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Malinowski's Reading List: Tess as Field Guide to Woman

By MONIKA ELBERT

... there was the pain of it. The question of a woman telling her story—the heaviest of crosses to herself—seemed but amusement to others.

—*Tess of the d'Urbervilles* 152

The female was strong in her. She [Tess] was herself. But she was out of place, utterly out of her element and her times. Hence her utter bewilderment.—D.H. Lawrence 72

BRONISLAW MALINOWSKI in *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* is obsessed with the meaning of partnership, marriage, and possession of woman—in the sexual and biological sense as well as in the legal married sense. He plays his obsession against the backdrop of Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* which he was reading and which he often mentions during the course of writing his "diary." Though the diary was never intended to be a public and scientific document, the prejudices inherent in his day-to-day observations are typical of the Eurocentric perspective of "native" populations. Hardy's legacy to Malinowski is a singular preoccupation with deciphering woman; ultimately, their ethnographic/narrative modes of investigation clash with their cultural biases that disrupt their "scientific" investigation of woman and the primitive. Though Malinowski is an early twentieth-century anthropologist, he exemplifies the contradictions inherent in late Victorian ethnography. The narrative strategies of Hardy are similar to the observation strategies of late nineteenth-century ethnography, and I shall look at Malinowski as an example of the latter.

Essentially, Malinowski is caught between Victorian cultural evolutionism and the functionalism and relativism of twentieth-century anthropology. Hardy is similarly caught between Victorianism and emerging modernism in his presentation of Tess as a country girl, neither clearly pure nor sexual, who needs to be deciphered. Issues of class and gender intersect as Tess becomes the disempowered object of the text, who is examined from a quite biased point of view by the narrative voice and by the two male middle-class interlopers, Alec and Angel, who, privileged either in terms of money or moral

I would like to thank my colleague Wendy Ryden for helping me with the revision of this essay.

culture, take it upon themselves to give Tess meaning. Tess is, in fact, in a tenuous position in that she represents both fallen aristocracy (the d'Urbervilles) and the concept of a natural woman (Durbeyfield) and so resists any categorization. Though her public status reflects the shifting nature of classes at the end of the nineteenth century, her personal reality is bestowed upon her by the two male observers, Angel and Alec, who never affirm her sexuality but rather use her as a vehicle to grapple with their own troubled sexuality. Just as Malinowski speculates about the native woman's blatant sexuality to deal with the problem of his own frustrated sexuality, so too do Angel and Alec use Tess to get to the root of their repressed or confused sexuality. Ultimately, Tess's sexuality and voice are unrepresentable, and when she attempts to give her version of her story to Angel, he responds with a cruel incomprehensiveness, so that finally her voice is silenced, her sex repressed.¹

Hardy's narration parallels Victorian ethnography in its preoccupation with the meaning of natural and unnatural, primitive and cultured.² As Christopher Herbert points out, most early Victorian ethnographic thinkers, from J.C. Prichard to W. Cooke Taylor, bifurcated culture into primitive and civilized, emphasizing the superiority of a civilized state that, with its checks on the sexual drive, was identified with "fluidity and progress" (60-64). Toward the end of the nineteenth century, cultural revisionists such as E.B. Tylor, John Lubbock, and John McLennan proposed that natives were not "savage" or "promiscuous" but were guided by the strictest customs (Herbert 64). Still, Herbert Spencer, in his *Principles of Sociology* (1873), declared that "horrors beyond our imagination of possibility are committed by primitive men" (Herbert 66) and also pointed to the unchecked sexual instinct as "the primitive unregulated state" (Herbert 66). However, he did assert that the alleged sexual promiscuity of the native was, after all, built upon fiction (Herbert 67).

Hardy's *Tess* (1891) was conceived against this conflicting intellectual backdrop. Hardy's notebooks during the 1880's show his interest in Spencer's ideas, especially concerning his debate on the nature of the real and the ideal (Millgate 285). Moreover, in 1893, shortly after *Tess*'s appearance, Hardy acknowledged that Spencer's *First Principles* was for him a "patent expander when [he] had been particularly narrowed down by the events of life" (Millgate 246) and declared that "whether the theories are true or false, their effect upon the imagination is unquestionable, and ... beneficial" (Millgate 246). Hardy's knowledge of Darwin might provide a link between the ethnographic view of native woman's sexuality and the male view of the country girl Tess's sexuality. Darwin felt that women's "powers

1. For an extended discussion of Hardy's meaning of silence in *Tess*, see Margaret R. Higonnet who, in describing his ambivalence, asserts, "Hardy forces us back upon the question whether silence expresses the ineffable or more simply records the unspeakable, and the most pervasive form of violence against women" (28).

2. After writing my essay, I discovered a recently published essay which suggests that Hardy's *Tess* and Frazer's *The Golden Bough* were similar in their treatment of ritual; Hardy sought to "primitivize the ancient and sexualize the primitive" (Gallagher 429).

of intuition, of rapid perception, and perhaps of imitation" are more developed than those of men, but that these "faculties" of women "are characteristic of the lower races, and therefore of a past and lower state of civilisation" (quoted in Beer 215). Darwin's view is reminiscent of Spencer's earlier assertion that "primitive man" could be equated with "women of the inferior ranks" in English society, and that "savages," like lower-class women, were unfocused and thought too impulsively, jumped to conclusions, relied on imitation rather than on originality, and could not separate the concrete from the abstract (Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* 229).

I.

TESS IS AN ANOMALY: she is perceived first by the narrator as "maiden" and then just as arbitrarily and quickly as "maiden no more." It is suggested throughout that her wrongdoing is not wrong according to nature, but rather according to man's laws, thus locating the narrative in the Victorian dilemma of natural versus the unnatural, savage versus civilized, and to the question of who the arbiter of these truths might be.

Beyond this strange conflation of purity and depravity, Tess is an anomalous figure because of her paradoxical social station, her hybridity. Having attained the Sixth Standard of schooling, she is no mere country bumpkin like the other neighborhood girls, but she is also totally spontaneous, which the narrator attributes to her being a child of nature. In fact, she is a hybrid, knowing two languages, the rustic dialect of her family and the Queen's language learned at school, and can transgress boundaries by negotiating between both realms. But like the ethnographer/observer who feels that he can improve upon the "savage" language, the status-conscious Angel promises to make her a "well-read woman" (159). At other times, he contents himself with "her unsophisticated open-air existence" which "required no varnish of conventionality to make it palatable to him" (162). He is caught alternately between the myth of Pygmalion and the myth of the Noble Savage.

Tess appears variously as child and beast of nature. Angel perceives her initially in a simplistic way as a pure milkmaid, a veritable creature of nature ("a fresh and virginal daughter of Nature" 102) and thus is surprised to see the more raw Tess. As a child of nature, Tess is so sensitive and empathetic that she can wring the necks of the injured pheasants to put them out of their misery. And she can kill Alec in cold blood for his wrongdoings—and for the joy he has deprived her of. The question is whether her guilt arises from her civilized or natural/animalistic nature. After all, Angel suggests on her wedding night that she is doubly damned because she is, paradoxically, a depraved member of the decayed d'Urberville aristocracy as well as an immoral peasant girl. The narrator suggests, too, that her sexual indiscretion and illegitimate child made her less than the "standard woman" and attributes her wrongdoing to "the slight incautiousness inherited from her race" (77).

Alec and Angel have the luxury of labelling Tess and even trying to impress a name upon her: Alec insists that she is a Durbeyfield, and Angel

would like her to take on the old d'Urberville name, though he often jokingly calls her by goddess names, "Artemis" and "Demeter" (111).³ Tess, though, would simply like to be called and to be "Tess." Angel would even like to impress his history upon hers and so obliterate her past by suggesting she take on his name in marriage: "Now then, Mistress Teresa d'Urberville, I have you. Take my name, and so you will escape yours!" (160). The male suitors' frame of reference originates from their own personal needs, and their sense of empowerment comes from seeing her as a peasant woman who, like the natives of Malinowski's world, is there for the taking—either in seduction or in marriage. Instead of seeing her as a product of her own subculture and within her own cultural framework, as Malinowski at his best tried to do with the "native," the male observers take Tess out of her framework and impose their definitions upon her. For example, Angel rationalizes his desertion of Tess by saying, "the woman I have been loving is not you [but] another woman in your shape" (192).

Tess is denied individuality throughout the text as she becomes everyone's favorite fantasy. She is first presented as sexual, naive, and native. The narrator focuses on her body and on her language, making both seem vulnerable, due to her gender, age, and class:

Tess Durbeyfield at this time of her life was a mere vessel of emotion untinctured by experience. The dialect was on her tongue to some extent, despite the village school: the characteristic intonation of that dialect for this district being the voicing approximately rendered by the syllable UR, probably as rich an utterance as any to be found in human speech. The pouted-up deep red mouth to which this syllable was native had hardly as yet settled into its definite shape, and her lower lip had a way of thrusting the middle of her top one upward, when they closed together after a word. (12)

This sexualized portrait of Tess has her performing linguistic acrobatics which prefigure those she performs later when learning to whistle to the d'Urberville finches, a whistle which ends in a kiss. Her language and her lips seem made for the teaching and the taking. The "Ur"-language she speaks, based on the syllable "Ur," seems foreign to the narrator and to Angel, who will later try to educate/possess her. W. Cooke Taylor noted in his 1840 study "of society in the barbarous and civilized state" that savage languages, with their excesses and repetitions, reflect "the same want of fixed limits that their bodily desires do" (Herbert 63). Both Taylor and Hardy link an unusual linguistic pattern with an alleged free sexuality. If in *Jude* Hardy asserts that "the letter killeth," in *Tess* the native tongue killeth, and the Ur-Tess suffers the consequences.

For much of the narrative, Tess is rendered a type—the rustic girl or peasant. From the beginning, the narrator emphasizes that Tess is part of the crowd of country girls. At the May Day dance, the girls are described as mere parts, contributing to one general sense of feminine sexuality: "Some had

3. For an excellent analysis of how other characters impose names upon Tess, see Michael Ragussis, 135-53.

beautiful eyes, others a beautiful nose, others a beautiful mouth and figure.... they were genuine country girls, unaccustomed to many eyes" (11). Tess appeared to "almost everybody ... a fine and picturesque country girl, and no more" (12). Tess attempts to resist this categorization by declaring her refusal to be caught in history or in someone else's fiction: "what's the use of learning that I am one of a long row only—finding out that there is set down in some old book somebody just like me, and to know that I shall only act her part; making me sad, that's all" (107). Tess's plea to be unique falls on the deaf ears of the pedigree-conscious Angel: "The best is not to remember that your nature and your past doings have been just like thousands' and thousands', and that your coming life and doings'll be like thousands' and thousands'" (107).

As a picturesque, rustic type of womanhood, Tess represents the country girl who becomes the object of curiosity for sightseers and visitors to the rural English landscape. From the vantage point of "middle-class observers," "there was the rural primitivism of the preindustrial world, marginalized in England" (Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* 213). In a convincing essay about *Tess*, Jeff Nunokawa describes how it was fashionable for tourists with their Baedeker handbooks to visit the Wessex landscape to satisfy their nostalgic longings for the "exotic and the simple" of a bygone era and disappearing culture as personified in Tess (75). Stonehenge, an emblem of primitive culture, which figures so prominently in the novel's conclusion, was "becoming a tourist trap by the end of the nineteenth century" (74). The urban invaders to the countryside are like the ethnographers traveling to distant lands for the touch of what they perceive as a primitive, more simple life style. Tourism, a kind of layperson's ethnography, was becoming a big business in England in the late nineteenth century as a result of the burgeoning geographical societies and magazines, like *National Geographic*, which catered to the public's taste for countries "inhabited by cheerful people with quaint and colorful customs" (Spurr 50-51). The image of Tess could easily have been superimposed on photos of native women around the globe; she becomes the lovely and exotic postcard image to send back home. Along with the development of the travel industry, fieldwork became an option for the late nineteenth-century naturalist and anthropologist: "the empire-building enterprise conditioned their itineraries and framed the immense opportunities through which they built careers" (Camerini 373).

For Angel, Tess becomes an Ur-woman, "a visionary essence of woman—a whole sex condensed into one typical form" (111). Similarly, the narrator insists that the peasant girls and their body parts are interchangeable, and their identities seem as indistinguishable as the cows they milk. The four dairy maids are seen as one, especially in their love for Angel: "Four hearts gave a big throb simultaneously" (120) and "The whole four flushed as if one heart beat through them" (121). Like Malinowski writing about the Ur-savage woman, the narrator describes the emotion "thrust on them by cruel Nature's law" and concludes that "[t]he differences which distinguished them as indi-

viduals were abstracted by this passion, and each was but portion of one organism called sex" (124). Tess's individuality, like that of her rustic sisters, is subsumed under this sexual impulse, according to the male narrator, and Angel seems ready to choose from among the lot (in the same haphazard manner in which he chose his dancing partner in the first scene). When Angel is left alone after Tess's departure, he invites Izz to accompany him to Brazil as his replacement lover, an offer he takes back, partly perhaps because he is reminded of the moral injustice; he warns Izz, "it will be wrong-doing in the eyes of civilization—Western civilization, that is" (225), as if for a rather rigid Angel, another civilization could exist. And finally, at Tess's death, Angel can accept too readily Liza-Lu, Tess's sister, as his wife—indicating his subtle approval of the skewed modular system of "Western civilization."

Woman becomes the symbol of all that is other—whether that be the "native" primitive populations of unknown lands or the rural population, the underclass, who, along with their traditions and colorful superstitions, were dying out in England. And like Malinowski and Conrad at their moral and intellectual best, Hardy at his best feels sympathy for the unfathomable native as he tries to grapple with his own shortcomings as observer. Malinowski complains that modern anthropology is trying to destroy the traditions of native populations. In his essay "Maclay, Kubary, Malinowski," Stocking focuses on Malinowski's plea "to 'preserve the integrity of tribal life as far as possible' in order to prevent the 'complete extinction' of native peoples" (*Ethnographer's Magic* 258). Similarly, Hardy, in letters written shortly after the publication of *Tess*, notes the "curious coincidence" of "the discussion on the migration of the agricultural labourer to the towns" occurring "with the publication" of *Tess* (14.12.1891) and states adamantly that his "views of the rural classes are entirely sympathetic" (6.2.1892). Critics have also discussed capitalism as a destructive force encroaching upon the rustic woman's identity, and as such, capitalism is allied with the colonial discourse of control and subjugation. Merryn Williams focuses on Tess's inability, as a woman, to escape the status of an unskilled field laborer (90); Elizabeth Campbell shows how Tess represents the marginalization of rural society caught between tradition and a burgeoning capitalist economy (5); Raymond and Merryn Williams expose how Tess's economic status and class are determined by her value as a sexual object (31); and Rosemarie Morgan connects the institution of marriage to the exploitation of the working class by the upper class (127).

II.

SIGNIFICANTLY, VICTORIAN middle-class males could indulge their sexual fantasies by imposing themselves upon working-class women (as Alec does) or by fantasizing about them (as Angel does). Middle-class "observers leapt too readily to adverse conclusions about the sexual morality of the working class on the strength of certain appearances" (Mason, *Victorian Sexuality* 157). Activities such as swearing, drinking, and uninhibited discourse between

young people were misread as licentious (Mason 157). Thus, Angel's pious middle-class brothers do not want to participate in the country girls' May Day dance because they consider the women to be no more than "a troop of country hoydens" (13). However, the actual rustic women's behavior has little to do with promiscuity; they live by a moral code that is as strict as that of their middle-class sisters, if not stricter. Hardy presents them in a most respectable way; though some might enjoy dancing and drinking, they go to church on a weekly basis and refrain from sexual activity, though they dream of passion with an ideal mate. The middle-class falsification of working-class sexuality is similar to the ethnographer's excessive sexualization of the native women he observes, and Hardy would find, like the progressive and revisionist anthropologist E.B. Tylor in 1881, that it is a mistake to associate promiscuity with the native peoples, "for life in the civilized world is fettered at every turn by chains of custom" (Herbert 64).

Tess, though meticulous about her ethics and principles, is caught in the precarious position of having to defend her purity and her intelligence in a world which would condemn her as promiscuous and simple. Indeed, she does feel condemned by the world of the flesh because of the thinking, shared by Angel, that divides the spirit from the flesh. When a repentant Alec tells her that she is re-tempting him with her beauty, she apologizes and feels "the wretched sentiment which had often come to her before, that in inhabiting the fleshly tabernacle with which nature had endowed her she was somehow doing wrong" (257). With Angel, she has to defend her moral nature as a peasant girl and as a fallen d'Urberville. When she argues to Angel that other girls who had premarital sex were not shunned by their husbands, Angel answers brusquely, with middle-class propriety, "Different societies, different manners. You almost make me say you are an unapprehending peasant woman, who have never been initiated into the proportions of social things" (195). More zealously than his Evangelical missionary father, Angel condemns Tess for her peasant past, especially as he has formed her into a proper bourgeois woman. In response, Tess comes close to anger, "I am only a peasant by position, not by nature!" (195), and defends the native/peasant women who have been thus maligned.

Henrietta L. Moore in *Feminism and Anthropology* ponders the place of women in traditional anthropological thinking and focuses on women as property in marriage relations as well as on the value of women as workers (inside and outside the home). Though Malinowski, in his formal works, does not overtly speak of women in his definition of family, he implies by their absence that they are the missing link in completing the kinship system: "Man, primitive and civilized alike, needs the companionship of a mate; he also needs to reproduce. All these needs are integrated and implemented through the institution of marriage" (*Scientific Theory of Culture, and Other Essays* 206). Alluding to the earlier ethnographic work of Frazer, Malinowski perceives the family as requisite to the stability of civilization:

From the very outset of culture the family has been the institution in which most of the fundamental needs of human beings have been satisfied. It is the institution primarily based on the reproductive need, but also directly associated with the production, distribution, and consumption of food. It is the institution in which the continuity of culture ... is primarily carried out. (*Scientific Theory* 206)

For Victorian and early modern anthropologists, family and marriage as stabilizing agents become focal concerns, and Tess's search for a home and family connectedness speak to this biological urge. Indeed, the initial mating May Day dance which prompts the action of the plot has Angel searching for a suitable partner. With its ritualistic and primeval tones and the focus on the archetypal virgin woman in white, the opening scene prepares the reader for the mating rituals to follow. The ethnographic concern with morality and marriage echoes the Victorian obsession with virgins and fallen women or, as Kristin Brady puts it, "the Victorian need to confine sexuality to reproduction and to keep control of that reproduction in patriarchal terms" (88).⁴

In his personal diary, Malinowski speaks candidly of his own pursuit of the perfect woman to fulfill his basic human needs in a "civilized" family/married way.⁵ Indeed, for him, his betrothed Elsie ("E.R.M.") represents that civilizing effect: "I feel that she is the only woman made to be my wife" (181), but he torments himself with reveries of N.S., the woman with whom he had a brief dalliance and whom his mother would have frowned upon.⁶ Throughout his diary, Malinowski juxtaposes his notion of "civilized" woman with "sexual" woman and frames his dilemma with his reading of *Tess*. Indeed, his reading of the "Maiden no more" section brings him "closer to E.R.M." (149). But just as Angel and Alec have two conflicting views about Tess, Malinowski dichotomizes the image of woman in reading *Tess*; for him, E.R.M. is the future wife to settle down with, "but without excitement" (150). N.S., who embodies a playful and erotic sexuality, would not be an appropriate wife. And interspersed with his reveries of the two types of women are his daydreams about the sexuality of the native women around him whom he is tempted to touch or "pat on the belly." Malinowski becomes aware of his confusion about his attraction to woman (whether spiritual or sexual) whenever he mentions *Tess*. For example, he compares Tess to N.S. rather than to E.R.M., most likely because Tess is the sexual woman deserted (indeed, two pages thereafter he reproaches himself for having deserted N.S.). He even insists that "T. of U." is "more like N.S." but that he plans to send marked passages of the text, a rather bourgeois, sentimental gesture, to the civilized Elsie (189-90). This leads to a discussion of Elsie as being a

4. Brady does maintain that Hardy's narrator challenges traditional "courtship rituals that privilege virginity and deny women's sexual experiences," but that he still adheres to "standard notions about women's weakness, inconstancy, and tendency to hysteria" (89).

5. Further references to Malinowski's work are to *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* and are noted parenthetically unless otherwise indicated.

6. Ironically, Malinowski's repentance about his sexual nature after his mother's death parallels that of Alec's conversion after his mother's death. Alec tries to convince Tess that it was "his old mother's dying wish" that he get married (261). Similarly, Angel feels compelled to assuage an imaginary mother, insisting to Tess that his mother would like her better if she were educated.

savior figure who will protect him from his sexual thoughts and impulses, and instead of seeing Elsie as a sexual creature herself, he equates her with propriety and civilization: "At moments almost unbearable longing for E.R.M.—or is it for civilization?" and he views marriage as the civilizing agent which will obviate his sexual needs: "... I chased lecherous thoughts. E.R.M. is my *de facto* wife. The night before I thought that if we met now we would *exchange vows* and put our relationship on a *firm basis*" (190). And yet it is N.S. whom, he feels, he has possessed and deserted, the "maiden no more" represented by Tess, which haunts him in a sexual way: "strong physical attraction to N.S., stronger than ever before. I think of her physique (*am I gross?*)—imagining her body vividly in every detail" (193). And yet, though he longs to achieve "spiritual mastery" over N.S. (159), he needs to possess E.R.M., for she is "the only woman for [him], the incarnation of everything a woman can give him" (188). But the images of naked native women crop up and he tries to suppress them and translate them in terms of his sanctioned love for Elsie: "I look at women and think of their breasts and figure *in terms* of E.R.M." He has a strong desire to "civilize" himself, to "have a family, to marry E.R.M., to settle down" (173). Indeed, his need to possess woman in a legal and sexual way becomes an obsession. He thinks about his past with Elsie and how he "never obtained the true reward which the very fact of possessing her must give [him]" (165).

In writing about eroticism in *Tess*, James Kincaid makes a statement about Victorian sexuality which relates to Malinowski's sexual fantasies when reading *Tess*, longing for his current or ex-lover or seeing the half-naked bodies of native women. Kincaid maintains that "Tess takes on any shape for those she meets, but is a conveniently empty shape, ready to be filled in and then longed for" (13). He continues that in "an indistinct, blurred form, she fits perfectly into erotic fantasies," especially those that are "unindividualised, making no distinctions between the participants, flowing from one to another" (13). Though he is talking about how we sexualize and objectify female bodies, what he says about Tess can be connected to what the ethnographer sees in the native, whom he usually sees as feminine or childlike. Kincaid finally damns Alec, Angel, Hardy's narrator, and the reader for "[w]e are all of us Alecs, Angels, Hardys; we all wish to create images by distancing, even or especially if that distancing means annihilating" (14). Kincaid's male view of "distancing" to see clearly and then "annihilating" are very common to the Hardy narrator, the male protagonists Alec and Angel, and certainly to the male ethnographer of Hardy's and Malinowski's time.

In his scientific frenzy to capture the picture of an "uncivilized" society in his journals, Malinowski is always thwarted by his need to possess. Though ostensibly he is trying to create an objective system whereby to explore a foreign culture, it is the most other "Other" (a native woman) who obsesses him. He feels smug that his diary has "historical value" (171), but he is always confusing the "historical" with the "psychological" in the system he has conceived, though he attempts to meld the two disciplines. In his attempt to rec-

oncile the scientific with the imaginary, he is very much like Angel who finally chastises himself for trying to piece together an illustrious past for Tess: "Why had he not known the difference between the political value and the imaginative value of these things?" (283). Moreover, Malinowski is convinced that language is an objective truth that can contain womanhood; language, "a product of collective psychology" and "an objective creation," "corresponds to the *institution* in the equation: social imagination=institution and individual ideas" (161). His biggest challenge, though, is to encompass woman through his linguistic structures: "Must organize the linguistic material and collect documents, find better ways of studying the life of women ... and system of 'social representations'" (167). One could compare Angel's false system of comparison: "In considering what Tess was not, he overlooked what she was, and forgot that the defective can be more than the entire" (222). Moreover, Angel, like the male ethnographer busy at field work, similarly sees Tess as a linguistic sign to decipher:

Looking at her silently for a long time; 'She is a dear dear Tess,' he thought to himself, as one deciding on the true construction of a difficult passage. 'Do I realize solemnly enough how utterly and irretrievably this little womanly thing is the creature of my good or bad faith and fortune? I think not. I think I could not, *unless I were a woman myself*. When I am in worldly estate, she is. What I become, she must become. What I cannot be, she cannot be....' (183, emphasis mine)

Angel Clare, then, depends upon his own imaginative re-creation of Tess for any sense of meaning; indeed, he suggests that without him she could not be! ("What I become, she must become"), and indeed her condition is circumscribed, he feels, by his own: "What I cannot be, she cannot be." Inadvertently, though, Clare shows the problems involved in capturing an apt picture of the other: ironically, he could not realize how utterly Tess's welfare depended upon his own, unless, of course, he were a woman. Moreover, he realizes that scientific explications of her being are impossible, as scientific models cannot contain her; he tries to decipher her, as if "deciding on the true construction of a difficult passage" (183).

Like Malinowski, Hardy's male protagonists are overcome by a deep depression upon losing their ostensible hold on woman, on Tess. These characters feel the "ache of modernism" as profoundly as Tess does when she loses her baby (105). Alec becomes obsessed with religion to fill the emptiness but quickly abandons his job of itinerant minister upon rediscovering her at the revival meeting. However, though he has been a scoundrel early on, his later behavior indicates a true feeling of devotion for Tess, perhaps a feeling brought on by the death of his mother, the only other significant woman in his life. Similarly, Angel, when he withdraws his claim as husband, is distraught and spends a night sleepwalking, muttering all the while, "My wife—dead, dead!" (207); the night ends with a somnambulistic love-making session with a bewildered Tess in an Abbey coffin. When he encounters his childhood friend Mercy Chant, he exclaims that he is "going crazy" (222). Desperation drives him to Brazil to do field work, like the good ethno-

grapher, and to establish his long-dreamed-of farm. It is interesting that Angel should choose South America as his future home—in its association for the cultured Englishman with unchecked primitive passions. Indeed, to Angel, the rustic maidens of England and the native women of Brazil probably shared the sexual latitude which Angel equates with naturalness. But Angel becomes further depressed and physically ill, and is only jettisoned back into life and into love for Tess through an actual encounter with the mortality of his friend who advises him prophetically that Tess's sin would not be perceived as a sin at all in many cultures.

Distance and death bring both men back to Tess. As Alec abandons the ministry, Angel abandons his boyish jungle adventures in order to return to Tess. But as the narrator has made perfectly clear, Tess only has meaning insofar as she is a self-sufficient entity who cannot be comprehended by the world around her: "She was not an existence, an experience, a passion, a structure of sensations, to anybody but herself. To all humankind she was only a passing thought. Even to friends she was no more than a frequently passing thought" (77). Tess, in essence, has become a springboard by which to measure Alec's and Angel's sense of inadequacy as men.

Tess's encounters with these men cause them to reevaluate their public projections of manhood. To the Victorian middle-class male, "[t]he association of manhood with gainful employment was ... also potentially undermining of masculine status" (Roper 18). Alec, who has been a scoundrel and a sluggard, living off his mother's wealth, turns to a "feminine" occupation, the ministry, after losing his ties to both mother and lover. The same existential void filled in his early years with dissipation later engenders the opposite extreme of fanatical minister. Indeed, Alec had threatened to proselytize Africans had he not found Tess. It is Tess who recovers that lost sexuality or sense of manhood for Alec, even if he submits to the civilizing effect of marriage. And so, too, Angel, who as the youngest son gets the least financial support from his minister father, does not follow in the father's or brothers' footsteps to go to Cambridge and attain a rather smug and feminized lifestyle as a minister. Instead, he goes the "tough" and physical route in choosing farming; his decision to go to Brazil after Tess's departure indicates that he really needs to capture some sense of masculinity through an adventure in an exotic and yet untamed place. Yet both men's adventures in finding themselves through employment end with reveries of Tess's body—the most uncharted territory that needs to be conquered. As typical middle-class Victorian men, whose faith in God has faltered, whose early promiscuous sexual adventures have proved unfulfilling, and whose attempts at finding a centered self through a profession have failed, they turn to the only means available of sustaining their masculinity and their sanity: the romance (a veritable fiction of their own making) of Tess. Like Victorian ethnographers, they attempt to impose order into the disorder and skepticism of their own culture, only to lapse into a depression of dissociation. Tess seems to provide the key to renewed meaning in their lives as they give up dreams of converting South

Americans or Africans. It is the same ritualistic meaning that Malinowski turns to in order to keep his equilibrium among the natives—and that is to do precisely what the natives do—to marry. But in the absence of E.R.M. or of Tess, Malinowski and the male suitors fantasize about the perfect wife to marry, mold, and protect. Civilization seems to triumph even among sexual “savages” such as Alec.

The sexual appropriation of woman’s body becomes a motivating drive for Malinowski and the male protagonists of *Tess*. Malinowski feels compelled to declare his ownership over E.R.M.’s body, and his reading of *Tess* allows him to conceptualize this feeling. He states that his reading of *Tess* permits him to “find something” related to the “theme of false sexual appropriation,” for which he does not know the treatment. He leaves his reading of *Tess* for a “short talk” with the natives and ends by thinking of E.R.M. with depth and respect: “My thoughts do not deviate into any lecherous impasse.” However, after applying vaseline to his hands, he once again is aroused to a “sensual longing, deep, sentimental,” and he ends his reverie with a statement of authority, ownership, as he thinks of his beloved E.R.M. and “the absolute value of her body” (174). In Malinowski’s mind, Tess’s body and E.R.M.’s body seem to merge.

Malinowski’s imaginative re-creation of his ownership of the body empowers him. This also holds true for Hardy’s male narrator and male protagonists/voyeurs, Alec d’Urberville and Angel Clare. In their efforts to decide how Tess can be both pure and natural at the same time and in their efforts to tame a wild Tess into a more civilized woman, with the proper language and the proper clothing, Alec and Angel are very much like the male ethnographer Malinowski who cannot render an objective view of woman because of his overwhelming sense of his own sexuality and needs. Indeed, the narrative conspires to civilize Tess to death. She becomes more and more statue-like, and a product of artifice, so that Angel finally finds her in her stylish lodginghouse with Alec, where she appears as a ghastly vestige of the robust country girl, now “loosely wrapped in a cashmere dressing-gown of gray-white” and with a “frill of down” at her neck and her hair up (312-13). Tess becomes the body to adorn, the body to decipher, the text to read, but only as a means for the male protagonists to explore their own sexuality in an oppressive culture and restrictive class.

III.

THE FOCUS OF THE TEXT is less Tess’s sexuality and more Alec’s and Angel’s attempts to comprehend their own repressed sexualities in a civilized, unnatural world. Alec’s and Angel’s sexualities are based on a conflict between the carnal and the spiritual, a recurrent theme in Hardy’s work. As D.H. Lawrence indicates, Alec, who is “physically male,” finds in Tess “the embodiment of his desire” (70) and implies that he was “her real kin, her real husband” (72). Angel only acknowledges the female in himself, but he finds “the female in himself ... detestable” and “the body, the senses, that which

he will share with a woman" degrading (70-71). But Alec and Angel are not just types representing the flesh and the spirit; indeed, their vacillating perspectives about sexuality, vis-à-vis Tess's body, create the tensions in the book. They experience a dialectic of desire and a transformation through their encounter with Tess; though they are moving in different directions, both men converge in their obsessive desires for Tess. Alec, initially the typical Victorian rake, goes through a spiritualization, ironically through a conversion by Angel's Evangelical father, and moves from promiscuity to abstinence. As the narrator notes, "sensuousness" had given way to "devotional passion" and "animalism" to religious "fanaticism" (252), indicating a sincere love for Tess.

Angel's feelings for Tess change from adoration to contempt when her confession thwarts his chronic attempts to spiritualize the sensual. Angel has an uncanny knack of spiritualizing the natural or the sensual in Tess: "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" (127). Though impassioned, he translates her beauty into poetry: her lips and teeth recalled to him "the old Elizabethan simile of roses filled with snow" (127). Even in her most sensuous moments, Tess appears to Angel "as something of a sexual threat, but primarily as a threat to his immaculate etherealizing process" (Johnson 268). Various critics, such as Rosemarie Morgan, point out how Angel's erotic encounter with Tess awakens him to his sexuality and makes him "wonderfully improved" (Morgan 106). However, being a Hellenist, as he proclaims himself in opposition to his father, Angel imbibes the classical moralism of his time and with that, the same prejudices towards sexual license, thus making him less tolerant than his Evangelical father. As Michael Mason points out, "fallen women," either as seduced women or prostitutes, were treated very humanely and sympathetically by the Evangelicals (*Sexual Attitudes* 59), who gave such women the benefit of the doubt by "supposing that they had been the unsuspecting victims of male ploys" (59). Angel's parents are far more sympathetic to Tess than he would have expected: "their Christianity was such that, reprobates being their especial care, the tenderness towards Tess ... was instantly excited by her sin" (306-07). Angel, inflexible about morality and woman's body, is unable to think that "the Magdalen might be at his side" (110). Indeed, Evangelicism prompted a kind of Magdalenism which revered the figure of the fallen woman and forgave "female sexual transgression" (Mason 89). Had Angel been more Evangelical like Alec, he might have forgiven Tess sooner, thus averting the catastrophe. Lawrence aptly remarks that in Alec d'Urberville, "there is good stuff gone wrong. Just as in Angel Clare, there is good stuff gone wrong in the other direction" (73). He blames their extreme behavior for the destruction of the woman "they both loved" (73).

This fixation upon pure and besmirched women (the "maiden no more" syndrome which fascinates Malinowski) resonates throughout *Tess*. The male

gaze—of Hardy's narrator and male protagonists—envelops Tess's being and affixes a meaning which she cannot escape.⁷ Penny Boumelha states that Tess is "doomed by her 'exceptional physical nature' and by the inevitability of an erotic response from men. That response binds her to male images and fantasies" (125). But she feels that the male narrator can never capture her essence: "The novel's ideological project, the circumscribing of the consciousness and experience of its heroine by a scientifically dispassionate mode of narration, is undermined by its 'placing' of Tess through genre and point of view" (128). Patricia Ingham feels that the changing meanings of archetypes assigned to women, "the fallen" as well as the "womanly woman," involve "problems of perception for those who encounter" Tess (74). Moreover, though the narrator defends Tess's sexuality as natural, he is ultimately bewildered by her sexual nature: "Since she is not sexless he construes her as all sex, reaching a description of generic 'woman' which is highly reductive" (Ingham 73). George Levine goes so far as to equate Hardy with his narrator and points to a common voyeurism: "The narrator is intensely conscious of the *unwariness* of the characters and sees them within contexts they could not perceive; he becomes, in a way, one of the innumerable voyeurs who populate his fiction" (*Darwin* 228-29). More recently, Levine points to Hardy's own anxieties about sexuality and civilization as reflected in his ambivalence towards his female characters:

The sexuality to which Hardy was reluctantly but inescapably attracted through the simple physical presence of women always threatens to thwart social advancement, to make rational control impossible, to undermine respectability and power. ("Shaping Hardy's Art" 542)

Judith Mitchell also maintains that the voyeur in *Tess* "is Hardy himself in the guise of the male narrator" (178). Brady shows how woman's sexuality provokes "acute anxiety" in Hardy's male narrator (90) and that the hysteria he detects in women is actually "a projection of his" (102). She maintains that "the unconventional aspects of the women he constructs threaten his own imaginary sense of masculinity, triggering his fear of castration" (90). Tess's sexuality has nothing to do with Tess, as Michael Ragussis points out, since it becomes the locus of everyone's fantasy: "Tess's body is a vehicle not only for her lovers—for Alec's lust and for Angel's ideal search for purity" but also for the "members of her own sex" who live vicariously through Tess (142). All of these analyses suggest the fearful consequences of woman's sexuality—as illuminating male deficiencies and exposing men's own hyster-

7. Most feminist critics who were writing at the time Laura Mulvey's influential essay on the male gaze appeared perceive Tess as being a mere object of the voyeuristic, erotic, and alienated male gaze (see Judith Mitchell, Dianne Fallon Sadoff, and Kaja Silverman). For a more moderate reading which has Tess fluctuate between activity and passivity, see Kristin Brady's, Kathleen Blake's, and Rosemarie Morgan's analyses. For a more temperate reading of the narrator, see Levine: Hardy's narrator, "like the post-Darwinian scientist ... needs to achieve the fullest possible distance from his subjects compatible with the closest possible scrutiny of them" (233).

For a reading which diverges radically from mine, see Adrian Poole who feels that Tess has much more power over her body and language: "She has ... the ability to own her own body, to live in it and through it and speak through it" (482).

ical reactions to the body—and the male need to define and confine Tess by possessing her body and appropriating her language.

In his preface to the fifth edition of *Tess*, Hardy articulates the dilemma which plagued Malinowski—the power of the observer (storyteller or ethnographer) over the observed object (in this case, Tess). Hardy defends himself to the readers who found fault with his depiction of Tess, “A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented by Thomas Hardy,” by stating that he is “a mere teller, who writes down how the things of the world strike him, without any ulterior intentions whatever.” Such a defense parallels the rationale of Victorian ethnography which likewise reveals conflicts about sexuality and civilization, primitivism and culture. Rebellious women inspire fear in Hardy as the characters become projections of his own inability to transgress. Levine asserts that Hardy’s characters “seem subject to the assaults of observation, some particularly so because they act out what must have been Hardy’s own self-thwarted passion to be careless, not to be respectable, not to be responsible to the conventions of the community: they pay the consequences he was ultimately unwilling to pay” (228).⁸

Tess is a book which focuses on man’s legal right or natural desire to own and to appropriate woman’s body. Much of the controversy in the book revolves around this idea—that Tess belongs to Alec in a biological, “primitive” sense and to Angel in the legal, “civilized” sense. From a traditional, prefeminist critical standpoint, Tess, “[a] victim of civilization ... is also a gift of civilization.... Tess is one of the greatest triumphs of civilization: a natural girl” (Howe 67). Such a discourse captures the ethnographic dilemma—of labeling woman. Tess is seen as both “gift” of civilization and “victim,” as artificial as well as natural.

Significantly, the book ends with the legal execution of Tess, and her death sentence is read at Stonehenge, where Hardy seems to return to the idea of the beginnings of civilization (however primitive and mystical) juxtaposed with Victorian man-made laws and with the men’s re-creation of Tess as a “natural” woman. If Tess is a natural girl to the end, with the passion to love as well as to kill, then the moral of the story is that her sister Liza-Lu learns the language of the civilized woman. Tess’s final perverse injunction to Angel is for him to marry her sister Liza-Lu, to tame her with the proper syntax and grammar: “If you would train her and teach her, Angel, and bring her up for your own self!... She has all the best of me without the bad of me” (326).

Malinowski himself felt that the dénouement of *Tess* was overdone, too “despairing.” Perhaps the “strong, unpleasant impression” which the ending left upon him says something about his own shortcomings as an observer of women or his own irresolution about woman’s sexuality. The final sections

8. On a cultural level, Hardy’s fear of women is related to his fear of class tensions and to the potential disruption created by the New Woman: “Hardy did indeed fear women, but in terms of their threatening social mobility, and therefore as a dimension of his acute class consciousness” (Widdowson 217).

of *Tess* ("The Convert" and "Fulfilment") deal with male justification of their behavior toward Tess, now in limbo, as maiden no more and wife no more. Indeed, the last part of the book involves the male solipsistic vision (Alec's and Angel's) of who gets the girl. Alec d'Urberville, apparently reformed as a wandering minister, tries to seduce and repossess Tess once more as he makes clear to her that she is "a deserted wife," that Angel has left her, and so he, Alec, could make her an honest woman. Alec pleads his case, that he was nearly driven mad "to think that I had no legal right to protect you—that I could not have it; whilst he who has it seems to neglect you utterly" (268). Shortly thereafter, Angel, the man who has given up his right to possess Tess, tries to reclaim her with the same legalistic banter: "I will not desert you! I will protect you by every means in my power, dearest love, whatever you have done or not have done!" (319).

In the end, though, Angel just transfers his notion of womanhood from Tess to her sister Liza-Lu, so that it seems that for Angel, Tess was a mere fantasy. That he can easily abandon Tess in the end for another woman in her shape, Liza-Lu, shows how easily the idealization of woman continues as the two sisters are interchangeable. Significantly, throughout the text, Tess is perceived as a vulnerable or amenable child of a benevolent nature. Tess, just pages before her execution, is described as civilized, tamed, and domesticated—a product of artifice residing in Alec's house. In the end, Tess is once again allied with nature, but this time with a malevolent and brute force of nature. Indeed, shortly before her arrest, Tess appears as all animal and not at all a "woman": "her breathing now was quick and small, like that of a lesser creature than a woman" (328), and she stood up, "shook herself," waiting for the men to apprehend her. Liza-Lu, though, is described as the purer and more desirable version of Tess: "half girl, half woman—a spiritualized image of Tess, slighter than she, but with the same beautiful eyes" (329). And so the myth and myth-making of woman are perpetuated as Angel quickly transfers his love, allegiance, and attention from one woman to another, to a "half girl" who could still be molded.

Feminist critic Trinh T. Minh-ha has attacked traditional anthropologists, for to them, "Women, like colored, is the 'lesser man'" (126). She herself attempts to resist categorization: "Like any common living thing, I fear and reprove classification and the death it entails" (109), and she resents male ethnographic authority, represented by his "ear, eye, and pen, which record in his language while trying to speak through mine, on my behalf" (109). Tess does not possess the language to resist such categorization as she becomes a product of nature whose language cannot be deciphered. Speaking of Tess, the field laborer, the narrator differentiates between the empowered active male and the passive natural woman: "A field-man is a personality afild; a field-woman is a portion of the field; she has somehow lost her own margin, imbibed the essence of her surrounding, and assimilated herself with it" (74). Minh-ha has asserted that "[t]he anthropologist-nativist who seeks to perforate meaning by forcing his entry into the Other's personal realm undertakes

the desperate act of filling in all the fissures that would reveal the emptiness of knowledge" (128). Just so, Hardy ends his text/quest desperately with the death of Natural Woman and with Tess's ultimate silence: Tess acquiesces passively to her death with a feeble "I am ready" (328).

The final *tableau mort* of Tess's execution is in stark contrast to the *tableau vivant* of the May Day mating ritual. Angel and Liza-Lu, the two mute gazers, will continue the sham of modern civilization through a dispassionate marriage. And ironically their marriage, which will be sanctioned by law and by the final words of a captive Tess, was, as various critics point out, not acceptable in the eyes of British law as such a marriage to one's sister-in-law was perceived as incestuous.⁹ A careful reader can see in such ironies Hardy's veiled disapproval of a system which drives lovers apart and makes a mockery of Tess's body.

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9. Both Ingham (89) and Boumelha (126) point to the incestuous quality of this proposed marriage, as even Hardy does when Angel insists to Tess, "she is my sister-in-law" (326). Tess seems above the law again in saying, "People marry sister-laws continually about Marlott" (326). According to Boumelha, "a man's marriage with his sister-in-law remained not only illegal but also tainted with the stigma of incest until the passing of the controversial Deceased Wife's Sister Act ... in 1907" (125-126).

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