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"A Fair Product of Nature in the Feminine Kind":
Deflecting Victorian Stereotypes of Womanhood in Thomas Hardy's Novels

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Para a minha mãe

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Resumo

Thomas Hardy é considerado um dos poetas e romancistas mais aclamados da história literária inglesa, sendo incontestavelmente conhecido pelas suas distintas representações de personagens femininas. Contudo, desde a publicação dos seus romances no final do século XIX, um particular aspeto da sua produção literária emerge como um factor de grande controvérsia, permanecendo até à atualidade, ainda sem uma resposta consensual. A pergunta que se levanta é a seguinte: mediante os padrões tradicionais vitorianos, serão as personagens femininas de Thomas Hardy criações convencionais ou não convencionais? A vasta maioria das leituras críticas das personagens femininas de Hardy tendem a estudar extensivamente o assunto dentro de uma estrutura conceitual focada na sexualidade feminina, postergando esta a questão da convencionalidade ou não convencionalidade com observações superficiais. Deste modo, devido à falta de pesquisas dedicadas a encontrar uma resposta fundamentada para esta questão de longa data, este estudo tentará fazê-lo através da análise de duas das mais icónicas personagens femininas de Thomas Hardy, Bathsheba Everdene, de *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), e Tess Durbeyfield, de *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), aplicando a metodologia proposta por Nina Auerbach na sua obra intitulada *The Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*. Ao dividir o núcleo do estudo em dois capítulos, cada um dedicado a um dos romances citados, será possível aplicar os estereótipos que Auerbach delineia na sua obra como predominantes construções socioculturais da mulher Vitoriana às heroínas de Hardy e, portanto, comprovar seu desvio aos padrões de convencionalidade.

Palavras-chave: Thomas Hardy; Estudos Feministas; Ficção Victoriana; Estereótipos; Mulher; Demónio.

Abstract

Thomas Hardy has been regarded as one of the most renowned poets and novelists in English literary history, being well-known for his distinctive portrayals of female characters. Nevertheless, ever since his novels were published in the late nineteenth-century and up to the present, there has been a particular aspect of his fiction that has sparked much controversy, and remains without any consensual answer: Are Thomas Hardy’s women conventional or unconventional creations according to traditional Victorian standards? Most critical readings of Hardy's female characters tend to extensively study the subject within a conceptual framework focusing on feminine sexuality, while dismissing the question of conventionality or unconventionality with superficial remarks. Hence, due to the lack of research devoted to finding a substantiated answer to this long-standing query, this study will attempt to do so by examining two of Thomas Hardy's most iconic female characters, Bathsheba Everdene, of *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), and Tess Durbeyfield, of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891), and by applying the methodology proposed by Nina Auerbach in her work *The Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*. By dividing the core of the study into two chapters, each devoted to one of the aforementioned novels, it will be possible to apply these stereotypes to the heroines, and thus prove their unconventionality.

Key-words: Thomas Hardy; Feminist Studies; Victorian Fiction; Stereotypes; Woman; Demon.

Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. She riseth while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household. She girdeth her loins with strength and strengtheneth her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise is good; her candle goeth not out by night. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.

Proverbs 31:10, 15, 17-18, and 27-29.

Introduction

Thomas Hardy once argued that well-written fiction had the capacity to illude the reader "to believe the personages true and real like himself", and that "[s]olely to this latter end a work of fiction should be a precise transcript of ordinary life" (Hardy and Millgate 154). By the time Hardy wrote this statement, circa 1880-81, he was already a well-established author in the sphere of nineteenth-century novel writing, reflecting from his vantage-point of experience on the purpose of fiction and the aim of the writer's art. This purpose, Hardy concludes, is to convey pleasure to the reader, and to do so, the writer must strike for a perfect balance between the element of the uncommon, which should predominate at the level of events, and the ordinary, so as to provide in equal measure a taint of interest and reality to the narrative.

Throughout his literary career, Hardy demonstrated faithfulness to this principle, applying it most notably to the visual design of his narrative surroundings, skilfully excelling in the depiction of natural landscapes, with contemporary critics unanimously praising his talent. On the 28th of September 1872, writing for the *Saturday Review*, Horace Moule compared Hardy's shrewd natural descriptions to Goethe's creative genius, stating, "the author produced a series of rural pictures full of life and genuine colouring, and drawn with a distinct minuteness reminding one at times of some of the scenes in *Hermann und Dorothea*" (Moule 17). On a similar note, Harry Quilter commented in a review for the *Spectator* on February 3rd, 1883, how,

> Mr. Hardy… cannot help being impressive when he talks of natural scenery; and no writer has ever conveyed more subtly the silence of the country at night, and the weird suggestiveness of little natural sounds of wind, or beast, or bird, when heard in the absence of human voices. (Quilter 114)

It is within this context that Hardy immerses himself in the creation of the "partly-real, partly-dream" world of Wessex, a name that Hardy "first ventured to adopt … from the pages of early English history", acquiring in his writing "a fictitious significance as the existing name of the district once included in that extinct kingdom" (Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd* 37). Through this reinvented county, Hardy precipitates an assortment of elements of the real, the ordinary, with the fictitious, the uncommon, that finds its most vivid expression in the depiction of a landscape he was well acquainted with, his beloved home county of Dorset, and its inhabitants,

transmuted into his novels as characters.[1] It is this deliberate projection of local customs and specific geographic locations into this semi-fictional world which sustains the quality of his renowned work, as Ronald Blythe noted, “[h]is nativity was his validity. It licensed his genius” (Blythe 459). Still, in my view, Hardy’s genius does not exclusively rest in his nativity or his admirable “word-painting of Nature” (Ellis 128); I would argue that Hardy equally succeeds in his techniques of character delineation, despite some critics considering them to predispose an injudicious nature. As it happens, characters are the chief interest of Hardy’s literary work, and while the environment plays an irrevocably significant role in the novels, its function is complementary rather than a defining component of the characters. This subsequent aspect is best exemplified at moments when Hardy intentionally manipulates the natural elements to mirror the characters' state of mind and feelings, considering in many instances the pathos is induced by the surrounding natural atmosphere, as the *National Review* pointed out in a review of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* in February 1892, “[e]ven Tess’s heartrending letter to her husband does not move one much more than the landscape, which is always painted in tones that accord with the temper of the figures in it” (Cox xxv).

Significantly, it is through the characters that Hardy architects his own microcosm of human life, in which a symbiotic relationship between character and environment, man and

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[1] One aspect that may contradict this assertion is the portrayal of the agricultural labourers and community, otherwise known as rustic characters, in Hardy’s fiction. Descending from the Shakespearean tradition, these characters are regarded as the chorus of the novels; they underscore the moral themes of the story and provide some comic relief. Yet, entertaining as they are with their marked caricatured idiosyncrasies, these characters have been chastised for their abnormal wit and erudition, which is most explicit in their usage of scriptural language for humorous moments. Therefore, such a discrepancy became a rather recurrent theme in the criticism of Hardy’s works. For instance, in a review of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, R.H. Hutton observes: “Even in the delineations of the less humble characters there is plenty of reason to suspect that Mr. Hardy has from time to time embodied in the objects of his studies some of the subtler thoughts which they have suggested to his own mind, or some of the more cultivated metaphors to which he would himself have given utterance had he been in their place, but which come most unnaturally from the mouths from which they actually proceed” (Hutton 32). Such rendering of sophisticated utterances by rustics sublimated Hardy’s preponderance to idealization in his characters, which ultimately leads to not only an imminent loss of credibility but also to the indication that Hardy uses “his peasants as mouthpieces for his own words”, as William J. Hyde put it (Hyde 46–47).

nature, predetermines their conduct and behaviour, where instinct prevails over reason and social convention, contrary to what was commonly believed at the time. This premise of our instincts shaping our acts is transversal to all of Hardy's characters, but it is most prominent in his feminine ones. In Hardy's fiction women have an elemental quality to them. As Compton-Rickett noted, they are "swayed far more by instinctive life, [and] their superiority is yet another example of Hardy's unique ability to deal with the primal type" (neoenglish n.p.). Thomas Hardy consistently placed the focus of his fiction on feminine subjects; ever since he wrote his first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady* (1867), which was never published, he presented it to one of his potential publishers as exhibiting "a wonderful insight into female character" (qtd. in Morrison 4). Regardless, this was not a compelling feature that would capture the interest of the publisher to whom it was submitted. Even though Hardy's potential as a writer was recognized, the work was not considered for publication because it was judged to be too opinionated, with its plot involving issues of social class. In 1871, Hardy succeeded in publishing his first novel, *Desperate Remedies*, although it was condemned by critics for its sensationalism and overcomplicated plot. *Under the Greenwood Tree* followed in 1872, and it is with this novel that Hardy begins to unravel his literary vocation and, in the words of Havelock Ellis, who wrote a piece for the *Westminster Review* in April 1883, titled "Thomas Hardy's Novels", "exercises it already like a master" (Ellis 119).

The feminine characters of these two novels are primaeval in their condition, standing out in Hardy's literary canon as orthodox creations, archetypal in their ordinariness. Cytherea Graye and Fancy Day lack the pivotal trait that defines Hardy's most celebrated heroines, defiance. This distinctive trait begins to emerge timidly in Hardy's third novel, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), a novel that marks a significant improvement in Hardy's ability to delineate characters, with the heroine Elfride Swancourt, in whom we see an embryonic promise of a lineage of voluptuous heroines, charming yet deliberately unconventional in their conception, and, according to the perception of Victorian readers, a daring misrepresentation of womanhood (cp. Morgan n.p).

Hardy's conception of womanhood was poised to be an audacious provocation to the prudish Victorians, who placed on a pedestal a certain model of femininity. This can find its best depiction in the semi-autobiographical poem by Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House* (1855–56). In its essence, the poem is a celebration of marital love between Coventry and his wife, Emily, yet the poem's significance lies in the author's extensive description and enumeration of the desirable attributes, all of which are essential to a woman's character, that make the female protagonist, Honoria, the perfect wife. Accordingly, the ideal wife is docile in

temperament, knowing not what selfishness or anger are, always innately good and passive. She displays virtues such as innocence, modesty, and purity. To her beloved husband, to whom she willingly submits, she offers her unconditional love and support. Likewise, to her children, she is a doting mother, and childbearing and childrearing are the most vital tasks she ought to thrive for in her lifetime (cp. Kühl 172).

Women belonging to respectable households and occupying privileged social status were expected to confine their daily activities to the comfort of their homes and devote their time and attention to family duties and ladylike skills such as painting, fine needlework, and singing. As a result, they were not expected to actively contribute to the family's income, as was often the case with women of the lower classes. Instead, a woman's livelihood and status was entirely "dependent upon the economic position of her father and then her husband" (Vicinus ix). In this way, by abstaining from any potential corrosive influences and temptations outside of the home, a woman's most prized possession, her innocence, could be more promptly safeguarded since, in that age, the prevalent ideology dictated that a woman should be "brought up to be perfectly innocent and sexually ignorant" (Vicinus ix) until the day she gets married. Ultimately, the figure of Honoria illustrates and labels the feminine ideal Victorian women were expected to mould themselves into in order to fit into the description of this "desirable stereotype of womanhood: passive, self-effacing and, above all, virgin" (Thomas, J. "Checkmate" 107).

Notwithstanding, society's reverence for an ideal type of womanhood also presupposes, in its inaccessibility, its subsequent fragmentation into multiple other images and labels that are fundamentally opposed to the venerated figure of the hallowed Victorian angel, thus gaining negative connotations or, in a more dramatic context, becoming society's target for marginalization or, even in some cases, annihilation. Inevitably, the woman who might otherwise be autonomous, venturesome, and audacious in her enterprises will always be met "with obstruction in a male-dominated world intent upon high-ranking the docile woman over the daring, the meek over the assertive, the compliant over the self-determining, the submissive over the dynamic" (Morgan 41).

And, as life imitates art, Hardy's heroines were subjected to similar obstructions and judgement, being relentlessly scrutinised by the inhabitants of Wessex and inexorable Victorian critics, as their departures from the idealised image became all too apparent. It is enough to superficially examine these dissimilarities to reveal that many of Hardy's feminine characters contradict key criteria to be considered in the traditional view as the Angel in the House.

Considering Hardy's heroines in the most distinctive role that best characterises women, that of motherhood, the number of examples we find in his fiction is remarkably limited. George Romanes defended, in his work *Mental Differences of Men and Women,* that "the maternal instincts are to woman perhaps the strongest of all influences in the determination of character" (Romanes 19). That may be so, and certainly in some instances Hardy's women can be described as protective and tender; that is the case of Tess Durbeyfield, whose tender nature innately gravitates towards the protection of her illegitimate child as well as her younger siblings. Indeed, Tess ends up having to sacrifice herself for the sake of her siblings; yet she cannot be described as fecund and maternal, since motherhood is a reality violently imposed on her.

Moreover, when it comes to the principle of respecting the boundaries of the domestic sphere, Hardy's feminine characters completely disregard the limits imposed by the Victorian drawing room by working outside the home in order to contribute to the household income. This is represented in a variety of different circumstances, not only being applied to characters belonging to lower social strata; Bathsheba Everdene takes on the role of bailiff, supervising the running of her farm, whereas Tess, who aspired to be a teacher in her youth, ends up working as a milkmaid and, in times of hardship, as a field-hand. Scenes where Hardy vividly describes his feminine characters' toiling and labouring not only display Hardy's defiance to the institutionalised values, conceding that work was not a suitable activity for finer ladies, but he also dignifies them through work, elevating and praising them for their activity and not their passivity. In fact, it is in scenes where they are engaged in some sort of labour that Hardy applies his mastery of word-painting to describe them in a most beautiful light, one of the many examples being the following excerpt from *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, where Angel Clare observes Tess milking a cow:

> The stillness of her head and features was remarkable: she might have been in a trance, her eyes open, yet unseeing. Nothing in the picture moved but Old Pretty's tail and Tess's pink hands, the latter so gently as to be a rhythmic pulsation only, as if they were obeying a reflex stimulus, like a beating heart. How very lovable her face was to him. Yet there was nothing ethereal about it; all was real vitality, real warmth, real incarnation. And it was in her mouth that this culminated. Eyes almost as deep and speaking he had seen before, and cheeks perhaps as fair; brows as arched, a chin and throat almost as shapely; her mouth he had seen nothing to equal on the face of the earth. (187)

In this excerpt, one must notice that Hardy does not solely focus on composing a vivid description of the female subject with minute attention to detail, greatly enhancing the sensorial quality of the writing, but he also concentrates on the "aesthetics of femininity" (Thomas, J. "Romances" 284), as Jane Thomas designated it.

Yet, although it is undeniable that this excerpt actively illustrates the sensual quality of Hardy's writing, and that this is, indeed, equated with the feminine subject as the object of desire, this imagery is presented to the reader from a voyeuristic male perspective. Through this technique, Hardy succeeded in subtly describing the female body, which ultimately allowed him to audaciously step further from the restrictive conventionality and address the beauty of a woman's physicality, imminently arousing the sense of their sexuality, which is something unseen in earlier Victorian authors. As Rosemarie Morgan observed, "Hardy begins where the majority of Victorian novelists left off, with 'real', flesh-and-blood women" (Morgan n.p.). Hardy refuses to comply with the culturally based convention marked by its puritanical censure of female sexuality, which sublimated the perpetuation of a woman's ignorance, advocating instead for a candid depiction of women in literature, as precise transcripts of ordinary life, and not as creations intently moulded to match society's preconceptions and expectations of the ideal of womanhood. Nevertheless, such an unorthodox portrayal of femininity sparked controversy amongst readers and critics, outraging Victorian propriety for its direct affront to society's core structure and foundational values, garnering, as a result, mixed reviews.

In the book *Letters to Living Authors*, first published in 1890, John A. Steuart lauded the realism of Hardy's female characters, writing: "Your women are not conventional. They are not of the flaccid pink and white type; but neither … are they inherently wicked. Let us have living creations — that is the great want in fiction — and that you give us in your women as well as in your men" (qtd. in Morrison 1). Also, though rather surprisingly, in a review for the *St. James Gazette*, published on April 2nd, 1887, Coventry Patmore exalted Hardy's heroines, remarking that they all combine a daring blend of captivating attributes with faults that make them all extremely alluring:

> It is in his heroines, however, that Hardy is most original and delightful … each has the charm of the simplest and most familiar womanhood, and the only character they have in common is that of having each some serious defect, which only makes us like them more. (Patmore 158–9)

However, revisiting the aforementioned piece by Havelock Ellis for the *Westminster Review*, we find a conflicting opinion. If on the one hand he commends the seductive characters, saying: "he has given us a gallery of women— 'Undines of the earth', they have been felicitously called—whose charm is unique" (Ellis 116). On the other hand, he swiftly changes, some pages later, to state:

> No, not too good. These Undines are not too good. Woman, in Mr. Hardy's world, is far from being 'the conscience of man'; it is with the men always that the moral strength lies … The women may be clever, practical, full of tact; they are always irresistibly fascinating; but veracity, simplicity, rectitude are with the men. (121)

Assertions of this type, accentuating men's moral superiority over women, women's capricious demeanour, and their lack of trustworthiness, are repeated in other unfavourable remarks, expressing the sense of disagreeability even more openly. In "Thomas Hardy, Poet and Novelist", first published in 1921, Samuel Chew, for instance, reflects this sentiment when he states that Hardy's female characters "are fickle and vain, insincere, conscienceless, and seductive" (qtd. in Morrison 2). Nevertheless, critiques of this nature, accusing Hardy's women of being vain or conceited, gradually subsided as critics abandoned the rigid moral stance of Victorian times and the novels came to be analysed from a variety of different angles.

In 1928, the year of Hardy's death, Virginia Woolf authored a critical piece, "Thomas Hardy's Novels", for *The Times Literary Supplement*, prefiguring the criticism that would emerge by the end of the century. In her comment, Woolf addresses the prevalence of sexual double standards in Hardy's literature, which inevitably leads to a conventional view of women, saying:

> However lovable and charming Bathsheba may be, still she is weak; however stubborn and ill-guided Henchard may be, still he is strong. This is fundamental; this is the core of Hardy's vision, and draws from the deepest sources of his nature. The woman is the weaker and the fleshlier, and she clings to the stronger and obscures his vision. (qtd. in Boumelha 2)

However unconventional Hardy's female characters may have been regarded, still Virginia Woolf disputes the concept of unconventionality, contradicting what had been previously conjectured and thus forging a new path of critical discussion involving one of the most contentious issues regarding Hardy, the treatment of his women and his subsequent attitude towards them. From this standpoint, critical contributions to the understanding of Hardy's novels are twofold: either approaching Hardy as an author with a sympathetic outlook on women, which is reflected in his work, where his characters and plots are frequently structured to actively express sympathy and understanding of the disadvantages that society foists on them, or else accusing Hardy of entrapping his female characters into stereotyped roles. The latter seems to be Woolf's position, and more than half a century later, authors such as Katherine Rogers, Penny Boumelha, and Rosemarie Morgan maintained Virginia Woolf's line of critique, further developing it, and producing various critical readings.

In her 1975 article "Women in Thomas Hardy", Katherine Rogers writes, "these novels show the tenacity of sexist assumptions even in so humane and enlightened a man as Hardy… His primary sympathy remains focused on the sensitive rational man" (Rogers 257). Almost a decade later, in 1982, Penny Boumelha proposes a study focused on the interrelationship between the conceptualization of women through sexual ideology and the narratological scope of Hardy's novels, being one of the first feminists to do so. Following a similar vein, by the end of that decade, Rosemarie Morgan conducted an analytical study aimed at examining the nature of women's sexuality in Hardy's novels, arguing that, contrary to what had been believed, women do have control over their conduct and destiny. She thus evidences Hardy's commitment to the portrayal of active, self-determined women, an awareness which is primarily articulated and manifested through feminine unrepressed sexuality, ultimately serving as their tool of resistance against the male-dominated world.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that both assessments acknowledge female sexuality as a pivotal component in Hardy's narratives, which could be described as the driving force behind the tensions that rise to the plot's key confrontations, there is a displayed propensity to read Hardy's novels as designed entrapments for the heroines to fall prey to the male discourse aimed at taming them. This is particularly noticeable in Morgan's work, as the central strand of her argument is constructed upon the question of the male gaze. Hence, Morgan's reading of Hardy's novels is imbued with the anima of patriarchal culture, as the male characters are portrayed as veiled patriarchal representatives intent on possessing and controlling the female, whereas women are portrayed, in the conventional light of Victorian norms, as passive and

subjugated by a sexual ideology, projecting the woman's worth solely in terms of being the object of desire by her male counterparts rather than her own, thus entrapped by the regard of her suitors. This tendency came to be designated by Linda M. Shires as "Hardyesque taming" (Shires 164). Opposing these critical interpretations by perusing a subversive reading of the novels, Shires defends a different approach, arguing that while feminist criticism, such as the above mentioned, is undoubtedly of great relevance, it risks being considered reverse sexism since it allocates power to the male and the role of victim to the female. In her brilliant article, published in 1991, "Narrative, Gender, and Power in *Far from the Madding Crowd"*, Shires examines the novel in question, exploring both representations of masculinity and femininity, and adverts feminists to attend:

> not only to those social meanings kept in place by alignments of gender and power at the start and the close of a text, but also to those which circulate disruptively. Such a strategy can splinter the monolith of patriarchy and make room for female power. (164)

She concludes that Hardy's representations of gender are, at their core, subtle and heterogeneous, allowing for the exploration of androgynous elements within the narratives.

Nonetheless, despite offering a distinct perspective from the other critical studies, it still fails to resolve the question that appears to be at the heart of this debate. From this overview, one can conclude that since 1928, when Virginia Woolf wrote her critical piece, the underlying question has been that of the conventionality or unconventionality of Thomas Hardy as an author, and subsequently his feminine characters. This is the primary question behind these profuse academic assessments. Many scholars understand that the study of the sexual ideology of the period is indeed the best course to attempt to provide an answer to this query. Yet the issue of cultural preconceptions, of stereotypes, is one that most authors overlook and is inextricably connected to Victorian sexual ideology. In essence, stereotypes are widely held, oversimplified images formed by human society and embedded in a culture's subconscious, and in this regard, Victorian society was exceptionally fruitful in the creation of stereotypical images of womanhood.

In the work *The Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*, Nina Auerbach deconstructs the restrictive myth of the Angel in the House in order to address the issue of

stereotypes. That is, she investigates the romantically idealised conception of the Victorian woman as an angel and its fragmentation into other latent meanings behind Victorian female stereotypes such as the queen, the victim, the demon, the fallen woman, and the old maid, as being the most pervasive stereotypes of Victorian womanhood observed throughout the period's most diversified artistic and literary representations. In the words of Auerbach, this work "grows out of feminist criticism" and has as a subject "the Victorian cultural imagination" and "its most powerful, if least acknowledged, creation… an explosively mobile, magic woman, who breaks the boundaries of family within which her society restricts her" (Auerbach 1).

In spite of being unanimously recognised as an important topic in relation to the study of sexual ideology, the stereotypical images of womanhood in Thomas Hardy's fiction have received little attention since the publication of his works, being readily dismissed with a few superficial remarks. For instance, Katherine Rogers, in the conclusion of her article, states, "[Thomas Hardy] could not altogether overcome the sexual stereotypes of his culture" (Rogers 249). Whilst Rosemarie Morgan claims that Hardy presented Victorians "with female models who did not conform to the stereotypes" (Morgan n.p.). Nevertheless, I argue that no one has conducted an analytical study nor a detailed evaluation comparing whether the criteria that would support such a claim do indeed apply to his characters. Though it is indisputable that there are characters in the Hardyesque canon for whom the stereotype they are moulded into is self-evident (Tess was and is a fallen woman), there are others, however, such as Bathsheba Everdene or Elizabeth-Jane in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, for whom no precise attribution in the light of Nina Auerbach's findings can be made.

Thus, the following study proposes to analyse Hardy's feminine characters through this lens of stereotypes and Victorian imagery of womanhood in order to determine their level of conventionality or unconventionality, accordingly. To accomplish this, I intend to apply Nina Auerbach's theory of Victorian imagination on womanhood to analyse two Thomas Hardy novels: *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. The results obtained will hopefully prove to be helpful in clarifying the long-standing debate over whether Thomas Hardy was truly a sympathiser for women's causes, gradually undermining oppressive stereotypes, or whether he was portraying the conventional assumptions that underpin the representation of women as objects of male desire in his female characters.

1. *Far from the Madding Crowd*

In December 1874, an anonymous writer from the *Athenaeum* magazine couldn't let pass unnoticed, in his review of Thomas Hardy's latest novel, "an admirable variation of an old aphorism" which appears in chapter 20 of *Far from the Madding Crowd:* "Men take wives because possession is not possible without marriage, and women accept husbands because marriage is not possible without possession" (qtd. in Anonymous, *Athenaeum* 29).

It is common knowledge that an aphorism presents itself as a concise statement of some general principle, which frequently takes the form of a definition**.** If one were to closely examine this aphorism, one would be met with numerous layers of possible meaning, all of which would be inextricably linked to Hardy's perspective on marriage as an institution. Nevertheless, a straightforward approach would suggest that Hardy is merely trying to convey that if a man succumbs to the natural urge to possess a woman, in whatever form that desire may manifest itself, then to do it properly he should marry her. While if a woman wants to acquiesce to society's demands and become a married lady, she must accept the inescapable reality that she will be entirely possessed by her husband.

As an author, Thomas Hardy is known to have challenged a great number of society's failings, and that is precisely what he does with this aphorism, subtly criticizing the sexual double standard that dominated Victorian morality — a strangling morality that proved to be pitiful for many women and from which imaginary constructions of Victorian womanhood abounded. Rightly so, as Hardy illustrated, women must conform to be possessed, to be utterly deprived of their sense of self in order to accommodate their husbands. Hence, I contend that the question of matrimony and its subsequent repercussions in a woman's life lie at the very core of all the stereotypes, outlined by Nina Auerbach's study, that womanhood might assume in Victorian imagination: if a woman is successful in accomplishing the greatest mission of her life, that of securing a husband, she then faces the challenge of meeting social expectations in transforming herself into the perfect Angel in the House. If she fails to meet these high standards, she incurs the risk of acquiring demonic traits. If she daringly steps further from this dual conception of womanhood, of angel versus demon, and engages in improper sexual behaviour she then ought to be punished for her sinful crimes, thus becoming, in the eyes of society, a fallen woman, a cursed figure condemned to die. Lastly, if she does not conform to marriage or simply was not fortunate enough to be proposed to, she is labelled an old maid, a spinster, a dreaded epithet that terrorized many young ladies, discarded by society as a mere figure of jest. Now the

paramount question to ask is into which stereotype does the heroine of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba Everdene, fit?

In chapter 4 of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba Everdene refuses shepherd Gabriel Oak's marriage proposal, a decision that certainly left many Victorian readers utterly perplexed. This rejection sprouts from the absence of mutual love, yet the premise of unsuitability is also emphasised in her words: "It wouldn't do, Mr. Oak. I want somebody to tame me; I am too independent; and you would never be able to, I know" (Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd* 68). Bathsheba's ability to express her self-knowledge so openly, unapologetically asserting herself as too independent in a time and society that dictated women not to be so, makes this statement in the novel absolutely striking.

Moreover, by delving into the essence of this scene, it is possible to conclude, firstly, that Bathsheba completely contradicts what Victorian society established as "a shared ideology and shared feminine consciousness which hotly denounces the notion that marriage should be the expressed goal of a woman's sexuality" (Morgan n.p.). In other words, by rejecting Gabriel's proposal, Bathsheba is simultaneously rejecting consent to this imposed ideology that prioritises marriage and subsequent childbearing as the main goals a woman ought to achieve in her lifetime. Secondly, this statement also provides a marked contrast between Bathsheba and Gabriel.

Gabriel Oak can be described as a good-hearted, humble man, but he is perceived as somewhat passive and, although these are admirable qualities to have, "passivity, modesty, and trusting patience belong to the gender role that Victorians attributed to the female" (Shires 166), which may explain why some of Hardy's critics considered Gabriel not "manly enough" (qtd. in Shires 163) to reject the impetuous Bathsheba Everdene. Even though Bathsheba's character is not graced with any of these commendable traits; in fact, she is quite the opposite. Thus, this constructed inversion of gender roles serves as a clear provocation to prudish Victorian readers, and Hardy, in that respect, was quite generous since he plays and plants many provocations throughout his text.

Nonetheless, at the prospect of obtaining what any respectable young woman ought to aspire to, a marriage proposal, Bathsheba races after Gabriel Oak, and as she draws near, Hardy cleverly notices how Gabriel's colour deepens with the emotion of seeing her come after him, whereas "hers was already deep, not, as it appeared, from emotion, but from running" (64). Amid her folly, Bathsheba does not yet fully comprehend "the absurdity of the position she had

made for herself" (65). Inconsequentially, Bathsheba follows Gabriel not with the intent of condescending to his offer but merely for the sake of sheer flattery of hearing him propose to her, and despite Oak's efforts in trying to seduce her, by alluringly painting before her eyes all the goods she might acquire if she accepts him as her husband: a piano, his flute-playing, a ten-pound gig, nice flowers, birds, cocks, and hens, a cucumber frame and their wedding event announced "in the newspaper list of marriages"(66), to which Bathsheba proclaims: "Dearly I should like that!" (66), she still will not acquiesce to his request. The reason for Bathsheba's refusal is the simple fact that she is delighted by the prospect of public adulation but not by the prospect of marital bliss, as the following excerpt proves, once Gabriel says: "And at home by the fire, whenever you look up, there I shall be—and whenever I look up, there will be you"(66), she immediately refrains from daydreaming about those far off likelihoods and declares, "I shouldn't mind being a bride at a wedding, if I could be one without having a husband" (67). This outlandish remark reinforces Bathsheba's rebelliousness against social conventions, a trait that was viewed as a fault, bolstering harsh criticism amongst contemporaries. Henry James, one of Hardy's most outspoken detractors, described Bathsheba as "a young lady of the inconsequential, wilful, mettlesome type" who "remains alternately vague and coarse and seems always artificial" in a review of the novel for the New York paper *Nation* on the 24th of December 1874 (James 40).

Moreover, this scene prompts the reader to share Gabriel Oak's impression of Bathsheba when he first sees her in the waggon, that she is vain, for in January 1875 an anonymous reviewer from the *Westminster Review* stated that Bathsheba is "represented as pretty and vain … [b]ut neither beauty nor vanity are the key to Bathsheba's character … the one leading trait of her character, and of all such characters, is at the bottom— selfishness" (Anonymous, *Westminster Review* 43).

It is evident that Victorian readers were unprepared for Thomas Hardy's innovative techniques of character delineation since Bathsheba Everdene, a vividly drawn character, was described as far worse than just vain, inconsequential, or selfish but as "an incorrigible hussy" (qtd. in Shires 163). Denouncements of such kind can only sustain the premises presupposed by common prejudices regarding a stereotyped view of the weaker sex, the same ones that Hardy progressively sought to undermine through his writing.

Notwithstanding, Hardy's heroine, infamous as she might have been considered, was not the sole object to attract attention; indeed, the overall critical response generated by the

publication of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, in 1874, was tremendous. When the first chapters were made available to the public, many entertained the conjecture that the authorship of the novel belonged to none other than George Eliot. But once the identity of the real author became known, Hardy was eventually distinguished as one of "the most vigorous of all the novelists who have appeared within the last few years" (Anonymous, *Athenaeum* 29). It was through *Under the Greenwood Tree* that Hardy caught the attention of the *Cornhill* editor, Leslie Stephen, who claimed that it was "long since he had received more pleasure from a new writer" (Hardy and Millgate 97) and proceeded to invite him to write a serialised story for the literary magazine, for "such writing would probably please the readers of the Cornhill magazine as much as it had pleased him" (Hardy and Millgate 97). In his turn, Hardy replied to Stephen that he was contemplating to write "a pastoral tale", following the theme set by *Under the Greenwood Tree*, "with the title *Far from the Madding Crowd* — and that the chief characters would probably be a young woman-farmer, a shepherd, and a sergeant of cavalry" (Hardy and Millgate 97). A promising narrative that would delight readers with its realist portrayal of a rural community invested in the labours of farming and sheep-rearing, living amidst an idyllic natural landscape of a country untouched by the advances of industrialization and modern urban life. Hence, Wessex stood as a timeless homage to Hardy's origins as well as to the pastoral tradition in literature. Tracing back to classical antiquity, pastoral literature can be defined as a highly conventional genre which depicts a society of innocent shepherds living in harmony with nature, completely free from the corruption and complexities of urban life. Undoubtedly, Hardy's creation can be perceived in such a light; otherwise, his heroine's lover, the good-willed Gabriel Oak, would not be himself a shepherd who also happens to play the flute; nonetheless, there is something of a much darker and unsettling tone to this seemingly quiet and unassuming world of Wessex.

Purported as a novel which reproduces the fluctuations of highbrow and lowbrow literature, an irrefutable requirement of serialised literature no doubt, *Far from the Madding Crowd* sets forward an image of bucolic blissfulness that is later clouded by unfolding events which purposefully counteract the supposed Arcadian sweetness of its first impression. For instance, not far into the novel, tragedy strikes a cruel blow to Gabriel's fortune when he loses his sheep; in fact, the chapter where this scene occurs is titled "A Pastoral Tragedy". Later, Fanny Robin is subjected to excruciating misery, ending up dying with her child in a workhouse, and Boldwood, in a fit of mad jealousy, brutally murders Troy, condemning himself to his own downfall. As a result, these elements of highbrow literature are conspicuous by aspects which

are inserted into a larger intellectual framework dominated by the classical allusions of the pastoral tradition, the abiding element of tragedy inherent to the human predicament, and the slight protruding sense of comedy that is typified by characters such as Joseph Poorgrass or Cain Ball. As Ronald Blythe noted, *Far from the Madding Crowd* is "a Victorian journey to Shakespeare's pastoral with its vigour and joy, spills and recoveries" (Blythe 451). Yet, the presence of Gothic elements, such as the sordid circumstances surrounding Fanny Robin's death or Bathsheba's scene as a runaway wife, taking refuge in a cavernous swamp for the night, the melodramatic tone of these sensational episodes and the unexpected twists in the narrative, indeed all factors characteristic of popular literature, prompts Hardy to gradually deviate from realism and direct the novel towards allegory and satire, precipitating a shift from the enslavement to fact that dominated the nineteenth century, as Mr. Gradgrind aptly exemplifies in the opening lines of Charles Dickens' novel *Hard Times*, mechanically uttering to his school pupils: "Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life" (Dickens 47).

Indeed, it seems Hardy and Dickens shared the same perspective that facts alone are insufficient to provide one with intellectual pleasure; something of a more elemental order being necessary. This is especially apparent when considering Hardy's response to the reviewers who criticised *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* for lacking plausibility, leading Hardy to state in the preface of the respective novel that "a novel is an impression, not an argument" (Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* viii). In addition, Hardy seems to target those who act like the "reasoning creatures" Mr. Gradgrind intended to create with his schoolchildren, like Angel Clare or Henry Knight, with his harshest censure.

Hence, Hardy's vision for his fourth novel is somewhat convoluted and is naturally reflected in the title, a verse deriving from a poem, "An Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751), by the pre-romantic poet Thomas Gray:

> Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife
> Their sober wishes never learned to stray;
> Along the cool sequestered vale of life
> They kept the noiseless tenor of their way. (Gray 64)

It is clear from this portion of Thomas Gray's poem that the author is referring to a place where utter passivity and quietude prevail. A place that cannot be disturbed because it is far away, it is "sequestered", so removed that it "kept the noiseless tenor of their way", implying that it is a location completely unaffected by the upheaval of a world involved in conflict, as well as the noise and bustle that a madding crowd produces. Thomas Hardy selects this piece of poetry and transports the intent of it into his work. Wessex is also an idyllic, secluded area, utterly removed from the tumult of civilization. Wessex, or in this case, Weatherbury Farm. Nonetheless, this geographical seclusion does not imply a lack of turmoil caused by human emotions. Hardy's characters are intended vehicles to carry out "disturbance in an area which is traditionally calm and passive" (Blythe 464).

Thence, the title alone acts as a caution to readers that this pastoral tale will not fit into the traditional parameters that define a pastoral piece. Instead, Hardy conceives a rather subversive pastoral where moments of serene composure are disrupted by gruesome scenes marked by tragedy, misery, and brutality, deriving from several provocations intently planted throughout the narrative with the ultimate purpose of generating havoc amongst the characters, threatening the essence of the mode completely. And perhaps, the most prominent element of disturbance that Hardy introduces into the storyline is a designated "fair product of Nature in the feminine kind" (44), who, despite epitomizing the impending destruction of Wessex's blissfulness, cannot, naturally, be entirely blamed for other characters' nefarious decisions and actions, since not all of it is her own fault, the beauteous Bathsheba Everdene.

Brought into the narrative, in the form of an "incident"[2], Bathsheba's entrance abruptly interrupts the placid "description of Farmer Oak":

> Casually glancing over the hedge, Oak saw coming down the incline before him an ornamental spring waggon, painted yellow and gaily marked, drawn by two horses, a waggoner walking

[2] Chapter 1 is titled "Description of Farmer Oak; an Incident".

> alongside bearing a whip perpendicularly. The waggon was laden with household goods and window plants, and on the apex of the whole sat a woman, young and attractive. (43)

Hardy's elaborate composition is intent on the absolute emphasis of the feminine subject. From Oak's casual glance, watching from afar, a waggon going down the incline of a hill, a succession of various elements emerge and are described to the reader through Gabriel's perception: an appellative yellow waggon, full of the most diverse domestic chattels; the waggoner; the horses; and the beautiful young woman quickly takes over the scene, shifting in an almost imperceptible manner the object of attention from Oak's character description to a garnished spectacle to the eye, brimming with its vividness, which altogether seems to evoke a great likeness to the coming of a queen, of a pompous royal parade, with its significant imagery and rich visual description of Bathsheba's grandiose entry. As Norbert Lennartz recognized, the overall scene appears to be "[i]ronically evocative of the idolatrous presentation of a goddess or remotely reminiscent of the pageantry of the imperious queen Cleopatra in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*" (Lennartz n.p.). Thereupon, such a perspective on Bathsheba's character seems to align with Auerbach's fundamental principle of polarity stipulated between two preliminary figures of womanhood, distinct in their identities yet correlated in the sense of transfiguration: the victim and the queen. Indeed, one cannot address the figure of the victim without mentioning the queen and vice-versa. Without the first, one cannot become the second. According to Auerbach, an ascending trajectory must take place for a woman to evolve from a powerless position into a position of power amongst men. Thus, the allusion to the figure of the queen stands as a preliminary stereotype of Victorian womanhood and, contrary to what might be thought, it does not exclusively refer to the members of royalty that perform the functions of sovereignty but to the common woman who is able to acquire grandiose proportions in fiction and transcends into that role, as Auerbach illustrates in George Eliot's heroines: "Actual queens and queenly women proliferate in literature and art; so do ordinary women, such as George Eliot's typical but strangely mighty and enlarged heroines, who swell suddenly into regality"(Auerbach 36).

As once Thomas Hardy was associated with and even mistaken for George Eliot by the similarities of their writing styles[3], so too is it possible to denote a likeness in their heroines, in the sense that they tend to be ordinary women compelled by extraneous circumstances to inflate, to swell, as Auerbach puts it, "into regality". A prime example of this is Bathsheba Everdene, the heroine in Hardy's canon who most consistently exhibits a certain pattern of behaviour, of poise, in which queenly qualities are vindicated, as throughout the narrative these characteristics are discernible in numerous instances, such as the one mentioned above. A careful examination of this excerpt corresponding to the moment of Gabriel Oak's first sighting of Bathsheba finds that it contains numerous fragments corroborating Bathsheba's sense of regality, and one must consider how highly significant it is that they appear immediately in the first chapter, as a clear indicator of the basic traces of the heroine's character. Hence, elements substantiating the sense of regality are found in the manner in which Hardy describes the "ornamental spring waggon painted yellow and gaily marked" carrying Bathsheba. The usage of adjectives such as "ornamental" and "gaily" implies a sense of wealth and splendour, entailing something that attracts attention. Such an ample display of ostentation, with a slight proclivity to be somewhat provocative, is not commonly associated with a simple farm girl from a small rural hamlet, which is what Oak assumes Bathsheba to be. Moreover, the colour in which the waggon is painted, yellow, cannot be dismissed as haphazard; rather, it appears to be intended to mimic gold. Nor can the fact that this waggon is drawn by two horses and not one. Although it may seem a trivial aspect, it is worth noting that this is a singular occurrence in Hardy's novels.

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[3] When the first chapters of *Far from the Madding Crowd* were published anonymously in the *Cornhill Magazine*, several critics pronounced that Thomas Hardy's serial must have been written by a woman, George Eliot more specifically, or else that it was a good imitation of her novels. In his review published in the *Nation* on December 24, 1874, Henry James writes: "Mr. Hardy's novel came into the world under brilliant auspices—such as the declaration by the London Spectator that either George Eliot had written it or George Eliot had found her match" (James 37). Such a supposition might have been entertained due to the text's gender ambiguity and the perception, at the time, that the pastoral genre was commonly considered as feminine. Besides, another curious detail that may have contributed to readers mistaking the two authors is the fact that the character of Fanny Robin has frequently been likened to George Eliot's Hetty Sorrell in *Adam Bede* (1859) because both must travel great distances while heavily pregnant.

Throughout the rest of the narrative of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, we do not see a waggon being pulled by two horses again; not when Bathsheba flees to Bath; for she does so with only one horse, the lame Dainty (Chapter 32), nor when the wretched corpse of poor Fanny Robin is brought back to Miss Everdene's farm from the Casterbridge Union Workhouse (it is also a spring waggon painted blue and red, driven only by one horse, and the driver is Joseph Poorgrass). Even in Hardy's other novels, such as *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, which will be addressed in greater depth later, we must note how Tess's humble family of alleged noble descent, the Durbeyfields, can only rely on one horse, Prince, for their means of sustenance and transportation, as Tess's father, the haggler John Durbeyfield, asserts in conversation with Parson Tringham in chapter 1:

> Well, I have heard once or twice, 'tis true, that my family had seen better days afore they came to Blackmoor. But I took no notice o't, thinking it to mean that we had once kept two horses where we now keep only one. (*Tess of the D'Urbervilles* 3)

Another suggestion of regality is Bathsheba being accompanied by a servant, a waggoner who walks alongside her, while she sits "on the apex" of the heavily loaded waggon carrying household furniture and utensils, such as "tables and chairs ... an oak settle… ornamented in front by pots of geraniums, myrtles, and cactuses, together with a caged canary[4]" (43). The decorative quality of such pieces is directly intended to augment the focus on the feminine subject, which is the primary focal point of this painterly scene. Hardy further expounds on this matter in the following quote: "The myrtles, geraniums, and cactuses packed around her were fresh and green, and at such a leafless season they invested the whole concern of horses, waggon, furniture, and girl with a peculiar vernal charm" (44). All these elements operate, therefore, as strategic instruments, designed to enliven the scene and, in particular, to highlight the figure of Bathsheba as the packed plants endow her with "a peculiar vernal charm". In other

[4] The imagery of the caged canary, I believe, is linked to Oak's marriage proposal and Bathsheba's subsequent rejection in chapter 4. She refuses him for a variety of reasons, one of which being her apprehension about the concept of marriage, as she recognizes that it would deprive her of her independence, and so marriage would be an entrapment for her.

words, the plants bestow upon her a certain attractiveness of which she is aware. Such is confirmed as soon as the waggoner is conveniently made absent to retrieve the tailboard, which had fallen off, and Bathsheba becomes the sole focus of the scene, the stationary object of the painter's eye, sitting motionless "on the summit of the load" observed by others, the narrator and an "unperceived farmer" (44), the outlier among a flock of sparrows and blackbirds. Erroneously presuming to be safeguarded from intrusive eyes, she appears to be reinvigorated by some life and embarks in an act of self-indulgence by fetching from her belongings "a small swing looking-glass" and proceeds to "survey herself attentively" (44). She then parts her lips, a symbol which suggests sexual arousal[5], and smiles in delight. The experience effects a blushing of her complexion, conveying her sense of excitability. Yet, the action is deemed by the narrator as pure and natural, for "she simply observed herself as a fair product of Nature in the feminine kind" (44). Nevertheless, the seemingly innocent imagery soon acquires pervasive contours, as the mirror is culturally seen as an ambiguous symbol. If on the one hand, it is often connected with inner truth, wisdom, and knowledge about oneself as, in psychological terms, the mirror represents the verge between the conscious and the sub-conscious mind; on the other hand, it can also work as an instrument for deception, illusion or vanity. Thus, the image produced by the mirror is symbolic, nevertheless it expresses concern about how individuals perceive themselves and others around them. Outwardly looking at this scene, one could say that, like Narcissus, Bathsheba is also enamoured by her reflection, however as William Mistichelli noted,

> Her appreciation of herself as a "fair product" of the "feminine kind" appears somewhat detached for a young woman presumably interested in reviewing her power to attract the opposite sex. There may be vanity in it, but there is also something more substantial which draws from real confidence in her womanhood. The narrator speaks of how she "observed herself", as though she were an object of scrutiny rather than infatuation. (Mistichelli 55)

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[5] According to Rosemary Morgan, a woman's mouth is the most "legitimised symbol of her sexuality" (Morgan 35), and Hardy places a lot of emphasis on this feature in his heroines. Through the imagery of the lips, a woman can express her desire, passion, and susceptibility to engaging in amorous or sexual entanglements.

Consequently, Bathsheba could simply be conducting an exercise of self-inspection from which she derives real confidence in her womanhood, as Mistichelli stated, as she is, after all, cognizant of her beauty and desirability as a woman. Observing from afar, Oak pries on Bathsheba's moment of indulgence and, from her blushing complexion, interprets the event in an entirely different light, presuming Bathsheba to be vain, bound in a narcissistic spell, a judgement that will inevitably taint her image and be further reinforced by the incident at the gatekeeper, as Gabriel kindly hands over twopence to the turnpike keeper, saying: "let the young woman pass" (45). Even so, Bathsheba is not much impressed by Gabriel's act of kindness "for she carelessly glanced over him, and told her man to drive on. She might have looked her thanks to Gabriel on a minute scale, but she did not speak them" (45).

Bathsheba treats Gabriel with regal indifference as she looks over him from her elevated position and orders the man to proceed without thanking Gabriel for his act of kindness, thereby belittling him. In return Gabriel "piqued by the comely traveller's indifference" accuses Bathsheba of "Vanity" (45). Still, could it really be vanity, as Gabriel assumed, or pride? Bathsheba, a few chapters later, declares herself to be an independent woman when Gabriel proposes to her; therefore, she could have taken Oak's kindness in paying for her passage as an offense. She was prepared to object to the unexpected fee. However, Gabriel didn't really give her the opportunity to do so; conveying the impression that not only does he assume Bathsheba to be vain as well as incapable of settling the issue independently.

Gabriel's impetuous judgement is hampered by cultural prejudices favouring an oversimplified vision of gender, prompting him to make some unwarranted conjectures about Bathsheba's character. Even though Hardy makes Gabriel the tale's moral conscience, he nevertheless exposes his "'unanalytic' or 'indolent' beliefs about women" in his seemingly passive posture (Auerbach 58). However, as the narrative unfolds, Gabriel's preconceptions are progressively dispelled, and the initial stereotyped view of Bathsheba is deconstructed revealing a growing richness and complexity of the feminine character, who distinguishes herself in the following chapters not so much for her vanity but rather for her pragmatism, as is actively illustrated in the episode where Bathsheba displays her excellent horseback riding antics.

Analogous to the waggon scene, Bathsheba's only witness is Gabriel, though unbeknownst to her, secretly surveying her "unexpected performance" as she rides her horse through "a pedestrian's track" where "the boughs spread horizontally at a height not greater

than seven feet above the ground" (53). Thus, owing to a question of practicality, the unsuspecting equestrian must recline on her horse's back. This unusual positioning allows her to solve a logistical problem that would otherwise impede her progress, facilitating the ordeal of her passage through the low hanging boughs of the trees, and as she does so, the narrator emphasizes, "[t]he rapidity of her glide into this position was that of a kingfisher—its noiselessness that of a hawk" (53). Even though the employment of bird imagery is a hallmark technique in Hardy's writing, to which he frequently reverted to enhance characterization, rarely did Hardy resort to the analogy of strong birds for such illustrations. The exception being Bathsheba Everdene. In this quote, her movements are compared to two birds: the kingfisher and the hawk, a bird of prey. Whilst the first comparison may suggest Bathsheba's physical agility, the second predisposes a hint about her dominant figure over others, namely male counterparts.[6] Once successfully overcoming the obstacle, Bathsheba proceeds to adopt an erect position, for she "had no side-saddle", therefore sitting "in the manner demanded by the saddle" (54), which, though more convenient for her riding, was hardly considered the most conventional for a lady, "trotted off in the direction of Tewnell Mill" (54). Bathsheba's straight up position allows her to travel at a faster speed, and as she approaches home, she sits in the saddle in the manner designated for a "lady". This constant interchangeability between a manly and a feminine position for riding is one of the best examples of gender reversal and mutability in the novel, highlighting something crucial about the heroine, namely her extraordinary capability to quickly adjust to shifting circumstances. Indeed, the heroine's unconventionality as a young Victorian woman is bolstered by this sense of matter-of-factness that she has about her, which adds to the text's overall sense of gender blurring, as ambivalence permeates normative sexual identities and roles, particularly in relation to Bathsheba Everdene.

This intriguing scene of Bathsheba's excellent horsemanship and her later rescue of Oak from his burning hut creates a great contrast between her earlier presumptuous behaviour, a harbinger of pride and arrogance (in chapter 1) and her later defiance and practical manner of

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[6] In her thesis, "Bird Imagery in Thomas Hardy's Novels", Sharon C. Gerson argues that there is an implicit dynamic of power relations between men and women transcribed into bird imagery. Signifying that, Bathsheba, as being compared to the hawk, a bird of prey, assumes a domineering position over the two other characters who are enticed by her power, Oak and Boldwood.

acting, constituting pivotal aspects that help unmask "Bathsheba's true capacity to overthrow presuppositions, especially those of men, about her person" (Mistichelli 55).

Furthermore, Bathsheba's triumph over Gabriel is amply proven, as, according to Lennartz, by being saved from suffocating in his hut by Bathsheba, Oak is downsized to the position of "a Samson" (26), who upon awakening, realises that he has been stripped of his manly power and authority, thus implying that sovereignty resides with Bathsheba. Indeed, the dynamic of their relationship after the marriage proposal seems to reflect Bathsheba's desire to assert her strength and dominance over the more vulnerable male. Though Oak has been compared to the most infamous voyeur, Satan, who, in Milton's *Paradise Lost* perched on the Tree of Life to look down on Paradise, as Oak perches on top of the roof to peek through a crevice to furtively spy on Bathsheba, that kind of imagery seems to be bitingly sarcastic, since it is Bathsheba who exerts control over Oak as he stands in a weaker position due to his innocence (cp. Lennartz n.p.).

Either way, both scenes contradict Gabriel's earlier supposition about her and further substantiate her complexity as a character, which ultimately entices Oak to propose. Yet, as previously noted, he is rejected. Nevertheless, attempting to console Gabriel, Bathsheba cleverly points out to him the weighing of the actual benefits that such a union would produce for them:

> Mr. Oak … you are better off than I. I have hardly a penny in the world—I am staying with my aunt for my bare sustenance. I am better educated than you—and I don't love you a bit: that's my side of the case. Now yours: you are a farmer just beginning, and you ought in common prudence, if you marry at all (which you should certainly not think of doing at present) to marry a woman with money, who would stock a larger farm for you than you have now. (68)

Nonetheless, boasting about the future proves to be unwise, as Bathsheba is clueless in matters of fortune, everything is about to change for both. After falling in love, proposing to Bathsheba, and being rejected, Gabriel is relegated to poverty due to the tragic loss of his entire flock. As for Bathsheba, starting off with nothing except her education and no great prospects for the

future, she becomes the well-heeled owner of a substantial farm on account of her uncle's inheritance. Hence, their positions in society are dramatically inverted: she is the established landowner and farmer, a woman of property, secure in her position, while he is the wanderer, having nothing but his craft to his name, looking for employment as a bailiff, who happens to see, one night, smoke coming from a burning rickyard. Confronted by this scenario, Gabriel sets himself out to quell the fire and is soon joined by Bathsheba's workmen. When Bathsheba finally arrives, Gabriel perches atop the rick, suggesting that the image from the first episode has now been transposed and inverted. Gabriel towers over Bathsheba, whilst she watches from lower down. Following observations made by Richard Carpenter, it is possible to note that the scenario now staged in chapter 6 also contrasts with the one depicted earlier in chapter 1. This encounter takes place at night and not on a bright winter day; the "vernal" freshness of the plants that once surrounded Bathsheba has been idly replaced by straw and grain (cp. Carpenter 333). Thus, one must conclude that "[t]he visual relationships established early in the novel have a profound structural importance and also carry a weight of social and cultural meaning" all throughout the narrative (Regan 248—9).

Finally, their sudden change of fortune compels the adoption of a new identity. This is yet another encounter in which both characters are unaware of the other's identity. Bathsheba, whose inheritance strengthens the stereotype of the queen into her character, assumes her role as the farm's new "sovereign", as her servants, or "subjects", clarify to Gabriel Oak, once he extinguishes the flames and descends the rick to inquire of Maryann "[w]here is your master the farmer?", she responds:

> "Tisn't a master; 'tis a mistress, shepherd."
>
> "A woman farmer?"
>
> "Ay, 'a b'lieve, and a rich one too!" said a bystander. "Lately 'a came here from a distance. Took on her uncle's farm, who died suddenly. Used to measure his money in half-pint cups. They say now that she've business in every bank in Casterbridge, and thinks no more of playing pitch-and-toss sovereign than you and I do pitch-halfpenny—not a bit in the world, shepherd." (83)

The bystander's remark is especially noteworthy since it appears as if he is discussing a line of succession as Bathsheba takes on her role from her uncle, as the property's new sovereign. Soon

after hearing such an enthralling narrative, Gabriel realises that the affluent woman farmer the labourers were referring to is, in fact, Bathsheba, and as he sets his eyes upon her again, he is positively bewildered by her transformation: "Oak walked on to the village, still astonished at the reencounter with Bathsheba … and perplexed at the rapidity with which the unpractised girl of Norcombe had developed into the supervising and cool woman here" (86). This image of the "supervising and cool woman" Bathsheba has grown into for her role as mistress is fully consummated once Bathsheba concedes an audition to her farmhands to formally introduce herself. In this scene, Bathsheba adopts a collected posture to convey her control over the situation. This is an image that will be often recaptured as Bathsheba reveals herself to be a master at the art of appearing regal and dignified in front of the public, for she is all too aware that she must prove herself before them, as they will tend to underestimate her as a woman. Yet she is prepared to play her part and conduct her business dexterously as: "She sat down at a table and opened the time-book, pen in her hand, with a canvas money-bag beside her" (112). Bathsheba's arrival and demeanour resembles that of a sovereign, as she stands in a higher position of power and dominates the scene with her "tantalizing graciousness" (181). While calling the workers to handle their revenue, her maid, Liddy, stays behind her, diligently absorbed with her sewing, acting like a maid of honour at court: "Liddy chose a position at her elbow and began to sew, sometimes pausing and looking round, or, with the air of a privileged person" (112).

Altogether, this scene epitomises Bathsheba's rise to the mighty position of queen. The farm's inheritance allowed Bathsheba to ascend the social ladder, widening the socioeconomic divide between her and Oak. Their relationship is reshaped by their new social positions, hers as his mistress and his as her employee. But even though Bathsheba is a powerful employer, she is still highly dependent upon her employee's masterful skills in farming and sheep-keeping to make her new position a success, thus establishing a convoluted dynamic of strength between them. Nonetheless, this abrupt inversion of their positions is something that Gabriel struggles to assimilate, as the maid who refused him is now this confident woman, his mistress:

> Gabriel was rather staggered by the remarkable coolness of her manner. Certainly nobody without previous information would have dreamt that Oak and the handsome woman before whom he stood had ever been other than strangers. But perhaps her air was the inevitable result of the social rise which had advanced her from a cottage to a large house and fields. (116)

Yet, this is not the first time that Bathsheba surprises Oak with the coolness of her manner in handling things. It might surprise him that Bathsheba seems to handle the farm’s matters independently and quite successfully. She understands the importance of assuring her labourers that she is capable of taking on the responsibility of running the farm. For that same reason, Bathsheba takes on the role of bailiff, after dismissing her former one on the basis of corruption, opting to perform that job herself. Such resolution shows her independence and the higher moralising spirit of one who does not condone corruption and theft, as well as her certainty of purpose, demonstrating a conviction in her ability to command, despite the fact that she is new in her position. Furthermore, Bathsheba’s decision to take on the position of bailiff for herself demonstrates her impending inclination to assume “attitudes or roles commonly held to be exclusively male” (Mistichelli 54), thereby subverting established sexual roles. R.H. Hutton, in a review published in the *Spectator* on December 19, 1874, recognised that such a bold venture marked the inauguration of Bathsheba’s “own reign” (Hutton 35). She was indeed careful to declare to her farm labourers:

> “Now mind, you have a mistress instead of a master. I don't yet know my powers or my talents in farming; but I shall do my best … I shall be up before you are awake; I shall be afield before you are up; and I shall have breakfasted before you are afield. In short, I shall astonish you all.” (117)

As the audition comes to an end, Bathsheba exits the room with “a sense of grandeur, float[ing] off behind” her (117).

This sense of “grandeur” that characterizes her synthesis of femininity and strength at the labourers' audition is carried over to the next scene, in which she makes her first appearance at the Casterbridge market, officially entering the broader frame of a man’s world and marking “[t]he first public evidence of Bathsheba’s decision to be a farmer in her own person” (123).

Again, Bathsheba’s power is captivating; becoming the central figure of the market, she attracts the attention of the male farmers, and revels in it, for she ought to be revered and admired not only for her beauty, but also for her queenly influence, which is magnified in this scene:

> Among these heavy yeomen a feminine figure glided, the single one of her sex that the room contained... It had required a little determination—far more than she had at first imagined—to take up a position here, for at her first entry the lumbering dialogues had ceased, nearly every face had been turned towards her, and those that were already turned rigidly fixed there. (123)

Bathsheba's difference, her sex, works to her advantage. As she glides through the room, the entire gathering of farmers has their gaze fixed on her. Her presence attracts their attention, and she rapidly adapts to the male-dominated ambience, as her skills as a negotiator prove to be as impressive as her horsemanship, transposing to the business world her exceptional capacity to quickly adapt to challenging conditions once more.

Exempting somebody else to properly introduce her to conduct business, she takes the initiative to do so, her character trait of defiance being well-supported by her bravery and audacity in speaking for herself while pursuing her business endeavours, for "if she was to be the practical woman she had intended to show herself, business must be carried on, introductions or none, and she ultimately acquired confidence enough to speak and reply boldly to men merely known to her by hearsay" (124). Bathsheba's irreverent demeanour certainly piqued the assembly's interest; however, that interest, which could otherwise be attributed to her success as a "buying and selling farmer" (124-25) or her sharp intellect, is overshadowed by her brilliant:

> triumph…as the maiden. Indeed, the sensation was so pronounced that her instinct on two or three occasions was merely to walk as a queen among these gods of the fallow, like a little sister of a little Jove, and to neglect closing prices altogether. (125)

Aware of the impact that her beauty and desirability have upon the collective of male farmers, Bathsheba glides through the room. Notice how Hardy applies the verb "glide" to describe Bathsheba's walk in order to convey the poise and graciousness with which she carries herself, proud and confident but above all crystallised in an etherealised figure, that of a goddess. In fact, Bathsheba is first referred to as a queen walking among the "gods of the fallow", meaning that she has conquered her place amongst mankind; and, then as a goddess, Jove, which again,

although acquiring mythical proportions, Bathsheba is still compared to a powerful figure of sovereignty, the king of the Olympian gods. Such a simile reflects how Bathsheba's beauty, charisma, and confidence lead her to stand out, whilst simultaneously revealing her tendency to be somewhat conceited about herself, her haughtiness almost expressing a sense of superiority and vanity. However, irreverent as Bathsheba might be, no one dismisses the conjecture that soon she will need a husband, as a man comments in conversation: "Tis such a shapely maid, however, that she'll soon get picked up" (124). Despite all of Bathsheba's efforts to project herself as a strong, independent woman, conventionality still dictates that she should be married soon. In short, her wish for wings[7] will not be everlasting; she might display a desire and even potential to become a "Mary Taylor", but she will not. Since it is not only her exceptional beauty and charisma that entice suitors, but it is also her possessions, her inherited property, that make her the most eligible match in Weatherbury, as Ronald Blythe stated: "She is all potential... She is sex, she is a good marriage, she is property, she is authority, but only as male Weatherbury decides" (Blythe 465). Bathsheba, on the other hand, refutes such notions. Hardy's protagonist, belligerently self-willed as she is, is not an archetypal Victorian maiden waiting for male endowment to define her. All that a marital union might award to her as a woman: the protection of her husband's name, his social identity, the security and comfort of his economic standing and status, she already has. Besides, marriage cannot be her expressed goal if she intends to keep her position, being fully conscious of what marriage entails for a woman like her: the abdication of her power. Therefore, she cannot share the collective ideology that marriage should be a woman's lifetime ambition, even though she recognises that she may have to surrender her authority to a man at some point in the future, as she tells Oak, "I hate to be thought men's property in that way, though possibly I shall be had some day" (66).

The iniquitous Married Women's Property Act of 1870 dictated that everything a woman owned belonged to her husband as soon as she was married. Through marriage, a man and a woman were unified as one person in the eyes of the common law doctrine, implying the obliteration of the wife's legal existence. In that event, a woman's control over income and property, held in the form of freehold land, was automatically recognised as her husband's as

[7] Mary Taylor was an early campaigner for women's rights, hailed as a hero. Her life stood in stark contrast to other Victorian conceptions of unmarried women, inspiring envy rather than pity. Contrary to the demands of Victorian convention, Mary Taylor did not become the ridiculed spinster or the horrendous old maid of gothic tales.

he was the only holder of a legal identity in that union. The possibility of a woman getting a divorce and maintaining any material possessions was practically null (cp. Kühl 177). Through marriage, the woman was placed in the category of the utterly disposed, regardless of her social status. As Auerbach observed, the "total union between husband and wife engorges and maims the woman" (Auerbach 12—13).

Along these lines, Bathsheba's pretensions to marriage differ from those of her maids, Liddy and Maryann and unlike them, Bathsheba does not express reservations about becoming a spinster. Both maids make comments about their single status; for example, in chapter 9, after hearing Bathsheba's accounts of rejecting a marriage proposal, Liddy complains, "Ay, mistress—so I did. But what between the poor men I won't have, and the rich men who won't have me, I stand as a pelican in the wilderness!" (110). Bathsheba refrains from making such remarks because her status as a woman deviates significantly from that of her maids. If she marries, her property is in jeopardy, and it's worth remembering that it's through the inheritance of her uncle's farm that she completely matures into a queen. Bathsheba is well aware that Victorian society had rigid "ideas on marriage" and the position of women, and that if she were to be married, she would have to sacrifice her legal existence and be completely dependent on her husband. Still, although she successfully attracts the general male interest, one man, Mr. William Boldwood, manages to elude her charms at the market. His willingness to remain unimpressed by her aura deeply distresses Bathsheba, who, failing to conjure any reasonable excuse, resorts to conventional wisdom, to formulate the following argument "that married men of forty are usually ready and generous enough to fling passing glances at any specimen of moderate beauty they may discern" (125). Hence, Boldwood's unaffectedness can only be attributed to the fact "that this unmoved person was not a married man" (125). Which turns out to be a rather cunning conclusion, as Boldwood maintains a dignified nonchalance in the face of her presence, Bathsheba assumes he is unmarried. Although Bathsheba's assumption turns out to be correct, Mr. Boldwood is indeed an unmarried gentleman, she is deceived by his presumably calm and undisturbed appearance. Besides, one cannot help but think that such an assumption might relate to the intriguing story told by Coggan, in chapter 8, about Bathsheba's father, Levi Everdene, who, after losing his passion for his wife, devised a peculiar strategy to rekindle it: he orders his wife to take off her wedding ring and pretends they are not married. Imagining he is "doing wrong" by "committing the seventh" (97) in his sexual approaches, he is enthralled by the prospect of defying society's rules and values. Nevertheless, by inventing the role of moral outlaw for himself, he is able to preserve one of Victorian society's most revered institutions.

Levi Everdene's story may connect with his daughter's assumption about Boldwood being unmarried, since it seems only married men succumb to the temptation of a seductive woman. Consequently, Bathsheba interprets Boldwood's reluctance as a challenge, finding it "faintly depressing that the most dignified and valuable man in the parish should withhold his eyes" (130) from admiring her. Boldwood's initial indifference and refusal to join in idolising Bathsheba, as her pretension of being a goddess demands, prompts her to exact vengeance on this "recusant's" (125) behaviour by sending him a valentine with the words "Marry Me" on the seal, an unpremeditated, ill-advised prank carried out on impulse, evidently incited by being denied "the official glance of admiration" (130), but still it succeeds in getting the desired result. As if under a hypnotic spell, Boldwood desperately clings to those words as he is made love-struck, utterly mesmerised, by Bathsheba's influence, who, shortly after sending the valentine, will see the so desired "glance of admiration" be returned to her with excessive devotion. Farmer Boldwood and Gabriel Oak's peaceful, uneventful existence of bucolic happiness is disrupted by the "ignoble strife" (Gray 64) Hardy purposefully absented from the novel's title, finding its way into the story in the form of a pernicious seductress who, in her drastic attempt to entice Boldwood, will also, though unexpectedly, fall victim to her own spell, as she disgracefully submits to the mesmerising sway of the perilous catalyst figure, the reckless and dashing Sergeant Troy. Moreover, just as Bathsheba's enticement of Boldwood led to his downfall, so does Troy's enticement of Bathsheba lead to hers, from queen to victim.

Seduced by the typical "Hardyesque rendition of the 'Victorian vile seducer'" (Fueller 13), Sergeant Francis Troy is forcefully ushered into the story as he first meets Bathsheba at night in the fir plantation amidst the impenetrable nocturnal darkness. As they walk into each other, Bathsheba's skirt becomes entangled in one of his spurs, and by the faint light of her lantern, she is able to discern the figure "to whom she was hooked was brilliant in brass and scarlet" (193). The brilliant display of his military uniform brings upon Bathsheba "a fairy transformation" (193), together with Troy's incredible ability to speak "fluently and unceasingly" (198), contributes to Bathsheba's loving encasement, whose unsettling effects she is unable to control. For instance, Bathsheba, though unwilling to admit it, is elated when Troy claims to have overheard in Casterbridge her being referred to as "the 'Queen of the Corn-market'" (201). Indeed, it is the latter aspect that distinguishes him from the other two suitors. Unlike them, Troy romances Bathsheba and lavishes unending compliments on her beauty, enabling her to idealise him in the same manner as Boldwood idealises Bathsheba, or Tess idealises Angel Clare. And while Tess "was conscious of the notion expressed by Friar Laurence [in *Romeo and Juliet*

by William Shakespeare]: “These violent delights have violent ends” (qtd. in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* 269), that the placing of lovers on a pedestal frequently leads to self-destructive patterns, Bathsheba seems to be oblivious to this truth, as she is described as a woman of “impulsive nature under a deliberative aspect”, considered to be “[a]n Elizabeth in brain and a Mary Stuart in spirit” (164). Bathsheba’s comparison to two illustrious queens is also a strong indictment of her queenly status. Like Queen Elizabeth I, Bathsheba is a well-educated, intellectual woman, distinguished by her remarkable wit, brightness, and temper. And, like Mary Stuart, she has the ability to fascinate whomsoever she encounters with her personal appeal and charm. Regardless of the fact that Bathsheba’s personality possesses all of the aforementioned traits, the tendency for impulsiveness and a certain lack of subtlety stands out most prominently, as one of the farm labourers, Henery, recognised, Bathsheba is, “[a] headstrong maid … and won't listen to no advice at all. Pride and vanity have ruined many a cobbler’s dog” (137). This is especially fitting given Bathsheba’s defiance in the face of warnings concerning Troy, and it is over the course of the period that Bathsheba is under the influence of her lover, from their first encounter in the woods and during their brief courtship, that her demonic traits begin to emerge, in spite of a few previous hints in the narrative. For instance, before her first encounter with Troy, when his spurs get entangled in her skirt, she admits to Boldwood that she was “wicked” for having kept him waiting after being pressed to marry him, but she only does so because “[s]he was frightened as well as agitated at his vehemence” (161). Unquestionably, she regrets her actions towards Farmer Boldwood as she certainly did not anticipate such a dramatic outcome of her childish prank, and this acknowledgement of her wickedness may be a sort of connection with her demonic traits, something that her workers also commented on: “So I said, 'Mistress Everdene, there’s places empty, and there’s gifted men willing … but the villainy of the contrarikind,' I said (meaning womankind), 'keeps 'em out'” (182). In chapter 21, this premise is further reinforced as Bathsheba is threatened with the loss of her sheep after their endeavour to break the fence to enter a field of clover. As a result, the bloated sheep must be punctured on the side or else they will die. When confronted by the situation, Bathsheba cries aloud to her farm workers, “[t]hat’s enough … O you fools!” and “throwing the parasol and Prayer-book into the passage” she runs “out of doors in the direction signified”. Bathsheba is overcome by emotion: “Her eyes were at their darkest and brightest now. Bathsheba’s beauty belonging rather to the demonian than to the angelic school, she never looked so well as when she was angry” (170). At this moment, any angelic pretensions Bathsheba may well have entertained completely vanish as she is subdued by her demonic nature which,

as the narrator observes, greatly enhances her beauty. This scene perfectly illustrates what Richard Carpenter designated as "[t]he two aspects of [Bathsheba's] character — the respectable Victorian girl on the surface and the amoral Dionysiac beneath" (Carpenter 344). When she tosses aside the parasol and the prayer book, it is almost as if she is dismissing herself from the leisure woman, she had lately become to be again the working woman, symbolising the complete abandonment of any remaining hopes of Bathsheba actually meeting the predetermined standards for the Angel in the House and also to taking over her role as the owner of the farm. Then, of course, her forceful Elizabethan character comes through; she is fearless and swells to demonic proportions; her beauty is now tarnished by demonic rather than angelic features. Consequently, this excerpt clearly demonstrates what kind of woman Bathsheba is, and as the narrative progresses, Bathsheba's figure takes on a new dimension of complexity as she transitions from a mighty queen, often revered as a goddess for her graciousness and composure, to this woman with demonic traits that arise only more frequently and eventually take complete hold of her, stripping off her queenly splendour. Bathsheba's demonic impulses are so exacerbated by her passion for Troy, following their midsummer-evening rendezvous, where he performs his swordplay practise on her, that her bizarre behaviour startles her maid Liddy: "Don't be frightened at me, though perhaps I am enough to frighten any innocent woman" (228). Her demonic nature leads her to acquire some grotesque features, being compared to an Amazonian, a strong, often masculine woman belonging to a race of female warriors in Greek mythology; Bathsheba "alarmed by this Amazonian picture of herself" (230) says: "I hope I am not a bold sort of maid—mannish?" Her maid Liddy, on the other hand, softens such a portrayal of her mistress through the use of a euphemism:

> "Oh no, not mannish; but so almighty womanish that 'tis getting on that way sometimes. Ah! Miss, … I wish I had half your failing that way. 'Tis a great protection to a poor maid in these illegit'mate days!" (230)

Throughout the narrative, the masculine and feminine are mingled together when referring to Bathsheba. She was referred to as "mate" and "Sir" while the labourers were still getting acquainted with the new term "mistress". When Troy first meets Bathsheba, he inquires if she is a woman, whilst Oak criticises Bathsheba for her own patriarchal toying with another as if he were a mere object, to which she consents by replying: "I've been a rake" (p.380) Though,

simultaneously, Bathsheba is also referred to as “Minerva” (102) and “Juno” (387). References of this kind precipitate a certain sense of gender fluidity to Bathsheba’s character, as she seems to perfectly embody both masculine and feminine characteristics, therefore inferring a transgression of the traditional gender constructions. Furthermore, it is Bathsheba’s duality that makes her so appealing to others, as, indeed, her maid Liddy paradoxically views a woman’s mannishness as a form of self-protection. Besides this ambivalence, her androgyny, also informs her ability to adapt to circumstances; this, in turn, awakens her spirit’s pragmatism, aligning with her capacity for resilience to determine if she is strong enough to survive or be doomed to extinction. According to the narrative, it seems that Bathsheba avoids the latter option, still in order to survive the adverse circumstances, Bathsheba’s daring spirit will be mercilessly repressed, after she elopes with Troy.

The last time Bathsheba will be seen in her fearless attitude is when she stealthily leaves Weatherbury, driving alone at night on her way to Bath to meet Troy, yet another scene where Bathsheba is assumed to be a male thief. As Gabriel and Coggan go after her, thinking someone stole a horse and caught her, Bathsheba reveals herself to be infuriated and frustrated by a woman’s lack of freedom to move forth in her endeavours without having to justify herself to anyone, “mustn’t a lady move an inch from her door without being dogged like a thief?” (244) To which Coggan expostulates: “But how was we to know, if you left no account of your doings?” … “and ladies don't drive at these hours, miss, as a jineral rule of society” (244). Nonetheless, Coggan’s expostulation is unsurprising, given that Bathsheba has already demonstrated that she does not adhere to customary standards that society imposes on women. And that is possibly why her collapse is so devastating. Bathsheba might have adapted better to her marriage to Troy, or even readily accepted Boldwood, and been easily submissive to him, if she had been a traditional Victorian woman completely moulded into the stereotype of the Angel in the House. However, this did not occur. Troy reveals himself to be an untrustworthy husband who is uninterested in administering his wife’s farm and carelessly spends her money on gambling. Like Boldwood, Troy is a thwarted man, though in a different way. His character flaws are hidden beneath his outward appearance, hampered by his role as a daring soldier and his decent social standing, as Hardy denounces, “Troy’s deformities lay deep down from a woman’s vision, whilst his embellishments were upon the very surface” (220). Thus, his marriage to Bathsheba could be seen as a marriage of convenience, as he seeks to live comfortably off her resources, like a parasite.

On the evening of the harvest feast, which also happened to be Bathsheba and Troy's wedding celebration, the first sign of Troy's recklessness is exposed as he is shown taking full possession of Bathsheba's old manor-house. A night of revelry and excess begins as Troy orders that everyone be served a strong drink, ignoring Bathsheba's protests against it, thereby overruling her, completely undermining her authority. Bathsheba now realises her mistake. Through marriage, Troy has been granted complete control over her land and labourers[8] whereas she has lost her power and authority, and she is compelled to obey her husband's wishes when he demands the dismissal of women and children from the feast, returning home like the other women and their children while her husband and her men indulge themselves.

Amidst this scenario, Troy's antagonist, Oak, preserves himself immune to the sergeant's corruptive influence by abandoning the crowded site of inebriation and moral turpitude shortly after Bathsheba. However, going out on his way home, Gabriel realises that a thunderstorm is approaching, and, fearing the possible loss of wheat and barley ricks, decides to return to the barn to seek assistance in order to prevent such a great loss. But his efforts are in vain as, upon entering the barn, he is confronted by a strange sight: the entire male assemblage, lulled by the drunken haze, lies sound asleep, grotesquely spread everywhere, whilst the scarlet-coated sergeant rules the scene, standing at the apex of the sleeping crowd.

The Weatherbury community of simple farm labourers are lured to their fall, following in the footsteps of their mistress, much as Tess Durbeyfield is, who also succumbs to the serenity of sleep while a ruthlessly profane agent abruptly intrudes upon her, precipitating her loss of innocence, her downfall. Even though the loss of innocence in this case seems, naturally, to be more symbolic and less dramatic than that which the feminine characters normally face, the male assemblage is nevertheless drawn into a devilish mist of folly and drunken debauchery cast

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[8] In his article "Paradise Lost and Hell Regained: On the Figure of the Intruder in Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*", Norbert Lennartz elaborates on this fascinating theory of the figure of the intruder contaminating the image of the seeming peace of pastoral life, as the title suggests. Bathsheba Everdene, he claims, exemplifies this role because she intrudes on both the shepherd Gabriel Oak and the farmer Boldwood's lives, unsettling both. As the story progresses, the plot is reversed as the previous intruder, Bathsheba, is abruptly "intruded upon by the dashing Sergeant Troy whose transgressive sexuality and propensity for dandyish modernity plunge Bathsheba into infernal depths" (Lennartz n.p.).

by Troy, the "Lord of Misrule" (Carpenter 334), who, victorious in his efforts, consecrates the total loss of pastoral innocence. As Lennartz further elucidates:

> Troy's presence casts an infernal shadow over Bathsheba's estate… after their night of debauchery, the rural people have undergone an ominous transformation into participants of a grotesque danse macabre … The ostensible Arcadian serenity of the first few chapters has now definitively given way to a menacing blackness (Lennartz n.p.).

As for the difference between Oak and Troy, it could not be more pronounced than in this moment of the narrative. The first, the sole sober-minded man in that gathering, the willingly kind, humble Arcadian shepherd who serves Bathsheba with self-sacrificing dedication; the second, the impish soldier who enters the story to sow discord and impose a reign of insurgency over the peaceful people of Wessex, threatening to jeopardise not only Bathsheba's life, but also her property and the community to which she is accountable as a farm owner. As the irresponsible husband continues to carouse with the farmhands, the dignified but spurned lover, Gabriel, is forced to undertake all of the work on his own, later joined by Bathsheba, who assists him in rescuing the ricks during the storm. While assisting Oak, Bathsheba reveals the reason for her visit to Bath, confessing that despite her intentions to terminate her relationship with Troy, she ends up marring him as her womanly folly takes over and the jealousy of a potential rival overpowers the feeling that prompts her to do so, but Bathsheba pays a heavy price for her pride and vanity. Deluded by Troy's "winning tongue" (188), Bathsheba sees herself now powerless to control her farm and money. In a scene where Bathsheba confronts Troy about him spending her money without giving her notice, it is possible to conclude that marriage has depleted her most terribly:

> "And you mean, Frank," said Bathsheba sadly—her voice was painfully lowered from the fulness and vivacity of the previous summer— "that you have lost more than a hundred pounds in a month by this dreadful horse-racing? O, Frank, it is cruel; it is foolish of you to take away my money so. We shall have to leave the farm; that will be the end of it!"
>
> "Humbug about cruel. Now, there 'tis again—turn on the waterworks; that's just like you." (289)

From the text above, it is clear that Bathsheba has lost her original anima and willpower, assuming instead a complacent posture which only encourages Troy's libertine behaviour. Additionally, one might infer from Bathsheba's reaction to Troy's response to her protest that Bathsheba is now a fully consummated victim of his, as she immediately starts weeping at his rude reply and he notes,

> "Why Bathsheba, you have lost all the pluck and sauciness you formerly had, and upon my life if I had known what a chicken-hearted creature you were under all your boldness, I'd never have—I know what." A flash of indignation might have been seen in Bathsheba's dark eyes as she looked resolutely ahead after this reply. (289)

Overall, this excerpt provides a great contrast between how Bathsheba used to be, a queen, and how she is now following her marriage to Troy, a victim. She lost her boldness, her vividness, the "sauciness", as he refers to it, to be now a mere fragment of what she used to be, and she is revolted by it. As Bathsheba's life took on a downward direction, the uncertainty of whether or not she could ever regain her former strength became a highly contested issue that contributed significantly to the notion that Hardy somehow approved of the maiming of his once-fearless heroine. Revisiting R.H. Hutton's review for the *Spectator*, he does in fact underlie this specific aspect: "Bathsheba is at first much more strongly outlined, and during the scenes in which she falls in love with Troy we begin to think Mr. Hardy is likely to make something great of her. But, on the whole, she falls back into an uninterestingness of which we cannot exactly define the reason" (Hutton 35).

Nonetheless, this aspect noted by Hutton is also something that Bathsheba herself acknowledges while declaring her dissatisfaction and heartbreak for their fleeting romance avowing: "Yes! The independent and spirited Bathsheba is come to this!" (303). In the beginning of Bathsheba and Troy's love affair the narrator is careful to advert, "Bathsheba loved Troy in the way that only self-reliant women love when they abandon their self-reliance. When a strong woman recklessly throws away her strength she is worse than a weak woman who has never had any strength to throw away" (219). The narrator here recognises the wisdom pronounced by Friar Laurence, that as previously noted, Bathsheba is ignorant of her violent delight for Troy will result in a violent end. Everything indicates that outcome in the narrative, as Bathsheba entirely predisposes herself to surrender to Troy as a "weaker vessel" (234) in their relationship,

as she is utterly powerless to withstand Troy's corrosive spellbinding. Her intense passion for him leads to the abandonment of her self-reliance, which proves to be a most unfortunate mistake.

Nevertheless, Bathsheba is not the only woman succumbing to Troy's charms. Fanny Robin, one of Bathsheba's farm maidens who goes missing at the start of the novel, is another sliver of what she had once been looming over the roads of Wessex. Similarly, Fanny is also seduced by Troy, and the two plan to marry. However, Fanny misidentifies the church, and by the time she arrives for the ceremony, her intended husband has jilted her. She is left unmarried and pregnant, making her, in the eyes of society, a fallen woman, and ends up dying during childbirth at the Casterbridge Union House. Despite having very different stories, both women are united not just by their common victimhood and love for the same man, but also by the fact that they both defy the conventions of their sex imposed by Victorian society. Both pursue and are pursued by Francis Troy; both maintain a romantic entanglement with him outside of marriage. The difference between them, however, resides in the fact that they are separated by money and social status, and in truth, that is the reason motivating Troy to choose Bathsheba over Fanny. Regardless of his feelings for his lover, Troy marries Bathsheba because she has the financial means to maintain him and accommodate his wants. Also, their social positioning is the determining factor for Fanny's tragedy; her class inferiority and vulnerability in society is only accentuated with her pregnancy, being subjected to vile judgements determined by "[f]ixed gender roles which oppress women harshly" (Shires 171), whilst Troy is left unaffected. Besides, Bathsheba's advantages over Fanny are those that allow her to break free from the constraints imposed on women by society's demands. Once succeeding where Fanny had failed, because she did not marry Troy, Bathsheba cannot escape "the soulless torpor of marriage", whereas Fanny, in her position as a fallen woman, Auerbach notes, may not accomplish any spiritual triumphs yet is able to avoid what Bathsheba is bound to face in her condition as a married woman (Auerbach 130).

At the emotional climax of the novel, Bathsheba offers to bury Fanny Robin after Joseph Poorgrass discloses to her that she has died. Following the conventional courtesies provided to a family servant, Bathsheba sends Poorgrass to retrieve the body from the Casterbridge Union Workhouse, and once arriving at Weatherbury Farm, Fanny's coffin is brought inside to Bathsheba's house, where she, obsessed by the uncertainty of whether the coffin contains a baby or not, decides to settle the matter for herself, summoning the courage to open the lid and

peer inside only to be confronted with the horrid reality of Fanny lying dead with her infant in her arms, a sight that profoundly shocks Bathsheba.

After the initial wave of shock dissipates, Bathsheba is overtaken by anger as she sees Fanny as the "Other who has come between herself and her husband" (Shires 172). Nevertheless, the viewing of the corpses leads Bathsheba, ultimately, to enter a state of reverie, proceeding to abandon her malediction to pay tribute to Fanny and her child, praying for her, and worshipping the motionless figure of Fanny by tenderly placing flowers around her hair. By engaging in this ritual of grief and mourning Bathsheba gradually forsakes the conception of Fanny as her antagonist, seeing her instead as someone who bears an uncanny resemblance to her. Both women are united by their common suffering as Troy's victims, as Bathsheba declares: "this woman [Fanny] is your victim; and I not less than she" (327). Hardy symbolically parallels the story of Bathsheba and Fanny with the biblical tale of Esther and Vashti, when he states:

> The sadness of Fanny Robin's fate did not make Bathsheba's glorious, although she was the Esther to this poor Vashti, and their fates might be supposed to stand in some respects as contrasts to each other. (320)

This is a reference to a biblical story from the book of Esther in which Vashti, the first wife of Ahasuerus, the king of Persia, is summoned by her husband to appear before the company with her royal crown on her head so that he might show off her beauty, but she refuses. Enraged, the king orders her permanent banishment, and later marries Esther, who succeeds Vashti as ruler of Persia.

As in the biblical story, both women hold the position of wife as Troy declares Fanny as his true wife in the eyes of Heaven. Like Vashti, his first wife, Fanny, is also forsaken by her husband and eventually replaced by another woman, Bathsheba, alias Esther. Yet, in Hardy's story, Troy explicitly excludes his "second wife", Bathsheba, by telling her, "I am not morally yours" (327). In accordance with Linda M. Shires' explanation of this section of the novel, Troy claims Fanny as his "truer wife" because she has produced his child, because she is a mother, while Bathsheba is not.

Witnessing Troy's remorseful reaction and pledge of undying love for another woman is a humiliating experience that Bathsheba, as his wife, cannot abide. Thence, in an outburst of

rage, Bathsheba reaches the pinnacle of her victimhood, as in the following chapter, 44, "Under a Tree: A Reaction", she seeks refuge from the grotesque spectacle and the mortification she endured at the hands of her husband, symbolically escaping from the pattern of male victimisation she fell into once she married, to flee and hide in a fern grove, where she discovers a wet hollow into which she disappears.

According to Linda M. Shires, who devised an astounding theory about how this scenario is vital to restoring Hardy's heroine's powers, Bathsheba's encumbrance into this natural depression stands as a metaphorical representation of a return to the maternal womb. Though "the general aspect of the swamp was malignant" (329), Bathsheba finds the seclusion that this natural cage provides to her protective not only from the predominate "damp fog" (328) but also from the world. Lulled by the surrounding atmosphere and giving in to the exhaustion from the day, Bathsheba falls asleep when snaking "down upon a tangled couch of fronds and stems" (328), being awakened to the sound of birdsong the next morning. When she awakes, she notices how "[t]he hollow seemed a nursery of pestilences small and great" (329), thus supporting Shires' observation of the natural setting's motherly feel. This natural refuge satisfies, even if momentarily, Bathsheba's impending need for motherly protection following her painful loss of self-reliance, but the "exposure to the clogged atmosphere all these hours of night" (330) causes Bathsheba to lose "the most authoritative, acculturated aspect of herself" (Shires 162), her voice, which in Shire's perspective translates itself to the downgrading of the once powerful woman farmer to a defenceless infant.

Furthermore, the scene of Bathsheba falling asleep appears to be reminiscent of a traditional legend, the Sleeping Beauty story, which became "[a] popular subject throughout the Victorian age" (Auerbach 41). Typifying all the sleeping queens, "the Sleeping Beauty seems to contain in herself both victim and queen, the apparent passivity of the one modulating imperceptibly into the potency of the other" (Auerbach 41). The image of the sleeping woman transposes the means for arousal, of expanding her powers, within the passivity of her sleep, meaning that there is a possibility of Bathsheba transforming from victim to queen while she rests asleep in the hollow, indeed this could serve as an explanation for the reason why Linda Shires argues that at the moment Bathsheba flees, she is able to reclaim her former position of power. Yet, as indicated in the beginning of this chapter, in order to restore her powers as queen, Bathsheba must have a rising trajectory, as Nina Auerbach announces: "The Victorian queen is not the anti-type of the Victorian victim, but the release of the victim into the full use of her powers" (Auerbach 39). Hence, Bathsheba begins the story as a queen and eventually subsides

to the role of victim; but, following Shires' thought, when Bathsheba runs away from home, after the episode of Troy viewing Fanny's corpse, there is a sort of metamorphosis element, a rebirth, that allows Bathsheba to reinvert her position as a victim to the figure of the queen once more.

Much like the cathartic experience of classic legendary heroes such as Homer's Odysseus or Virgil's Aeneas, whose journey into the underworld, the land of the dead, is symbolised as an act of deep emergence within the realms of the unconscious mind, ultimately leading to the acquisition of greater knowledge about one's own nature, similarly, the time Bathsheba spends hiding within the deepness of the hollow allows her to restore the power she has lost by allegorically descending into the recesses of her mind searching for her truth.

Succinctly put, such an account of events captures the otherwise known paradigm of katabasis. Deriving from ancient Greek, this concept has been applied in literary terms to signify a retreat of some sort, being frequently used to denote a hero's descent into the underworld. American mythologist and author Joseph Campbell addresses this concept in his 1949 book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, where he elaborates on the mythological framework of the hero's journey and the thesis that its unifying image stands as a monomyth archetype.

Campbell's theory is particularly important because it correlates with Bathsheba's episode. Through the endurance of such a venture, the protagonist is reborn, emerging anew from the experience after overcoming the hidden darker aspects of their personalities. A state of "mental katabasis" must be achieved so that upon their return, the hero has obtained more knowledge and self-awareness about himself, or in this case, herself. Consequently, it may be said that Bathsheba is able to regain her power through her fall into the hollow, as the act can be ultimately viewed as a katabasis performance. Hence, only after Bathsheba has endured not only the perilous fall but also the world of her inner darker personality, can she be reborn and be fully self-aware of her true nature.

However, one question may arise as a result of Bathsheba's change. Bathsheba is classified into the stereotype of queen when the narrative begins; as a young, wilful, and independent woman, how could she come to that position if she had never been a victim before, since Auerbach precisely delineates that an ascending trajectory must take place to evolve from the powerless position of victim to a position of power, that of queen? The answer to this query seems to be present in a dialogue between Bathsheba and Boldwood, in which he presses her to accept his marriage proposal and Bathsheba admits her wicked behaviour towards him, leading Boldwood to criticise her coldness, to which she responds: "An unprotected childhood

in a cold world has beaten gentleness out of me" (235). Such a reply seems to be an explicit suggestion that Bathsheba was once a victim, during her formative years, her upbringing, making the possibility of victimisation plausible.

Bathsheba may therefore have progressed from being a victim as a child to being a queen as a young adult. In other words, Bathsheba's journey indicates that she was a victim in her own youth, grew up to become a queen, receded to victim through marriage to Troy, and one cannot be quite certain if she rose back to the position of queen at the end of the novel, as Bathsheba can only fully recover her queenly status if the man who made her a victim is destroyed. Conveniently, Troy mysteriously disappears after Fanny is buried, and he is even considered to have died by drowning. That is not the case, however. Troy was saved from drowning by a ship that took him "to the United States, where he made a precarious living... as Professor of Gymnastics, Sword Exercise, Fencing, and Pugilism" (364). But he soon returned to England, where he joined a travelling circus and rose through the ranks to become a daring rider, billed as "Mr. Francis, the Great Cosmopolitan Equestrian and Roughrider" (365). Since Troy's presumed death, Bathsheba makes little progress in her recovery, but when she attends the Greenhill sheep fair and is successful in her business of selling sheep, she expresses an interest in watching the play "Turpin's Ride to York" (363), and Boldwood graciously offers to obtain her a seat for the performance. Bathsheba was the only person seated in this supposed reserved area, which turned out to be a raised bench in a prominent portion of the tent and she sits there self-consciously enthroned. Troy "peeping from his dressing-tent through a slit for a reconnoitre before entering" sees "his unconscious wife on high before him … sitting as queen of the tournament" (367). From this description, one can assume that, though slow in her recovery, Bathsheba has already regained her queenly poise. Attracted by the sight of Bathsheba, Troy decides to reclaim his wife back, attempting to do so at Boldwood's Christmas celebration, foiling the host's plan to finally obtain Bathsheba to be his wife. Ultimately, the Christmas party ends in tragedy as Boldwood, overtaken by a fit of mad jealousy, murders Troy, fulfilling the pledge he stated earlier when discovering Bathsheba's nightly incursions to see Troy, "I'll punish him—by my soul, that will I! I'll meet him, soldier or no, and I'll horsewhip the untimely stripling for this reckless theft of my one delight" (237). Boldwood has also been a victim, albeit under very different circumstances than Bathsheba and Fanny. Their distinction lies in the fact that he becomes his own victim as a result of his exaggerated idolization of Bathsheba. The feeling he nourishes for her, which he misinterprets for love, is in fact a sickly obsession concerning a question of ownership of the female subject. As he justifies in the discourse above, Boldwood

unmistakably objectifies love, comparing Troy's enamours captivity of Bathsheba's heart to the theft of something tangible. In fact, in some other editions of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the word "property" is present in place "of my one delight", sublimating Boldwood's feelings for Bathsheba more overtly.[9]

Accordingly, even if Bathsheba had not married Troy and had instead chosen Boldwood, the outcome would have been practically the same as both men would have robbed her of her fullness to accommodate their more limited natures. As Troy requires her to support him as a dependent, while Boldwood's obsession over her would suffocate her; he would ask her to give up her capacity for useful labour as he explicitly suggested to Bathsheba, if she marries him, to give up the farm and become the conventionally typified feminine figure of the Angel in the House:

> You shall have no cares—be worried by no household affairs, and live quite at ease, Miss Everdene. The dairy superintendence shall be done by a man—I can afford it well—you shall never have so much as to look out of doors at haymaking time, or to think of weather in the harvest. (161)

The kind of life Boldwood proposes for Bathsheba would in fact reduce her to inertia. Besides, Boldwood's ardent infatuation for Bathsheba is merely supported by this highly idealised perceptual construct he has for her. Such becomes evident once Boldwood comes to comprehend the dynamic of their entanglement prior to their marriage and is compelled to urge Troy to marry Bathsheba, otherwise she risks becoming a fallen woman. Nevertheless, he is enraged by Troy's persistent wooing, seducing Bathsheba out of her moral reservations to surrender to him. Consecrating his role as an agent of insurgency and chaos, Troy is successful in conjuring up the fabled "green-eyed monster" (Shakespeare 218)[10] and drives Boldwood to maddening agony, who threatens to kill him, and eventually fulfils his promise, but is unable to do so since Bathsheba's reputation cannot be saved any other way than by marrying Troy.

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[9] Consult Hardy, Thomas. *Far from the Madding Crowd*. London, Penguin, 2012. pp. 232.

[10] *Othello* 3.3.168.

Notwithstanding, as the narrative draws to a close and the males who maimed the protagonist have an adequate conclusion to their careers, Troy's death and Boldwood's imprisonment, there is finally an opportunity to discuss the heroine's rejuvenation, her figurative ascent from the ashes. Although Bathsheba is released from the two suitors who tormented her, the overall romantic experience had a modifying effect on her and still weighs her down; after all the hardships she endured, her force and willingness were drained out of her, as her maid Liddy observes: "If you haven't seen the poor mistress since Christmas, you wouldn't know her... She's not the same woman. Only two years ago she was a romping girl, and now she's this!" (409). This gloomy state of spirit will remain unaltered as Bathsheba decides to marry Oak. Indeed, the ending of the novel cannot be viewed consensually, being often, in fact, considered somewhat ambiguous.

On the one hand, the novel's conclusion—Bathsheba's decision to wed Gabriel Oak—can be viewed as a fitting restoration of the equilibrium that was upended at the beginning of the story, thus perfectly conforming to the pastoral genre's conventions, which do indeed demand that the balance that was disturbed at the beginning of the story be restored at the end. This pattern may be seen in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, where the narrative begins with a quaint description of Gabriel Oak in a harmonious environment before being abruptly interrupted by Bathsheba's appearance, or intrusion as Lennartz would put it, and later by Sergeant Troy. But once Troy dies, a new chance arises, not only to the heroine to fully recover her previous status, but also to the entire framework of the narrative as it is deliberately set up to have a conventional ending.

Moreover, as the novel draws to a close, it becomes increasingly important to restore the narrative's sense of balance and to find a straightforward way to resolve the plot's key disruptive force, Bathsheba. As a result, the heroine's marriage to Oak appears to be the ideal answer, the final movement of the novel pointing "to the ultimate fulfilment of the heroine with her marriage to the proper mate" (Mistichelli 162).

Another factor that may strengthen this argument and is frequently overlooked is the fact that Hardy was just beginning his career as a writer, and his earlier novels were not so well received. Therefore, this could well be another reason why he could not allow his female character to remain as she was in the beginning—as we can see from the criticism it drew—because it was simply not feasible, and certainly not favourable to his blossoming career.

Even so, such a conclusion reinforces the perception that Bathsheba is unquestionably diminished from the impressive figure she had once been, clearly not regaining her queenly

splendour at the time of her marriage to Oak, leading contemporary academics to peruse a more pessimistic perspective on the novel's ending, since Bathsheba's marriage to Oak can be interpreted as the defeat of the heroine, her last submission to patriarchal society, ultimately succumbing to the greater force generated by societal pressure, which demands that a woman should be married.

However, if one were to apply or follow Auerbach's theory, hypothetically speaking, I would contend that Bathsheba might have reclaimed her previous self—her grace and attitude befitting of a queen—after her marriage to Oak. The primary justification for my position is that, as Auerbach noted, Oak served as her passive growing companion throughout the entire story, "woman is the active instigator and man the passive attendant of her growth" (Auerbach 58). This is precisely the dynamic of Bathsheba's and Oak's relationship. As Oak patiently waits for her, watches her make her own judgments and mistakes, and learn from them, he appears to be the passive overseer of Bathsheba's development. While he disagrees with her behaviour and even questions it, offering sometimes reprimands, which leads him even to be compared to a mother figure (282), he does not meddle much in her affairs; he only stands by, giving her the freedom to do as she pleases. Unlike Troy or Boldwood, Oak never suffocates Bathsheba, allowing her instead to be entitled to her own agency in a society dominated by men.

Bathsheba's flaws are clearly visible on the surface, and Gabriel never overlooks them, nor does Hardy gloss over them or demonstrate a tendency to romanticise or glamourise his heroine's less appealing aspects. Hardy simply confines himself to portraying her as a real woman with flaws and defects; his heroine is affected by her vanity, her behaviour is juvenile, she is excessively proud, and she takes advantage of the novelty that being a female farmer provides her to endow herself with some ludicrous airs. Yet, she soon learns that her choices do have a significant impact on other people, and the consequences have a profound impact on her. Accordingly, such a progression, from victim to queen and back again, shows the heroine's growth into maturity and self-reliance, and in light of this, the novel could well be categorised as a Bildungsroman: Bathsheba makes mistakes and learns the hard way, but it is only after overcoming them that she can reconsider her first suitor, Gabriel Oak. She must develop psychologically in order to come to understand the unwavering love he has for her and to value Gabriel's genuine openness and lack of pretence when it comes to his feelings and ideas.

Therefore, their union may signify the heroine's rescue from the depths of her downward trajectory by faithful Oak, who, throughout the novel, counters Troy's destructiveness and Boldwood's feebleness with "oaken" solidity. But above all, their union

represents the old trope of friends that become lovers. Their shared deep affection for each other takes the form of a friendship after getting to know one another's less appealing traits. And even though Hardy publicly sustained a sceptical opinion about marriage, he makes explicit in this novel that Bathsheba and Oak's union will be a successful one because it is the product of a unique confluence of a long history, shared interests, *camaraderie*, as he puts it, and close friendship, as he states at the conclusion of his novel:

> This good-fellowship — *camaraderie* — usually occurring through similarity of pursuits, is unfortunately seldom superadded to love between the sexes, because men and women associate, not in their labours, but in their pleasures merely. Where, however, happy circumstance permits its development, the compounded feeling proves itself to be the only love which is strong as death — that love which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown, beside which the passion usually called by the name is evanescent as steam. (419)

Bathsheba and Oak's union is structured upon friendship and companionship, and Hardy emphasises how seldom that tends to happen, how rare is their relationship. This may be Hardy's way of conveying that the reason a man and a woman should come together far surpasses the need to satisfy the initial feeling of attraction, the prosaicness of passion and lust that underlies the temptation that most fall into, to idealise the romantic interest. Those feelings will, with time, eventually subside. Something deeper, of a more elemental nature, must reside in the purpose of coming together with another.

2. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

Bathsheba's downfall into the status of victim might have been an endearing one in its likeness to an enchanted midsummer night's dream; lured into the density of a forest, her eyes were dazzled by a swordplay performance that quickly took on the mystical dimension of a mesmerising spell cast upon her mind, permitting her metaphorical fall to happen almost imperceptibly. The same, however, cannot be said of the next Hardy heroine to be analysed in this study, Tess Durbeyfield.

Beyond the intricacies of their respective falls, the two heroines stand wide apart from one another, being, in fact, remarkably different. In the face of adversity, Bathsheba is autonomous, whereas Tess is passive. As Bathsheba rejoices in the privileged position her uncle's inheritance has bestowed upon her, Tess toils in stark poverty. While Bathsheba has a very interesting arc of evolution that plays well within the dynamics of queen and victim, Tess is constantly and irrevocably a victim, which causes the story to have a much grimmer tone when compared to the earlier work of *Far from the Madding Crowd*. As the author of an unsigned review published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on December 31st, 1891, is sure to humorously advertise to potential readers how the two works are quite distinct in this regard,

> The reader, intent on the seasonable pleasures of fiction, who carries home *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* for his delectation over the Christmas fire, thinking perhaps to have another *Far from the Madding Crowd*, may well feel a little shaken as the gay pastoral comedy of the opening chapters is shifted by degrees into the sombre trappings of the tragic muse. (Anonymous, *Pall Mall Gazette* 193)

Indeed, as this reviewer objectively denoted, if *Far from the Madding Crowd* was considered to be a subversive pastoral with its sporadic moments of tragedy befalling on some characters, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is simply ravaged by it.

As is well known, Hardy's late fiction, namely *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, blatantly reflects his pessimistic perception of society. And, as a consequence, it sparked far more criticism and discussion than any of his earlier works on the subject of their morality and general outlook on life. As R. G. Cox details in the introduction of *The Critical Heritage of Thomas Hardy*:

> Occasionally the critics of the eighties would touch on his pessimism … but it was not until the nineties, with *Tess* and *Jude*, that critical discussion tended to be seriously distorted by outraged conventionality and the concentration upon moral and philosophical issues. (Cox xxxvi)

Though Thomas Hardy repeatedly denied this critical accusation of being an unrelenting pessimist in the prefaces of his novels, his letters, and diaries, that did not prevent an ample debate on the subject from being sustained to support and refute such a premise. Rather, Hardy simply considered himself a thorough realist, a faithful portrayer of the harsh realities of life that sometimes seemed to be utterly devoid of any happiness. For him, it was self-evident that not a single person could legitimately deny the existence of suffering. And by this, he did not solely refer to the suffering experienced by humans. Thereupon, the politics of boundless optimism eloquently preached by the romantic poets, such as William Wordsworth[11], failed to satisfy him as they proved to be misaligned with the ruthless struggle for survival that he saw being perpetrated everywhere in the natural environment.

Hardy recalls an incident from his youth in a letter dated March 1902, addressed to Rider Haggard, who was investigating the working conditions of agricultural labourers at the time and to whom Hardy provided some information on the subject. In this letter, Hardy details the great hardship experienced by agricultural labourers, writing:

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[11] See, for instance, the poem "Lines Written in Early Spring" published in the acclaimed volume of poetry *Lyrical Ballads,* which Wordsworth wrote conjointly with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In this poem, Wordsworth muses on nature, announcing that there is joy and beauty everywhere in the natural world and that nature has a "Holy plan" saying: "If such be Nature's holy plan, /Have I not reason to lament/ What man has made of man?" (Wordsworth and Coleridge 103). Hence, the poetic subject dismisses man's suffering and the anguish that men have inflicted upon one another as unworthy of much contemplation because this agony, however terrible it may be, is an integral part of what Wordsworth designated as Nature's "holy plan".

> as a child I knew a sheep-keeping boy who to my horror shortly afterwards died of want-the contents of his stomach at the autopsy being raw turnip only. His father's wages were six shillings a week… [b]etween these examples came the great bulk of farms-wages whereon ranged from seven to nine shillings a week. (Hardy and Millgate 335)

From the content of the letter, one may surmise that Hardy offered Rider Haggard a very realistic portrayal of a delicate issue in order to powerfully illustrate how the menacing plagues that have tormented human existence since the dawn of time—famine, illness, poverty, and violence—seemed to be nothing but long-standing issues that aroused a sense of unfairness, especially because it seemed all too meaningless in its condition. Ultimately, it was this apparent ineptitude of divine providence as well as the utter blindness to such mundane human issues that led Hardy to be unable to "reconcile the idea of an omnipotent and merciful Deity with the human sufferings that he witnesse[d] daily" (Brennecke 79). Consequently, despite being brought up as a Christian, Hardy's curiosity and rationalism inclined him from an early age towards the questioning of religious doctrine, drawing him closer to the scientific and philosophical writings of diverse and influential authors such as Auguste Comte, John Stuart Mill, François Fourier, Herbert Spencer, and Leslie Stephen, to name a few.

Thomas Hardy was a man born into a scientific era. In 1859, when Hardy was just 19 years old, Charles Darwin's book *On the Origin of Species*, which introduced the theory of evolution through natural selection, was published. The significance of this lies in the fact that many contend that this was the work that prompted Hardy's intellectual shift of paradigm, leading him to abjure his religious faith completely. In fact, it is well known that Hardy prominently features Charles Darwin in his list of thinkers who influenced him, as scholars on Hardy invariably mention a famous notation in his autobiographical work, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, in which he declares himself as one "among the earliest acclaimers of *The Origin of Species*" (Hardy and Millgate 158).

Refuting the prevailing narrative of the divine creation of man, Darwin's work constructed an entirely new system of knowledge based on scientific evidence by analysing the process of evolution of animal species, from which he derives a straightforward conclusion: species are subject to mutability; therefore, equal to other animal species, humans are also subjected to evolutionary change. Such a premise, however, directly refutes the prevailing religious paradigm that the cosmos is governed by some divine and almighty entity.

As Hardy's agnosticism was cemented through all these modern thinkers' perspectives and works, and his religious faith in the benevolent, anthropomorphic God of Christian orthodoxy subsided as a whole, he gained the necessary freedom from the restraints imposed by the conventionalisms of Christian ethics to explore other plausible alternatives of thought, and that is how, according to J. O. Bailey, Hardy came to view and define himself as "an evolutionary meliorist" (Bailey 569).

The concept of meliorism consists of the idea that there is an inherent tendency toward improvement in the human condition through concerted effort. Hence, Hardy can be defined as someone who believed in the gradual process of individual betterment and progress through the evolution of the human race. Yet, to be hopeful for a better change that would benefit all requires an honest, as well as thorough, examination of what is wrong, as he expressed in his poem *Tenebris II*:

> If a way to the better there be
>
> It implies a good look at the worst (Hardy 154)

Therefore, through such insight, it is reasonable to suppose that the polemical pessimistic tone that permeates Hardy's later novels and poetry can be justified by his stance as an evolutionary meliorist. Consequently, Hardy purposefully "modifies the pastoral tragedy [once seen in his previous works, such as *Far from the Madding Crowd*] with conventions that speak forcefully to class oppression in modern urban, industrialized, secular, and rational societies" (Dolin 335–16), in order to accurately depict the reality in which our heroine, Tess Durbeyfield, lives. After all, Hardy was writing at a time when the industrial revolution had come to England and was rapidly encroaching on rural horizons.

Even though this reality is only very marginally reflected in the majority of his works, it is nonetheless personified in the ominous threshing machine at Flintcomb-ash, the blood-red reaping machine (chapter 14), and even the train (chapter 30), which invade the green pastures of the Wessex landscape and permit, as a symbol of the agricultural revolution that swept away the traditional connections to the countryside, the bourgeois usurpation of old family names belonging to that long Anglo-Saxon tradition upon which Tess's ancestors were consecrated as of a mediaeval noble lineage. Former feudal families like the D'Urbervilles, who had a more

organic relationship with the land and its people, have been replaced by individuals like Alec D'Urberville, "who is not really a D'Urberville at all, but the characteristic product of a family of nouveaux riches who adopt the name in buying the D'Urberville estate" (Anonymous, *Pall Mall Gazette* 194).

In fact, Hardy gives a very clear indication of this in the character's complete last name, Stoke-D'Urberville, which represents the conflicted nature of his family, whose origins are simpler than their pretences to grandeur, since Stokes is a rather blunt and unflattering name.

Noble houses, however, much like the human race, are also susceptible to mutability. And Tess's family name was, by the time the narrative starts, nothing more than a fanciful long-lost reverie unearthed in historical records, belonging to an eroding line of aristocracy dating back to the time of William the Conqueror, that found its rightful descendant, the plain peddler John Durbeyfield, merely by a chance encounter with the vicar of Marlott, Parson Tringham, who divulges to him this extraordinary intelligence. Were it not for this chance encounter, there would have been no tragedy. Tess would remain untouched by Alec D'Urberville, and her innocence preserved. She would have never been a "fallen woman". She would have been spared the suffering of being punished and thus been able to avoid her cruel death by hanging. Instead, she would have continued to live her uneventful life as a Wessex inhabitant, much like Gabriel Oak was before being interrupted by Bathsheba's queenly arrival, which leads one to conclude that the incident that sublimates Tess as a victim is nothing more than a mere product of chance.

Even so, as the reader is equipped with this essential knowledge about the heroine, aligning her within an historical perspective and elevating her, in terms of status, as more than a mere peasant's daughter. In the following chapter 2, the narrator swiftly shifts perspective to present yet another event running parallel to John Durbeyfield's incidental encounter with the county parson, a matriarchal country ritual of fertility, commonly known as the May Day dance, in which innocent Tess proudly participates.

Hardy introduces his heroine into the narrative through an elaborate enactment of a dying fertility tradition, welcoming spring, which can be surely interpreted as a representation of pastoral tradition, an homage to the beauty of rural life; a simple, yet meaningful festivity signalling the start of a new cycle of life that is reminiscent of the cultural customs of Celtic people, whose calendar was regulated by the cyclical change of seasons. The nearly imperceptible moulding of one season into the other informed when to carry out particular

agricultural work like ploughing, sowing, harvesting, and resting, always in accordance with the timing of nature. Such knowledge persisted over time, along with the four primary annual festivities of the Celtic calendar[12], even if they were slightly modified, symbolising the ongoing cycle of birth, death, and rebirth of nature.

Thereupon, Hardy's introduction of his heroine while participating in the May Day dance, which in the Celtic tradition translates into the name Beltane, seems to be particularly symbolic since this ethereal, pagan-like ceremony purposefully invokes the same sense of ancestry and antiquity as "the ancient and knightly family of the D'Urbervilles" (*Tess of the D'Urbervilles* 2), from which Tess descends.

Amidst this picturesque natural setting where the dance is held, Tess's figure distinctly emerges from the white gathering of all the other village girls. Nevertheless, the narrator denotes that "[s]he [Tess] was a fine and handsome girl," albeit "not handsomer than some others" (*Tess of the D'Urbervilles* 10), demonstrating that her sense of distinction is conveyed in many other ways than just her physical beauty. This sense is expressed by the all-too-familiar red motif, which in this instance takes the form of a ribbon Tess wears as an adornment for her hair and is evocative of Bathsheba's rich crimson coat that she wears in chapter 1 of *Far from the Madding Crowd* when she makes her entrance. Tess, however, unlike Bathsheba, stands out in this introductory scene not for her haughtiness but rather for the unique charm she exudes through her innocent appearance, which is epitomised by her childlike features. Still preserving traces of her infancy in her outward appearance, Tess is described by the narrator as having noticeably "large innocent eyes" (10), being possible to perceive that "[p]hases of her childhood lurked in her aspect" (11) as one "could sometimes see her twelfth year in her cheeks, or her ninth sparkling from her eyes; and even her fifth would flit over the curves of her mouth now and then" (11—12).

[12] In ancient Celtic tradition, there were four days of great cultural significance, known as the fire festivals, that marked the changing of the seasons. According to the Celts, a year was evenly divided into two halves: the darkness of Samhain (October 31st) and the light of Beltane (May 1st). Within this division, there were also two other days of celebration: Imbolc (February 1st) and Lughnasadh (August 1st). This quartering of the year was based on the solstices and equinoxes.

Nevertheless, the narrator also ensures to emphasise the “bouncing handsome womanliness” (11) of her figure, indicating that this innocent quality conveyed by her physical aspect never annulled the womanliness she was maturing into. Subsequently, Hardy’s heroine embodies a complex mingling of ambiguous elements. Still presenting an appearance marked by childlike features, Tess is portrayed as innocent and pious; an aspect which is positively reinforced by her name, a contraction of the name Theresa, which is a direct allusion to the great Spanish Christian martyr and saint (cp. Anonby 17). However, her body already donned a beautiful womanly shape with voluptuous contours.

In order to understand this dynamic of fluency between antagonistic elements converging into the feminine character of Tess, one must bear in mind the ongoing transformations taking place in the second half of the nineteenth-century when, according to Sarah Kühl, particular social norms and customs, as well as positions within society, had to be restructured as a result of the impact of industrialization and urbanisation on society. It is within a scenario of social and cultural upheaval that rises the pressing need “for labelling, for categorising, and stereotyping women” (Kühl 171). This phenomenon that assists in the categorising of womanhood, however, is reckoned to be an archaic practise with roots in Western Christian culture, and in line with this, Kühl identifies Mary and Eve as the two preliminary icons that serve as the foundation for a dual conception of womanhood. The first being qualified as: “The holy Virgin, pure and good, willing to sacrifice and to be made an instrument of God”; whereas the second is “the temptress, herself seduced by the Devil, carnal in her sinfulness, who defies the rules laid down to her and thereby causes not just her own fall but the fall of man” (Kühl 171).

Therefore, considering the fact that this was the conceptual framework structuring the Victorian dichotomy between two types of women, one can see that something of a wondrous complexity as well as boldness underpinned the process of character delineation for Tess Durbeyfield, since what the feminine character evidences is not just the effect of the polarisation of women into the image of the demure virgin or the seductive temptress, but also the delicate convergence of the two opposing ends of the Victorian gender stereotypical spectrum into a single woman, as Lyn Pykett noted: “In the figure of Tess, Hardy attempts … to negotiate the polarities of a contradictory discourse on sexuality which constructs 'woman' either as a passive, asexual, bodiless saint, or as a physical, sexually active sinner”(Pykett 158).

This “passive, asexual bodiless saint” Pykett refers to, or in other words, the Angel in the House, within Tess is detectable right after fate decreed that the “black Misfortune's baleful train” (Gray 50) should trace its course once more by letting Angel Clare select someone else to dance with instead of Tess, just as it did when John Durbeyfield ran into the parson Tringham. Tess, earning nothing but a fleeting glance of regret from a departing Angel, returns to her parents’ home in Marlott to find her mother, Joan Durbeyfield, eager to deliver the unexpected news, and her father gone to the Rolliver’s pub to celebrate his newfound pedigree, recklessly abandoning reality to live in a world of dreams.

Joan Durbeyfield, who seems to be only too willing to transfer her motherly responsibilities to her eldest daughter, soon joins in her husband’s fecklessness, wandering off where her husband had gone to celebrate and boast about such fantastic news, leaving Tess to be forcibly imparted with “a deputy-maternal attitude” (22) to care for her younger siblings. In the absence of their mother, Tess demonstrates not only her mature sense of responsibility, being in fact the only responsible member of her family, but also how she possesses the idealised features of the archetypal Angel in the House.

To apply this conceptualised image of the ideal Victorian woman to Tess, it is worth noting that this conception was deeply intertwined with issues of social class distinction, as those deserving of such a label frequently belonged to the middle or upper classes, being, therefore, seldom attributed to the woman on the opposite end of the spectrum, the “working woman”. Hence, when Hardy’s heroine is analysed through this lens, one can conclude that, on the one hand, she possesses social class elevation due to her family’s noble ancestry; whilst, on the other, she does not, since in practical terms, she is just a peddler’s daughter with no genuine social status. Nonetheless, reiterating what was detailed in the introduction of this study regarding the concept of the Angel in the House as a stereotypical product of all the desired qualities in a virtuous woman, a wife, that Coventry Patmore specified in his poem of the same name, it is possible to observe very clearly that Tess meets most of the established requirements for being deserving of such a title.

Firstly, although at this stage of the narrative Tess does not have a husband to whom she is subservient, she will in the future, and in the meantime, she is willing to be subservient to her parents' wishes and ideals, even if she disagrees with them. Tess is wise enough to condemn both parents for treating their children so carelessly while being too kind-hearted to disregard them completely, and also reproachful to some extent of her parents for having so many

children, as the narrator states that over the time of her upbringing, Tess developed a "Malthusian" attitude "towards her mother for thoughtlessly giving her so many little sisters and brothers, when it was such a trouble to nurse and provide for them" (39).

Secondly, she does engage in the domestic affairs of the home. Thirdly, she fulfils the role of the loving, wise mother to the children carelessly abandoned by their parents. And this is most certainly the cause for Tess's strong feelings about her parents in this regard, because as was mentioned in the introduction, motherhood is a reality violently imposed on Tess, she is obliged to fully assume the role of parent as her mother is described to be a "light-minded woman" (53) whose "intelligence was that of a happy child" (39). Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, she was raised to be sexually ignorant, her innocence being perfectly preserved. However, this is about to change. For, if Tess's mother is mentally inferior to her, her father often exceeds in his drinking indulgences, causing him to neglect his own responsibilities, which then fall irretrievably upon Tess's "young shoulders" (40).

Due to the effects of the festive intoxication, Tess's father is unable to fulfil his responsibility to ride their horse, Prince, and a cart laden with beehives to the Casterbridge market early in the morning. Hence, it comes as a natural solution that Tess should be the one to assume the task and undertake the trip. However, tragedy strikes as Tess, soothed by the obscurity of the woods and Prince's steady trot, drifts off into a profound sleep on the way to the market, and not until Prince is fatally struck by a noiseless mail-cart does Tess awake. Pulled violently from the nocturnal state of reverie into reality, Tess is also struck by the sensational vision of the vigorous sprout of blood "falling with a hiss into the road" (34) and splashing her "from face to skirt with the crimson drops" (34).

Prince's death is a crucial event in the narrative, for even if, in truth, Tess can hardly be responsible for the accident that befell the family horse, the gruesomeness of the scene, of seeing herself covered in blood, nefariously affects the heroine's susceptible ego, precipitating her fall into a downward spiral, as this specific moment uncovers the very first crack in Tess's own mirror of self-perception. No longer able to regard herself as an unblemished country maiden, for believing to be responsible for the fatidic act, Tess comes to regard herself in the light of a murderess, which, in turn, leads to the subsequent revelation of yet another layer of complexity in the heroine. Here contradictions begin to multiply, as adding to the labels of angel and fallen woman, through this perceptual moment which burdens Tess's persona to bear the cumbrous title of murderess, it is possible to infer, both from the scene and Tess's consequential

perverted sense of self, that she acquires demonic traits, and as the narrative advances, this darker side of Tess will be further reinforced, allowing a new path to be perused and approach Tess's persona from the spectrum Auerbach describes as a prominent and fundamental stereotypical polarization of Victorian womanhood; that of the angel and the demon.

From a more direct perspective, this single tragical incident does not solely throw the heroine into a downward spiral because it makes her dubious about her true self, but it is also sufficient to leave the whole Durbeyfield household in a precarious situation, and as is customary, women and children are typically the ones most vulnerable to unforeseeable circumstances. The terrible loss of the family horse only aggravates the already bleak prospects of the Durbeyfield's: the shiftlessness of her alcoholic father and co-dependent mother, both excessively simple-minded, combined with Tess's vulnerable mental state, highly consumed with a dooming sense of moral responsibility towards her family, prompts her to abandon her reluctance and finally concede to her mother's insistent pressure to go claim kinship to the Stoke-D'Urbervilles.

Yet, as Tess finally concedes to her mother's wishes, she fails to exercise adequate control over her situation, completely predisposing herself at the hands of her mother, as she expressly says when her mother assists in her preparation to depart for her grand journey: "Do what you like with me, mother" (54). Joan intently attends to her daughter's physical appearance with the purpose of making her look not just presentable but physically appealing, selecting

> the white frock that Tess had worn at the club-walking [so that] the airy fulness of which, supplementing her enlarged coiffure, imparted to her developing figure an amplitude which belied her age, and might cause her to be estimated as a woman when she was not much more than a child. (54–55)

From this account, it is possible to infer that Tess's mother seeks to highlight her daughter's "luxuriance of aspect... [the] fullness of growth, which made her appear more of a woman than she really was" (46). In other words, Tess's mother is enabling her daughter to become a "physical, sexually active sinner" (Pykett 158). However, Tess is completely oblivious to her own beauty, with a shapely figure and a lovely face that can effortlessly entice the opposite sex.

This, coupled with her vulnerability, inexperience, and lack of egoistic drive, makes her an easy target to exploitation, so Tess is essentially set out on a trap by her parents.

As Margaret Oliphant observed, writing a review for the *Blackwood's Magazine* in March 1892, the impression one gets is that "the mother... is ready to sell the beautiful daughter for the benefit of the family, and think no harm" (Oliphant 220). Throughout this whole process of preparation, Tess is described as being "undecided", visibly unsettled, and this "seeming indecision" of hers was a "misgiving" (58) hint that she was perceiving that danger should be looming ahead, yet she passively allows her mother's apparent assurance to allay her anxieties until she departs. At the end, the image the narrator consecrates of Tess dressed in white being walked alongside her mother and siblings, who holding out her hands would look "at her meditatively from time to time, as at one who was about to do great things" (56–57), is faintly reminiscent of a human sacrifice, which only reinforces the premise of Tess as a victim of her own family.

But these high expectations would remain unmet. Tess's parents' ambitions for a grand marriage match for their daughter that would improve their financial position and social reputation miserably crumble, as Joan's efforts to enhance Tess's physical attributes to put their "fairest side outward" (40) amounted only to their disgrace without appreciably alleviating the family's indigency. For as soon as Alec D'Urberville's malicious eyes rivet upon Tess's handsome figure, she is doomed to pass from a simple country maiden to a fallen woman, as she embarks on a literal downward gig-ride with Alec, symbolically foreshadowing her impending loss of innocence.

The term "fallen woman", used to stereotype Tess, is an archaic one, with roots in the biblical fall in the Garden of Eden, commonly used by Victorians to designate the victim of seduction, a woman who, like Eve, fell from an original state of innocence. One aspect of this cultural myth that should be emphasised is that it possesses a certain diversity to it, in the sense that there are a few possible variations, not solely being applied to women who saw themselves forced to resort to one of the only available trades in Victorian times, prostitution. On a more general note, this punitive term served as a symbol for any sort of deviant promiscuous behaviour, being applied to a wide range of perilous situations in which a woman could find herself. Therefore, following this line of thought, when compared to Bathsheba, Tess can be less ambivalent in terms of how stereotypes fit into her character since it is indisputable that Tess is

a fallen woman or a victim; Hardy intentionally conceived her to be so, and it would be absurd to argue otherwise.

As a fallen woman, Tess Durbeyfield follows the same line of tragedy traced previously by characters such as Fanny Robin in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and Lucetta Templeman in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Though Hardy is diverse in the way he narrates stories about his fallen women, he skilfully weaves the plot to create a different spectrum of circumstances that would lead to that unfortunate path. As noted in the previous chapter, seduced, left unwedded, and pregnant, Fanny "becomes the archetypal fallen woman of Victorian melodrama", dying at childbirth (Wittenberg 37). Whilst Lucetta, living a dubious life, is condemned to the public humiliation of a skimmington ride, the stress of which leads to her miscarriage and subsequent death. Hence, Tess seems to be the product of a line of preceding fallen women in Hardy's canon, as she combines elements of Fanny Robin and Lucetta Templeman. In fact, it is possible to make the case that Fanny Robin served as Tess Durbeyfield's earlier prototype, since both arouse the same feelings of pity and empathy in the reader and both struggle in their misery. In addition, it is clear from comparing Lucetta and Tess that both women shared the same trait of being subjected to abhorrent public humiliation, which predetermines the violent annihilation of the fallen woman, as convention dictates. As the elements of two distinct characters were combined with the intention of creating a character who, in her societal status as a fallen woman, ought to be undermined and destroyed for her lack of conformance to society's strict standards, it should be noted, however, that this is something over which Tess has no influence. The events that lead to her fall are oblivious to her since, ultimately, it is her parents' determination to obtain recognition from the new branch of the family that enmeshes Tess in great ruin as she meets the widow's son, Alec D'Urberville, the reckless sensualist or "child of the devil" (Anonymous, *Athenaeum* 197), as a reviewer from the *Athenaeum* dubbed him, who leads Tess to peril.

Enticed by her looks and with no good intentions, Alec plays flirtatious games with Tess once he comes to retrieve her from her parents' house to work in the attendance of the widow's poultry farm. In the setting of the Stoke-D'Urberville mansion, the same dynamic of male-engendered events of gazing at the female that characterised the opening chapters of *Far from the Madding Crowd* is developed. In both novels, it is possible to observe how the male gaze presupposes a defining effect upon the female subject by penetrating the subject's self-perception and, through the process of sexual objectification, demeans them—or at least attempts to, as it did with Bathsheba—while empowering the voyeur. Lecherous Alec insistently

rivets his eyes on the spectacle Tess's feminine body offers, resembling the two elders who crept upon fair Susannah[13] while bathing. Throughout the time Tess spends at the mansion, she is constantly being secretly surveyed by the pernicious male observer, as when she desperately tries to learn how to whistle melodies for Mrs. D'Urbervilles pet finches, and Alec exclaims after quietly observing her unsuccessful attempts:

> "Upon my honour!" cried he, "there was never before such a beautiful thing in nature or art as you look, 'Cousin' Tess… I have been watching you from over the wall—sitting like Impatience on a monument, and pouting up that pretty red mouth to a whistling shape, and whooing, and privately swearing, and never being able to produce a note." (70)

Shortly after her arrival, Tess comes to learn that Alec is, figuratively, the serpent that "hisses where the sweet birds sing"(93), luringly feeding her the forbidden fruit, in this case strawberries, an image that has undeniably strong sexual connotations and is presented as a preliminary image of penetration that will be consummated once Alec seizes the perfect opportunity by deceitfully rescuing Tess from her querulous drunken companions and driving her into the midst of a slumberous chase, where the most important erotic scene, famously known as the "Garden" scene, due to its Edenic connotations, unfolds.

Purporting many similar elements to the ones that led to the first tragic event in the narrative, Prince's death, Tess's experience with Alec paradoxically reproduces the exact same sequence: the inebriation of her father now mirrors that of her companions; in both circumstances, Tess acts impulsively by accepting her father's responsibility and Alec's offer to

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[13] The Biblical tale of Susannah and the Elders (Book of Daniel, chapter 13) is commonly interpreted as a moralising allegory, as most biblical tales tend to be, and depending on the context, as a classic example of masculine voyeurism. The tale is about a wealthy Jewish woman from Babylonia named Susannah and two elderly men who covertly watch her while bathing. Driven by intense lust, they plot to entrap her by threatening to accuse her of adultery if she does not concede to having sexual intercourse, but Susannah, as a woman of strong faith and high moral spirit, refuses their advances, and they fulfil their threat. As Susannah is being judged for adultery in court, she prays to God for help. In response, God sends a man by the name of Daniel to expose the judges as false witnesses and save Susannah from her death sentence.

take her; in both scenarios, she is defeated by her physical exhaustion, which accommodates her drowsiness, leading to yet another opportunity for something terrible to happen.

Regarding this moment in the novel, some critics claim that Tess's passivity renders her accountable for her suffering because she allowed her ruin to happen by deliberately forsaking herself at the hands of Alec. As Margaret Oliphant states, she ought to have known better than to "have trusted herself at midnight with the unscrupulous young master who was pursuing her, and whose habits she was fully informed of, in order to escape from the drunken and riotous companions" (Oliphant 221) and to, following her escape, yield completely to her fatigue, which seems to be a recurrent pattern for Tess, for she is, according to Boumelha, essentially "asleep, or in reverie, at almost every important part of the plot" (Boumelha 121). Nevertheless, in the moment prior to the rape, Hardy provides a thorough account of Tess's demanding life, and her extraordinary fortitude to endure continuously lengthy and heavy workdays, saying,

> She was inexpressibly weary. She had risen at five o'clock every morning of that week, had been on foot the whole of each day, and on this evening had in addition walked the three miles to Chaseborough, waited three hours for her neighbours without eating or drinking … she had then walked a mile of the way home, and had undergone the excitement of the quarrel, till, with the slow progress of their steed, it was now nearly one o'clock. (85)

And yet, as Morgan elaborates further, when Alec tries to encircle "her waist with his arms to support her" (85), Tess tries to retaliate against his advances by adopting a defensive stance and pushing him almost into the road. Thus, citing Morgan, this cannot be classified as "dumb, passive yielding but self-determined, volatile resistance" (Morgan 66). Nevertheless, as stated above in the excerpt, Tess was inexpressibly weary, and as Alec prepares a bed made of fallen leaves to accommodate Tess's numb body, placing his overcoat over her, she immediately falls "into reverie upon the leaves where he had left her" (89). Whilst sleeping tenderly, Alec naturally takes advantage of Tess's vulnerability and appropriates her body for his pleasure, tracing a "coarse pattern" upon Tess's "beautiful feminine tissue" (90). Thus, as Rosemarie Morgan concludes, "it is not that Tess sleeps at an inappropriate moment but that she suffers an appropriation of her sleep" (Morgan 64). Moreover, to support Tess's blamelessness, Morgan cleverly brings forth a crucial aspect, that Hardy purposefully employs the word "appropriate", as the following excerpt demonstrates: "why so often the coarse appropriates the finer" (90); to

convey the idea that Alec's action is the equivalent of a criminal "act of theft, a dishonest appropriation of another's property with the intent to deprive her of it permanently. The term suffices to denote the moral nature of the act, which passes beyond sexual assault to take account of violation of rightful ownership" (Morgan 67).

As a result of this heinous act of appropriation, Tess is reduced to the roles of fallen woman and victim. She is forced into the latter by her family's lineage of nobility, her parents' unrealistic castle-building, the lust of men and their devious manipulations. But Tess is also a victim of society because the moment she chooses to leave with Alec, a woman maliciously exclaims: "Out of the frying-pan into the fire!" (82), which means that by escaping the quarrel and going with Alec, Tess got herself into a bigger problem than the one she was trying to avoid, implying that her companions knew what was going to happen to her once she left with Alec and rejoiced in it without attempting to prevent it. And finally, Hardy also signifies that Tess is a victim of the unknown pre-deterministic forces of the universe, as divine providence fails to intervene when a grave injustice is being committed; nothing availed Tess in her fall, not even the birds nesting in the chase's trees that remained undisturbed, carelessly napping while Tess lost her maidenhood (90).

During the Victorian era, a woman's identity and social respectability were intimately linked to her sexual status. This notion conveys the commonality of Victorian society's double standards as, on the one hand, it required women to be taught from a very young age that any form of involvement with a man who was not their husband, if perchance exposed, would most certainly result in irreparable damage to their reputation; while, on the other hand, a man's engagement into a sexual relationship prior to marriage, or outside of it, was generally found to be a mild and completely pardonable offense. For a woman the repercussions of a fleeting act of passion or, in horrific circumstances such as Tess's, abuse, represented an unavoidable entrapment into a derogatory term cast upon her person, and Hardy effectively captures the insurmountable doom a fallen woman would experience, as upon turning the final page of chapter 11, he greets his readers with the heading of phase the second, "Maiden No More". From this moment on, Tess is irrevocably changed, but not inwardly, as perhaps one would presume, for despite her "fall", Tess's spirit and integrity are perfectly preserved; in the eyes of society, however, she is different, as the narrator notes by stating, "[a]n immeasurable social chasm was to divide our heroine's personality thereafter from that previous self of hers who stepped from her mother's door to try her fortune at Trantridge poultry-farm" (90–91).

This striking assertion effectively corroborates Hardy's moral stance against the ingrained social construction that chastity has a bearing on a person's inherent worth or character, something that is also bravely expressed through the subtitle of the novel, which alludes to the protagonist as "A pure woman faithfully presented". Hardy's decision to add this defiant inscription was considered, as he reflects on the preface of his work, to be, "the estimate left in a candid mind of the heroine's character—an estimate that nobody would be likely to dispute" (*Tess of the D'Urbervilles xi*). But Hardy was dreadfully mistaken; the vast majority of readers and critics vehemently disagreed with this subtitle and were unable to find any reasonable grounds on which to fundament Hardy's insistence on labelling Tess as a pure woman.

When reviewing *Tess* for the *Quarterly Review* in April 1892 under the title "Culture and Anarchy", Mowbray Morris addressed this dissatisfaction with the subtitle by making the following observation:

> Mr. Squeers once with perfect justice observed that there was no Act of Parliament which could prevent a man from calling his house an island if it pleased him to do so. It is indisputably open to Mr. Hardy to call his heroine a pure woman; but he has no less certainly offered many inducements to his readers to refuse her the name. (Morris 229)

Unfortunately, Mr. Morris failed to comprehend Hardy's work through the lens he was trying to present his heroine — as a victim of circumstances and society — and like him, many others, as it is made explicit by a comment in an unsigned critical piece for the *Saturday Review* on January 16th, 1892: "Still, Mr. Hardy did well to let her pay the full penalty" (Anonymous, *Saturday Review* 205).

The cause for such outrage, Mary Jacobus explains, is that by deeming Tess pure, Hardy was not only defying Victorian convention by featuring a fallen woman as his heroine rather than a virtuous wife, a figure that clearly poses a threat to the constrained paradigm that insists on the categorization of femininity, but he also explicitly questions society's traditional idea of feminine purity, something that came to be seen as somewhat problematic since,

> To those who accept a Christian definition of purity, it is preposterous, and to those who do not, irrelevant. The difficulty in both cases is the same—that of regarding Tess as somehow immune to the experiences she undergoes. To invoke purity in connection with a career that includes not simply seduction, but collapse into kept woman and murderess, taxes the linguistic resources of the most permissive conventional moralist. (Jacobus 319—320)

As Tess's most fervent apologist, Thomas Hardy succeeds in constructing his attack against the hypocrisy of traditional values upheld by Victorian society, undermining its institutions and attitudes by adamantly vindicating the term "pure" for the kind of womanhood that Tess Durbeyfield represents. Indeed, Hardy goes further and does something unseen in other Victorian novels and authors: he accurately portrays the patriarchal system as the contradictory structure that it was, while also attempting to liberate his heroine from all of the prejudices and judgements commonly associated with it, rather than condemning or condescending to the women who had to endure such a system on a daily basis.

After facing a serious amount of rejection on the grounds of morality, Hardy's twelfth novel was accepted for publication by the *Graphic*, though only after being severely modified. These format changes had to do with the removal of scenes that were deemed to be equally outrageous, such as Alec seducing Tess, the birth of their illegitimate child, and even the famous scene of Angel Clare wheelbarrowing the dairymaids across the stream rather than carrying them in his arms, because that would not have been considered appropriate (cp. Cox xxiii). But when it was finally published in three volumes in December 1891, *Tess* was simultaneously hailed as Hardy's greatest novel and condemned for its enmity to the moral and intellectual establishment (cp. Dolin 334).

As was previously made clear by the aforementioned critical remarks, the contentious work and protagonist aroused a wide range of reactions and opinions, most of them undoubtedly negative. However, there were also some positive responses to it, for instance, in *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* there are some personal accounts of the public reception of the novel, one of which rather humorous, reflecting how society's remarks on *Tess* were of a curious sort,

> "The Duchess of Abercorn tells … that the novel has saved her all-future trouble in the assortment of her friends. They have been almost fighting across her dinner-table over Tess's

> character. What she now says to them is 'Do you support her or not?' If they say 'No indeed. She deserved hanging: a little harlot!' she puts them in one group. If they say 'Poor wronged innocent!' and pity her, she puts them in the other group where she is herself." (Hardy and Millgate 258)

Indeed, there were critics who supported Tess in the same way that the Duchess of Abercorn did. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* also received high praise from D.F. Hannigan in the *Westminster Review* in December 1892, who classified the novel as a "monumental work" that inaugurated "a distinct epoch in English fiction. From beginning to end it bears the hallmark of Truth on every page of it" and supported Hardy by describing him as a "modest type of author" who "seems to be utterly unconscious of the fact that he has written one of the greatest novels of this century" (Hannigan 255–256).

Additionally, there were critics who, like Hardy, believed Tess blameless, as was the case with W. P. Trent, who in November 1892 wrote a critique for the *Sewanee Review,* headlined simply "The Novels of Thomas Hardy", where he stated, "[a]s we all know Tess, the milkmaid heroine, has fallen from virtue through no fault of her own" (Trent 243). While others perfectly understood Hardy's intent with his work, like Clementina Black, when she stated in her review for the *Illustrated London News* on the 9th of January 1892, that the "essence lies in the perception that a woman's moral worth is measurable not by any one deed, but by the whole aim and tendency of her life and nature" (Black 202). Then proceeding to declare Hardy as an author, belonging to a minority of authors who display through their work the clear-sighted as well as the bravery of their creative minds.

Indeed, as Clementina Black observed, Hardy's advanced intellect allowed him to bravely acknowledge that his heroine's virtue rests on the integrity of her moral character and not on other external factors, her sexual encounter being of limited significance to her purity of heart and good nature, as her virtue rests on the integrity of her moral character and not on other external factors. Tim Dolin articulately develops on this idea to clarify the debates at the core of Tess's melodrama, stating, "[v]iolent change cannot alter what is intrinsic: she is a pure woman, in spite of rape, adultery, murder; she is a Norman D'Urberville, in spite of the long deterioration of her family line" (Dolin 341). In other words, the premise that Hardy pleads for is the following: despite the passage of time or the changes it brings, no matter how brutally

they are classified, they cannot alter what is intrinsic to one's nature; and that is Tess's purity, because she shares the same essence as her noble forebears.

Yet, by the time Tess finally returns to her parents' home, her mother, surprised by her daughter's unexpected visit, is appalled to learn what tragedy has unfolded and, much like Hardy's contemporary critics, admonishes Tess for not being more cautious if it was not her intention to have Alec D'Urberville as a husband, to which Tess desperately responds,

> "O mother, my mother!" … "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? Ladies know what to fend hands against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o' learning in that way, and you did not help me!". (101)

Through this agonised cry of sorrow for her circumstances and angry revolt against poor parental support, it is possible to verify, firstly, that Tess's new condition as a fallen woman is mitigated by her naturally docile disposition; the Angel in the House within Tess is still empowered to shine through. Secondly, the answer she provides to her mother's late advice is most fitting, and it displays Tess's intellectual superiority; for in accordance with the societal standards of Victorian morality and the venerated ideal of femininity, Tess was brought up by her mother to be an exemplary maiden, completely innocent and sexually ignorant, utterly devoid of any knowledge of sex, as conventionality mandated. Therefore, Tess's mother, ethically speaking, cannot hold her accountable since she, along with her husband, is responsible for loosely throwing their daughter into a perilous pattern of victimisation and actively sustaining it by acting as the perpetrators of Tess's suffering, perhaps unintentionally, but certainly unable to be absolved of their parental duty to safeguard their daughter.

Regrettably, now that the irreparable damage has been done, Tess must bear the burden of the social divide. To this end, Hardy persistently and cunningly plants into the text a number of unsettling details and situations that not only heighten the sense of impending doom that comes with Tess's new condition and her inability to disengage from it, but also, on a profound level, enable the collective eye to serve as the locus for moral judgement.

As soon as Tess leaves the Stoke-D'Urberville mansion, incidents of this kind will tend to repeat themselves ceaselessly, always transposing the denunciatory tone, which only contributes to amplifying Tess's excruciating feeling of guilt. It happens on Tess's way home,

when she is greeted by an odd stranger, a follower of the Reverend Clare, who, wielding a pot of bloodred paint, writes the text of biblical commandments on any decent, available surface, and as if endowed with the power of omniscience and able to read through Tess's flesh, the carving of the "coarse pattern" (90) that had been inscribed on her body by Alec D'Urberville, luridly exalts the words "THY, DAMNATION, SLUMBERETH, NOT" (98). The intensity of the scarlet colour and the accusatory tone of the words leave Tess feeling as if it was not a coincidence at all, but rather a warning that her sinfulness will not pass unpunished.

Even so, this is only the first sign of the upcoming social judgement and ostracization that Tess is still to face, as upon her return to her parents' house from Tandridge, Tess attracts the attention of individuals who were intrigued by Durbeyfield's apparent social rise. This sort of attention, however, which delighted Joan Durbeyfield, will be short-lived, for soon innocuous conversations inquiring about her stay at Mrs. D'Urberville's estate will turn into obnoxiously critical, probing stares and whispered comments about her delicate condition. This feeling is perpetuated, if not intensified, after the birth of the child, and Tess is forced to take up work as a field-hand, binding sheaves of wheat behind a primitive reaping machine. In this instance, Hardy illustrates yet another episode of public humiliation of the fallen woman, as the other field women sing "a few verses" of a ballad "mischievously", referring to the typical "maid who went to the merry green wood and came back a changed [in] state" (114).

The message conveyed by the verses is clear: once a woman had fallen, she was forever declared a social outcast. Such is eloquently demonstrated by the author of a 1791 book with a rather suggestive title, "Advice to unmarried women: to recover and reclaim the fallen; and to prevent the fall of others into the snares and consequences of seduction", where an explicit advert is provided to all young women that if they fall, the future awaiting them is one of hardship. As the author exemplifies, the difficulty a fallen woman will face when looking for employment, even for a menial position as a maid, in any respectable household, the chances of being accepted would be exponentially low. Hence, the fact that Tess is shown labouring in the field among other women does not imply that she has been accepted or forgiven by the community. Quite the opposite, there is a marked division between Tess, who now stands as an example of impurity, and the other women, who are classified as pure. Consequently, this scene not only underlines the common idea that the fallen woman should be shunned but also how society's treatment of this ostracised group was intentional to inflict a sense of shame upon the individual, and Tess comes to understand fairly quickly that people looked upon her "as a figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence"(105–106) because "[s]he had been made to

break an accepted social law”. Yet, to her own conception, there was “no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly” (106).

Nevertheless, even though Tess never regards herself as an anomaly, it has been demonstrated that she represents a dangerous deviation from the common rule. Still, in spite of this, there is this sense of fascination towards the enigmatic icon of the fallen woman, towards the figure of Tess, which makes her simultaneously “a social warning” (104) to the other young maids, as typified in the musical tune, and “the most interesting personage in the village” (104). Tess embodies the piquant blend of awe and condemnation for the fallen woman’s abasement due to the transgressive nature of the sexual sin, which indeed leads her to be repudiated and shamed but also transforms her into this object of intense curiosity and fascination because of her exceptionality, and this sense of fascination is derived, as Auerbach explains, “from the tension between social possibility, in which the community, more elastic than it seems, absorbs the fallen woman comfortably, and a social myth that aggrandizes the outcast” (Auerbach 170). And, indeed, I would contend that this sense of fascination Tess arouses will be morphed into a mystical dimension of power when, after a day at work, she returns home to find her baby dying.

In despair for the imminent loss of her child without salvation for his soul, Tess names him Sorrow and baptises him in front of the small congregation of her young siblings. As Tess invokes the sacred rite, uttering words of redemption over her child, the other children simply “gazed up at her with more and more reverence” (118). In this ceremonial moment Tess transforms herself completely under the impressionable and persistent gaze of the children: “[s]he did not look like Sissy to them now, but as a being large, towering, and awful—a divine personage with whom they had nothing in common” (118). The description the narrator offers is filtered through the visual perception of the group of children which makes the scene altogether very impactful, due to their innocence and sincereness of feeling, but also because Tess’s figure is aggrandized by the action, both literally and figuratively, and endowed with a sense of authority whilst playing her role as a priestess, as the narrator notes, “[h]er figure looked singularly tall and imposing as she stood in her long white nightgown” (117). This scene, which depicts a rare instance of the heroine transcending herself, represents Tess’s liberation from the victim and fallen woman role to take on magnificent queenly proportions, leading to the conclusion that Tess is also able to trace the pattern Auerbach defines as being preliminary to all other conceptions of Victorian womanhood.

Even though, according to Victorian conventionality, Tess's condition as a fallen woman invalidates her transcendence into the role of priestess or minister of the holy sacrament, Auerbach defends that the fall of a woman "empowers her to break through the design of her world" (Auerbach 161). Thereupon, Tess, by embodying the "defiant powers of all womanhood" (Auerbach 163), is empowered to go against the Victorian conventionality and freely perform the defiant act of baptising her illegitimate child, uttering with no shame or fear that the soul of her child was cleansed through of all sins as well as her own, allegorically vindicating the redemption of both.

Furthermore, Auerbach's statement can also find support within the text if to recover the moment when Tess is asleep in the Chase's bed of fallen leaves and parallel this scene with Bathsheba's episode as a runaway wife. Firstly, it is possible to denote a resemblance in the way Bathsheba slips into the protective encumbrance of a natural hollow, which is described, I recall, as "a tangled couch of fronds and stems" (*Far from the Madding Crowd* 328), whilst Tess falls into a "sort of couch or nest" made "in the deep mass of dead leaves" (87). And curiously, both are, in their distinct surrounding atmosphere, aware to the sound of songbird.

Subsequently, as both, entranced by a state of reverie, gradually recede into unfeelingness, succumbing into a peaceful sleep, they allow a transformative experience to occur. Thus, since the similarity between scenes is evident, it opens up the possibility to discuss Tess's elevation to the position of queen, following the tragedy that renders her a victim, just as had happened previously to Bathsheba.

Regarding this element of metamorphosis which both heroines denote, Auerbach brilliantly defends, grounded on the text of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* text, how there is a great potential for growth and renewal within the figure of the fallen woman,

> One constant element in the myth of the fallen woman reaching back to the Old Testament and to Milton's epic recasting of it, is the absolute transforming power of the fall. At Eve's fall, Milton tells us, "Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat/Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe/That all was lost" (*Paradise Lost*, IX, 781-784) … Once cast into solitude, the fallen woman, like Milton's Eden, is irretrievably metamorphosed (Auerbach 160)

This seems to be precisely what happened to Tess. Through her own desire to cleanse her child of sin and exonerate his innocent soul from eternal damnation and guilt, she is enlightened by

the experience, which operates as a transformative moment, ultimately kindling her own regeneration enabling her to change "from simple girl to complex woman" (123).

After the spring of her baby's death, Tess is urged to commence life anew and so begins the next stage of the story, Tess free from all encumbrances, departing from Marlott to go work as a milkmaid to the picturesque pastoral setting of Talbothays dairy. Amid this idyllic scenario, where beautiful landscape descriptions comparable to those in *Far from the Madding Crowd* begin to sprout abundantly, Tess is once again conjoined by fate with Angel Clare, a young farm apprentice and the son of a neighbouring clergyman, with whom she quickly falls in love, as well as the three other dairymaids, Marian, Izz Huett, and Retty, who comically daydream about him.

J. Hillis Miller, in his analysis of Hardy's writings, recognises romantic love to be the dominant theme of his fiction and poetry, as his work consistently "tells the story of a love affair which emerges from the dreaming background of Wessex … and is followed to its predestined end" (qtd. in Irwin 194).

Indeed, it is the romantic love that springs and blossoms between Tess and Angel capacitating her full regeneration to be completed after the death of her child with the same power as transformative magic. When hearing the airy notes of Angel Clare's harp playing floating over the verdant hills, Tess is tantalised by its melodic sound, pursuing its source like a fascinated bird into the midst of wilderness. As foretold by this reencounter, the early days of romance Tess and Angel experience at Talbothays dairy are idealistically portrayed as a renewed Edenic myth, with direct allusions occasionally made in that regard, as the following passage proves:

> The spectral, half-compounded, aqueous light which pervaded the open mead, impressed them with a feeling of isolation, as if they were Adam and Eve. At this dim inceptive stage of the day Tess seemed to Clare to exhibit a dignified largeness both of disposition and physique, an almost regnant power. (162)

Beyond the allusions to the Edenic myth, reflecting the blissfulness of their romance and conferring to the novel a broader metaphysical and philosophical dimension, this passage also reveals that Tess's regal splendour, first enveloped the baptism scene, is being perpetuated throughout her infatuation with Angel Clare. Though one fails to be certain whether this is merely a direct effect of the transcendentalist energy that marked the event of the baptism, an

inherent feature of the heroine's character, a passing feeling sparked by the passionate love that binds her to her lover, or simply the result of all these different variants, intricately interwoven, what is certain is that when Angel studies her voluptuous figure and lovely semblant up close against the misty, irradiated atmosphere of the greenery pastures of Talbothays, what he perceives is the ideal of femininity, her queenly aura oozing a "dignified largeness" (162) that elevates her above all others.

At this moment in the narrative, stereotypically speaking, Tess is nothing but a magnificent creation of womanhood, dazzling Angel's eyes, who paints her being in a golden light, worshipping her as an archetypal figure as he ceases to regard her as merely a milkmaid, only to acquire in his fanciful imagination the elemental quality of "a visionary essence of woman" (162) consecrated to the status of a goddess, the whole feminine sex crystallised into a single beautiful human shape. As is evidenced by this piece, for Hardy the main factor of relevance to exalt in his feminine characters, and which both Bathsheba Everdene and Tess Durbeyfield are endowed with, is the extraordinary sense of womanhood which both tend to redefine in a time and place where everything was highly circumscribed for women. Therefore, to his own conception, accepting what was stigmatised by society—female physicality, and subsequently, sexuality—was the most efficient method to accomplish this, and in that order, Hardy embraces female sexuality as an essential, natural component of his feminine characters, which is what ultimately gives them that lauded elemental quality, which critics often praised as a distinctive feature separating feminine Hardyesque characters from any other, as W. P. Trent beautifully elaborates on this subject, writing the following words about Tess:

> She has the elemental freshness, the odour of earth, that Mr. Hardy's other peasants have, but she has also an elemental strength and nobility that they have not. This elemental freshness, this elemental strength and nobility, make her a woman fit to set in the gallery of Shakespeare's women—which is but to say that she is a creation of genius that time cannot devour. (Trent 244)

In the same way Bathsheba Everdene is referred to as "a fair product of Nature" (*Far from the Madding Crowd* 44), Tess is described as a "fresh and virginal daughter of Nature" (150) , who in the "luminous gloom" (162) of early dawn metamorphoses into the bewitching vision of Artemis and Demeter, the Greek deities of chastity and agriculture, respectively, demonstrating

how these women are inextricably linked to the soil on which they work, and how their physicality is highlighted and praised through that aspect; both are fundamentally Eve-like in their sensibilities, partaking in the assimilated spirit in tune with the surrounding natural environment.

Moreover, as this renowned quality captivates Angel Clare's gaze to be enraptured by Tess's figure, there is yet another aspect to consider that equally contributes to his fascination. For him, Tess epitomises the simplicity and beauty of the life he chose when he disregarded his family's expectations for his future as a minister. Refusing to emulate his father and brothers, he instead chose to devote himself to the study of agriculture and farming in the hope of having his own property one day. And in Tess, in his idealised vision, he finds his innocent Eve, the companion who would suit him best in his endeavours to be a farmer. However, this is merely an illusion, bound to fade, for she can only be thought of in such terms to a significant extent.

As already mentioned, the heroine can definitely be considered as naturally endowed with an elemental Eve-like sensibility, in the sense that she is a daughter of the soil, very much connected to nature. Yet, in terms of innocence, Tess cannot be equated with Eve before the fall, as Angel does, as to his ignorance at this stage, his Eve has already been seduced by the deceitful serpent, failed her God and Adam and, consequently, fallen from grace.

Such is made evident by the narrator as he deviates from this line of thought to compare Tess to other biblical female characters, proceeding to state how Angel would "often... think of the Resurrection hour" in the moments he spent with Tess, while in fact, little did he know "that the Magdalen might be at his side" (162). As Hardy points out, it is more appropriate to consider Tess as a sinful Magdalene rather than Eve—since she is the woman marginalized by her adulterous behaviour and elevated by Victorians into a religious, almost saintly icon, the sinner that Christ did not overlook and the lost soul that He works to redeem (cp. Roberts 67).

Thus, if following the line of the Genesis story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Tess and Alec D'Urberville are naturally attributed the roles of Eve and the serpent in paradise, delegating to Angel Clare the final role of the noble, newly born Adam. Yet such a simplistic structure of thought is a fallacy since, to my view, just as Tess is no Eve, Angel is no Adam either. He, for who in Tess's imagination is revered as a god-like Adam, along with the other three milkmaids, is in fact another serpent slithering around in this garden of Eden. Angel Clare may not be malicious or deceitful in intent—since, admittedly, he was created to stand in stark contrast to Alec—yet, his greatest flaw, one might find, is that he is a "slave to custom and conventionality" (332). A flaw carefully concealed beneath his nonconformist pretence and

rebellious dissidence from his father's "rigid fundamental Christianity" (Jacobus 329). This external pretence of being a free-thinking man, however, quickly collapses as, in his own blind idealisation of Tess, he tries to impose this unrealistic image he has produced of her on his parents only for the sake of their approval of her, despite knowing that they will most likely not. Angel may surely believe that Tess is indeed pure at heart, a virtuous woman capable of loving him devotedly as a worthy wife should, perfectly befitting of the stereotypical image of the Angel in the House, as Angel does imagine Tess to be so, and in essence is, but not in the eyes of society. To Angel, Tess does not solely reunite in herself all the desired attributes to be a perfect replica of the ideal wife in accordance with social norms; but also, Tess, in her position as a milkmaid, being well-aware of her ways around a farm, would be the ideal companion to have by his side to commence his venture as a farmer, thus making a perfect farmer's wife.

And here is where the subliminal conflict arises; Angel's notion of the ideal wife does not correspond to the same one his family entertains for him. His parents' conception of an ideal suitable wife for their youngest son materialises in the shape of Mercy Chant, a devout and pious young woman, "the only daughter of his father's neighbour and friend" (194), who stands to all intents and purposes as the faithful representation of the stereotype of the Angel in the House in the novel. Being described as a "blameless creature" who excelled at "Antinomianism and Bible-classes" (194), she is the lady for whom Angel's parents quietly hoped "that he might wed someday" (194).

In chapter 26, Angel discusses with his father precisely what kind of wife would suit him best when he becomes a farmer, asking, "Would not a farmer want a wife, and should a farmer's wife be a drawing-room wax-figure, or a woman who understood farming?" (192). With this query, Angel explicitly alludes to Tess and Mercy Chant in order to contrast them and inform his father of his predicament. He believes that by speaking with his father he would be able to persuade him that Tess is the best choice and, only then, introduce her to his parents. However, his father is adamant about Mercy Chant, as he notes to his son, "for a pure and saintly woman you will not find one more to your true advantage, and certainly not more to your mother's mind and my own, than your friend Mercy" (203). To which Angel contraposes,

> "Yes, yes; Mercy is good and devout, I know. But, father, don't you think that a young woman equally pure and virtuous as Miss Chant, but one who, in place of that lady's ecclesiastical accomplishments, understands the duties of farm life as well as a farmer himself, would suit me infinitely better?" (203)

In practical terms, Angel is referring to a woman that would "be able to milk cows, churn good butter, make immense cheeses; know how to sit hens and turkeys, and rear chickens, to direct a field of labourers in an emergency, and estimate the value of sheep and calves" (203). His father cannot disagree, "[y]es; a farmer's wife; yes, certainly. It would be desirable" (203). Still, his father simply "persisted in his conviction that a knowledge of a farmer's wife's duties came second to a Pauline view of humanity" (203). In this exchange between father and son, the conflict between two types of women becomes evident—the farmer's wife and the virtuous wife, one signifying laborious effort and activity, the other contemplating passivity; in essence, the archetypal conflict between the fallen woman and the Angel in the House, represented in the novel by Tess Durbeyfield and Mercy Chant, respectively. Still, Angel seems to disregard the fact that Tess's occupation as a milkmaid, theoretically speaking, implies a nullification of the pretence of being an angelic domestic wife since it directly vindicates activity over passivity, as he so eloquently stated in the previous question to his father about which wife would suit him best. The relevance of this, however, lies in the fact that it may well constitute yet another valid reason for his parents' disapproval. Beyond Tess's lack of religious devotion to the Christian doctrine, her lack of conformance to Angel's parents' expectations for a future daughter-in-law, and her apparent humble, or unsophisticated even, social rank, there is something else within Tess's persona which seems to relate to her innate elemental quality, causing the collision between the antagonistic spheres.

Tess is described as a woman belonging to the realm of the inebriating senses, glorified for her oneness with nature in a Hellenistic and pagan understanding, but to the common pious Victorian, this represented an unfettered indulgence of the senses (cp. Roberts 45). To all effect, Angel also seems to understand the true nature of religion, at least its practical side, leading some to say that he could even be construed as a deist, as Hardy writes of how Angel prefers "sermons in stones to sermons in churches and chapels on fine summer days" (177). In Talbothays, he is completely immersed in that world, educating himself in the workings of a farm, surrounded by common rural folk who are far less pretentious than his university-educated brothers, and falling in love with Tess, a very unpretentious dairymaid, who is virtually the antithesis of his family. A respectable family, one that privileges religious and intellectual knowledge, one that immediately notes how Angel seems to be "somehow losing intellectual grasp" (199) after spending time around the common "Hodge" (147). So, naturally, it is rather

incongruous that he would choose a wife based on her ability to be a good one for a farmer and not for her religious views.

Nevertheless, Angel would not have attempted to persuade his father in Tess's favour if he did not sincerely believe that Tess possessed the characteristics of a genuine Angel in the House, but he does so for the wrong reasons. Ultimately, what motivates him to be so steadfast in this belief is his infatuation for the knightly cadence of Tess's noble name, as the narrator states, "Tess's lineage had more value for himself [Angel] than for anybody in the world" (264). Angel wholeheartedly entertains the idea that he could somehow modify Tess into a different person, a lady, who would live up to her noble name and impress his family. This is the version of her he wishes to introduce to his family, not Tess, the milkmaid from a humble family, so he plans to wait some time before introducing his intended one to his family, for he felt that "[t]o produce Tess, fresh from the dairy, as a D'Urberville and a lady, he had felt to be temerarious and risky" (264).

So, Angel purposefully withholds the intelligence of Tess's noble lineage from his parents in order to improve her to his own idealised conception of herself, to later positively surprise his disapproving parents, "hence he had concealed her lineage till such time as, familiarized with worldly ways by a few months' travel and reading with him, he could take her on a visit to his parents, and impart the knowledge while triumphantly producing her as worthy of such an ancient line" (264).

In this respect, Angel's strategy seems to be analogous to the classical myth of Pygmalion and Galatea, in *Metamorphoses* of the Roman poet Ovid. Pygmalion was a gifted Greek sculptor from Cyprus who, after losing all interest in women, devoted himself to the creation of a beautiful ivory statue representing his ideal of womanhood. After his creation is completed, he gives her the name of Galatea and gradually develops a passionate affection for her. Such a passion could not pass unnoticed by the goddess of love, Aphrodite, who, in response to his prayers, brings the statue to life so that they could be together.[14] Unlike Pygmalion, however,

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[14] The Pygmalion narrative is a versatile myth that has been told numerous times in a variety of different ways. In essence, it encompasses the idea of a man metaphorically giving birth to a woman in the sense that he transposes towards her a specific sort of wish fulfilment, namely the wish to create someone entirely new according to his own image. In modern renditions of the Pygmalion myth, there is the short

Angel Clare is unable to avidly use a hammer and chisel to sculp his own ideal of womanhood striving, instead, to materialise it in a real woman, which naturally proves to be impracticable.

Nevertheless, one could argue that Angel has such high expectations for his chosen model since despite being a simple girl, Tess also possesses qualities of composure and graciousness befitting of a queen, prominent features which were perceivable as soon "as she walked across the barton on that afternoon of her arrival", and the folks of Talbothays dairy swore her to be "of a good family" and to Angel Clare this initial sense of "superiority might have been a growth of the imagination aided by subsequent knowledge" about Tess's noble ancestry (254).

Angel's plan to transform Tess into a lady, nonetheless, is described by the narrator as nothing more than "a pretty lover's dream" (264), and regrettably, it denounces the nature of the love Angel fosters for Tess, a love that "was doubtless ethereal to a fault, imaginative to impracticability" (305) as confirmed after their marriage. One might therefore draw the conclusion that while Angel Clare differs greatly from Alec D'Urberville, his predecessor, he nevertheless shares some commonalities, especially in the sense that both miserably fail to recognise Tess as a real person with wants, feelings, and desires. Angel's limited perspective allows him only to see Tess to the extent of an "idyllic creature" (255) as opposed to a flawed human being, as Hardy comes to say, "[h]e loved her dearly, though perhaps rather ideally and fancifully than with the impassioned thoroughness of her feeling for him" (255).

As for Tess, "the impassioned thoroughness of her feeling for him" is unmeasurable. Equally chained to her own impassioned idealisation of Angel Clare, she believes him to be intellectually and morally superior to her, and, indeed, he is presented in such a fashion.

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story *The Birth-Mark* (1843) by American author Nathaniel Hawthorne, in which a man named Aylmer, a talented scientist, is repulsed as well as oddly obsessed with the birth-mark on his wife's cheek, so he dreams of cutting it out with a knife while she is sleeping. When he awakens, he prepares a concoction and has her drink it in order for the birthmark to fade, but this results in her death. Another modern version of the Pygmalion myth is George Bernard Shaw's famed play of the same name (1912), where Henry Higgins, a phonetician, wagers that he will be able to transform the cockney-speaking flower seller, Eliza Doolittle, in six months into a woman as poised and well-spoken as a duchess.

Although conveying that Tess's "idolatry" of Angel is excessive, Hardy portrays it as a genuinely compassionate and altruistic emotion that is almost sacrificial rather than a demeaning one. Even though Angel is unworthy, her submissive love is praised. Notwithstanding, what distinguishes them in their idealisation is the veracity of the feelings, which in Tess's case seems to be more genuine and Angel's more of a caprice.

Tess's devotion to Angel is in every way comparable to the selfless love that Coventry Patmore extols in his poem *The Angel in the House*, but in her blind idealisation she is unaware that she is worshiping a false god: "She loved him so passionately, and he was so godlike in her eyes; and being, though untrained, instinctively refined, her nature cried for his tutelary guidance" (227). The desire Tess expresses to be completely under Angel's "tutelary guidance" is very relevant since it corresponds precisely to the Victorian preconception that the husband should act as the wife's "father figure" by protecting and instructing her, as the most blissful union was considered to be the one where the husband served as a sort of father figure to his vulnerable wife (cp. Cominos 169). Fitfully, Angel offers himself to tutor her in history or any subject of her choosing, to make up for her lack of higher education, and though Tess gently refuses such offer she has nonetheless irrevocably fallen under his spell, as "[h]is influence over her had been so marked that she had caught his manner and habits, his speech and phrases, his likings and his aversions" (255).

Once again, Tess is proving to be the ideal emulation of the paragon of Victorian femininity, for as Frances Power Cobbe declares, in "Criminals, Idiots, Women and Minors", when a woman would wed, she was expected to merge her sole existence into that of her husband. It was widely believed that "the wife's true relation to her husband" was that her "whole life and being, her soul, body, time, property, thought, and care, ought to be given to her husband; that nothing short of such absorption in him and his interests makes her a true wife" (qtd. in Cominos 161). Hence, Tess seems to be quite in conformance with what was stipulated by society.

Additionally, because Angel Clare is the first person to show signs of caring, Tess's fragile ego is particularly open to this kind of influence and infatuation. Up to this point in the narrative, Tess never had someone to rely on, and in Angel, she finds a companion, someone who is able to support and help her. For the first time, she feels that she is not alone, and in all matters, she never had a counsellor, or any guidance, so when she finds one, she grapples for it insufferably. So much so that when her mother advises her to keep the horrifying events of her past from Angel, her future husband, she feels incapable of doing so for,

> To her sublime trustfulness he was all that goodness could be—knew all that a guide, philosopher, and friend should know. She thought every line in the contour of his person the perfection of masculine beauty, his soul the soul of a saint, his intellect that of a seer. The wisdom of her love for him, as love, sustained her dignity; she seemed to be wearing a crown. The compassion of his love for her, as she saw it, made her lift up her heart to him in devotion. (241)

This excerpt can be said to be "a maze of meaning-laden clues" (Roberts 46) since it encapsulates every single element of Tess's undying idealization for Angel and indicates that, like him, she also is unable to view him as a flawed human being. To her eyes, this wonderful specimen of masculine beauty possesses heavenly attributes and saintly virtues, which are undeniably conveyed through his name. A name that inspires ethereality, lightness, and purity, therefore substantiating his intellectual and moral elevation above everyone else, including Tess. As a result, she adores him with devotion and does not question his dogmatic word. She instead regards him as her mentor, someone she can blindly trust. Additionally, the narrator expressly notes how "she seemed to be wearing a crown" since the romantic love supported her dignity and granted her a superior posture, which seems to be a confirmation of Tess's character being endowed with queenly dimensions through romantic love.

But this is bound to soon end, for in spite of these intense feelings that swerved her being, she is still deterred by her awareness that she is not "a proper woman" to marry any man, due to the implications of her past indiscretions. That, along with her placing of Angel on such a high pedestal, makes her feel as a whole unworthy of him and his love, and for this reason she rejects his marriage proposal and makes an effort to divert Angel's attention to the other milkmaids, for though Angel "really did prefer [Tess] in a cursory way to the rest, she who knew herself to be more impassioned in nature, cleverer, more beautiful than they, was in the eyes of propriety far less worthy of him than the homelier ones whom he ignored" (184). This awareness of being "in the eyes of propriety far less worthy" (184) is profoundly ingrained within Tess's sense of self. After the death of her baby, at Talbothays, far from the reputation that precedes her, Tess only wishes to pursue a calm and discreet life of maidenhood, vowing to do so and thus imposing upon herself a period of sexual atrophy. Indeed, being single and leading an exemplary life of spinsterhood is the best possible alternative for Tess's future, since in her

condition as a fallen woman she is perpetually exiled "from woman's conventional family-bounded existence" (Auerbach 150). She would better find the life of an old maid appropriate to her situation, as she "could never conscientiously allow any man to marry her now" (171). Yet despite her pledge, Tess will not be able to keep that promise and eventually concedes to Angel's marriage proposal.

This resolution of Tess to accept Angel's proposal is consolidated thanks to the intense dispute of the other three milkmaids for Angel Clare's affection, which reaches its peak moment in chapter 23 when Angel, in his gentlemanly ways, offers to carry all four milkmaids, Izz, Retty, Marian, and Tess, across a flooded river on their way to church. When he finally transports Tess, his Rachel, in his arms after three Leahs[15], it became apparent to Tess that "[t]here was no concealing from herself the fact that she loved Angel Clare, perhaps all the more passionately from knowing that the others had also lost their hearts to him" (181).

As the wedding day approaches and finally arrives, Tess unintentionally follows her mother's advice to conceal the truth and Angel marries her ignorant of his wife's past, despite her numerous unsuccessful attempts to communicate to him the one event that marred her otherwise fair existence. Insistently contriving misfortunes never cease to appear in Tess's path, and once their simple wedding ceremony is over and Angel and Tess are declared husband and wife, reminiscences of Tess's past tragedy and old family come back to taunt her. The recurrent aspects in the narrative that stand as a constant reminder of her fall appear once again materialised in the crowing rooster, an ill omen foreshadowing the extreme brevity of Tess's period of joy after her marriage to Angel, the legend of the D'Urbervilles coach, and the paintings of the family dames. Even nature attempts to mark Tess as a fallen woman when later, after their arrival into their lodgings, an ancient D'Urbervilles farm-house, the sunlight comes through the window, stretching across Tess's skirt, making "a spot like a paint-mark" (273–274), which,

[15] The expression Angel Clare uses "Three Leahs to get one Rachel" is a reference to the biblical story of Rachel, in Genesis, the first book of the Hebrew Bible, one of the two wives of the patriarch Jacob. Forced to serve Rachel's father, Laban, for seven years to win her, Jacob was tricked at the end of that time into marrying her sister, Leah. He was then allowed to marry Rachel as well, in return for seven more years of labour. At first childless, Rachel eventually gave birth to Joseph and died giving birth to Benjamin. This biblical analogy highlights Clare's troubles for having to carry three other milkmaids to finally carry the one he wants and desires, Tess.

in the view of Lynn Parker, “echoes the painted signs of adultery and damnation which Tess sees on her way home after the scene in the Chase” (Parker 277).

Events like this, however, are nothing new to Tess; even throughout the blissful time of courtship, signals pointing in that direction appear to Tess as painful reminders of her past, awaking her to her reality and forcing her to come to terms with the fact that the past still follows her in the same manner that it did Michael Henchard in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Despite the fact that everyone around her remains unsuspicious of her past, Tess is constantly plagued by the knowledge that she is a fallen woman. As it happens, one day at the breakfast table, a reminder of her past materialises in a ludicrous story Dairyman Crick tells of a man called Jack Dollop which amuses everyone except Tess, for she finds the situation detailed in the story similar to what happened to her and is disturbed by the fact that everyone laughs at the story. From this episode, it is possible to conclude one thing: elements of societal morality and judgement will always pervade the narrative simply because Tess, in her condition as a fallen woman, must carry her heavy cross; it is her torment, “there was the pain of it. This question of a woman telling her story— the heaviest of crosses to herself—seemed but amusement to others. It was as if people should laugh at martyrdom” (226).

As a result, any potential sense of triumph Tess might have otherwise experienced after wedding the most coveted man at Talbothays dairy, after winning over the other milkmaids, swiftly vanishes as the heroine is assailed by an intensification of signs denouncing her sinful facet, which amounts to a burdening weight upon Tess’s already conflicted consciousness.

This conflicted mental tendency, exacerbated by her sense of unworthiness, along with her characteristic recurring drive to punish herself and the laborious conspiracy she believes is being hatched around her, eventually prompts her to make her wedding night confession, telling her husband the truth about the Chase encounter. She feels that she “deserved worse” than the other milkmaids whom Clare had rejected and should, accordingly, be punished for her wickedness of taking “all without paying”, for now she would have to “pay to the uttermost farthing” (281). But as Tess summons the courage to speak, Angel catches her off guard by saying that he also wants to confess something to her: while in London, Angel was seduced by a woman who nearly led him into a relationship, implying that, like his wife, Angel is not chaste either. Tess, relieved of hearing her husband’s confession and assuming that, because he had such a similar experience as hers, he would promptly forgive her, hastily grants him instant absolution

without resentment for purposefully withholding the truth from her and proceeds to make her own confession.

But as soon as the words start pouring out of Tess's "peony mouth" (10), detailing the sad narrative of her encounter with Alec D'Urberville, and pleading with her husband, he is no longer able to comprehend, make use of his common sense to assimilate all of this information, nor to empathise with her story. The only aspect he is able to assimilate in his distraught mind is the extinguishing of the luminous aura that had formerly enveloped her figure; utterly stripped of her angelic pretensions, Tess now assumes grotesque demonic proportions before Angel's very eyes as, "[a] large shadow of her shape rose upon the wall and ceiling" (283). At the moment of her revelation, however, not solely Tess undergoes a subtle transformation to acquire demonic contours before her lover's perception; the unanimated furniture and appurtenances contained within the room, accompanying the protagonist's shifting mode, also suffer a slight alteration. As Tess bent forward, "each diamond on her neck gave a sinister wink like a toad's" (283), while the fire in the grate, the only natural element in the room disposed, mirrors the demonised perception Angel has of Tess, and "looked impish" (284) to him, as if an imaginative effect is cast upon the rest of the objects that stand as quiet observers witnessing, in their superior stance, the tragedy unfolding upon the newlywed couple, utterly aloof to it, much like the birds nesting in the Chase's trees that remained unaffected by the event that ruins Tess:

> The fender grinned idly, as if it too did not care. The light from the water-bottle was merely engaged in a chromatic problem. All material objects around announced their irresponsibility with terrible iteration. And yet nothing had changed since the moments when he had been kissing her; or rather, nothing in the substance of things. But the essence of things had changed. (284)

On a deeper level, although the "substance of things", both material and spiritual, remains unaltered in their ordinary surface, in the face of prior transgressions, Angel is unable to sustain his idealisation of Tess, no longer regarding her as the pure, chaste, and angelic country-woman idyll, the perfect blank slate in which he could mould and shape to suit his own ideals, but "as a species of impostor" (286), a deceitful woman, who, before his eyes, acquires demonic proportions.

A furious and aghast Angel is quick to forget his own offence and vehemently denies her what she so willingly granted to him, forgiveness, even though she can barely be claimed to have been at fault. Through Angel's terrible response to Tess's confession, Hardy exposes not only the intensity of his disillusionment but also his inability to free himself from the crudities of conventional judgement, ultimately denouncing the prevalence and utter hypocrisy of sexual double standards. Upholding the widely held social belief that men were entitled to have certain liberties which for a woman would be unthinkable and much less pardonable, Angel expects Tess to forgive his pre-marital laxities, whereas her sexual assault and subsequent pregnancy is something he simply cannot abide, as it proves to be sufficient for him to desert her and their marriage. Thereby, Angel Clare is "totally unable to entertain the idea of marriage with a woman who has experienced sexual relations with another man, no matter how extenuating the circumstances" (Thomas, K. 210). His intractability, along with the kind of love he nurtured for Tess, a love inclined to the imaginative and ethereal, which made him stand as a lover closer to the intellectual poet Shelley than to the passionate Byron (242), as the narrator had previously warned the readers, led him to the rejection and excoriation of "the woman he was supposed to love because she did not fit his egocentric ideal of womanhood" (Rogers 249).

In this aspect, Angel Clare, in his desire to be first comer in a woman's heart and body, shares the conventional view of women preconised by another precedent Hardyan male character, Henry Knight, from *A Pair of Blue Eyes,* who, likewise, falls in love with an idealised, asexual image of the love interest of the story, Elfride Swancourt, and, after learning the truth of a previous entanglement of hers with another man, rejects her, thus foreshadowing the exact same pattern that would be developed in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (cp. Thomas, J. "Checkmate" 112—116). The mistake both these male characters, as well as Tess and even Bathsheba Everdene, commit is a typical one an individual makes when falling in love with someone. The lover's mind, in its natural condition, severely deprived of rational guidance, fails to discern the two conflicting realms that are built within his or her own mental space of the person with whom they are enamoured. In other words, the lover creates high expectations while abstaining from reality. And, indeed, Tess and Angel mutually idealise each other as lovers; the difference between them nonetheless lies in the fact that, as Morgan announces, Tess "seeks at once to 'cleanse' him of his illusive vision of her and to resist his appropriation" (Morgan 74). The manner in which Tess accomplishes this is by rejecting Angel's attribution of fanciful pseudonyms during the early stages of their romance; she refuses to be called Demeter or Artemis, asking instead

for him to call her by her baptismal name, for such practise corresponded to the depersonalization of herself "into one typical form" which she did not fit (162).

Thus, inevitably, the infatuated individual eventually produces an over-valued subjective image that, most of the time, rather tragically, completely obscures the other image that corresponds to reality. Then, in a moment of conflict, when both spheres intersect, it frequently leads to utter disappointment and heartbreak, condemning that love to fade once the image is confuted and effaced by the real personality of the individual in question. Therefore, following this line of thought, as Angel's image of Tess collapses, he is unable to recall the pledge he had solemnly sworn to himself earlier, on the same evening of their wedding, that Tess, as his wife, would be his regardless of his "good or bad faith and fortune" and should he "ever neglect her, or hurt her, or even forget to consider her? God forbid such a crime!" (274). Now, in the face of such sad circumstances, he could only see her as "a guilty woman in the guise of an innocent one" (286). As such, Angel's treachery following Tess's confession shocks for its hypocrisy, offending and disappointing the reader much more than Alec's misdeeds.

After the damage has been done, Tess strives to redeem herself and reclaim the image she withheld in Angel's mind by acting like the perfect wife, the Angel in the House, because she knows, as Helene Roberts explains, that "[s]entiment's favourite domain in Victorian times was near the warm cosy hearth of the home where the wife, sweet, passive, and long-suffering, waited patiently for the return of her husband" (Roberts 48). Therefore, for a brief period of time, whilst she still hopes that she may persuade him to forgive her, "Tess's feminine hope… had been … to revive in her surreptitious visions of a domiciliary intimacy" (304).

That approach, however, fails to impress her husband; in fact, posing as an Angel in the House after disclosing to him that she is a fallen woman only confuses him further. In being honest with Angel and confessing her prior guilt, Tess unintentionally transposes to him the same tensile dynamic that has been playing out inside the realms of her own mind; her fluctuation between a demonic fallen woman and the pure Angel in the House; thus dramatically altering the perception he has of her, shattering his idealisation, much like her own conception of herself had been fragmented at the time of Prince's death. Intriguingly, however, Auerbach claims that this peculiar mingling of distinct traits of antagonistic conceptions of Victorian womanhood seems to be a common phenomenon, since she claims that, in her singularity, the fallen woman has the remarkable ability to be examined as a "haunting Victorian type in whom angel, demon, and old maid converge" (Auerbach 160). Indeed, such a premise can be further

supported by the fact that, to Angel's dismay, Tess "looked absolutely pure" (297) and, to this, Auerbach counterposes that an inherent characteristic of "female demons" is that they "bear an eerie resemblance to their angelic counterparts" and thus "characteristics that are suggestively implicit in the angel come to the fore in the demon" (Auerbach 75). Auerbach, to support such a claim, goes on to explain that: "In Victorian literature female demons often assume this broader identity, while male demons limit themselves to single-minded opposition to good" (Auerbach 75). As a consequence, Tess most emphatically fulfils Auerbach's description of the Victorian feminine demon; her conflation of divinity and demonism perturbing Angel Clare to such an extent that, given the tragic circumstances that lead to the miserable collapse of their romance and recent blessed state of matrimony in only one night, overwhelmed by these stressful events, he suffers an episode of sleepwalking, which turns out to be the most bizarre scene in the novel.

In his dream, he grieves the death of his wife, whispering endearing words over Tess's body and carrying her outside towards the river. While standing over the edge of the narrow bridge that crossed the deep, fast river, Tess, overpowered by the sentiment of imminent loss, wishes for Angel to sacrifice her life and drown her in the river, in order to end their sufferings, as Tess had previously conveyed to him, saying: "I don't see how I can help being the cause of much misery to you all your life. The river is down there. I can put an end to myself in it. I am not afraid" (291). In her wish to die by drowning, Tess is essentially evoking the most common solution suggested in Victorian times for women like her, a fallen woman.

Female suicide, particularly suicide by drowning, became a subject extensively depicted in nineteenth-century literature and visual art as a reminder of the grim reality that was frequently the only alternative for many Victorian women who failed to follow the ideal of domesticity. The act of drowning, as portrayed in several paintings, as, for instance, "Found Drowned" (1850) by George Frederic Watts, which shows a young suicide victim found near Waterloo Bridge, represents the dictum of social convention to annihilate anything that might be contrary to the common rule; it represents a passive way of ending one's life; and it is quite emblematic due to its association with cleansing and purification of sins, closely resembling the idea of baptism. Many women were driven to take such desperate actions indirectly, either by the pressure of their lovers or society. Here, however, Angel carries Tess directly to the river, and though it may not be his intention to proceed with that action consciously, it nonetheless emphasises the desire to annihilate and cleanse the fallen woman, his wife. This is further reinforced when they reach the old abbey, where Angel places Tess's body inside a stone coffin.

And, Tess, in the midst of all these bizarre events, simply "delivered her whole being up to him" because,

> it pleased her to think he was regarding her as his absolute possession, to dispose of as he should choose. It was consoling, under the hovering terror of to-morrow's separation, to feel that he really recognized her now as his wife Tess, and did not cast her off, even if in that recognition he went so far as to arrogate to himself the right of harming her. (310)

As a true Angel in the House, Tess wholeheartedly embraces the Victorian notion that entitled the husband to own the wife, subsequently implying the right to dispose of her whenever he pleases, as if she were a good rather than a being. Such a mentality goes so far as to demonstrate how Tess is a victim of marriage. As Hardy made abundantly clear through his works, marriage can turn out to be a disastrous affair, especially for women. And most certainly, this is also the reason behind her easy acceptance of Angel's decision to separate after realising that their marital condition was beyond repair. Nevertheless, Tess's ready acceptance demonstrates that she has no agency of her own; agreeing with any plan or suggestion Angel may put to her, she simply limits herself to willingly submit to whatever he decides, even if it does not benefit her in any way; and this mood of "long-suffering made his way easy for him, and she herself was his best advocate" (317) which consecrates Tess a victim of Angel Clare; his abandonment of her is a violation of her trust in him, and it precipitates her last tragedy.

Left with nothing more but a "thorny crown" (184), Tess returns to her parents' house, as Angel had instructed her to do, and informs her mother about the tragedy that has unfolded. Finding no solace nor place for herself there, Tess is once again admonished by her mother for her behaviour and is left alone to find somewhere else to stay, and so she departs to work precariously in the harvesting labour in a grim village called Flintcomb Ash, alongside the former dairymaid Marian. Following these events, one feels very intensely that Tess has no one in the world for her, that she has been utterly ostracised and abandoned. This may be meant to emphasise the sense of desolation, hopelessness, and solitude that a fallen woman must have felt when everyone turned their backs on her, leaving her to handle problems on her own and thereby repeating the pattern of victimisation. Therefore, it is possible to observe how Tess commences the narrative as a victim of her family, falls from grace to become a fallen woman, is capable of transcending both the roles of the fallen woman and victim through the baptism of

her child, Sorrow, vindicating the redemption of his innocent soul as well as her own, and thus acquiring queenly proportions that shall be maintained as she falls in love with Angel Clare and experiences a short period of blissfulness at Talbothays dairy, to now recede to her original role of victim.

It is during this vulnerable moment, following a fruitless visit to her in-laws to try to inquire about the whereabouts of her estranged husband, that Tess encounters the author of her downfall, Alec D'Urberville, now converted into an evangelic minister through the hand of Reverend Clare.

Upon seeing Tess's fair figure, he is once again awakened to the carnal cravings and lustful urges he swore to forgo after converting to his religious path, and he does not hesitate to forsake his faith, that he so exalted for making him a changed man, in order to resume his "systematic pursuit of his old victim" (Oliphant 226), chasing her wherever she goes, persistently wooing her against her will, and systematically following her to Flintcomb Ash. Rosemarie Morgan characterised Alec's behaviour as an obsession to recapture what he yearned for but failed to obtain when he assaulted Tess in the Chase. He failed to claim "[t]he Tess he deeply desires, the woman he genuinely wants to possess" (Morgan 69). As a result, in a dubious attempt to atone for his past mistakes towards her, for he is still essentially villainous, Alec proposes to Tess, repeatedly, in spite of always being met with her vehement refusal. Yet he does so because, in his view, similarly to what happened with Troy and Fanny Robin, he considers himself to be her true husband for having her first, and he warns her: "Remember, my lady, I was your master once! I will be your master again. If you are any man's wife you are mine!" (416). And indeed, as if these words sealed Tess's fate, he shall, as upon Tess's father's unexpected death, the economic situation of her mother and siblings is desperate and is only further aggravated after the family loses their lease on the family home and land, due to Tess's lack of respectability within Marlott society.

As the burden of Tess's impoverished family falls upon her, Alec, her pertinacious suitor, seizes the opportunity to act as "the Providence of her family" (Oliphant 226) and succeeds in capturing Tess through the fragility of her family that she so desperately sought to alleviate. Thus she yields to her former seducer in sheer hopelessness in order to maintain her bereaved mother and siblings.

Tess's injudicious decision to return to the opportunistic Alec elicited, as expected, the negative response of critics, who, for the sake of morality and hasty judgments, crudely

condemned her, as R. H. Hutton implies when he writes that Tess essentially "sells herself ultimately for the benefit of her mother and brother and sisters" (Hutton 209). However, by reviling such a decision, they entirely neglect an essential aspect that underlies this decision which was, in fact, a serious social problem. Naturally, Tess is pressured to take this decision due to the emotional and financial strain she and her family were experiencing, yet, through her final subserviency to Alec, Hardy highlights the degree of economic and sexual victimisation she experiences at Alec's hands.

Tess's dependency on Alec exemplifies the Victorian conundrum in which working-class women, in their social and economic powerlessness within society, were often left with no other purpose but to serve the interests and pleasures of upper and middle-class males; and, indeed, as we can see throughout Tess and Alec's relationship, his interests are served upon Tess, who, as a lower-class person, is easily taken advantage of by someone who is socially superior. Alec D'Urberville stands in the novel as a representative of the "moral carelessness of upper-class men who thought they could freely dally with women beneath them" (Vicinus xiii). He is the character within the Hardyesque canon who most evidently resonates with the classic devilish figure of the Mephistophelian villain, the figurative Satan guised in peasant's clothes, working alongside Tess in chapter 50, who, too absorbed in the work of weed burning, fails to notice who is really standing next to her. Laughing at Tess's stupefaction at seeing him standing amidst the eerie plumes of smoke and flames, with a fork in hand, he compares himself to "the old Other One" (Satan), and Tess to Eve, as he jocularly proclaims, "this is just like Paradise" (440), proceeding to quote Milton for her:

> *Empress, the way is ready, and not long,*
>
> *Beyond a row of myrtles ...*
>
> *... If thou accept*
>
> *My conduct, I can bring thee thither soon.'*
>
> *'Lead then,' said Eve.* (qtd. in *Tess of the D'Urberville*s 440)

The reciting of Milton's verses announces how Tess stands on the threshold of Hell and will accept Satan's tempting offer to lead her. However, the price Tess pays for completely giving herself to the male master is the loss of every sense of self-hood. She is no longer Tess, the

simple rural damsel; she is now Alec’s mistress, the kept woman, “loosely wrapped in a cashmere dressing-gown” and “embroidered in half-mourning tints” (479).

This time, she has truly fallen and her inability to preserve herself attests to her fallenness. She is left powerless, utterly defeated by Alec’s unyielding sexual advances, thus ceding into a state of numbness which she can only break once a haggard and emaciated Angel comes from Brazil to reclaim her as his wife. Unlike Gabriel Oak, Angel Clare did not learn to grow as a person on his own; he had to be enlightened by someone else, a “large-minded stranger” (430) he encounters in Brazil to whom he confides his sufferings. This stranger poses Angel’s problem in such a way that it minimises its proportions, as he analyses the subject of Tess’s moral character regarding disparities in societal conventions around the world, pointing out to Angel how insignificant it really is.

Encouraged, Angel sets out to find Tess after arriving in England, journeying through the farm of Flintcomb-Ash and Marlott, where he learns about Tess’s father’s death. Eventually, he locates his mother-in-law, who, though initially reluctant to respond to his inquiry regarding his wife’s whereabouts, eventually concedes, taking pity on his plight, and informs him that Tess had gone to the rich coastal town of Sandbourne. There, Angel questions some of the locals before learning that a D’Urberville is staying at expensive lodgings called The Herons. But as the door is opened and Angel enters, announcing himself to the maid, all his hopeful dreams for reconciliation are crushed as Tess emerges, unrecognisable, beautifully arranged and expensively clothed.

Angel pleads for her forgiveness, assuring her that he has come to embrace her for who she is, and that his parents will now accept her, but it is too late for all of that. The words she mutters in response seem to come out of her in a trance-like state, devoid of essence, of life, and he soon realises “that his original Tess had spiritually ceased to recognise the body before him as hers—allowing it to drift, like a corpse upon the current, in a direction dissociated from its living will” (480—481). After their bewildering meeting, Angel leaves the house, and Tess, desperate to recover her marital relationship with Clare, rushes upstairs to the room where Alec was sleeping and stabs his chest with a carving knife, effecting the final act of vengeance; Tess penetrating his heart with a knife, just as he had penetrated her “beautiful feminine tissue” (90) before, and so vindicating her liberation from the man who had marred her life.

In the novel’s framework, Alec’s violent murder is reduced to a recurring pattern invoked in the context of prior circumstances, as Tess's fate as a murderess is persistently foreshadowed

in various scenarios throughout the storyline. Tess is marked in chapter 2 with the red ribbon adorning her luxurious hair whilst dancing (10). In chapter 4, her face and dress are splattered with the crimson drops of horse's blood, Prince, as it pours out on the roadway, unjustly conjuring the image of a murderess upon herself (34). In chapter 5, she accepts, though "in a slight distress", Alec's feeding her strawberries (45), and after a few weeks of confused dalliance with Alec, when Tess decides to leave the D'Urberville mansion, in chapter 12, a stranger paints a warning for her with blood red ink (98). In chapter 47, she slaps Alec with her heavy work glove; "[a] scarlet oozing appeared where her blow had alighted, and in a moment the blood began dropping from his mouth upon the straw" (415–416); and now the blood of her perpetrator drips continuously onto the bedroom floor. Seeping into the ceiling of his landlady's parlour, the pooling blood in the "oblong white ceiling" resembles "a gigantic ace of hearts" (485), finally consecrating the prediction of Tess as murderess into a reality.

The melodramatic violence of Alec's murder completes the pattern that has been interwoven throughout the narrative, its outlining threads uniting at the moment when all paths to moral development and self-knowledge have been locked to the heroine. Tess has the strength to stab her seducer to death because, like Eve, she has tasted the fruit of the tree of knowledge. As a result, in her final moments, Tess defies "the role... of victim", contradicting the image that most readers have entertained of her throughout the course of the novel as a "slain and supine heroine... helpless before the controlling male who would dismember her". In the moment Angel reappears in her life, "our slain heroine" finds enough strength and "restores herself to appropriate the powers of the destroying male" (Auerbach 15), executing the fatal blow and annihilating him, even if that directly implies her own annihilation.

Recapturing the Victorian image of the doomed woman who sacrifices everything for love, once freed from the man that tormented her, Tess rushes after Angel, and finding him, she confesses her crime and begs for his forgiveness, which he promptly concedes, assuring her of his love. Even though Angel is taken aback by her revelation and presumes her to be delusional, he limits himself to doing what he previously failed to do, protecting her regardless of the circumstances. No longer troubling himself with questions concerning Tess's purity, he now seems to have fully accepted her for who she is. He is not repulsed by knowing Tess is a murderess; instead, he is absolutely dominated by "tenderness" (490), societal distinctions, or the high value placed on feminine virginity being of little significance at this moment, and that appears to be the reaction Hardy intended for his readers as well, that certain social constructions are simply irrelevant.

Angel, nevertheless, has some difficulty believing the veracity of Tess's confession since, oddly, she seemed emotionally and mentally unaffected by the incident, which leads one to conclude that Tess exhibits a certain "tendency to resist continual mutation", enabling her, as Auerbach defends, to "modulate almost imperceptibly into a demon, while retaining her aura of changelessness" (Auerbach 107). Therefore, within the short period of time between her murdering Alec and escaping the crime scene to rejoin Angel, Tess imperceptibly shifts from demon to angel.

As they flee together and slowly lapse back into their original love they had experienced at Talbothays dairy. However, as they approach Stonehenge's circle of stones, they realise that, like that previous time, this present one is also bound to end soon. In this pagan setting Tess feels quite at peace, and as she gazes at the ancient stones, she tells Angel, "[y]ou used to say at Talbothays I was a heathen. So now I am at home" (500). Finally arriving at Stonehenge, the place she calls home, Tess finds the same sense of refuge that Bathsheba found under the oak tree.

Analysing the symbolic meaning of the locations these Hardyesque heroines choose as their refuge, a tree has been associated with life, growth, wisdom, and resilience since ancient times, and the ending of *Far from the Madding Crowd* leaves the possibility open for Bathsheba to reclaim her former grandeur. In the case of Tess, however, her sanctuary is an ancient archaeological site, a site where remaining large standing stones grouped in a circle had once meant to serve as a primitive calendar, as a temple, and as a burial ground. Therefore, such an aspect not only reinforces the idea of the cyclicality of time, as this prehistorical location now provides a haven for a modern woman who has been failed by the suffocating constraints of Victorian society, but also, considering that Tess's refuge is a temple and a burial ground, it clearly indicates that she is about to be sacrificed. The scene thus very meaningful and powerful, as "[i]n this pagan setting" Tess is about to be "sacrificed to the barbarisms of civilised Victorian morality" (Pykett 161). Discarding Angel's advice to keep moving, Tess surrenders to her destiny by resting beside a pillar, and eventually falling asleep. At dawn they are surrounded, with men approaching from all sides, and Angel finally realising that what Tess had told him was true; she had killed Alec. Hounded by patriarchal forces, Tess wakes up and feels strangely relieved. She knows that the "day which lay sly and unseen and among all the other days of the year, giving no sign or sound when she annually passed over it" (123) was now incoming, so she surrenders in peace with history bearing witness to her plight.

Her demise had been predicted not only because Victorian conventions dictated that a woman's fall should end in death, but also by the warning Tess received before re-encountering Alec D'Urberville, a symbolic scene that echoes both the past, Tess's rape in the Chase, and the future, Tess's impending death at the scaffold.

At the end of Chapter 41, Tess stumbles upon a strange and unexpected image of a moribund flock of pheasants. In these innocent creatures that have been hunted down and deserted to suffer and die Tess sees herself and her own anguish, as she compassionately laments:

> "Poor darlings—to suppose myself the most miserable being on earth in the sight o' such misery as yours!" she exclaimed, her tears running down as she killed the birds tenderly… 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. (349)

The spectacle of gratuitous cruelty, the image of silently suffering victims of violence evokes Tess's violation at the hands of Alec, and these flightless birds which Tess, out of pity, snaps their necks to spare their suffering likewise emulate her own death by hanging for the murder of Alec D'Urberville. Much like the poor birds, Tess is a victim caught up in the typical chase; the insistent pursuit of the male over the female; and the eternal struggle of the female trying to escape from the male and consistently getting caught. Conversely, this is also a scene that prefigures cruelty's triumph over an innocent creature, a once fair maiden, as Tess is convicted of Alec's murder, imprisoned, and sentenced to death by hanging.

Watching from afar, Angel and Liza-Lu stand motionless on the hillside as the black flag is raised above the tower, announcing that justice had been served and that "the President of the Immortals... had ended his sport with Tess" (506). After a moment of quiet contemplation, they join hands and depart together, as if a fallen Adam and Eve after the loss of Eden, venturing into the world, even with their loss of innocence, to rebuild a life together. Such finale invokes the picture of a full circle, as once again, a chastened Clare begins a new life with Tess's younger sister, Liza-Lu, fulfilling his wife's request.

Tess had entertained such a hope because for her, her younger sister Liza-Lu is a more perfect version of herself, the version of her Angel so desired, as she tells him before being captured: "She is so good and simple and pure…Liza-Lu is so gentle and sweet, and she is growing

so beautiful… She has all the best of me without the bad of me; and if she were to become yours it would almost seem as if death had not divided us" (501). Thus, by joining them together, Tess ensures that someone will look after her sister, whom she adores, while Angel will obtain what he so longed for, an idealised version of Tess. However, even though Tess expresses the desire of Angel to marry her sister after she dies, proclaiming, "[p]eople marry sister-laws continually about Marlott (501)", such a union may have been possible in the fictional world of Wessex, but in Victorian England, it was virtually impossible for a woman to marry the spouse of her deceased sister, as it was deemed an incestuous relationship and thus illegal. The law was only repealed 72 years later, in 1907, with The Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act 1907, which allowed a man to marry his deceased wife's sister (Duffield-Fuller n.p.). Consequently, what Tess proposes to Angel is impractical. Angel Clare will never be able to marry the idealised version of Tess, as regardless the woman he so desired is unattainable.

Conclusion

Of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* Clementina Black writes,

> The conventional reader wishes to be excited, but not to be disturbed; he likes to have new pictures presented to his imagination, but not to have new ideas presented to his mind. He detests unhappy endings, mainly because an unhappy ending nearly always involves an indirect appeal to the conscience… a reorganization of that traditional pattern of right and wrong which it is the essence of conventionality to regard as immutable…*Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is precisely such a challenge. (Black 201)

Tess is such a challenge, and so is Bathsheba Everdene, as well as many other Hardyesque feminine characters that were not featured in this study. Hardy's female characters are oddly hybrid creations; they are modern-minded, spirited women with acute sensibility and intelligence, trying to affirm their individuality in a society defined by its stifling norms, unwilling to accept unconventional behaviour. They seem to be women belonging to the future, yet they are sacrificed to the archaism of their time. Their manners and actions are typically judged unbefitting and even contentious by the prudish Victorian reader, for they seem to contradict the social formations that aim to govern them.

Hardy's female characters mirrored the spirit of their creator. As an author, Thomas Hardy is known to have been somewhat impatient with the decorum and conventionality surrounding the Victorian novel. Nonetheless, as he gained recognition, he became more ambitious in his craft and more outspoken in his intent. In a variety of "outlets, in prefaces, letters, and sometimes even in the novels themselves", especially his later ones, Hardy would object to "the doll of English fiction", claiming that it should be demolished "while retaining the other conventions of the novel" (Bayley 24–25).

Hardy was bold in his writing and disliked it when circumstances of serial publication forced a modification of the intent in his narratives, as inevitably tended to happen, for, as mentioned previously, both the novels analysed in this study underwent alterations, primarily for the sake of moral propriety. To briefly recall just two examples, Leslie Stephen compelled Hardy to alter the swordplay scene in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, whilst Angel Clare carries the milkmaids across the flooded river not in his arms, but in a wheelbarrow.

This was precisely what Hardy revolted against, and certainly, if confronted with such obstacles impeding the fulness of the creative process, one would surely fail to make transcripts of real-life women. Yet somehow, in his genius, Hardy succeeded, if not excelled.

Arriving at the end of this research, it is now feasible to assert unequivocally that Hardy's female characters are unconventional by nature. They are so because they were intended by their creator to counteract the Victorian prudishness and conventionality that so hindered Hardy's creative endeavours.

The conceptual framework devised by Nina Auerbach in her work *The Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* presented itself as an interesting method to demonstrate the unconventionality of Hardy's characters. Following her premise on stereotypes of Victorian womanhood, it was feasible to compare Hardy's heroines to the prevalent rule of the era in which they were created, drawing concrete images of womanhood from Hardy's novels *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and thus determining how they do not fit into society's standards.

As has been adequately proven, both Bathsheba Everdene and Tess Durbeyfield tend to fit into more than one stereotype of Victorian womanhood that Nina Auerbach has delineated, and in that regard, they deviate from the venerated ideal of the Angel in the House. Their ability to fluctuate between different stereotypes demonstrates their complexity and imparts depth and dimension to their characters.

Therefore, I consider it is reasonable to assume that if they were conventional, as some defend, they would be devoid of the subtleties and of the sensuality that so characterise them; they would have been one-dimensional in the sense that they could only fit one stereotype, and that would have to be the Angel in the House. They would have to be like the prim Mercy Chant, the character identified in this study that best exemplifies the figure of feminine Victorian conventionality in Hardy's work. And, to demonstrate how much Hardy reviled this oppressive model of perfection, it is worth noticing the manner in which he reduced her to the role of a secondary character, utterly eclipsed by Tess. Characters who naturally conform to society's expectations for women, such as Mercy Chant, tend to be minor characters in Hardy's novels, whereas those who do not naturally or readily adapt to social standards are elevated through their unconventionality to the position of protagonist, such as Tess, aiming to elicit the reader's sympathy through her suffering and restlessness.

Tess can as well be viewed as the Angel in the House, yet her case differs from Mercy Chant's, because it is an example of how Hardy employed stereotypes in his writing as a way to undermine them. For instance, Tess is simultaneously portrayed as both an Angel in the House and a fallen woman, in order to expose the utter idiocy of the glorified ideal, the absurdity of the love she has for Angel Clare, as Hardy proclaims: "The firmness of her devotion to him was indeed almost pitiful" (302). For this reason, feminist criticism generally subscribes to the argument that Hardy is inappropriately objectifying the female form. However, from my perspective, it seems more likely that Hardy is attempting to expose the shallowness of some Victorian social mores and it that order highlight female mistreatment rather than support it, so that readers would empathise with the female characters rather than judge them harshly.

These novels, to my judgement, do not "show the tenacity of sexist assumptions even in so humane and enlightened a man as Hardy", as Katherine Rogers claimed (Rogers 257); they show the tenacity of sexist assumptions in the society in which Hardy lived. As such, the downfalls his heroines face should not be interpreted as revenge plots, but rather as realistic portrayals of the misfortunes Victorian women endured. Hardy's intention with this is not to attack or blame his female characters, but to criticise and hold accountable the society that constrains and cruelly condemns them. Yet, not solely female characters have sufferable experiences. For instance, Michael Henchard's fate, in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, is much grimmer than Bathsheba's, for through her highs and lows she learned to love a man who respects and loves her dearly, whereas Henchard is abandoned by all and dies alone, but such a topic would lead to a whole new avenue of discussion.

It seems to me, nonetheless, pertinent to emphasise that, within Thomas Hardy's vast literary oeuvre, there are still plenty of characters that may be analysed employing Auerbach's theoretical approach; the examples that I selected and illustrated for this thesis are not unique or exclusive cases. For instance, Elizabeth-Jane from *The Mayor of Casterbridge* comes to mind as a heroine who resists all Victorian preconceptions and could be an interesting subject to analyse. Moreover, a stereotype that I failed to explore further in my work due to, in my perspective, the lack of concrete examples in the novels analysed is the old maid. Hence, suggesting a new path for debate, I would indicate the eccentric Miss Aldclyffe, from *Desperate Remedies*, who appears to have received scant attention, and likewise, Elizabeth-Jane, could be an interesting figure for analysis.

To conclude, I can confidently finalize my research by acknowledging that, while stereotypes are a rather complex and somewhat abstract concept, it was fascinating how Hardy's heroines could fit so perfectly into Auerbach's stereotyped imagery of Victorian womanhood, which to me proves not only their unconventionality but also their remarkableness.

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