her own, elevates Tess to "spiritual altitudes more nearly approaching ecstasy" than anything else she has experienced (151). After he spurns her, Tess's virtue is further attested by her inability to imagine seducing Angel and binding him to her through physical means, though the narrator implies that she would have succeeded: "There was, it is true, underneath [his harsh treatment], a back-current of sympathy through which a woman of the world might have conquered him. But Tess did not think of this; she took everything as her deserts, and hardly opened her mouth. The firmness of her devotion to him was indeed almost pitiful"—in fact, remarkably so, since it

causes her to submit to her punishment as though receiving judgment from a higher being (189). But it is Tess who is the greater Christian of the two—the one who is humble and compassionate rather than self-righteous and severe, the one whose love is distinguished by “honesty” and “meekness,” “single-mindedness” and “endurance,” “devotion” and “good faith” (167).

Unfortunately, Angel’s obsession with chastity leaves him unable to give due consideration to Tess’s numerous virtues, or to the possibility that her sexual encounter was not a willing one. We do not know exactly what Tess tells Angel, other than that she recounts her story “without flinching” and provides “reassertions and secondary explanations”; but the latter phrase hints that she, like Hardy, attempts to justify her behavior (177-8). When she first meets Alec, he compels her to eat the strawberry that he places to her lips—despite her protests—and to accept a bouquet of roses, the thorns of which prick her skin in an “ill-omen” that presages another equally unsolicited but more painful letting of blood (31-32). Upon Tess’s return home, her mother eagerly asks, “And did he own ‘ee?” (32). Of course, Joan Durbeyfield wishes to know if Alec acknowledged their familial connection, but given the nature of their encounter, the statement holds a darker meaning. He is “inexorable” in his pursuit of Tess and desire to possess her, going so far as to threaten her with physical harm until she feels cornered, “pant[ing] miserably” in “desperation,” “her large eyes staring at him like those of a wild animal” (40). In *The Bride of Lammermoor*, Lucy’s likeness to an animal serves to exaggerate her madness and deprive her of humanity, but here Hardy calls attention to Tess’s touching vulnerability and distress. Seeing no alternative, she finally allows Alec to put his lips to her cheek, but he gives her not a sign of affection but a “kiss of mastery”—a proof of ownership (40). “No sooner had he done so,” however, “than she flushed with shame, took out her handkerchief, and wiped the spot on her cheek that had been touched by his lips” (40-41). Only after she submits does Tess

realize that the act contains greater meaning than she imagined, and so she tries to erase the kiss "as far as such a thing was physically possible" (41). Significantly, this scene foretells the manner in which Tess loses her virginity, which Hardy cannot explicitly narrate but describes in vaguer but similar terms: "She had dreaded him, winced before him, succumbed to adroit advantages he took of her helplessness; then, temporarily blinded by his ardent manners, had been stirred to confused surrender awhile: had suddenly despised and disliked him, and had run away" (64). Scholars have often pointed to this passage as evidence that it is impossible to tell whether Tess was raped or seduced,[12] but Hardy's emphasis on her incomprehension, powerlessness, and fear is quite expressive. The words "confused surrender" especially indicate the lack of consent, which must be both informed and voluntary, not bewildered and coerced. Moreover, if we believe the victim's own account of that night—that she "was a child" who did not conceive of the "danger in men-folk"—the case appears to me quite clear (64).

One might object that Hardy's heroine had ample warning of danger, even if she did not understand the exact form it would take. From the beginning she feels uncomfortable around Alec, who repeatedly places her in awkward positions. But Tess remains in his presence not because she wishes to but because she feels *obliged* to do so. Regarding "herself in the light of a murderess" after her negligence kills the Durbeyfields' horse, Tess feels responsible for her family's welfare and the pressure of earning money to support them. Aware that Alec discomfits her but ignorant of the true threat that he represents, she asks herself, "How could she face her parents, get back her box, and disconcert the whole scheme for the rehabilitation of her family on such sentimental grounds?" (42). With this financial burden on her shoulders, Tess "was more pliable under his hands than a mere companionship would have made her, owing to her

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[12] See Mallett 121-3.

unavoidable dependence upon his mother, and, through that lady's comparative helplessness, upon him" as her direct employer (46). She is not Alec's cousin and social equal whom he is courting but a working-class woman, performing labor for his upper-middle-class family, whom he can harass with impunity due to his position of power. As a result, John Goode emphasizes that when Tess succumbs to Alec in the Chase, she is not only emotionally worn out from his relentless harassment, but also physically exhausted as a rural laborer who has been working since before sunrise and walking for miles after dark (113). In such circumstances, it is no wonder that she falls asleep and can no longer muster the energy to defend herself.

The forces of economic exigency and class vulnerability are precisely what Laura Claridge overlooks when she questions Tess's moral purity. If it "is so potent an ingredient in her makeup, why did she open up her lips and take in the strawberry—and then continue to eat?" Claridge demands. "Why, finally, does Eve not refuse Satan?" (331). Alec is certainly a diabolical figure, but Tess's childish innocence and unintentional sexual appeal prevent her from being accurately identified with Eve, that deliberate temptress. Relying upon Alec as her employer and for his potential patronage of her family, Tess feels compelled to please and obey him. At times her moral intuition causes her to rebel when he has pushed her too far; but she then falls back into relative passivity due to her sense of guilt for the financial damage she has caused her parents and siblings. In viewing Tess's surrender to Alec, whom she neither desires nor loves, as proof that no moral code informs her actions, Claridge fails to consider her acute sense of responsibility and defenseless position (328). In fact, the matter is less an issue of ethics than it is an issue of class and its dynamics of dependence, control, and coercion.

Though Angel is in many ways the opposite of Alec, his relationship with Tess is also considerably shaped by class. Part of the reason that she worships Clare and believes herself to

be his inferior is because, in status and education, she is. His language and ideas mark him as a cultured scholar, and to a dairymaid who has received only limited instruction, his soul appears like "the soul of a saint" and "his intellect that of a seer" (151). As a working-class woman, Tess has never been on an equal footing with Angel, whom she eventually agrees to marry because he will not take no as an answer. In fact, in his refusal to credit her words and his attempts to "reach those lips against her consent," he is little better than Alec (189; Higonnet 18). But Tess's simple, adoring, complete faith in her husband's goodness and judgment make his condemnation all the more devastating:

> She perceived in his words the realization of her own apprehensive foreboding in former times. He looked upon her as a species of imposter; a guilty woman in the guise of an innocent one. Terror was upon her white face as she saw it; her cheek was flaccid, and her mouth had almost the aspect of a round little hole. The horrible sense of his view of her so deadened her that she staggered; and he stepped forward, thinking she was going to fall. (179)

As Morgan points out, Tess's real fall occurs at this moment, when she is struck by the import of Angel's words, "the woman I have been loving is not you" (179). Tess is thus rendered "dumb, mute, and prone"—the adjectives of the fallen woman—"not by the seducer but by the lawful husband. The emphasis is purposeful. Hardy's denunciation of a mythology which prescribed the fallen woman sick and sickening from the day of her 'fall' comes full circle in the wedding-night scene, where, with a bitter, satiric twist, the legitimate marriage partner becomes the myth-maker's agent" (Morgan 51). Just as Lucy's devout attachment to Ravenswood "made him the arbiter of her fate for weal or woe," Tess's absolute love for Angel means that she feels his rejection like a death sentence. Though she has been able to heal from her sorrow and embrace

love and hope, Tess is now awakened to the chilling prospect that society—even, and especially, the man who vowed to cherish and protect her—will always view her as corrupted, and blame and despise her for it. Pressed by "an almost physical sense of an implacable past which still engirdled her," as well as a great "hunger for affection too long withheld," she falls into despair and almost wishes for her life to end: "Bygones would never be complete bygones till she was a bygone herself" (240).

Tess's detachment from life is closely connected to her detachment from her physical form, which has borne "the record of a pulsing life [that] had learnt too well, for its years, of the dust and ashes of things, of the cruelty of lust and the fragility of love" (220). This dissociation from her body begins after her sexual encounter with Alec, further indicating that it was a nonconsensual and traumatic experience. When she first arrives at Talbothays Dairy, she tells the other laborers that "our souls can be made to go outside our bodies when we are alive" by lying "on the grass at night, and look[ing] 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*" (94; my emphasis). When memory has been too great a burden, it appears Tess has practiced a habit of mind that allows her to momentarily escape her physical frame and the history traced upon it. As she heals in the Var Vale and falls in love with Angel, Tess returns to feeling in accord with the natural world and her body, whose desires impact her decision to accept his proposal; but after Clare condemns her, she entertains the rather Gothic wish for them to perish in each other's arms (194). Nevertheless, they live on, though separately, and as she travels alone she again becomes the object of the aggressive male gaze. Feeling unloved by the man she adores but desired by strangers, Tess goes so far as to deface herself by snipping off her eyebrows (219). She again crosses paths with Alec, who calls

her temptress and blames her for the lust she arouses in him (254). Confronted by the man whose desire has been the source of her suffering, Tess comes to feel antagonism toward the body she has been given: "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" (243). As Penny Boumelha observes, Tess has become "trapped by a sexuality which seems at times almost irrelevant to her own experience and sense of her own identity" (125). Her detachment is complete when she relinquishes ownership of herself and agrees to be Alec's mistress. When they are reunited, Angel recognizes that "his original Tess had spiritually ceased to recognize the body before him as hers—allowing it to drift, like a corpse upon the current, in a direction dissociated from its living will" (299). Discarded by Angel and hounded by Alec, Tess gives up herself and all attachment to life—much like Lucy Ashton. In fact, Scott's diamond and casket metaphor, with which Lucy expresses her hopelessness and dissociation from her body, is recalled in the warning that Tess's friends send to Angel: "A woman should not be try'd beyond her Strength, [because] continual dropping will wear away a Stone—ay, more, a Diamond" (288). These metaphors indicate that even the most virtuous and resilient woman will fail when all forces are allied against her, and they hint of the danger and disaster that may result from her desperation.

Through Tess's troubled relationship with her body, Hardy draws attention to her victimization as well as to mid-Victorian bourgeois attitudes and anxieties surrounding working-class women, which are voiced in the novel by Alec and Angel. Tess's employment as a dairymaid leads Clare to idolize her as a "visionary essence of woman" and to "half-teasingly" call her by the names of pagan goddesses of nature (103). Ignoring the fact that reproduction is an intrinsic part of the organic world, Angel entertains the romantic fantasy that unlawful sex and

sin are urban ailments which have no place in the healthy, pristine countryside. Alec represents the alternative (and perhaps more dominant) Victorian perspective that identified the working class with vulgarity, moral looseness, and disease (Goode 115; Poovey 30-31). When Tess, who has consistently repulsed his advances, attempts to erase the kiss he has given her, Alec is surprised by her modesty and irritably remarks, "You are mighty sensitive for a cottage girl!" (41). Hardy's insistent portrayal of Tess as both naturally and morally pure, in addition to being an articulation of his pastoral vision and rejection of the fallen woman, is thus a direct challenge to the era's bourgeois capitalist ideology, which viewed the lower classes as inferior in intelligence and morality and justified the middle class's objectification and exploitation of them (Goode 115; Poovey 30-31).

But Hardy argues that like her social superiors, Tess has a virtue of her own that deserves protection. Speaking to this issue, Goode claims that "this novel is not about Tess's sexuality—it is about the articulation of … sexual politics…. The theme of purity, to put it another way, is incorporated into the question of justice," specifically the issue of the economic and sexual abuse of the working class (124). As he aptly observes, "Tess is made to pay as a working-class woman for the desire of the middle-class males" (128). Both Alec and Angel project their reductive and disempowering stereotypes of women onto Tess, whom they persistently pursue and silence, and ultimately use or discard (Higonnet 17-18). Tess herself recognizes that she is a victim of class privilege, as indicated by the words she chooses to condemn Alec's new espousal of Christianity: "You, and *those like you*, take your fill of pleasure on earth by making the life of *such as me* bitter and black with sorrow; and then it is a fine thing, when you have had enough of that, to think of securing your pleasure in heaven by becoming converted!" (242; my emphasis). Yet Tess's knowledge of his unworthy character and their unequal power dynamic only serves to

elucidate her situation, not free her from it (Goode 131). Just as she first falls prey to Alec due to financial distress, so she again becomes his victim because he promises to take care of her family, who are to be turned out of their home. "And you had used your cruel persuasion upon me … you did not stop using it—no—you did not stop!" she accuses him through her sobs. "My little sisters and brother, and my mother's needs … they were the things you moved me by … and you said my husband would never come back—never; and you taunted me, and said what a simpleton I was to expect him…. And at last I believed you and gave way!" (300). Through his characterization of Tess, Hardy "demands that his Christian, male, middle-class reader enter the *double* bind of the working-class woman," for whom "[p]rostitution is the ultimate capitalist relationship," the greatest instance of her exploitation and degradation (Goode 124, 131). When Tess tells Angel that Alec has "bought" her, she thus reveals that she has finally fallen (299).[13] The world has at last defeated Tess, but it is because her husband, in withdrawing his love and protection, has allowed it to do so.

Angel's desertion of Tess caused her to give up hope and ownership of herself, but when he reappears in front of her with arms opened in forgiveness, her desire and will are rekindled. Just as Lucy stabs Bucklaw to assert her loyalty to Ravenswood and resist becoming the possession of another man, Tess wields a knife against Alec in a desperate attempt to eradicate the obstacle between herself and her husband. But unlike Lucy, Tess's great act of violence is not the work of a madwoman—though Angel cannot comprehend it in any other way. Indeed, when Tess first confessed her past, he responded, "Am I to believe this? From your manner I am to take it as true. O you cannot be out of your mind! You ought to be! Yet you are not" (178). Like Scott, and like many Victorian medical theorists, Angel's only explanation for what he

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[13] This quotation appears in the 1892 edition of the novel.

perceives as transgressive female behavior is insanity: Tess's sexual encounter strikes him as proof that bodily passions conquered her moral compass, for which the only excuse would have been the failure of her will and rationality (Krishnan 32). But as she assured him, "I am not out of my mind" (178).[14] Angel attributed Tess's surrender to Alec as proof of her corrupted blood, and he turns to the same explanation when she tells him that she has killed her seducer:

> [Clare] wondered what obscure strain in the d'Urberville blood had led to this aberration, if it were an aberration. There momentarily flashed through his mind that the family tradition of the coach and murder might have arisen because the d'Urbervilles had been known to do these things. As well as his confused and excited ideas could reason, he supposed that in the moment of mad grief of which she spoke her mind had lost its balance, and plunged her into this abyss. (304)

Believing that his wife has gone mad provides Angel with a rational explanation for her actions, but it also enables him to pity her as a victim rather than fear or detest her as an assailant. Lacking the vocabulary to adequately express and justify her desperation, Tess also describes it as a fit of insanity: "How wickedly mad I was! Yet formerly I never could bear to hurt a fly or a worm, and the sight of a bird in a cage used often to make me cry" (308). These words attest to the extent of her torment, which has pushed her to commit an act completely foreign to her sweet and gentle temperament; but the very fact that she is able to recall the murder, and to express astonishment at it, proves that she still has her wits about her.

It is true that when Tess explains her motives (particularly the belief that Angel will be sure to forgive her now that she has killed Alec), she lacks composure and sound logic; but such

[14] In fact, if anyone is prone to madness it is Angel, whose idealistic personality resembles Lucy's and makes his inevitable disillusionment devastating. After his romanticized image of Tess is shattered, Angel feels unmoored and aggrieved, leading him to lash out at the respectable Mercy Chant and then beg her forgiveness with the words, "I think I am going crazy!" (209).

qualities once again indicate the depth of her distress, which Angel interprets as delirium but, significantly, never the narrator (303). Indeed, Hardy portrays his heroine as close to madness as he can without actually attributing it to her in order to preserve her dignity but gain the reader's sympathy. Mrs. Brooks, the proprietor of the villa where Alec and Tess are living, hears from within the apartment a moaning low and constant, "as if it came from a soul bound to some Ixionian wheel [of torture]," and peeks inside to witness Tess's face distorted in pain, "the long lashes of her closed eyes stuck in wet tags to her cheeks" and "her lips … bleeding from the clench of her teeth upon them" (300-1). But though her eyes shine unnaturally—like Lucy's—the blow she gives Alec is carefully aimed and lethal (298). The mad Lucy strikes out randomly at Bucklaw and deals him a bloody but temporary injury, whereas Tess acts with deadly intent and precision: "The wound was small, but the point of the blade had touched the heart of the victim, who lay on his back, pale, fixed, dead, as if he had scarcely moved after the infliction of the blow" (302). Moreover, though in the first overexcited moments Tess rejoices in her liberation from Alec, she soon recollects herself and rationally perceives that she cannot evade the consequences. "My life can only be a question of weeks," she reasons, to which Clare replies, "Don't say it, Tess!" (309). In contrast with Angel, "who refuses to believe in the act of blood[shed]" and its cost, "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" (Millgate 737). As she stoically prepares herself for death, she proves that she is in perfect command of her senses.

In fact, rather than descending into madness, Tess acquires an almost transcendent clarity and eloquence that elevates her voice to "a vehicle of poetic truth" (Higonnet 20).[15] In the first

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[15] With good reason, Higonnet questions the ability of Hardy or any "man implicated in patriarchy [to] speak for a woman constrained by it" (15); however, Goode justifies Hardy's decision to tell a woman's story by arguing that her very oppression, and its imposition of silence, compels him to tell it for her (134).

phases of the novel, she internalizes society's view of herself as a fallen woman and submits to Angel's denunciation; but in its final phases, she comes to reject her sense of guilt and its enforcement of silence and surrender. A critical moment of realization occurs on her way to Flintcomb-Ash farm, when Tess comes across a group of pheasants mangled from gunshot wounds and slowly bleeding to death. Witnessing such misery, she weeps in sympathy; but the simple fact that she is suffering psychologically, not physically, prompts her to recognize that her anguish is the result of man's invention, with no objective basis in reality: "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" (219). Tess's new understanding of her situation, combined with her moral intuition, soon inspires her with a "rebellious sense of injustice" and urges her to reject her husband's judgment in favor of her own (281). If Lucy feels angry with Ravenswood, she never expresses it; but Tess passionately reproaches Clare for his misguided principles and lack of compassion: "O why have you treated me so monstrously, Angel! I do not deserve it. I have thought it all over carefully, and I can never, never forgive you! You know that I did not intend to wrong you—why have you so wronged me? You are cruel, cruel indeed! I will try to forget you. It is all injustice I have received at your hands!" (281). Tess's ability to articulate her dissatisfaction coincides with her increasing dissociation from her body, the symbol of her sexuality and the site of her trauma. The narrator ceases to dwell with fascination on her form, which fades almost into invisibility as Tess grows in voice and spirituality until she becomes "identical with soul" at Stonehenge (Garson 143).[16] This "heathen temple," where an ancient people worshipped the sun and the pastoral Tess hearkens to the song of the wind, is naturally the site where she feels "at home"

[16] See also Goode 124.

and at peace (310-1). Lucy is silenced and debased by her transformation into an animalistic madwoman, but Tess gains fluency and the glow of a stature almost divine. She meets the men who come to arrest her with sublime grace and composure, saying simply yet majestically, "I am ready" (313). She does not expect to be reunited with Angel in heaven, but she is content with the rest that will come from returning to the earth and lying in its embrace.

It appears that Tess has no need of a Christian heaven—or, at least, of the one that doctrine has described to her. For Tess, Christianity is represented by the painter of signs, who suggests that God does not discriminate between deliberate and unintentional sins, and the local church, where she is a spectacle and subject of gossip. At first she feels oppressed by the fear of a vengeful God, but the birth and death of her child change her assessment of her needs and therefore of justice itself: "In the daylight, indeed, she felt her terrors about his soul to have been somewhat exaggerated; whether well founded or not, she had no uneasiness now, reasoning that if Providence would not ratify such an act of [baptismal] approximation she, for one, did not value the kind of heaven lost by the irregularity—either for herself or for her child" (75). For Tess's moral code is founded upon her intuition, which Hardy's pastoral vision links to the organic world: she is one of those "women whose chief companions are the forms and forces of outdoor Nature [and who thus] retain in their souls far more of the Pagan fantasy of their remote forefathers than of the systematized religion taught their race of later date" (81). When Alec asks her if she has no religion, perhaps owing to him, Tess responds, "But I have. Though I don't believe in anything supernatural" (252). Rather than the *super*natural Tess believes in the natural—in what strikes her heart and mind as good and fair. Hers is a faith that prescribes mercy over punishment, flexibility over rigidity, and individual thought over institutional doctrine. "Why, you can have the religion of loving-kindness and purity at least, if you can't

have—what do you call it—dogma," she explains (259). In moments such as these, "Hardy oppose[s] his heroine's individual voice to the unnatural laws and maxims of men" in order to challenge "a set of repressive discourses that are inadequate to true morality and inimical to the development and expression of Tess's selfhood" (Higonnet 17). He also expresses a "mistrust of … all ways of thinking that give abstract ideals or principles … priority over the actual needs of specific human situations" (qtd. in Blake 703). As Tess herself has realized, what good is a notion of justice, however traditional and revered, if it exonerates the powerful and punishes the downtrodden?

Hardy's dissatisfaction with both the Old Testament and modern interpretations of it becomes explicit in his discussion of fate and tragedy. In one of the novel's most moving passages, the narrator steps back from the fateful scene to reflect upon it:

> Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman the man, many thousand years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order. One may, indeed, admit the possibility of a retribution lurking in the present catastrophe. Doubtless some of Tess d'Urberville's mailed ancestors rollicking home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time. But though to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children may be a morality good enough for divinities, it is scorned by average human nature; and it therefore does not mend the matter. (57)

Hardy is not, as Marjorie Garson theorizes, suggesting that Tess is punished for the crimes of her ancestors, which is the mistaken belief that Angel entertains when he ascribes her loss of chastity

to her lineage.[17] Rather, by connecting such false logic with the punitive ethics of the Old Testament, Hardy proclaims that the latter fails to satisfy modern intellects and needs. The principal source of Hardy's tragic vision is, in fact, his frustration with Christianity and the moral degradation of society, which he blames as the cause of Tess's suffering and grim fate. As a result, his novels' "versions of social law and 'divine' justice … are presented with irony, modified and even shown false by the contexts in which they occur," as he emphasizes their inadequacy and calls for an alternative spiritual vision (Kramer 17-18).

Although he rejects Christianity, Hardy does not renounce religion altogether. Instead, he imagines a new faith that resembles an old one: his nostalgia for the bucolic generates his promotion of an ethical system founded upon nature and the pagan past. As Marie Panter points out, Hardy's "relationship towards faith and transcendence is made up of resentment and regret rather than atheistic conviction" (1). Discontented with the current state of the world, he explores means for its moral revitalization: "Convinced by Darwin, Hardy believes that it is man's responsibility to make up for the absence of God. Through the pagan theme, his late works show that man may replace God with nature, and that religion, though it needs to be deeply renewed, remains necessary for humanity to be able to found an ethical society" (1). Hardy's paganism consists of the worship of nature, which is essentially the worship of life (2), as well as "a positive set of practices and values, in harmony" with the organic world (1). Naturally, the pastoral Tess acts as his mouthpiece and develops into a greater freethinker than Angel once "she becomes fully aware of how responsible Christian morality is for her misfortune

[17] Clare is a complicated figure. In addition to his own contradictions, there seems "to be something of self-exploration and self-expiation in Hardy's portrait of Angel" (Garson 141). Garson questions "to what extent [Hardy] himself is implicated in the very attitudes he exposes in his male characters—particularly Angel's," and especially with regard to Tess (141). However, despite their similarities, Clare's conservative rigidity and conception of a pastoral free from sexuality reveal his thinking as erroneous and serve to distance him from the author.

and moral condemnation" (20). It is not Clare, the scholar and professed Christian, who is the novel's moral center but Tess, the rural woman whose intuition is valorized by Hardy as more noble and just than any instructed religion. Though Boumelha is right to observe that Hardy makes the traditional Romantic move of assigning "sex and nature to the female, intellect and culture to the male," he challenges this habitually conservative view by arguing that the latter has failed to provide an adequate morality, which must be sought instead in the former (122). Consequently, he endorses Tess's "spontaneous faith" in the forces of "desire, energy, life, [and] love," which "[she] contemplate[s] in nature and which moves [her] in return. The innocence of this force explains Hardy's exoneration of Tess from guilt and his simultaneous approval of paganism, which accepts sexuality as natural" (Panter 25). Against a religion and society grounded "on a negation of nature"—that is, of life and sexuality—Hardy offers an "ethics of life, that is to say love": Tess's "great ability to love shows the possibility of transforming" the natural impulses that motivate her "into the foundation of a new ethics" (26).

However, many scholars have argued against such readings of the novel by noting the discontinuities and contradictions within *Tess*, which, they contend, is a work that defies any coherence of form or ideology (Boumelha 128).[18] Perhaps aware of or anticipating such criticism, Hardy himself defends the ambiguity of his narratives, explaining that they do not advance either a "consistent philosophy" or a "coherent scientific theory," being "imaginative writings" and "impressions of the moment" authored over a span of forty years (*Tess* xiv). In particular, Boumelha claims that "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

[18] See also Brady, Garson, Gatrell, Goode, Ingham, and Mallett. In fact, Boumelha suggests that the "radicalism of Hardy's representation of women resides, not in their 'complexity', their 'realism' or their 'challenge to convention', but in their resistance to reduction to a single and uniform ideological position" (7).

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" (128). Though it would be misguided to seek a stable perspective across Hardy's novels, which reflect his evolution in thought and argument, it would also be a mistake to separate the author and his purpose from his work. *Tess* especially is a novel with a personal and ethical agenda, directed toward the public and much revised in a manner that granted it "particularly polemical sharpenings" (Goode 110). In addition, though it is undeniable that Hardy occasionally contradicts himself, certain views are vehemently advanced at the expense of others. With regard to chastity, however, I believe that he is consistent: he categorically repudiates it as a virtue, depicting Tess's loss of virginity as problematic only due to the issue of consent.

Like Boumelha, Garson questions the uniformity of Hardy's moral framework, arguing that "the text makes clear that specifically human excellence involves more than a surrender to 'nature'. If Tess's behaviour is merely natural, and to be defended on that ground, why should Alec's be condemned?" (145). Hardy censures Alec's sexual drive because it is unrestrained and predatory, which may be natural in the Darwinian sense but conflicts with his rather Romantic perception of the organic world as ordered and balanced. His pastoral vision embraces vigor and bounty, yes, but not excess or cruelty. For instance, after Angel has spent time at Talbothays Dairy, the "vicarage life" and its "transcendental aspirations—still unconsciously based on the geocentric view of things, a zenithal paradise, a nadiral hell—[became] as foreign to his own as if they had been the dreams of people on another planet. Latterly he had seen only Life, felt only the great passionate pulse of existence, unwarped, uncontorted, untrammelled by those creeds which futilely attempt to check what *wisdom* would be content to *regulate*" (124; my emphasis). Though he ultimately fails to adopt it, Angel has been steeped in the pagan consciousness and

realized that it possesses its own regulatory wisdom, akin to the rhythms of the earth, and the source of his beloved Tess's virtues. Indeed, before she is pushed beyond her endurance, Hardy's heroine embodies the balance of nature: her character (and love for Angel) is neither too sexual nor too anemic, neither too assertive nor too apathetic. Because it is extreme, Alec's lust can be viewed as *un*natural and, accordingly, immoral.

Other scholars have taken issue with the "easy interchangeability, for Hardy, of the words 'chastity' and 'purity,'" despite his claims to the contrary (Blake 691). Lynn Parker suggests that this "thematic confusion … results, in part, from Hardy's loyalty to the ballad narrative—a narrative which contains moral judgments which conflict with Hardy's own notions of Tess's purity" (275). Viewing the issue as linguistic rather than thematic, Margaret Higonnet argues that Hardy's efforts to represent the purity of his heroine ironically force him to fall back upon conventional discourse and to produce contradictory statements (25). Similarly, Patricia Ingham ascribes the novel's ambiguity to his inability to forge a new language beyond the familiar "tainted terminology" of spotless virgin and fallen woman (68, 73). They point to moments in the novel such as the following: "In considering what Tess was not he overlooked what she was, and forgot that the defective can be more than the entire" (208); "Despite her not inviolate past, what still abode in such a woman as Tess outvalued the freshness of her fellows" (269). In these instances, it seems that Hardy is adopting and perpetuating the established definition of purity as chastity; but just like the moment when Tess's mouth is compared to a snake's, the narrator here is relating *Angel's perspective*. It is her traditional husband who, reflecting on his decision to leave her, judges Tess to be "defective" instead of "entire" and "inviolate." In other words, it is Clare who thinks in these terms, not Hardy—who is *referencing* such conventional discourse rather than upholding it. The difference is subtle but significant.

Even if his philosophy and vocabulary are not the most well-defined, Hardy unambiguously denounces the sexual double standard and lays the responsibility of restraint upon the man, whose physical strength enables him to either protect or ruin a woman. Our heroine has learned this fact to her detriment, which makes her admire Angel all the more:

> Tess was woman enough to realize from their avowals to herself that Angel Clare had the honour of all the dairymaids in his keeping, and her perception of his care to avoid compromising the happiness of either in the least degree, bred a tender respect in Tess for what she deemed, rightly or wrongly, the self-controlling sense of duty shown by him, a quality which she had never expected to find in one of the opposite sex, and in the absence of which more than one of the simple hearts who were his housemates might have gone weeping on her pilgrimage. (110-1)

To further absolve Tess and vulnerable women, Hardy weighs intentions over actions in his moral balance, arguing that the "beauty or ugliness of a character lay not only in its achievements, but in its aims and impulses; its true history lay not among things done, but among things willed" (267). Tess comes to resent Angel because she reaches the same conclusion: "Never in her life—she could swear it from the bottom of her soul—had she ever intended to do wrong; yet these hard judgments had come. Whatever her sins, they were not sins of intention, but of inadvertence, and why should she have been punished so persistently?" (281). In the eyes of both Tess and her creator, purity is a matter of the heart and mind, a spiritual rather than physical state of being.

Nevertheless, the fact that *Tess* is the story of a woman who loses her innocence to a man, becomes his mistress, and then kills him has caused many reviewers and scholars to object to the subtitle labeling the heroine as "A Pure Woman." The Victorian editor Mowbray Morris

flat-out refused to publish the novel, protesting that calling pure a woman who commits adultery and murder "entails something of a strain upon the English language" (qtd. in Mallett 114). One may admit the validity of such a perspective, but Morris went so far as to claim that even if Tess is not guilty of sexual desire, she is morally to blame for eliciting in others—a harsh and disciplinary attitude that imposes on women the necessity of being "constantly on guard, monitoring not only one's own behaviour but also that of others" (121). More recently, Nina Auerbach has suggested that "Tess seems … the most pitiably abased of all our fallen women" because of her "own unremitting sense of sin"; but Tess ultimately rejects the guilt she has internalized, facing her death with serenity and without repentance (42-43). Of course, her murder of Alec strikes most readers as the action that unambiguously marks her as fallen, regardless of whether she was pure after he deflowered her. "Although it is frequently and perhaps fairly read as a tragic moment of energy and heroism," Parker claims that the murder "exposes the extent of her degradation or 'stain' which began with her sexual experience" and therefore perpetuates Victorian convention (280). Taking a similar approach, Boumelha asserts that Tess's death "expiat[es] the guilt of her woman's sexuality," particularly since Angel is rewarded with Liza-Lu, a younger and de-eroticized version of her (125).

On the other hand, Irving Howe makes the case that the "murder is an act of desperate assertion which places Tess in the line of folk heroines who kill because they can no longer bear outrage, but it is also an act toward which our responses have been trained by Hardy to move past easy approval or easy rejection, indeed past any judgment" (418). Though it would be incorrect to say that Hardy condones murder, he essentially exonerates his heroine by painting a moving portrait of her misery and desperation that elicits our sympathy rather than our censure. It is true that Tess accepts her death as the just consequence of the crime of killing Alec, but she

feels no remorse, and in the final pages of the novel she becomes not monstrous but semi-divine. There is also an undeniable power and appeal in the fact that the victim has freed herself from her persecutor, especially given the extent of the torment he inflicted. In fact, Howe argues that not even the murder corrupts Tess's purity: "Absolute victim of her wretched circumstances, she is ultimately beyond their stain. She embodies a feeling for the inviolability of the person, as it brings the absolute of chastity nearer to the warming Christian virtue of charity. Through a dialectic of negation, Tess reaches purity of spirit even as she fails to satisfy the standards of the world" (408). Morgan, too, considers Tess to be vindicated: "Hardy retains, then, for Tess, with her emotional generosity, sexual vitality and moral strength, the capacity to rise above her fall and, ultimately, to redeem the man who, bearing the values and sexual prejudices and double-standards of the society, fails to rise above them in the hour of need" (51).

But Auerbach argues that Tess does not prove her virtue and spirit *in spite* of but rather *because* of her fall, which "empowers her to break through the design of her world" and to expose its wrongs and failures (35). "In looking at the fallen woman, not only as she was but as she was created," she elaborates, "we see a power transcending the retrieval of respectability: the alchemical possibilities of the outcast, a half-acknowledged image of revolution and transfiguration, one divine-demonic vehicle of faith in an age of doubt" (51-52). Auerbach is right to point out that it is the social exile who most effectively challenges the established order, but I cannot agree with her claim that Hardy demonstrates a "final conformity to Victorian conventions" (41). According to her perspective, Tess's murder of Alec and consequent execution conform to the typical path of the fallen woman, who cannot be rehabilitated into society and whose only possible redemption lies in death. Whatever the similarities, however, Hardy's ending is not a "punitive" one, nor does it reflect a "moral timidity" (41). Society

scorns and eliminates Tess—punishing the victim after it has not only failed to protect but also broken her—but, more importantly, Tess renounces society, its approval, and even its religion. She comes to peace with her fate not because she expects to be pardoned and granted a Christian heaven but because she finds comfort in a pagan death.

Though our heroine achieves the rest she deserves after a short but immensely sorrowful life, we are not left at ease. The novel concludes not with the impression of the majestic Tess at Stonehenge but with the disquieting image of the black flag announcing that she has been hanged. Hardy himself protests against his novels being "condemned as 'pessimistic'" since his artistic vision and philosophy aspire to "truth"—to the representation of existence according to his experience of it (*Tess* xiv). Yet he admits that his "writer's instinct for expression" most readily responds to the tragic aspects of life, as we see in this, perhaps his greatest work (xiv). Though *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is the story of a heroine's purity, nobility, and resilience, it is also an account of her abuse, despair, and destruction. Ultimately, the novel's "pastoral is disrupted by tragedy" (Boumelha 7). While we likely recall Tess's vibrancy, we certainly remember her violent end.

Like *The Bride of Lammermoor*, *Tess* is a tragedy of both character and circumstance. At the individual level, the intensity of Tess's personality and perception of her situation amplifies her experience from the sorrowful to the devastating; at the communal level, "[t]ragedy occurs because Tess's character is hard-pressed by her past, the circumstances of her present, and her rejection by society and Angel" (Kramer 19, 115). She is prey to her own passions as well as those of two men, the victim of their shortcomings as well as the powerful external forces of economic exigency and sexual double standards. To put it simply, "Tess is an example of the destructive effect of society's pressures and conventions upon a nature naturally pure and

unstained" (Gatrell 105). The novel is therefore "more than the history of a woman's life and death; it is also an indictment of 'Justice,' human and divine" (Johnson 390). Walter Scott relegates injustice to the past, but Thomas Hardy unequivocally argues that it is not only present but predominant. Consequently, the conclusion of *Tess* is intended to disturb and dissatisfy. In addition to the gruesome manner in which the heroine meets her death, the "utopian interval" in which she and Angel are briefly reunited "makes the novel's end completely uncathartic" (Goode 136). Likewise, Tess's replacement by her sister appears inadequate because it is. How can any individual be replaced with another? And how can any reader be content with an ending in which a woman who has been raped is also executed—"hanged by the neck until she is dead" (137)?

The question of the novel's conclusion leads us back to its beginning. Returning to Hardy's explanatory note, the truth he shares is offensive because it challenges Victorian notions of sexuality, morality, class, and religion but also because it is *on* the offensive, calling for an alternative system of ethics and justice (Goode 137). To deflect criticism, the author claims that "the novel was intended to be neither didactic nor aggressive, but in the scenic parts to be representative simply, and in the contemplative to be oftener charged with impressions than with convictions" (x); but he also argues that "shiftings" in social opinion "often begin in sentiment, and such sentiment sometimes begins in a novel" (xii). What is a poignant portrait of injustice, after all, if not an effective argument against it?

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