

“The Inward and Outward Eye”:  
Shame and Guilt in the Work of Thomas Hardy

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## **A. Introduction: The Centrality of Shame and Guilt in Thomas Hardy**

### **I. The Neglect of Shame in Hardyan Criticism and its Impact upon Guilt**

Then she became aware of the spectacle she presented to their surprised vision: roses at her breast; roses in her hat; roses and strawberries in her basket to the brim. She blushed, and said confusedly that the flowers had been given to her. (*Tess*, 84)<sup>1</sup>

Appearing ridiculous and indecorous on her journey home from The Slopes, Tess d'Urberville's sense of shame seems at first glance no more than the effect of a simple faux pas. Yet whilst on one level shame may be seen to result, in the conventional way, from the failure to fulfil accepted standards of behaviour, Thomas Hardy is sooner concerned with its inner workings as a mental and physical experience and the wider personal consequences of such an experience upon the self. Communicated silently through the body language of the blush, a sign offering infinite poetic possibilities, shame in Hardy is primarily about perception and ways of seeing the self in relation to others. In the above extract it marks the point when, realizing she is the object of observation by her fellow travellers and imagining herself in their eyes, Tess' view of herself changes, a process which also proves capable of influencing her behaviour and altering her outlook upon life. Shame, a painful and powerful emotion, represents the individual's interaction with and understanding of the outside world.

In the literary history of human experience, shame has a long biblical and classical tradition. In Genesis it is associated with the carnal enlightenment Adam and Eve attain by eating from the tree of knowledge. After doing this they are ashamed of their nakedness and hide. In Homer it is conveyed by such words as *aidos*, *aideomai* and *aischros* to describe, for example, Hector's shame before the Trojans in the closing stages of the *Iliad* lest he does not confront Achilles in single combat, or Odysseus' shame for being seen crying by the Phaeacians in the *Odyssey*. Its intrinsic value is also acknowledged by Plato and Aristotle.<sup>2</sup> Through its repeated reappearance in myth, literature and social ritual, some shame types and scenarios have become archetypal. The fallen woman's shame is one such example. Its classical model is the Phaedra of

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Harmondsworth, 1985, abbreviated hereafter as *Tess*. The texts used for this study are the Penguin Classics Editions; all further quotations in the text are cited with page numbers in brackets, with the abbreviated novel title where necessary.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *The Laws*, Bk. 2, 671c-e; Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 1383b-1385a.

Euripides' *Hippolytus*, its biblical representation found in the Old Testament figures Jezebel and Delilah, and in the New Testament Mary Magdalen. This type of shame is a recurring design in English and American literature, being the basis of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and of course Hardy's *Tess*. Filial shame is another type of shame that has a long literary tradition. Tess' humiliation upon her father's overindulgence in the "market nitch" at the beginning of *Tess* echoes the Old Testament description of Noah's sons in response to his drunkenness and nakedness. These hide their faces in shame when they discover their father has consumed so much wine that he has gone to bed without any clothes on<sup>1</sup>; similarly, we cannot think of a child's shame of its parents without thinking of Jane Austen's heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, who "blushed and blushed again with shame and vexation" (*Pride and Prejudice*, 141)<sup>2</sup> at her mother's bad taste and immodesty at the Netherfield Ball.

More important than this, however, is the fact that the first serious theoretical reflection on the existence and nature of shame took place in Hardy's lifetime and, more precisely, spans the period of his career as a novelist. Charles Darwin published his study on blushing and shame in his pioneering work, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, in 1872; Henry Havelock Ellis' "The Evolution of Modesty" was first published in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* in 1898. Works by Friedrich Nietzsche concerning shame, such as *The Gay Science*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil* were all composed in the 1880s, and the Russian philosopher, Vladimir Solovyof's *The Justification of the Good* dates from 1898. Yet instead of implying that Hardy was familiar with all these works, or that he had to be, to make shame a focal point of his fiction,<sup>3</sup> this only serves to highlight his earnest and exceptional interest in the area compared with his contemporaries. In the studies of Darwin and Ellis, which he possibly knew, shame does not receive the scrutiny Hardy grants it. Subsumed under other-related emotions such as shyness, self-consciousness or

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis, 9: 20-24.

<sup>2</sup> Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, Harmondsworth, 1985.

<sup>3</sup> Of the four studies it is possible that Hardy was familiar with Darwin and Ellis' work; for their discussion see pp. 25-28. Although Hardy is known to have been interested in Nietzsche, he did not hold the German philosopher in very high regard, writing in a well-known letter in 1902 that "to model our conduct on Nature's apparent conduct, as Nietzsche would have taught, can only bring disaster to humanity," *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy by Thomas Hardy*, ed. Michael Millgate, London, 1984, p. 399. Further criticism of Nietzsche is found in numerous entries in the "Literary Notes," ed. Lennart Björk under the title, *Notebooks: The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. II, London, 1985, pp. 75 and 511f. Hardy is not known to be familiar with Solovyof's work.



modesty, it is paid no specific attention and almost always discussed in relation to blushing. The same can be said for the forerunning essay to Darwin's work, *The Physiology or Mechanism of Blushing* (1839), written by the Royal College surgeon, Thomas Burgess. By examining shame in such complex terms as the human mind and body, the self, motivation and behaviour, and identity, Hardy's handling transcends conventional definitions in many respects, and approaches understandings of shame in the fields of psychology and anthropology first articulated in the twentieth century. That the author is able to transfer this shame experience to a literary setting in so faithful and natural a way in a number of the major novels, integrating it within his narrative technique in works like *The Return of the Native* (1878),<sup>1</sup> *The Woodlanders* (1887)<sup>2</sup> and *Tess* (1891), not only pays credit to Hardy's literary skill, but demonstrates shame's structural importance in giving language and shape to his storytelling.

In spite of its centrality, shame has remained wholly neglected by critics of Hardy. Instead it has been subsumed under guilt, a subject which has received steady critical attention. This trend is also found in the study of psychology where the imbalance of attention paid to shame in the interest of guilt has only recently begun to be redressed.<sup>3</sup> As a result works such as *Tess* have remained partially misunderstood. Examining this novel, for example, under the traditional aspect of guilt is misdirected, which means that its first and foremost concern with shame and all its varieties pass unnoticed. A similar fate is met by the novels *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874)<sup>4</sup> and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886)<sup>5</sup> where shame, particularly of a public nature, is equally important as guilt, just as the traditionally guilt-centred novel *Jude the Obscure* (1896)<sup>6</sup> is not without its unique interest in the matter. The reason for this precedence of guilt over shame is twofold. First, on a historical level, guilt is an integral part of our cultural consciousness. Since the dawn of Christianity, and as Freud took care to point out in *Civilization and its Discontents*, western civilization has been characterized by a sense

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, Harmondsworth, 1985, abbreviated hereafter as *The Return*.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, Harmondsworth, 1998, abbreviated hereafter as *Woodlanders*.

<sup>3</sup> Helen Block Lewis, "Introduction: Shame – the "Sleeper" in psychopathology," pp. 1-28, and "The Role of Shame in Depression over the Life Span," pp. 29-50 in *The Role of Shame in Symptom Formation*, ed. Helen Block Lewis, Hillsdale, New Jersey, 1987. Particularly significant here is Lewis' discussion of Freud's neglect of shame and focus upon guilt. See also Wendy Hoblitzelle, "Differentiating and Measuring Shame and Guilt: The Relation between Shame and Depression," p. 207, in the same.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Harmondsworth, 1985, abbreviated hereafter as *Madding Crowd*.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Harmondsworth, 1997, abbreviated hereafter as *The Mayor*.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, Harmondsworth, 1985, abbreviated hereafter as *Jude*.

of guilt. This is secured by the Christian doctrines of original sin and the Atonement, the notion that, as the descendants of Adam and Eve, we are not only all born innately ‘guilty’ of their sin, but that Jesus had to atone for our guilt by dying on the cross in order to renew the broken covenant between man and God. Subsequently the idea of guilt and its presentation and examination has always played a central role in western culture: as early as the seventeenth century Shakespeare was exploring different ways of coping with guilt through his two characters, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* and Nikolaevich Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (1878), for example, or Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamozov* (1880), Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* (1925) and William Faulkner’s *Light in August* (1932) are all works automatically associated with guilt, even though shame plays an important part in them.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, on a phenomenological level and despite the semantic distinction between the two terms, which implies their difference, shame and guilt frequently overlap and occur simultaneously as emotions. We have only to look at one of shame’s definitions as a “guilty feeling”<sup>2</sup> to appreciate this, a feature that makes them difficult to differentiate.<sup>3</sup> This, together with the fact that guilt is instinctively easier to define, means that shame has tended to be assimilated under it. Revealing a plain and definite etymology and concerned with clear-cut facts, lent authority through their legal association and our unequivocal notion of right and wrong, guilt is a more transparent emotion than shame. All-encompassing and less determined than guilt, shame is infinitely more difficult to pin down; involving the desire to hide and disappear from view, its very nature is disposed to concealment, a fact that hardly encourages critical investigation.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, their discussion in Helen Merrell Lynd, *On Shame and the Search for Identity*, New York, 1958, pp. 27-56. Despite having been written nearly fifty years ago, Lynd’s work, combining psychological and anthropological approaches to shame with history and sociology, continues to offer new ways of looking at shame, and will be referred to throughout this study. In Pamela Fox’s study of working-class literature in *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890-1945*, Durham and London, 1994, pp. 12-17, (also referred to in this study), she re-examines Lynd’s theory concerning the role of history in the shame experience and shame’s unique ability to tell us about dominant ideological norms.

<sup>2</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, ed. James A. H. Murray *et al.*, Oxford, 1961, s.v. *shame* (sb.), I. 1. c. Hereafter abbreviated as *OED*.

<sup>3</sup> See Lynd (1958), pp. 20-26 and Douglas L. Cairns’ detailed discussion of shame and guilt in his introduction to *Aidos: The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature*, Oxford, 1993, pp. 14-26, both of whom are against an absolute definition distinguishing shame from guilt. Lewis also discusses this overlap in *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*, New York, 1971, p. 38 and in Lewis (1987), p. 17. Indeed much of the recent research in psychology has involved differentiating the two emotions, see for example Hoblitzelle, pp. 207-235 in *ibid*.

Yet it is this very affinity between guilt and shame that instigates this study's double focus, for analysis of one cannot be done without analysis of the other. In addition to being explored in a selection of Hardy's major novels for the first time, shame's examination presents a means of looking at guilt that has not been possible before. It does this by establishing the intrinsic constitution of guilt in relation to shame: in contrast to writers like Darwin and Hawthorne before him, Hardy distinguishes carefully between the two. It is within this binary framework that a typology of shame and guilt characters, plots, text-worlds, narrative styles, communications and sympathies are based, a typology in which several of Hardy's chief views towards man, civilization, gender and writing are contained. At the same time and on another level, shame and guilt form and explain the tragic experiences of three separate characters from three different novels. Shame underlies these characters' tragedies by representing their failed expectations and loss of faith in life, loved ones, God and Nature; guilt provides a response to this experience by presenting a means of coping with its consequences. Thus by being intrinsic to the tragic experience, guilt and shame are not only used to illustrate the author's wider conviction about man's predicament in life, but also to underline the humanness of this predicament by remaining, above all, human experiences had by individuals in living situations.

## II. The Interpretation of Guilt as a Social Sanction and a Psychological Phenomenon

In his historical and cultural survey on guilt, John Carroll calls Hardy “The most extreme of the English novelists of guilt”<sup>1</sup>: in contrast to shame, the observation that guilt is a central element in Hardy’s fiction is not a new one. In spite of this its assessment has been confined to two chief areas, both are which are based on the traditional premise that guilt is an emotion felt upon moral responsibility for some specified offence or crime. The first understands guilt as a sanction operating in the societies of Hardy’s text-worlds to foster characters’ morally correct actions by punishing their morally dissident ones. Guilt is thus a motive of behaviour whose effectiveness depends upon the characters’ internalization of standard moral codes.<sup>2</sup> What is more, this moral code frequently pertains to sexual behaviour. “[S]uch guilt,” writes Jagdish Chandra Dave, “is not natural but the artificial product of traditional morality. It is seen nowhere among the lower forms of life, and it disappears when society sanctions indulgence.”<sup>3</sup> Guilt is thus essentially a social construct and an unnatural effect of civilization, an interpretation that finds support in “shameless Nature,” the cause, according to *Tess*’ narrator, of the heroine’s illicit pregnancy. This not only means that guilt is evoked by a sense of having done wrong, but also, given Hardy’s well-known preference for the natural state and criticism of conventional morality and civilized society, that its very moral deservedness is questionable.<sup>4</sup> Yet whilst this interpretation of guilt certainly holds true for *The Mayor* and *Tess*, which Dave discusses, it fails to explain guilt in *The Return* and *Jude*. *The Mayor*’s Lucetta Templeman is condemned for her unlawful relations with Michael Henchard although she has the insight to realize “that my only crime was the indulging in a foolish girl’s passion for you with too little regard for correctness, and that I was what *I* call innocent all the time they called me guilty” (*The Mayor*, 176), whilst in a similar fashion, Tess is condemned for her loss of virginity to Alec d’Urberville although “She had been made

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<sup>1</sup> John Carroll, *Guilt: The grey eminence behind character, history and culture*, London, 1985, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Jagdish Chandra Dave, *The Human Predicament in Hardy’s Novels*, London and Basingstoke, 1985, p. 108.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107. See also H. C. Duffin, *Thomas Hardy*, Manchester, 1921, p. 147, for a discussion of the type of morality to which this kind of guilt leads.

<sup>4</sup> Opposing views which argue that certain characters are morally responsible for their own or other’s tragedies do exist. These are discussed separately according to individual novels.

to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly” (*Tess*, 135). But the wrongdoing and guilt of *The Return*’s protagonist, Clym Yeobright, and *Jude*’s heroine, Sue Bridehead, with which this study is especially concerned, are different. Being self-inflicted, their guilt is given little or no public support, with Clym even maintaining his culpability for his mother and wife’s deaths in opposition to his neighbours’ belief in his innocence. Subsequently guilt’s connection to moral transgression and the individual’s desire to right the wrong in order to be reaccepted into the folds of social approval is altogether secondary. In spite of this the notion that Sue’s guilt-driven transformation at *Jude*’s close concerns her need to conform to social convention has become so standard that it is taken as a given. Peter J. Casagrande, for example, argues that after the children’s deaths and in spite of Sue’s non-conformity, Sue’s guilt represents the fact that she “cannot live without the support of the traditional morality and social rituals she says she despises.”<sup>1</sup>

The figure, Sue, introduces the second way in which guilt has been understood in Hardyan criticism, namely as an emotion caused by an inexplicable masochistic impulse. If Sue’s guilt is not socially generated, then it is ‘psychologically’ generated by an irrational, self-destructive force within her psyche. Albert J. Guerard, for example, looks beyond Sue’s wish for social conformity and sees her guilt as simply a disguise for her inherent desire for punishment, writing that “she marries him [Mr. Richard Phillotson] a second time, when her self-punishing has become almost hysterical, like all such persons, she *wants* to subject herself to punishment and horror; her religious and social scruples are the most transparent of disguises.”<sup>2</sup> Masochism caused by mental infirmity is thus the deeper cause of Hardyan guilt; hysteria and “not her ‘real’ self”<sup>3</sup> being the cause of Sue’s self-reproach after the children’s deaths, a guilt which can only be explained by “deeper psychological drives,”<sup>4</sup> which is “pathological,”<sup>5</sup> “persecutory”<sup>6</sup> or downright “hysterical.”<sup>7</sup> Explanations for Hardy’s choice of focus

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<sup>1</sup> Peter J. Casagrande, *Unity in Hardy’s Novels: ‘Repetitive Symmetries,’* London and Basingstoke, 1982, p. 218. See also Richard C. Carpenter, *Thomas Hardy*, New York, 1964, p. 141; Simon Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy and the Proper Study of Mankind*, Basingstoke, 1993, p. 154; Shanta Dutta, *Ambivalence in Hardy: A Study of his Attitude towards Women*, Basingstoke and London, 2000, p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> Albert J. Guerard, *Thomas Hardy*, New York, 1964, p. 111.

<sup>3</sup> T. R. Wright, *Hardy and the Erotic*, Basingstoke, 1989, p. 130.

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Thurley, *The Psychology of Hardy’s Novels: The Nervous and the Statuesque*, St. Lucia, Queensland, 1975, p. 198.

<sup>5</sup> Casagrande, p. 215.

<sup>6</sup> Carroll, p. 35f.

<sup>7</sup> Carpenter (1964), p. 149.

tend to lie in the ‘modernity’ of *Jude* as a whole and the understanding of the psychological emphasis of twentieth-century literature as a product of modernism. Thus Irving Howe’s comment that “Sue Bridehead invites psychological scrutiny,” being “one of the greatest triumphs of psychological portraiture in the English novel,”<sup>1</sup> is taken as a signal of her “modern” character, her guilt demonstrating Hardy’s attempt to understand human behaviour by providing an insight into the deeper drives and motives of her psyche.<sup>2</sup> As Jean R. Brooks writes, it is Hardy’s rejection of the traditional notion of “rational order and stable character” for his focus upon the human psyche as “a battleground of contradictory impulses,” that points *Jude* in the direction of the “modern psychological novel” and the techniques of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce.<sup>3</sup> Other, feminist-oriented studies of Sue relativize her sense of guiltiness into a general human breakdown, with Anne Z. Mickelson, for example, seeing it as no more than a “painful sense of unworthiness” which emerges at the children’s deaths,<sup>4</sup> and Elizabeth Hardwick as simply the result of “the strain of life” whereupon Sue “sinks into a punishing denial of her own principles about marriage and religion.”<sup>5</sup>

The understanding of Sue’s guiltiness as a self-inflicted, masochistic drive powered by an unbalanced mind has coloured the reading of guilt in the other major novels, with the exception perhaps of *The Return*. Lacking the great psychological potential of Sue, Clym’s guilt does not tend to be understood in the same way, receiving significantly less critical attention and often being put down to a more plain-spoken motive such as the protagonist’s deep and exclusive attachment to his mother.<sup>6</sup> Basing his argument around Sue, meanwhile, Carroll writes that she, the mayor and Tess “all live with a powerful sense of foreboding” and that, “When fate treats them harshly, as it invariably does, that is what they expect, and at some deeper level, what they wish for.”<sup>7</sup> Thus an unconscious desire for suffering and punishment lies behind their guilt, a “chronic guilt” which “finds its consummation in destroying them.”<sup>8</sup> And yet whilst this approach

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<sup>1</sup> Irving Howe, *Thomas Hardy*, Basingstoke, 1967, p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> Lance St. John Butler, *Thomas Hardy*, Cambridge, 1978, p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> Jean R. Brooks, *Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure*, London, 1971, pp. 254-256.

<sup>4</sup> Anne Z. Mickelson, *Thomas Hardy’s Women and Men: The Defeat of Nature*, Metuchen, New Jersey, 1976, p. 145.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Hardwick, “Sue and Arabella,” in *The Genius of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Margaret Drabble, London, 1976, p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> See for example Carpenter (1964), p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> Carroll, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

offers one way of understanding Sue's painful self-destruction in *Jude*, it can be applied convincingly to neither Henchard nor Tess. Both show a healthy will to live which involves their attempt to break free from accusations brought against them by others or themselves, with the result that their guilt is markedly less powerful than Sue's. Their guilt does not, therefore, become more comprehensible by the same approach. Nevertheless Carroll's verdict is typical of a long-established tradition. Taking it as one of the primary causes of suicide, Frank R. Jr. Giordano discusses guilt purely within a self-destructive context.<sup>1</sup> Although conceding that Henchard frequently denies his guilt, Giordano makes this alone responsible for the mayor's downfall in that "His massive, unexpiated guilt requires completion of the self-destruction on which his whole life has been spent."<sup>2</sup> Similarly in his study of *Tess*, he ascribes the heroine with a natural tendency towards guilt which he argues is part of what he calls a "life-denying" principle within her person – her "determination to die."<sup>3</sup> Tess' "radical inability to manage guilt" is thus the key underlying force which leads to her downfall<sup>4</sup>; like Evelyn Hardy who writes of Tess' "insidious need to immolate herself,"<sup>5</sup> Giordano takes the instances of her selflessness as evidence of a general sense of self-sacrifice and denigration which her guilt signifies. Indeed so strong is this impulse that, according to the latter, Tess' confession to Angel Clare after their marriage is characteristic of her will to "jeopardize her happiness" and is caused by her being "determined to suffer still."<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey Thurley's verdict is similar in that we find that "the order of honesty she exhibits in revealing to Clare her liaison with Alec d'Urberville seems indistinguishable from a fatal ability to accept her own happiness."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frank R. Jr. Giordano, *"I'd Have My Life Unbe": Thomas Hardy's Self-destructive Characters*, Alabama, 1984. Giordano's choice of corpus is somewhat questionable. Despite professing to be about Hardy's self-destructive characters, he fails to examine what is surely Hardy's most self-destructive character, Sue. This is all the more surprising since complete chapters are dedicated to characters such as Eustacia and Tess who are arguably more positive and life-loving. The reason seems to lie in Giordano's definition of self-destructive, which he understands strictly in the literal sense of committing suicide. Again, however, this is suspect where characters like Tess and Giles Winterborne are concerned.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78f. Giordano's argument that Henchard unconsciously brings about his own downfall is based upon Albert J. Guerard's hypothesis in *Thomas Hardy*, New York, 1964, that the protagonist causes his own "bad luck" in order to punish himself.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>5</sup> Evelyn Hardy, *Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography*, New York, 1970, p. 234.

<sup>6</sup> Giordano, p. 171f.

<sup>7</sup> Thurley, p. 177. I refute this motive behind Tess' confession on p. 133f.

Last but not least this interpretation of guilt is often taken to stand for a general affliction and calamity that not only pervades Hardy's characters, but also the author's own attitude to life. Words like "pessimism" and "tragic vision" are often used in connection with Hardy to describe his understanding of the general human situation.<sup>1</sup> Whilst this labelling is not always helpful, the notion that Hardy's own unmistakable view of the world should be worked out in his writing, and through his characters' experiences, is widely recognized within Hardy scholarship, a premise which is also taken up in this study. Care, however, must be taken when seeking aspects of the novels in the author himself, with the psychobiological approach to guilt as a 'real' emotion experienced by the author and described in his work as a means to relieve himself of it, having little value,<sup>2</sup> since any feelings of such a specific kind that Hardy may have had will always remain inaccessible, and any attempt to pin them down, a highly subjective and unrealistic task.

Whether guilt is a masochistic drive used to demonstrate the psyche of a modern mind, or whether it is a 'flawed' social sanction to undermine conventional morality, both approaches have common ground. Guilt can only be a man-made construct to ensure social conformity if we assume that it is an emotion automatically experienced when a character has performed some offence, and it can only be irrational if we assume it is normally only experienced when we are truly responsible for this offence. Yet whilst elements of both approaches are sustained by novels like *The Mayor*, *Tess* and *Jude*, this understanding of guilt is essentially too simplistic and obscures another important cause of guilt in *The Return* and *Jude*. This cause has little to do with moral responsibility and irrationality in the sense used thus far. For although on a primary level guilt's standard link to moral responsibility is essential for establishing basic distinctions between itself and shame, and serves Hardy's purpose as social critic, on a deeper level this question is irrelevant.

There is never any doubt in the eye of the reader that Clym, Lucetta, Tess and Sue are innocent of the wrong society considers them to be guilty of, or they consider themselves to be. Especially in the case of Clym, Sue and Tess, the issues connected to

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Giordano's discussion of these terms, Giordano, pp. 3-20, where he deems "melancholic" a more fitting description of Hardy's *Weltanschauung*.

<sup>2</sup> Giordano uses such an approach as one of the reasons for Hardy's interest in suicide, arguing that "in distributing his own wish to die among his fictional characters, Hardy found an adequate way of neutralizing such a wish and liberating himself from it," *ibid.*, p. 46.



these characters are not moral issues, but concern the failure of their expectations about life and God. Again this places us in the realms of shame as opposed to guilt, with shame characterizing the tragic experience in terms of its shattering of our understanding of the self and the world. It is then that guilt as a means of coping with this tragedy in *The Return* and *Jude*, and at points in *Tess*, comes to the fore. Here guilt is not assigned according to moral responsibility, but originates as a *rationalizing* force to make sense of this shattering. Assigned in an attempt to explain why things happen as they do, it is only irrational in as far as the false sense of security and order it creates for the characters involved. Living in a chaotic and futile world, it offers Clym and Sue a new and distorted *Weltanschauung* which fits their needs. Thus in *The Return* and *Jude*, guilt is a response to tragedy and a response to shame. This interpretation links these two works in a new way by showing how Clym and Sue's guilt originates from a similar experience.

### III. *The Return of the Native, Tess of the d'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure:* A Trilogy

Hardy's 'modern' novels, *The Return*, *Tess* and *Jude* comprise the chief focus of this study.<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that its rudiments cannot be applied to other major and minor works. Certainly where the intrinsic nature and function of shame and guilt are concerned, aspects are liable to occur elsewhere. The uniqueness of the three novels, however, is that they document an inter-related, developing concern with shame and guilt. This concern not only attempts to define the precise nature of these concepts in terms of cause, kind and effect, and, even more important, to show them at their most extreme, but to put forward theories based upon them concerning man and his environment. Whilst *The Return* marks the beginning of this process, it is not until the two final novels that it is fully revealed and justice is done to both entities, *Tess* being dedicated to shame, *Jude* to guilt.

In order to appreciate this development more fully, and since every Hardy novel owes something to each of the previous novels, reference is also made to the remaining three of the six canonical major novels – in as far as we can talk of a canon in regard to Hardy. *Madding Crowd*, *The Mayor* and *Woodlanders* act as signposts within the trilogy, distinguishing their line of thought more clearly. Hardy's treatment of shame in *Madding Crowd*, for example, is mainly of profit only as far as its randomness emphasizes its refinement and systematisation in subsequent works. Often considered by Hardy scholars as the weakest of the six novels, shame is distributed indiscriminately regardless of character, sex or class – even the sheep feel shame in this early work!<sup>2</sup> Together with its agent, the blush, it appears in almost every other chapter, and thus has nothing of the careful typing begun in *The Return* and perfected in *Tess*. Similarly the treatment of guilt is relatively straightforward in comparison with *The Return* and *Jude*. Helping to further the plot and appearing when wrongful action deserves reparation, its function is not unlike that found in *The Mayor* and *Woodlanders*. The two latter novels, meanwhile, continue *The Return*'s concern with shame in the areas of public shame, and

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<sup>1</sup> This labelling of 'modern' is made on the grounds of the three novels' treatment of such issues as marriage, the relation between the sexes, and morality in a way that is akin to their discussion in the twentieth century.

<sup>2</sup> *Madding Crowd*, p. 197.

initiating action and motivation, respectively. Their inclusion in the study thus helps to strengthen the centrality of shame in Hardy and redress the sole attention paid thus far to guilt. At the same time the visual presentation of shame and its function in *Woodlanders*, just as the treatment of guilt in *The Mayor* prepares the way for both these concepts in *Tess*. Finally, together the six novels document two wider areas in which shame and its various associations play a decisive role. The first concerns the visuality and brevity of Hardy's narrative style and the systems of communication he sets up in his fiction; the second the question of gender and the means of presenting women characters in a socially acceptable way.

**B. Defining Hardy's Shame and Guilt:  
Rethinking Shame and Guilt within and beyond their Conventional  
and Cultural Context**

**I. Descriptions and Associations of Shame and Guilt in the Nineteenth Century:  
Moral Climate and Moral Wrong**

Shameful, shamefaced, shameless; to feel shame, to be ashamed, to have no shame, to be put to shame, to be a shame; guilty, guiltless; to feel guilty, to be found guilty, to be guilty – these words cover just some of those in Hardy's vocabulary. Yet despite their variety of forms, the meanings behind shame and guilt are not easy to discern. The *OED* defines shame first and foremost as "the painful emotion arising from the consciousness of something dishonouring, ridiculous or indecorous in one's own conduct or circumstances (or in those of others whose honour or disgrace one regards as one's own)."<sup>1</sup> Definitions of guilt it gives are "the fact of having committed, or of being guilty of, some specified or implied offence" and "the state (meriting condemnation and reproach of conscience) of having wilfully committed crime or heinous moral offence."<sup>2</sup> On this conventional footing, and in comparison with the whole scale of human emotions, then, shame and guilt are unique. Unlike other emotions like joy or grief, which are isolated and markedly personal, they carry information about conventionally accepted standards of conduct. What we feel ashamed and guilty about depends on what is considered 'dishonouring,' 'ridiculous,' 'indecorous,' 'offensive' or 'criminal' by ourselves and others. Cultural factors play an inherent part in the constitution of any emotion; as a result shame and guilt signify different things to different people at different times<sup>3</sup> – a fact that of Hardy's characters, *Tess*' Angel Clare recognizes and *Jude*'s Arabella Donn acts upon.

The period in which Hardy wrote automatically conjures up elaborate images of miscreants being put to shame for dissentient, dysfunctional behaviour and transgressors prostrate with guilt for having broken one of God's small, yet sacred laws. The

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<sup>1</sup> *S.v. shame* (sb.), I. 1. Tennyson (1842) and Pusey (1860) are the nineteenth-century sources.

<sup>2</sup> *OED*, *s.v. guilt* (sb.), 4. and 5. Byron (1813), Scott (1828) and Mozley (1876) are some of the sources listed.

<sup>3</sup> Gerhard Piers and Milton B. Singer, *Shame and Guilt: A Psychoanalytic and a Cultural Study*, New York, 1971, p. 83.

preponderance of these emotions was undoubtedly greater then than today where, given the growing permissiveness and secularization of western society, they are seen as inhibitions of which we are openly encouraged to rid ourselves. Depictions of the fallen woman's shame in the nineteenth century, for example, are epitomized by such portraits as George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver from *The Mill on the Floss* (1850) and Elizabeth Gaskell's Ruth Hilton in *Ruth* (1853); similarly guilt abounds in various shapes and sizes, ranging from the morbid narrator of Tennyson's "Maude" to Charles Dickens' Scrooge for his idolization of Gain in *A Christmas Carol* (1843); from Lady Deadlock in *Bleak House* (1852-3) for the loss of her illegitimate daughter, and *Our Mutual Friend's* (1864-5) Bradley Headstone for his attempted murder of Eugene Wrayburn, to Hetty Sorrel's conviction of infanticide in Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859). Indeed we have only to think of the word 'Victorian' to imagine a guilt-ridden and repressed people with a peculiar attitude towards the body and sexuality, an image that modern works such as Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* have only helped to foster. The passionate efforts of the Edwardians and later generations to distinguish themselves from and disclaim their debts to their Victorian parents and ancestors, and establish their own identity, are not solely responsible for this image. The revitalization of the Christian faith and the fervid practice of its doctrine in nineteenth-century everyday life through the Evangelical Revival also ensured the dominance of guilt and shame in peoples' lives. A guilt-based religion, it was particularly the body and its impulses which, being the cause of Adam and Eve's fall, was considered the seat of all sin. Not only this, but it was also particularly women, the daughters of Eve, that were blamed for bringing this woe to mankind – since as early as the Church fathers' interpretations of the bible in the second century AD., women have been made to feel ashamed of their bodies. A moral code ensued which was puritan in approach and degree. The body and sexuality was seen as something dirty and secretive, the sexual act considered, as Solovyof also sees it, as a yielding to the baser nature of man. Subsequently, anything that honoured or gratified the body was guilt-evoking and shameful. In an age when the reading of Shakespeare's comedies was prohibited on the grounds of their levity and obscenity, sex was a shrouded and nasty subject, with children being denied "so much as one word in explanation of the true nature and functions of the reproductive organs"<sup>1</sup>: as the narrator

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<sup>1</sup> *The Science of Life*, published anonymously, Oxford, 1877.

of *Middlemarch* explains, Tertius Lydgate grows up with “a general sense of secrecy and obscenity in connection with his internal structure.”<sup>1</sup> Healthy sexual drives were not only kept rigidly in check, but considered abnormal and a sign of madness, thus deserving condemnation, punishment and moral reprobation. Describing the Victorian attitude to morality, Morton N. Cohen writes, “all agreed on an uncompromisingly Christian ethic that required self-discipline and good habits, that demanded that all action conform to a Christian conscience and all behaviour be characterized by honesty, good manners and generosity.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, it was the transgression of laws of a divine nature that counted above all. Indeed, so high were the standards of conduct that God prescribed, and so great the range of wrong, sin being understood in the widest possible sense of the word, that the individual’s failure to live up to them and subsequent fall was in many cases inevitable.<sup>3</sup> The diary of the well-known preacher, F. W. Robertson, shows the extent of this preoccupation with guilt through its detailed, painful listing of all the sins and duties he has as yet failed to achieve.<sup>4</sup> Even non-believers were not spared the sense of guilt or shame they would be made to feel if they did not conform. “You might not believe in God, but you behaved according to his Commandments anyway”<sup>5</sup>: external conformity and respectability, as Thomas Morton’s character, Mrs. Grundy, epitomizes, was equally vital. Thus another side of shame which is more explicitly socially oriented than our first definition, comes into play. This is shame in the sense of securing ‘good’ conduct, or as the *OED* defines it, the “fear of offence against propriety or decency operating as a restraint on behaviour.”<sup>6</sup> Dr. Johnson places this public-oriented definition of shame, “the passion felt when reputation is supposed to be lost,” above all other entries in his *Dictionary of the English Language*.<sup>7</sup> It is closely associated with ignominy and ostracism.

If we consider this strict moral context alongside Hardy’s track record of criticizing Church teaching and convention, shame and guilt become tools of social criticism. For

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<sup>1</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, Harmondsworth, 1994, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> Morton N. Cohen, “Lewis Carroll and Victorian Morality,” in *Sexuality and Victorian Literature*, ed. Don Richard Cox, Knoxville, 1984, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> See Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870*, New Haven, 1972, pp. 232f. and 394-430.

<sup>4</sup> Stopford Brooke, *Life and Letters of Frederick W. Robertson*, New York, 1865.

<sup>5</sup> Cohen, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> *S.v. shame (sb.)*, 2. Jowett (1875) is given as the nineteenth-century authority.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, London, 1755, repr. Hildesheim, 1968, Vol. II, *s.v. shame (sb.)*, I. Hereafter abbreviated as *ADEL*.

taking guilt in this basic sense of being culpable of an offence and deserving penalty, and examining its allocation in the three novels, we meet with nothing but inconsistency. Eustacia Vye, a character culpable of several wrongs, is completely lacking in guilt, whilst Clym experiences far more guilt than he is entitled to. Tess does no deliberate wrong yet is condemned and attacked with guilt; when she consciously commits a crime, she feels nothing. Alec and Angel, though both seriously accountable of wrongdoing, are devoid of guilt. Jude and Sue are not responsible for their children's deaths, yet Sue is overwhelmed by a sense of wickedness and self-reproach. This brief survey works on the false assumption that there is a correlation between *being*, *feeling* and *being found* guilty. For Hardy's characters can be guilty in the eyes of the narrator / author and reader, feel guilty themselves, or be found guilty by the societies of the texts without any of these states coinciding. On one hand, this incongruity demonstrates a basic breakdown of society. By showing these emotions in his characters as unnecessary responses to their inattention to moral law, Hardy attacks the fixed and formalistic ethical system which maintains these laws. This system is based upon a narrow-minded and dogmatic interpretation of Christianity which fails to take individual circumstances and feelings into account.<sup>1</sup> It also discriminates against women by supporting a double standard where greater sexual freedom is granted to men. The societies portrayed in *The Return* and *Tess* condemn Thomasin Yeobright and Tess for their sexual indiscretions, yet forgive Damon Wildeve, Alec and Angel for theirs, although we are made to understand that these male characters are the more responsible party. A similar incongruity also occurs in the presentation of shame, between characters being *shamed* or *to put to shame* by a larger social group without them actually *feeling shame* or *being ashamed* in the sense of accepting this disgrace as merited. Large discrepancies are thus created between the reader's understanding of shame- and guilt-evoking conduct and that of the society's of the texts, between the *legitimacy* and *validity* of moral law. On this level all three novels present clear and intelligible moral positions: Thomasin and Tess are not guilty for their fall from grace, nor *Jude's* title character, Jude Fawley, Sue and Phillotson for their ostracism and expulsion from society. Much work has been

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of Hardy's religious sympathies and his ultimate rejection of conventional Christianity, see Jan Jedrzejewski's *Thomas Hardy and the Church*, Basingstoke and London, 1996.

done on discussing the latters' inherent innocence which has led in turn to the precept that Hardy's characters are tragic victims, undeserving of their suffering.<sup>1</sup>

Another effect that this incongruity has is that it damages considerably the image of guilt and shame assignment in Hardy as an absolute and indisputable process based on moral culpability and 'facts.' Just as Hardy's fiction does more than criticize Victorian convention and morality, the function of shame and guilt cannot be confined to a mere attack on propriety and the Church. This would not only mean limiting the Victorian period to a moral sphere, but seeing shame and guilt predominantly as moral emotions connected to good and bad, or right and wrong behaviour. The first is a common trap. It fails to take into consideration the fact that behind the scenes, Victorian life was more diverse than we have till now believed, its morality far more vital and interesting than the old repressive hypothesis,<sup>2</sup> a fact that Steven Marcus' influential study of the great range of sub-literature of pornography in the Victorian period has shown.<sup>3</sup> Nor may guilt and shame simply be lumped together as moral emotions, although it is precisely the above associations we have of the Victorian Age that create such an assumption. Given the fact that its offence is frequently considered a crime, and its legal associations, guilt is predominantly (but not exclusively) a moral emotion, in the way that shame is not. Common sense tells us we can just as well feel shame for doing some moral wrong, as we can guilt, and yet there are many occasions when shame has no moral basis at all.<sup>4</sup> Yet even where shameful conduct or circumstances only result from

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<sup>1</sup> The accepted view is that these characters do not deserve to be charged as guilty because they are superior to the law. See for example Linda M. Shires, "The Radical Aesthetic of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*" in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Dale Kramer, Cambridge, 1999 (hereafter abbreviated as *TCCTH*), p. 154, who writes that "Hardy's interest goes beyond individual right and wrong." For the study of the 'tragic' element in Hardy's work, see Dale Kramer, *Thomas Hardy: The Forms of Tragedy*, Detroit, 1975 and R. P. Draper, *Hardy: The Tragic Novels: The Return of the Native, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Jude the Obscure*, London, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> For a reassessment of the term 'Victorian' see J. B. Bullen's introduction to *Writing and Victorianism*, ed. J. B. Bullen, London and New York, 1997, pp. 1-13. Here Bullen emphasizes the diversity of minority groups and competing structures in the Victorian Age, to which the book's subsequent articles bear witness. These include studies of working women writers, the opium eater's literary work and discourses upon Victorian science, as well as smaller articles written for the periodical press, all of which were also vying for an audience alongside the standard 'canonical' writers of the time.

<sup>3</sup> Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England*, New York, 1966.

<sup>4</sup> In Lewis (1971), p. 84, Lewis states that guilt can only be evoked by moral transgression, whilst shame can be generated by transgressions of a moral and "non-moral" nature. In her later work, Lewis (1987), p. 17f., she states that it is precisely this fact that is responsible for the way in which shame and guilt are so often confused. Drawing on D. Ausubel's study of 1955, "Relationships between shame and guilt in the socializing process," *Psychological Review* 67, pp. 378-390, she gives "competitive defeat, sexual rebuff, social snub, invasion of personal privacy, or being ridiculed" as examples of non-moral shame. In *Shame*



a lapse in propriety, the sense that the subject is somehow morally impaired and has in fact performed some moral ‘wrong’ is never far behind. Thomas Burgess typifies this understanding in his work, *The Physiology or Mechanism of Blushing* (1839). Making the blush of shame – the “True Blush” – the origin of the blush, Burgess takes it as an external sign designed by God to expose internal or secret moral transgression to others.<sup>1</sup> The blush, i.e. the exposure of shame, is thus seen as a God-given “check on the conscience” to “prevent the moral faculties from being infringed upon, or deviating from their allotted path.”<sup>2</sup> Not only this, but Burgess distinguishes sharply between the “True Blush” of shame and the “False” or “diseased” blush which has no moral cause.<sup>3</sup> This “uncalled-for blush,” caused by a “morbid” or “inordinate sensibility,” is a perversion of the original which the process of civilization and over refinement has caused, and to which cultivated persons particularly fall foul.<sup>4</sup> Thus the notion that shame’s dishonour and ridicule can also be caused by social blunders and defective etiquette – which indeed it can, and which is especially so of Hardy’s class shame – is effectively cancelled, and shame remains strictly within the limits of moral wrong.

Yet it is this very keenness to cast shame into the typical moral mould which overlooks its essential nature. In *The Return*, *Tess* and *Jude*, Thomasin, Tess and Sue are all shamed for having an illicit relationship with a man, but Sue also feels ashamed for wanting a warm meal, Tess of her dirty walking boots, and Thomasin of her husband’s neglect of her. Indeed, we cannot only feel ashamed of things which are intensely personal, of our baldness, for example, but of things which are only vaguely related to the self, such as our compatriots behaving badly abroad. This very aspect of shame introduces another important distinction with guilt. From the compatriot example it is clear that shame is not confined to the subject who causes it, but can be felt on behalf of others, “whose honour or disgrace we consider our own.”<sup>5</sup> Guilt, on the other

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*and Necessity*, Berkeley, 1993, p. 91f., Bernard Williams is against this distinction between shame and guilt on the grounds of non-moral responsibility. He argues that whilst, in contrast to shame, guilt is closely connected to the concept of morality, how much moral responsibility it involves is sometimes difficult to assess, with the result that it is impossible to limit guilt to moral transgression. Nor do we, he states, make this sharp distinction between shame and guilt on the grounds of morality in everyday life.

<sup>1</sup> Burgess, *The Physiology or Mechanism of Blushing; Illustrative of the Influence of Mental Emotion on the Capillary Circulation; With a General View of the Sympathies, and the Organic Relations of those Structures with which they seem to be Connected*, London, 1839, pp. 11, 48-55 and 67-69.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26, 44-47 and 55-57.

<sup>5</sup> *OED*, s.v. *shame* (*sb.*), I. 1.

hand, is not vicarious.<sup>1</sup> This distinction not only plays an important part in the comparative pervasiveness of shame alongside guilt, but also in Hardy's positioning of his characters within their environments, and the links they share with others. It is upon this basis that the author presents and evaluates the respective social structures and systems that shame and guilt require and maintain in the three novels, structures and systems that, by the time we reach *Jude*, have undergone considerable change. This critical means of considering guilt and shame as structural forces that shape society – just one of the uses to which they are put – is clearly indicative of a concern that not only includes, but also goes beyond moral criticism. As the critical survey has already mentioned, such an understanding of guilt fails to explain the sum of Clym and Sue's lives. Rather it is what shame and guilt involve for the mind, body and self, and the consequences of this upon the process of writing, that is Hardy's concern.

A central student of mankind in Hardy's time, Darwin sets about solving this mystery in his work, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872). Though drawing heavily on Burgess' earlier work for his section on blushing and shame, Darwin's study is nevertheless the first in which shame is subject to critical scrutiny based on controlled long-term observation and experiment.<sup>2</sup> Taking blushing to be synonymous with shame, Darwin's first distinction concerns the exclusivity of shame to human beings, blushing being the "most peculiar and most human of all expressions" and the attribute which distinguishes man from other creatures: "Monkeys redden from passion, but it would require an overwhelming amount of evidence to make us believe that any animal could blush."<sup>3</sup> Darwin goes on to make the remarkable realization that the key to understanding shame's nature does not lie in its moral state. According to his account, morally wrong behaviour is not the foremost cause of blushing / shame. Rather it is self-attention, i.e. the consciousness of the self in one's own eyes or others.<sup>4</sup> This self-attention is caused in turn by the imagining of being observed and of what others think of us: "It is not the simple act of reflecting on our

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis (1971), p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Although Burgess' study lacks the 'scientific' experiments to support it, it must nevertheless be said that his work is greater in scope than Darwin's, providing in addition to Darwin's anthropological and physiological approach, a literary, historical and sociological survey of the blush's development.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, New York, 1969, p. 309. Solovyof also understands shame as that which "absolutely distinguishes man from all lower nature" since it is "a feeling absolutely unknown to any animal," Vladimir Solovyof, *The Justification of the Good: An Essay on Moral Philosophy*, trans. Nathalie A. Duddington, London, 1918, pp. 28 and 32.

<sup>4</sup> Darwin, p. 326.

own appearance, but the thinking what others think of us, which excites the blush.”<sup>1</sup> This import of the opinion of others is particularly crucial where moral causes of the blush are concerned: “It is not the sense of guilt, but the thought that others think or know us to be guilty which crimsones the face. A man may feel thoroughly ashamed at having told a small falsehood, without blushing; but if he even suspects that he is detected he will instantly blush.”<sup>2</sup> Detection is thus an integral part of blushing / shame, “an act which is really criminal, if not blamed by our equals, hardly raises a tinge of colour on our cheeks.”<sup>3</sup> Finally, whilst Darwin concedes that shame may arise from moral transgression in the sense of committing a crime, he makes social and conventional transgression in the sense of breaching some rule of etiquette, the far more shattering experience, this having the potential, in his opinion, to “cause even more intense blushes even than a detected crime.”<sup>4</sup>

Darwin’s work gets no mention in Hardy’s notebooks or in any other biographical source, although the author was more than familiar with other of his works.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless the biologist’s focus and findings correspond to some extent with the author’s. Shame’s separation from the standard notion of moral transgression; its reorientation as primarily a *human* experience which is directed upon the self, its link to exposure, and connection to and dependence on some form of audience, are all aspects that are taken up in the novels. Taken up also in the physical hallmarks of Hardy’s characters’ shame are Darwin’s accounts of his patients’ symptoms. Not only this, but the latter’s emphasis of shame’s humanness bestows it with an intrinsic value. By distinguishing man from the animal kingdom, susceptibility to shame becomes something positive. Although to be ‘shameless’ can be something desirable in the sense of being free from shame or disgrace,<sup>6</sup> just as to be guiltless means to be without guilt, shamelessness, in the sense of being insensitive to shame, is a serious reproach. It signifies an insensibility to disgrace and a lacking in decency and modesty. Bearing Darwin in mind and turning to Hardy, shamelessness is even given an ‘animalistic’

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<sup>1</sup> Darwin, p. 311 and 325.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>5</sup> This seems somewhat surprising since Hardy was well-read in Darwin, being as Michael Millgate notes in *Thomas Hardy: A Biography*, Oxford, 1982, p. 90, one of the first people to have read Darwin’s, *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin’s evolutionary theory and his portrayal of nature’s cruelty is a recurring theme in Hardy’s work.

<sup>6</sup> *OED*, s.v. *shameless* (a.), 3.

quality in the way that Arabella's shamelessness in *Jude* reduces her to a crude and barbaric level. Indeed sensibility to shame creates a value system in all six novels by which characters' shame experiences are measured, and upon which a hierarchy of sympathy is built based on characters' susceptibility to shame. Significantly, and in accordance with Darwin's mapping of shame to women,<sup>1</sup> this value system only works for female characters. In fitting with the Victorian model for womankind as compliant, submissive and passive, shame in the sense of modesty and shyness helps to ensure Hardy's women characters are socially acceptable and praiseworthy heroines. Finally this very connection of shame to modesty and shyness introduces a last point concerning the sheer complexity of shame that Darwin's study brings home. This complexity is reflected in the ill-defined nature of Darwin's terms. Speaking of guilt in the same breath as shame,<sup>2</sup> and using the terms shame and blush interchangeably, when Darwin refers to blushing it is not clear whether he means shame or one of the other three causal emotions he also identifies as its cause, namely self-attention, shyness, and modesty.<sup>3</sup> Quite apart from the limiting effect this has on his work, it also demonstrates the difficulty of defining shame due to its close bordering upon other emotional states. Ellis meets with a similar problem in "The Evolution of Modesty" (1898).<sup>4</sup> As the title of his work signals, the examination of shame takes place within the larger study of the roots, cause and manifestation of modesty, demonstrating again shame's resemblance to other emotions, and causing confusion. Whilst admitting that modesty is difficult to differentiate from shame, shyness, bashfulness and timidity, Ellis claims that modesty is still distinct "on account of its special connection, on the whole, with the consciousness of sex."<sup>5</sup> In spite of this, again, definitions of modesty are equally applicable to shame,

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<sup>1</sup> Darwin, pp. 310 and 325. This point and its implications are discussed on pp. 237-251.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332, as quoted on p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 309, where examining blushing, Darwin describes how "the face becomes under a sense of *shame* gorged with blood"; *ibid.*, p. 320 where he opens the section headed "Movements and gestures which accompany Blushing" with "Under a keen sense of *shame* there is a strong desire for concealment"; *ibid.*, p. 323, where he ascribes increased heart beat and breathing with being "*ashamed* or very *shy*" (all my italics). Burgess' use of terms is discriminating in contrast, it being clear to which exact cause of blushing he is referring each time.

<sup>4</sup> Ellis was a keen reader and reviewer of Hardy's work, although his study of modesty was published too late to have an effect on Hardy's fiction. Brought out in 1898, Hardy had already given up novel writing for poetry after the scathing criticism *Jude* received on its publishing in 1896.

<sup>5</sup> Henry Havelock Ellis, "The Evolution of Modesty," in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, Vol. I, New York, 1942, p. 7f.

and sometimes no distinction is made between the two.<sup>1</sup> As a result, and as before, shame remains indefinite and confused.

Yet far from this confusion setting the standard for the nineteenth century, Burgess, Darwin and Ellis' studies only make Hardy's discriminating presentation of shame and guilt all the more unique. This presentation clearly draws on the cultural climate of the author's age as far as general causes and associations of shame and guilt are concerned. The Victorians' attitude towards the body and sexuality based on Church doctrine, a neo-puritan philosophy particularly active where Hardy lived and worked,<sup>2</sup> and the consequences this had upon novel writing are important here, as is the priority given to respectability, and ideas about male and female roles. Yet in spite of this, socio-historical factors alone cannot explain the focus and scrutiny to which these concepts are put in the author's work. Whilst retaining their conventional denotations and connotations, Hardyan shame and guilt also have an inherentness and universality that transcend all the social, moral and conventional limits of his time. They achieve this by going to the root of their psychological experience which is independent of specific, concrete causes.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Ellis' criticism of Hohenemser's study of the psychology of shame where he concludes that "this discussion of *modesty* is highly generalized and abstracted," Ellis, p. 6f., (my italics).

<sup>2</sup> Dorset was particularly marked for its Evangelical fervour, see Timothy Hands, *Thomas Hardy*, Basingstoke, 1995, p. 94.

## **II. “The Inward and Outward Eye”: Levels of Shame and Guilt in Hardy and their Function**

Basic and scientific definitions of shame and guilt from the nineteenth century do not suffice to explain their function and significance in Hardy’s work. Nor does Hardy furnish us with single ‘valid’ definitions of them. Typical of the author, their treatment reflects complex, and at times, contradictory ideas, with some doubling back within single novels. In spite of this, their essence is captured by an abstract contrast which works across three different levels. This is the contrast between inner-directed and outer-directed consciousness, thought and behaviour, and their presentation in a literary form. Starting with shame as an emotion, Hardy depicts its experience in terms of shifts in consciousness, perception and point of view which are either focused inwards towards the self or outwards towards the world. This depiction goes on to form a contrast with the predominantly inward focus of guilt. The way in which these direct experiences are then transformed into an artistic form and communicated to the reader, constitutes the second level upon which this abstraction works. On the third and final level guilt and shame are presented as internal and external sanctions used to control a character’s behaviour, and which constitute different types of social structures in the novels. These distinctions fuel a wider interplay between the private and public worlds of Hardy’s fiction, between the personal, inner make-up of a character, his selfhood and self-conviction, and his self-image, view of and interaction with his environment. It is this relationship and its critical evaluation by the author, represented by an “inward” and “outward eye” which mediates between the guilt and shame experience, that is examined in the three novels and that underpins their function as a trilogy.

### **1. The Psychology behind the Shameful and the Guilty Moment and the Question of Identity a. Consciousness and Exposure**

Tess went down the hill to Trantridge Cross, and inattentively waited to take her seat in the van [...] She did not know what the other occupants said to her as she entered, though she answered them; and when they had started anew she rode along with an inward and not an outward eye. (*Tess*, 84)

Shame's notion of being the *consciousness* of being connected to dishonour, ridicule or indecorum raises a central question: how does this consciousness come about? Hardy's answer is clear. Journeying home from The Slopes, Tess is preoccupied with her first impressions of her 'cousin' Alec, making her unobservant of her fellow passengers and the formalities they exchange. Travelling with "an inward eye" she is unaware of the outside world and how she must appear to it. Penetrating observation from another traveller, however, awakens Tess from her reverie, "One among her fellow-travellers addressed her more pointedly than any had spoken before: 'Why you be quite a posy! And such roses in early June!'" This comment suddenly makes Tess apprehend how her overladen appearance, Alec's fruit and flowers about her bosom, hat, and basket, must seem to them: "Then she became aware of the spectacle she presented to their surprised vision: roses at her breast; roses in her hat; roses and strawberries in her basket to the brim." Realizing how absurd she must seem, adopting an "outward eye," "She blushed, and said confusedly that the flowers had been given to her."

In this extract, then, the shameful moment is first and foremost a mental process involving shifts in consciousness. On becoming aware of her surroundings, of which she was previously ignorant, Tess' consciousness switches back to herself whereupon she sees herself from a different point of view. Two kinds of consciousness are thus discernible, the "inward eye" signalling an inner consciousness or self-absorption; the "outward eye" the consciousness of surroundings or environment which, when taken into consideration by the individual, affect some form of altered view of the self.<sup>1</sup> This process of awareness that shame involves finds ratification in theoretical discussions today. In her study, Gabriele Taylor pinpoints the view of one's actions or situation from a detached observer's point of view as shame's decisive ingredient.<sup>2</sup> Describing shame she writes, "What is essential is the shift in the agent's viewpoint *vis-à-vis* himself. [...] the agent's becoming aware of the discrepancy between her own assumption about her state or action and a possible detached observer-description of this

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<sup>1</sup> The term "outward eye" as denoting a character's outer-oriented awareness is also applied to Giles Winterborne in *Woodlanders*. Driving his sweetheart, Grace Melbury, home from Sheraton Abbas at the beginning of the novel, Giles' attention is reserved for her alone, "Occupied solely with the idea of having her in charge, he did not notice much with outward eye," *Woodlanders* p. 41. This inability of Giles to view himself or his situation objectively, to regard his "inner self spectacularly," is presented as one of his general characteristics through his comparison with other lovers who are "now daily more want to do [so]," *ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment*, Oxford, 1985, pp. 57-68.

state of action.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise shame scenes in Hardy frequently take the form of characters awakening from a state of self-absorption in which they were blind to a certain aspect of themselves or their situation. If this aspect is something they consider to devalue or to reflect badly upon them, shame will result on it being exposed. Often developed perceptive powers and a high level of self-consciousness are required in order for such a stage of self-enlightenment to be reached, with characters such as Tess and Jude being particularly disposed to doing so. Both are especially sensitive creatures with vivid visualizing abilities. Existing as a “structure of sensations,” Tess, for example, imagines that the trees’ “invisible eyes” can penetrate her inner self, and is subject to out-of-body experiences; as a child, Jude has the habit of “seeming to see things in the air,” and as a man, can transcend his “bodily situation” by becoming engrossed in some higher spiritual experience.<sup>2</sup>

The notion of exposure that this new viewpoint of the self secures is lent weight by shame’s linguistic origins. Although disputed, one possible root the *OED* gives is the pre-Teutonic “kem” meaning to cover up or envelop.<sup>3</sup> This urge to instinctively cover oneself or ‘put on a brave face’ in response to shame presupposes an exposure of some kind. Its most obvious example is that of physical nakedness which may make us want to conceal our bodies and to feel ashamed. The shame theorist, Helen Merrell Lynd, describes this exposure as particularly unexpected, naming the element of surprise one of the key distinctions between shame and guilt.<sup>4</sup> Catching one unawares, shame is sudden and unforeseeable, and takes away presence of mind, hence the expression “covered with confusion,” and the way in which Tess explains “confusedly” about the flowers. Guilt on the other hand, as Jude’s lengthy deliberations on starting a friendship with Sue more than adequately document, involves foresight, choice and awareness, the calculation of pros and cons over a prolonged period of time.<sup>5</sup> Another issue that the idea of exposure raises brings us to a fundamental, much-disputed question in shame and guilt theory today. This is whether some kind of spectator or audience is always needed to bring about this altered view of the self and to whom the shame subject is then ‘exposed.’ In the above example, it appears as though it is Tess’ fellow travellers

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> *Tess*, p. 175; *Jude*, pp. 63 and 162.

<sup>3</sup> *S.v. shame (sb.)*.

<sup>4</sup> Lynd (1958), p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> Lewis (1971), pp. 41, 81 and 84.



that ‘make’ her feel ashamed, and that the shame experience thus relies entirely upon them. As the following chapter will show, this is not the case, for shame is, typically, more complicated than this.

### **b. Seeing and being Seen: Audience or Conscience**

There can be no outrage, methinks, against our common nature [...] more fragrant than to forbid the culprit to hide his face for shame. (*The Scarlet Letter*, 47)<sup>1</sup>

Of shame’s physical gestures the hiding of the face and avoidance of eye contact is central. Erza’s prostrate cry in the Old Testament, “O God, I am too ashamed to raise my head in your presence”<sup>2</sup> bears testimony to this instinctive reaction, as do the observations of the Roman writer and philosopher, Macrobius, in his *Saturnalia*. Discussing the brain’s influence on the workings of the body, he writes, “Physicists say too that, when one’s nature feels shame or shyness, she spreads out the blood before her to serve as a veil, just as we often see a man hold a hand before his face when he is blushing.”<sup>3</sup> In Shakespeare one of many examples of the same phenomenon is provided by the words Marcus Andronicus speaks to Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*. Speculating to his niece that her bloody mutilation has resulted from her rape, he observes, “Ah, now thou turn’st away thy face for shame!”<sup>4</sup> Countless scenes are also found in the Hardy novels under examination. *The Return*’s Thomasin “hid her face in her handkerchief,” its heroine, Eustacia “turned aside”; *The Woodlanders*’ Felice Charmond’s eyes are “hastily withdrawn”; Tess wishes she could “sink into the ground,” and Jude wants “to get away to some obscure spot and hide.”

Shame’s elaborate imagery of hiding or disappearing from view automatically infers the presence of some other person whose eyes are upon us. In his study Bernard Williams sees shame first and foremost as the experience “of being seen, inappropriately, by the wrong people, in the wrong condition.”<sup>5</sup> Its external orientation

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<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, Harmondsworth, 1994, on describing the torture contraption on the Salem scaffold. By clamping the neck and head fast, this prevents the prisoner from hiding his face.

<sup>2</sup> Erza, 9:6.

<sup>3</sup> Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, trans. Percival Vaughan Davies, New York and London, 1969, p. 487.

<sup>4</sup> William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, II, iv, 28.

<sup>5</sup> Williams, p. 78.

is born out by the way it can be felt on other people's behalf, and by its wider meanings of ignominy and loss of reputation, with theorists linking it to the individual's comparison and competition with his peers.<sup>1</sup> Guilt, on the other hand, does not invoke or presuppose the notion of an audience. Connected to the conscience, the innermost faculty we have of acknowledging and recognizing right and wrong behaviour, it is an instinctively more internal and private emotion than shame. Rather than evoking images of seeing and being seen, it is also sooner connected to hearing,<sup>2</sup> the guilty conscience often taking the form of a niggling inner voice that continually reminds us of our trespass. As well as directing guilt inwards once again, this contrast between guilt's orality and shame's visuality has an important effect on both concepts' literary representation in the novels.

Admittedly, and as the opening example of Tess' ostentatious appearance shows, Hardy's shame frequently involves an audience and its gaze upon the character subject to shame. Eustacia's double shame under the accusatory glare of Diggory Venn on his exposure of her affair with Wildeve and the mortifying fact that she has just lied about it,<sup>3</sup> Tess' shame before the Cerealia dancers' sniggering on behalf of her father's drunken behaviour, and Jude's in front of the Marygreen crowd for his failure to have entered one of Christminster's colleges are just some excruciating examples of the direct presence of the 'other.' What is more, this gaze must not be negative. In a sexual context, the very experience of being seen, even when the spectator's attitude is positive, is reason enough to feel ashamed, as scenes between Tess and Alec show. Nor must this audience be real, but can simply be an imaginary one in the character's mind.<sup>4</sup> In the novels, the explicit presence of a fantasy audience often goes hand in hand with shame. Branded a lost woman, Thomasin imagines how disgraceful she will seem in her aunt and cousin's eyes; married to a furze-cutter, Eustacia imagines how stupid she will appear in the eyes of those at Budmouth; having separated from her newly-wed husband, Tess imagines how ridiculous her situation will seem to her parents, and, learning of the fact, John Durbeyfield imagines the mockery he will receive from

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<sup>1</sup> Lynd (1958), p. 23; Piers and Singer, p. 53; Taylor, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> See Herbert Morris, *On Guilt and Innocence*, Berkeley, 1976, pp. 59-63.

<sup>3</sup> I take the term mortification, as Lewis (1971), p. 34, does, as simply another variety of the basic shame phenomenon. Lewis also includes embarrassment, humiliation, feeling ridiculous, chagrin, shyness and modesty in this shame family. For the distinction between embarrassment and shame see p. 43, n. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Taylor, p. 58f.; Cairns, p. 16; Williams, p. 82.

Marlott village. Whilst the judgement of this imaginary audience can be directly involved in the moment of shame, at other times it is simply an integral part of the whole process, as Angel wonders what his family will say and think about him if he marries the socially inferior Tess. Sometimes, if this imagining takes place before the action is undertaken, it can seem enough to actually prevent the individual from acting. “O no – I wouldn’t have it for the world! And letting everyone know the reason – such a thing to be ashamed of!” (*Tess*, 68), cries Tess at her mother’s suggestion of asking some young man she has danced with to take the bees to Casterbridge, the thought alone and the pending shame it would bring ensuring Tess’ rejection of the idea.

In spite of this, although shame is often prompted by someone witnessing and appraising another’s actions, it does not depend upon the presence of an audience and cannot simply be reduced to an externally controlled experience lacking all involvement of the conscience. As Helen Block Lewis writes,

Although the stimulus to shame often appears to arise from someone or some circumstance outside the self, shame is a state of self-devaluation, which would not be possible if internalized judges (the superego) were not also devaluing the self. Shame and guilt are automatically registered as one’s own experiences although shame is often localized as emanating from ‘out there.’<sup>1</sup>

In the original example of Tess journeying back from The Slopes, Tess does not automatically take on her audience’s view of her: its members alone cannot ‘make’ her feel ashamed. It is only because the heroine has internalized the rules of decorum that they uphold and that they consider her to have breached, that her altered view of herself corresponds with their judgement of her. If this internalization had not taken place, Tess would simply reject her travellers’ criticism, a case of someone being *put to shame*, without actually *feeling ashamed*. Indeed, as other shame examples demonstrate, the view of the person subject to shame must not be identical to his audience’s. Alec’s sexually gratifying and positive regard of Tess is one such case: by feeling ashamed Tess does not simply take on her spectator’s approval, but evaluates this approval as something inappropriate and negative to receive by judging herself according to other values.<sup>2</sup> Thus even when an audience of some sort is present, the shame process cannot

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis (1987), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> There are many other subject and audience combinations which demonstrate the independence of view in each case. These include shame being generated by an indifferent audience, when the individual feels he has gone to great lengths to secure their approval, or that generated by an audience’s disapproval even though their judgement is rejected, due to a feeling of having let ourselves down. The latter happens on

be experienced without some internal process of the conscience which understands and appraises one's situation and oneself.<sup>1</sup> Applying this premise to pending shame means that this, too, cannot be reduced to the fear of being seen doing something disgraceful or unworthy by someone.<sup>2</sup> If people only refrained from doing things through fear of being found out and a situation arose in which they could avoid discovery, there would be no end to the wrong they would do: no society could work on this basis.<sup>3</sup> Although in *Tess*, for example, Felix and Cuthbert Clare talk as though it is only the chance of being caught that prevents them joining in the festive dancing at Marlott, "Dancing in public with a troop of country hoydens – suppose we should be seen!" (*Tess*, 53), we can hardly imagine them doing so even if there was no risk: the brothers are acting according to the rule of etiquette they have internalized which asserts that, as members of the middle class, mixing on a festive occasion with country peasants is 'not done.' This argument for an internal evaluating process in shame is all the more true of a fantasy audience which involves a hypothetical, detached assessment of the self from an imagined audience's point of view. As a result, shame remains the recognition of one's own shortcomings in one's own eyes, regardless of whether the audience shares in this revelation,<sup>4</sup> the audience being, at the most, a catalyst of shame by bringing a previously unconsidered action or state of the individual to his attention and making him focus upon the self.<sup>5</sup>

There are many examples of Hardy's characters feeling shame without all reference to a spectator of any kind; often characters are their own spectators by taking up the position of a detached observer.<sup>6</sup> In spite of this, there is a clear distinction in the novels between shame which is connected to an audience in some way, and shame which is not. Shame connected to an audience may take a number of forms. It may, as we have

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Tess' encounter with Car Darch on the way home from Chaseborough, as discussed on p. 125f. For the detailed explanation of the range of possible cases, see Cairns, p. 16.

<sup>1</sup> Cairns, p. 15f.; Williams, pp. 81-84.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor, pp. 57-68; Lewis (1987), p. 16. This is discussed further on pp. 48-50.

<sup>3</sup> Williams, p. 81. Williams argues that if shame depended purely upon the fear of being found out, we could speak neither of character nor culture, since this would infer that no system regulating conduct existed, but rather that people were controlled through the pure chance of someone catching them performing some wrong.

<sup>4</sup> Lynd (1958), pp. 27-32.

<sup>5</sup> Taylor, p. 59, and her discussion in Cairns, pp. 15-18.

<sup>6</sup> The most lucid example of this is found in a description of Elizabeth-Jane's face. This reddens on her pretence that the letter she has in her hands is from Farfrae, "though *nobody* was there to see what she had done," *The Mayor*, p. 108, (my italics).

just seen, simply involve the audience's attempt to put someone to shame, without the subject accepting this criticism and feeling ashamed. "You may ridicule me [...] But I think if you knew what I had gone through these last few years you would rather pity me" (*Jude*, 399), says Jude to the Christminster crowd clearly not sharing their view of his shameful failure. Indeed, how much influence an audience has depends on its identity, attitude and relation to the shame subject.<sup>1</sup> We need not, for example, feel shame when we are judged critically by someone if we do not value their opinion. A good example of this is provided by the characters Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright in *The Return*. Filled with a sense of superiority over their Egdon neighbours, they hold little store by the latter's standards and maxims and are thus greatly indifferent to any disapproval they receive from this quarter. Yet this does not lessen their capacity for shame based upon other personal standards they have learnt to value elsewhere. Similarly Tess does not consider her Marlott audience important enough to permanently accept their conviction of her as fallen woman and social outcast; this changes when Angel arrives on the scene and his opinion of her is at stake. On the whole, however, shame which is sparked off, catalysed or intensified by some person or persons very often concerns issues of a conventional and social nature, and focuses upon its external and public consequences. Causing public disgrace, ridicule and sometimes ruin, it concentrates upon the relation of the individual to some wider group or community, and can for this reason, be called public shame. The second type of shame discernible in Hardy is felt without all connection to an 'other' and is infinitely more personal. Less directly concerned with the outside world, it takes its cue from more private, inherent values the individual has acquired, and focuses upon the personal, emotional effect upon the self when these values are challenged or destroyed. These values are not only presented as an integral part of the characters' personalities, but also of being human, and can sometimes run contrary to social convention. In both cases the essential shame structure is the same; the distinction between public and personal shame, or alternatively, conventional and inherent shame – shame based on artificial social code as opposed to natural, instinctive human impulses – being above all one of emphasis.

Providing a certain degree of internalization has taken place, and depending on the relation between the subject and its audience, guilt, like shame, may also be provoked or

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis, (1971), p. 42; Taylor, pp. 60-68; Lewis (1987), pp. 16-19; Williams, p. 81f.

intensified by a real or fantasy audience. We have all experienced someone ‘making us’ feel guilty at some time in our lives. Although the opposite is true for Clym, whose friends and acquaintances try to convince him of his innocence, Tess is made to feel guilty about her smudged sexual state although she does not see how she is fully to blame, and Phillotson writes carefully constructed letters to Sue in order to increase her sense of guilt concerning their divorce. In spite of this, internal processes instinctively play a greater role in guilt than they do in shame. This is because, being predominantly a moral emotion, guilt automatically involves the conscience to a greater extent. Formed by fixed values which have been internalized, the evaluation of guilt thus tends to take place inside within a character’s mind, rather than outside in the presence of others. An excellent example of this inward focus is when the values which have been internalized are based on divine law. Here the person feeling guilty needs no third person to convict him, but acknowledges the thing as forbidden as though he is under some authoritative command.

### **c. Human Beings versus Human Doings: Self, Action, Trust and Disillusionment**

In addition to their respective inner and outer focuses, guilt and shame are distinguished further through the states of *doing* and *being*. By shame involving the exposure of parts of the self, which have not been previously recognized or perhaps do not want to be admitted, to the self, it is ultimately concerned with what type of person one is; it focuses on the self and arises from a sense of inferiority. Guilt, on the other hand, is concerned with what one does; it focuses on a particular course of action and arises from a feeling of wrongdoing. In terms of narrative technique this connects shame to characterization, revealing aspects of a character’s personality and standing, and guilt to action and therefore to plot, by describing what a character has done. Shame’s close involvement of the self, something which has made it vital to personality studies, also brings the question of identity in Hardy’s work sharply into focus. By identity being influenced by the environment in which the individual is located, the question of who a person is and where he belongs gains in pertinence in periods of great change and social dislocation. Dating from the eighteen seventies to the mid-nineties, *The Return*, *Jude* and *Tess* belong in such a period. All three novels deal with the formation, conflict, re-establishment and forfeiture of identity, experiences often caused by their protagonists’

attempt to change their social positions or their landing in situations foreign to their own, experiences in which shame and guilt play a crucial role.

The German expressions *Ich bin schuldig* and *Ich schäme mich* reflect guilt and shame's distinction between self and action, the self-reflexive form *Ich – mich* showing shame's inseparability from the self, just as the following example illuminates:

If I were to experience guilt after hitting someone else's car, my attention would be focused on the act (why it had happened, or how I might have avoided it) and possible reparations such as paying for the repairs. I could feel shame in the car example, in which case the content of the awareness would be on my self rather than the act, and my thoughts might focus on how stupid, or uncoordinated, or unobservant I was.<sup>1</sup>

Albeit on rocky ground, psychoanalytic theory also picks up this distinction. Here shame is thought to result from a tension between the ego and the ego ideal, guilt from a tension between the ego and the superego. Because the ego ideal is formed by parental ideals which the child internalizes, it follows that shame arises when a goal, held by the ego ideal, is not attained.<sup>2</sup> And the superego being formed by parental prohibitions, guilt is created when a boundary, set by the superego, is touched or transgressed.<sup>3</sup> Applying this theoretical distinction, guilt results from a breach of some boundary or fixed rule, shame from the failure to live up to a certain ideal. This classification of shame and guilt does not stand up to critical scrutiny: common sense tells us we can just as well feel shame for some transgression as we can guilt for falling short of some image or ideal.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless the separate focuses on what we do, as opposed to what we are, are

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<sup>1</sup> Hoblitzelle, p. 209 in Lewis (1987). See also Lewis, p. 15, in the same.

<sup>2</sup> Piers and Singer, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-30; Lewis (1971), pp. 18-29. Piers goes on to give a further two distinctions involving the mapping of shame to abandonment and guilt to mutilation or castration, and the application of the Law of Talion to shame, but not to guilt. These distinctions, however, though valuable to psychoanalysis, need not concern us here.

<sup>4</sup> See Cairns' detailed discussion and criticism of Piers and Singer in Cairns, pp. 18-21.

evident once again here, both strands of which are also found in Hardy's work. For Thomasin, for example, shame is her recognition of her weakness in begging Wildeve to marry her; for Eustacia her sudden recognition of her "dog in the manger" disposition upon realizing that she no longer finds Wildeve attractive now that Thomasin does not want him. Later and more permanently, it is her failure to fulfil the image she has of herself as an "educated lady-wife" by her husband's occupation as a manual labourer. For Mrs. Yeobright it is the choice of her niece and son's partners, partners of such low social standing that they fail to live up to those she considers suitable for her family, choices which reflect painfully upon her. For Tess it is her realization on the way to Flintcomb-Ash that her gloom about her plight is excessive given the fate of the shot pheasants; far worse it is her recognition that she has totally misjudged Angel's response to her confession, a shame which is presented in one respect as her failure to live up to the model of purity he has mistakenly taken her to be. Her guilt on the other hand, together with Clym and Sue's, appears at first hand to be generated by their sense of having broken a particular moral rule. Similarly Jude's potential shame before the Christminster crowd lies in his failure to realize the academic goals he set himself as a child.

This shame / self, guilt / action framework has powerful implications. According to Lewis, "shame is about the whole self and is therefore more 'global.' Guilt is more specific, being about events or things."<sup>1</sup> As Hardy's shame subjects document, it is not just a part of them that is affected by their experience, but their entire selves. In the bitter disappointment of Clym's mother on learning of his choice of wife, in the insufferable scorn dealt to Grace's father's for his lack of learning, and in the painful revelation of Tess' impure state, their shame is immobilizing. Struck to their very cores, these characters are temporarily – or in Tess' case, permanently – put out of action. Guilt, meanwhile, arises from clear-cut, culturally-defined wrong action based on a codified system within society. Confined to this single wrong action or offence, it is thus kept from spilling over and affecting the self, just as it also fails to affect others by not being vicarious. Devoid of surprise, being, unlike shame, something brought upon ourselves after consideration, not something that happens against our will, it is altogether more manageable. Nor is guilt permanent. As Sue's guilt-engendered

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis (1987), p. 18. See also Lynd (1958), pp. 49-56; Lewis (1971), pp. 30f., 40, 77 251; Cairns, p. 21f.



activities register, it can be reduced or absolved by making amends and sacrifices to atone for the wrongdoing. In our legal system guilt rarely stands alone, but goes hand in hand with some form of punishment. Indeed the line between guilt and atonement is often extremely fine. This is in part due to guilt's linguistic origins. Evolving from the OE word, 'debt,' guilt is simultaneously wrong and amendment in one. Its roots being defined in Dr. Johnson's dictionary as the "fine paid for an offence, and afterwards the fine itself,"<sup>1</sup> it is as though the action taken to put the wrongdoing right almost overrides the original offence, or at the very least that both states co-exist.<sup>2</sup> By there thus being specific acts of atonement that can be done to get rid of guilt, it is not only an intrinsically active state, as opposed to shame's passivity, but above all a provisional one. No definite act exists to dissolve shame. Short of a transformation of the self or a deadening towards it, shame remains to a great extent irreversible.<sup>3</sup> Nebulous, all-engulfing and ever-lasting, it is this that makes it infinitely more incomprehensible and more painful.

Applying shame's involvement of the self to the question of identity, it follows that by shame being the recognition of our failure to be what we thought we were, it threatens to cause a crumpling, failure or even loss of self. Lynd describes this identity threat in terms of the overall failure of our expectations about ourselves and society. This not only describes the central shame of Tess before Angel, but also the consequences of the tragic experiences of Clym and Sue, which cause their guilt. Describing the basic shame experience, Lynd writes, "We have acted on the assumption of being one kind of person living in one kind of surroundings, and unexpectedly, violently, one discovers these assumptions are false."<sup>4</sup> It is this "violation of expectation, of incongruity between expectation and having expectation met" that

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<sup>1</sup> *ADEL*, s.v. *guilt* (sb.).

<sup>2</sup> This application of guilt in the sense of a debt is found in *Madding Crowd*. At Boldwood's Christmas party, the heroine, Bathsheba Everdene, agrees to marry the host some five years hence in reparation of the wrong she has done him by sending him a valentine's card. Guilty of having played with his feelings, she sees this as a "debt, which can only be discharged in one way," and one which she is "willing to pay the penalty of," *Madding Crowd*, p. 416.

<sup>3</sup> Lynd (1958), pp. 50-52; Lewis (1987), p. 17. Of course there are cases where shame is short-lived. These occur for example when the individual realizes that he does not in fact accept the standards by which he has judged himself, as discussed by Taylor, pp. 68 and 82. Even here, however, Taylor underlines the time taken to reach such a view and argues that even this "cannot alleviate the feeling of helplessness at the moment of feeling shame." For the opposing view of shame's permanence see Piers and Singer, pp. 44-45, who state that the guilt cycle is more difficult to break than that of shame.

<sup>4</sup> Lynd, (1958), p. 35.

shame exposes, that leads to a “shattering of trust in oneself, even in one’s own body and skill and identity, and in the trusted boundaries or framework of the society and the world one has known.”<sup>1</sup> For Lynd the experience of shame is frightening: it marks the exposure of mistaken personal and social assumptions and sees them collapse, an experience shameful in itself; it signals the breaking of trust in the self and the world, a trust which is vital for establishing the sense of self. Again it is here that the connection between the three novels lies. Each deals with its characters’ attempt to establish their identity through understanding, finding and ascertaining their places in the world; all deal with their failure. The tragedies that Clym, Tess, Jude and Sue suffer all concern the exposure of mistaken personal assumptions they have made, and the broken trust in the world that this leads to. Confidant beliefs and theories about God, nature and the human condition are all proved shamefully and horribly wrong. Tess’ good faith in Angel and in life in general is crushed beyond repair when she tells him of her sexual indiscretion with Alec. Her assumptions about herself and her partner are not only exposed to be highly inappropriate, but slyly presumptuous and downright outrageous, an experience of shame that causes Tess to question her very existence. Similarly it is through the deaths of their loved ones that Clym and Sue’s views of themselves and the world are challenged and destroyed. Their belief to have discovered the meaning of life is shown to be utterly mistaken, with it being exposed instead to be a futile, senseless and merciless game where humans are the losers: as the narrator of *Tess* says, a “sport” that the “President of the Immortals” plays.

Yet such is the shock and pain of this unexpected discovery that no character can accept it. Guilt saves Clym and Sue from facing Hardy’s tragic view of the world and God, as it hides the truth of her husband’s cruelty from Tess:

Acknowledgement of personal sin or confession of guilt may sometimes be a defence against the possibility that there be no meaning in the world. Sin, guilt, punishment – each is, in one sense, an affirmation of an order and significance. Shame questions the reality of any significance. Guilt in oneself is easier to face than lack of meaning in life.<sup>2</sup>

Clym and Sue welcome guilt like a friend. Disoriented and disillusioned, it provides a clearly-defined explanation and response to their catastrophes: connected with action, it

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<sup>1</sup> Lynd, (1958), pp. 35 and 46. Lewis also discusses shame resulting from personal betrayal and shame’s connection to the self and identity in Lewis (1971), pp. 24f. and 86, and Lewis (1987), pp. 5 and 15-20.

<sup>2</sup> Lynd (1958), p. 58.

gives them a specific task of atonement to do and a specific direction in which to go. It also provides them with a mask to face the world. For whilst shame threatens to destroy identity, guilt works in the opposite way. Finding themselves guilty, Clym and Sue take on the personas of penitent preacher and puritan adulteress to adopt to the new image and role they see as theirs. Shamed to her roots, meanwhile, Tess is left with nothing; undergoing a painful depersonalizing process, she degenerates into a nobody. These intrinsic distinctions, then, embodied in the psychological experience but reaching far beyond it, go to the heart of guilt and shame in Hardy. By involving different ways of seeing the self, one's actions and the world, and the painful realization that these views are in fact mistaken, guilt and shame cover the tragic experience of these three characters in terms of threat to identity, disillusionment and delusion.

## **2. The Representation and Language of Shame and Guilt**

### **a. The Blush, the Body and the Mind**

Thou changed and self-cover'd thing, for shame, / Be-monster not thy feature.  
(*King Lear*, IV, iii, 63-64)

As the preceding chapters show, shame is a highly visual ordeal. Not only does its response often take the form of avoiding eye contact and hiding the face, but the very moment of its experience is also accompanied by involuntary, visible signs. These signs heighten the sense of exposure by revealing the shame against the subject's will, which can bring even more shame upon him, and perhaps helps to explain the subsequent desire to hide. In addition to the feeling of heat and tingling of the skin which can lead to perspiration, the foremost of these signs is seen in the face, in its reddening into a blush. As Somerset notes accusingly to Richard in the crucial Temple garden scene of *Henry VI*, "Tis not for fear, but anger that thy cheeks / Blush for pure shame to counterfeit our roses."<sup>1</sup>

As early as the fifteenth century, the word blush in the sense of becoming red in the face has been taken as a sign of shame or modesty.<sup>2</sup> As the studies of Burgess and Darwin verify, the relation between shame and blushing is extremely close, with

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, 1 *Henry VI*, II, iv, 65-66.

<sup>2</sup> *OED*, s.v. *blush* (*sb.*), 3. and 4.

Darwin even confusing the two terms. What their studies also show is that blushing can, of course, be caused by emotions other than shame, such as self-consciousness and shyness.<sup>1</sup> In Hardy, additional causes abound, ranging from embarrassment,<sup>2</sup> excitement and vexation, to anger and exertion;<sup>3</sup> cheeks can even redden out of guilt as Bathsheba Everdene and Eustacia ascertain.<sup>4</sup> Very often the meaning of the blush is dependent on the context: when, upon hearing of the attack on his sweetheart in church, for example, Clym says to Eustacia, “I blush for my native Egdon” (*The Return*, 244), he means that he is ashamed of the way Egdon has treated her. But when his face is described a few pages later reddening “like fire” (*The Return*, 253) in response to his mother’s vehement criticism of Eustacia, the degree of his anger and the damage to his sense of modesty is clearly meant. Although in its traditional usage, the term blush is connected more exclusively to shame than the word flush, Hardy uses both terms interchangeably to describe shame, and has his characters blush from feelings other than shame.

As Christopher Ricks notes in his study of John Keats and embarrassment, blushing was a prominent feature of nineteenth-century literature.<sup>5</sup> In Hardy it has a central function. By being a visual sign it contains a unique artistic potential; it is able to describe visually the experiences of Hardy’s characters. Apart from the great creative possibilities this offers the author (as discussed below in D. II.), this sign also becomes the basis upon which a complex visual communication system is built. One of the effects of this system is that shame need not be explicitly mentioned. By being tacitly expressed by the sign of the blush, which is read and recognized by characters and reader alike, it remains below the surface of the text. This sets up a form of subtext in

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<sup>1</sup> See the discussion on pp. 24 and 27.

<sup>2</sup> Given their shared focus on self-consciousness, being seen and critical self-judgement, and the fact that they can be felt at the same time, often no distinction is made between shame and embarrassment. But a theoretical distinction does exist. As Taylor says, shame is “the weightier and more shattering emotion,” connected to the individual’s whole person in a way that embarrassment is not. According to Taylor, pp. 68-76, the self-critical judgement in embarrassment is not of the person as a whole, but is relative only to a given situation or social context, and can be removed as soon as the situation passes. Lynd also understands embarrassment as the less powerful emotion, subscribing it to a sub-type of shame often felt at the beginning of shame before it is either covered up or explored, Lynd (1958), p. 38n. It is in this sense as a less undermining emotion than shame that I shall use the term.

<sup>3</sup> Examples are plentiful. See *The Return*, p. 250, where Clym reddens with excitement, and *ibid.*, p. 277, where Wildeva does from anger; *Tess*, pp. 103 and 228 where Tess and Angel both flush with distress and vexation respectively; *Jude*, p. 99 where Arabella blushes from exertion, and *ibid.*, p. 314, where Phillotson does with surprise.

<sup>4</sup> *Madding Crowd*, p. 145; *The Return*, p. 264.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Ricks, *Keats and Embarrassment*, Oxford, 1974, p. 2f. It is interesting to note that Taylor finds a number of Rick’s examples of and comments upon embarrassment closer to shame, see Taylor, p. 69n.

five of the six novels which allows the author to write about explicitly ‘shameful’ matters in an implicit way. Given the strict moral context in which Hardy was writing, and the subsequent censorship of the novel, the value of this increase in literary freedom should not be underestimated.

Focused upon the face and the body, and signalling specific physiological changes, another effect of the blush is to show that the language of shame is essentially a body language. This opens up a whole avenue to Hardy concerning the representation of the human body and its workings.<sup>1</sup> Just as Darwin and Ellis’ studies before him, Hardy’s presentation of shame involves the specific biological processes of blushing such as the raise in pulse, the flow of adrenaline and the spreading redness over parts of his characters’ bodies.<sup>2</sup> Thus, as Darwin takes care to investigate, this reaction is not confined to the face, but affects other parts of the body, too, such as the neck, shoulders and arms.<sup>3</sup> “[A] slow heat seemed to rise” in Tess on the drunken spectacle her father makes of himself in front of the Cerealia dancers, which, accentuated by their taunts, extends downwards from her cheeks, “over her face and neck” (*Tess*, 51). And, upon reading, “with a sudden flush” (*Tess*, 129), the inscription of the scripture painter on her way home to Marlott, the narrator describes how Tess “throbbingly resumed her walk, her eyes fixed on the ground,” the “throbbingly” conveying the sudden rush of adrenaline and the increased heart beat the flush has caused, sending the blood pumping through her body and causing a tingling sensation in her skin, and making the heroine hang her head in shame. Frequently fire imagery is also used in order to convey the raised body heat in Hardy’s characters when they feel ashamed; there are faces that are “on fire” or cheeks that “burn,” the finest example being poor Elizabeth-Jane whose “ears, cheeks, and chin glowed like live coals at the dawning of the idea that her manners and tastes were not good enough for her position, and would bring her into disgrace” (*The Mayor*, 107). These attempts at physiological realism in Hardy’s presentation of shame are remarkable, and accord with the author’s view that English

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<sup>1</sup> The representation of the body – particularly the female body – in Hardy has recently received much critical attention. For its discussion in relation to shame and the face, see pp. 46f., 93f., 130-133, 174f., 223f. and 239-243.

<sup>2</sup> Darwin explains the process of blushing as a relaxation of the artery surfaces, making the capillary fill with blood, Darwin, pp. 309 and 336; he links it to the brain, *ibid.*, p. 324f., and connects it to a tingling of the skin, *ibid.*, p. 312. The majority of these factors are also noted by Burgess in a more long-winded fashion. For Ellis’ similar theories see Ellis, p. 72f.

<sup>3</sup> Darwin cites a number of experiments which attempt to pinpoint how far this reddening of the skin extends, Darwin, pp. 311-315.

fiction should allow an “honest portrayal” of life as a “physiological fact.”<sup>1</sup> However, it must also be said that Hardy’s achievement here is overshadowed by his limitations in another field. One question that the concern with shame’s physiology begs is that of gender. Rather than being found equally among men and women characters, typically and in keeping with shame’s associations with modesty, shyness and passivity, the body of shame in Hardy’s texts is predominantly female.

Without such a rich and distinctive visual sign to accompany it, the mental and emotional experience of guilt does not have the same creative potential as shame. This does not, however, mean that it is without its own unique form of presentation. Being essentially a private and internal experience, which is very often limited to the confines of the conscience, guilt is primarily connected to the mind rather than the body. Thus lacking in shame’s externality, it at first appears silent and incommunicable to the reader and the outside world. But although, as *The Return* and *Jude* demonstrate, guilt’s very nature sets up the conditions for isolation and introspection, it does not follow that it is indescribable. All that is needed in order to hear the inner voice of the conscience is an insight into the characters’ mind. This is provided by Hardy’s method of narration, where, arising out of a well-considered and often intolerable weighing up of the moral legitimacy of a specific action, guilt takes the form of a live internal debate between the character and his conscience. Increasingly internal and presented from the character’s point of view in the progressive absence of a narrator, this means of depicting guilt begins a process of introspection and consciousness of his thoughts that has all the marks of the modern narrative technique, stream of consciousness.

The above distinctions between guilt and shame clearly form an integral part of their representation. It must, however, be noted that these distinctions only apply to the immediate moment or moments of feeling guilty or ashamed; if we consider the wider consequences of shame and guilt upon the self, as discussed above in B. II. 1. c., it is shame, not guilt, that is incommunicable. Synonymous with the desire to hide, shame is above all a “wordless state”<sup>2</sup>: its very expression brings fresh shame upon the self, creating paralysing silence and concealment. Connected, in contrast, to the action undertaken to make amends, guilt finds expression in the confession or atonement that follows, these acts being means by which the wrong can be communicated to the world

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hardy, “Candour in English Fiction,” *New Review* 2 (1890), pp. 15-21.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis (1971), p. 37.

at large in a way that shame cannot be. Nevertheless, as far as their immediate experience is concerned, guilt and shame's method of expression is clearly mimetic in that it reconstructs their individual symptoms and properties in a realistic way. Another facet of their representation takes place on a symbolic level in that, thanks to their wider associations, shame and guilt also come to stand for a whole range of other related values concerning the body and the spirit, primitivism and progress.

### **b. Bodily Shame and Spiritual Guilt**

Guilt's metaphorical location in the mind, together with the long-established position it enjoys within the Christian tradition, as presented in *Jude*, automatically lends it a spiritual guise and connects it to matters of the soul. These connotations are highlighted by one of guilt's earlier, religious denotations as to "trespass" or "sin."<sup>1</sup> Given, meanwhile, its concern with the self, the body and being seen, shame involves a greater body awareness than guilt<sup>2</sup> and is closely connected to sexuality.<sup>3</sup> Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, the Russian philosopher, Solovyof, links shame expressly to the body, sexuality and animal drives. Although later in his manifesto he concedes that shame covers all moral wrong, Solovyof roots it in a sexual context and argues, very much along the lines of Darwin, that it is through the ability to feel shame of a sexual nature that "man becomes in the full sense human."<sup>4</sup> Given that shame separates man from the animal kingdom, it also separates and protects him from his animal and material self, by which is meant the whole sum of his impulses and instinctive desires, all his "natural inclinations and organic functions," shame being a form of "mastery over the material senses."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *OED*, s.v. *guilt* (v.), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis (1971), p. 34; Lewis (1987), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis (1971), p. 85. Shame's sexual connotations are furthered by its wider meanings, the 'parts of shame' in the English language signifying the external sex organs, a meaning found in other languages such as the German *Schamgegend* for the pubic region and the Greek *aidoia* for the genitals. Similarly a 'woman's shame' is the violation of her honour or the loss of her chastity.

<sup>4</sup> Solovyof, pp. 37, 135-138 and 178.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 32, 35 and 41.

This distinction between shame and guilt is accentuated by the dichotomy between the spirit and the flesh in *The Return*, *Tess* and *Jude*. Both Thomasin and Tess' shame is first and foremost of a sexual nature involving a lapse of the flesh. Not only this, but Tess is penalized for being beautiful and made to feel ashamed of her body, experiencing a "wretched sentiment [...] that in inhabiting the fleshly tabernacle with which nature had endowed her she was somehow doing something wrong" (*Tess*, 388). And having spent the night with his estranged wife, Jude feels "heartily ashamed of his earthliness in spending the hours he had spent in Arabella's company" (245), rather than guilty. Further, in *Jude*, wherever guilt is present, Christian doctrine and practice is never far behind. Representing the mind and spirit, and preaching the suppression of all things connected to the body, it comes as no surprise to see less of shame in this novel.

Given the repressive attitude towards the body in the nineteenth century, it has not only come to stand for those instinctive drives in man, his feelings, passions, and sexuality, but also for anything that honours the body such as sensuality and beauty. The spirit, soul or mind, meanwhile, is home to thought, knowledge and intellectualism. These types of distinctions are also mapped to Hardy's characters. Just as psychologists argue that some people are more naturally disposed to one or the other emotion,<sup>1</sup> Eustacia and Tess, beautiful and pagan characters who indulge their natural instincts, are linked to shame; Clym and Sue, infinitely more spiritual and intellectual creations, to guilt. Thus by being connected to specific character types, guilt and shame take on a wider system of values which go beyond their original emotional meaning.

### **3. Shame and Guilt Cultures, Text-worlds and Social Comment**

Moving on from the psychology of the shameful and guilty moment and its literary representation, a third level remains to be examined which involves an "inward and outward eye" of a different kind. Having dealt with shame and guilt as an emotional, mental, and, in part, physiological experience, the focus so far has been upon the inner activity of Hardy's characters and the predominantly personal effects of shame and guilt upon the self. Turning now to the position of these characters within their environment,

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<sup>1</sup> Piers and Singer, p. 44f.



the focus of this final level is upon the external, public nature and consequences of shame and guilt. Environment being everything that falls under the external world and its conditions in the texts, this area of study is important for the single fact that *The Return*, *Tess* and *Jude* all belong to the group of novels which Hardy calls, “Novels of Character and Environment,” clearly emphasizing the importance of understanding these characters within a wider external context. Hints of this public aspect of shame and guilt have already been given. Connected to the notion of an audience, it relies upon the essentially conventional understanding of shame and guilt as representatives of accepted standards of conduct (which the individual may or may not internalize), that act as social sanctions to ensure good behaviour.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the environment of the novels is conferred with some sort of moral identity which has an influence upon the characters.

Again, in this area, Hardy does not become tied up with questions about concrete causes of guilt and shame. The issue at stake here is not so much what is considered guilt or shame evoking, but rather how these sanctions work. Given their explicit contrast thus far, it comes as no surprise that similar distinctions are felt here in those text-worlds whose moral obedience is dominated by guilt, and those dominated by shame. The organization of such fictional worlds and the demands they make upon its people are not only explored and appraised in all three novels, but are also issues taken up by anthropologists of the twentieth century in their classification of societies into shame and guilt cultures. Again, too, these ideas are put to another use beyond that of their immediate descriptive function, with Hardy’s construction of shame and guilt worlds mapping a larger theory of social change that he observed over the span of his novel writing. This change draws on wider, cultural associations of shame and guilt concerning their origin, manifestation and development.

#### **a. Public Opinion versus Self-evaluation**

The notion of shame cultures and guilt cultures was first expanded and popularized by Ruth Benedict, assigned by the American government during the Second World War to

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<sup>1</sup> For this established interpretation of guilt within Hardyan criticism see p. 11f.; for the according *OED* definition of shame and its discussion, see pp. 21-23.

research Japanese culture so that the Americans might get to know their enemy better. Benedict's classification, based on earlier anthropological work on primitive societies,<sup>1</sup> is essentially quantitative in the sense that societies are categorized on the basis of how much emphasis they place on each emotion.<sup>2</sup> On the premise that shame and guilt control behaviour through the individual's learning to avoid situations in which they arise, Benedict defines the different means by which shame and guilt are activated in such societies:

True shame cultures rely on external sanctions for good behaviour, not, as true guilt cultures do, on an internalized conviction of sin. Shame is a reaction to other people's criticism. A man is shamed by being openly ridiculed and rejected or by fantasizing to himself that he has been made ridiculous. In either case it is a potent sanction. But it requires an audience or at least a man's fantasy of an audience. Guilt does not. In a nation where honour means living up to one's own picture of oneself, a man may suffer from guilt though no man knows of his misdeed and a man's feeling of guilt may actually be relieved by confessing his sin.<sup>3</sup>

The distinction Benedict makes between shame and guilt cultures and their means of regulating conduct concerns external and internal sanctions. It follows that shame is experienced at other people's actual or fantasized knowledge of one's misdeed, so that a shame culture is one in which the individual's fear of what other people will think of him is decisive in maintaining good behaviour. In a guilt culture the necessity of an audience in regulating behaviour is removed through the internal sanction, the conscience, which gives rise to the feeling of guilt when the individual has wronged. According to Benedict, the essential wrong that generates each emotion in the first place remains the same in each case.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See for example *Cooperation and Competition among Primitive People*, ed. Margaret Mead, New York, 1937 and D. Leighton and K. Kluckhohn, *Children of the People: The Navaho Individual and his Development*, Cambridge, 1948, to whom Benedict acknowledges grateful thanks.

<sup>2</sup> The terms society and culture are used interchangeably by many social scientists, especially shame and guilt theorists, and where this is the case, I shall make no distinction between the two. On the whole, however, it is helpful to distinguish between society as the organized institutions of a social group that make up its functioning and ensure its survival as a group, and culture as the wider term that includes this and the total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge a group shares and acts upon. In this study shame and guilt are chiefly concerned with the operation of society rather than culture although, at times, their meanings can be traced to the totality of shared belief of the Victorian age.

<sup>3</sup> Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*, London, 1947, p. 223.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

Benedict's theory is founded upon many of the leading, general associations of shame and guilt discussed so far; on shame's externality, visibility and connection with an audience, and on guilt's contrasting inward focus, isolation and silence. Nevertheless, as already shown, the exclusion of any internal process from the shame experience and its dependence on an external audience – "So long as his bad behaviour does not 'get out into the world' he need not be troubled"<sup>1</sup> – is faulty. Applied by guilt-ridden western anthropologists to what were considered backward Asian, Oceanic, African and native American cultures, Benedict's theory, though extremely influential, has since been criticized for its invalid definitions of shame and guilt. Its subjectivity and racism means that it has little or no standing in modern sociology and anthropology.<sup>2</sup> Classicists, however, have been more merciful. Whilst recognizing the flaws of the theory to a lesser or greater degree, these are subordinated to its ability to convey an idea. This idea is highly relevant to Hardy's presentation of public shame.

The terms shame and guilt cultures persist in a revised form in classical scholarship to describe the gradual shift which took place in values and attitudes in Greek society in the fifth century BC.<sup>3</sup> This shift concerns the change in understanding of Homeric man's conception of himself, and of motivation, moral responsibility and justice. It marks the transition of Homeric society from an essentially carefree society where the Gods are understood as fickle superhumans, to a society filled with religious unease where the individual feels increasingly responsible for his own fate. Synonymous with this shift is guilt's replacement of shame in its moral function. Homeric society is considered a shame culture on the basis of its honour-, pride- and public-based nature, and, most importantly, on its reliance on 'external' public opinion. In such a society the

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict, p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> See for example *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, eds. James Clifford and George Marcus, Berkeley, 1986. Two anthropological studies directly challenge Benedict's theory, the first being Clifford Geertz's work on Balinese culture as documented in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York, 1973, the second Milton Singer's study of the University of Chicago's Indian Education Project in the 1940s as presented in Piers and Singer, pp. 71-84. Some of the key findings in Singer's discussion are that guilt plays a significant role in the traditional 'shame culture' of the American Indian tribes and that tribe members also have a sense of moral judgement and responsibility.

<sup>3</sup> E. R. Dodds was the first to apply Benedict's terms in 1951 in his influential book, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley, repr. 1968, pp. 28-63. The terms are continued to be used with some qualification; see Arthur W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values*, London, 1960, pp. 48f. and 154-156; Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus*, Berkeley, 1971, p. 25; Arthur W. H. Adkins, *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece: From Homer to the end of the Fifth Century*, London, 1972, pp. 12, 61 and 138, and more recently Williams, pp. 78 and 91, and J. M. Bryant, *Moral Codes and Social Structure in Ancient Greece: A Sociology of Greek Ethics from Homer to the Epicureans and Stoics*,

highest goal is the experience of public esteem and respect; this is the yardstick by which all action taken by the individual, past, present and future, is measured. It follows that the worst that can happen to a man living in such a society is that he 'loses face' and experiences the contempt or ridicule of his peers, fear of this being a controlling behavioural force. In a guilt culture, meanwhile, the standing the individual enjoys in the group plays a less important part than his standing in relation to his conscience and God. As a result any public esteem he may enjoy can afford to be jeopardized and public disapproval is altogether less influential. All in all, the difference in cultures is a difference in *emphasis* on 'what-people-will-say' and 'what-I-will-think-about-myself' in regulating an individual's behaviour.

Hardy, well versed in classical Greek literature and tragedy, and living as he did in the nineteenth century, knew the value of the external world in making or breaking the individual and deciding single-handedly over his standing, reputation and well-being; in the three novels the chief elements of shame and guilt cultural theory are fused and sustained. Although, as shown above in B. II. 1., shame in Hardy works in terms of the conscience, self and identity, the distinction between shame and guilt on the basis of conduct influenced and controlled by one's peers or the world at large, (that which we have defined as public shame), and conduct determined by an inner voice, or one's own evaluation of oneself, is also directly taken up. Whilst the three fictional worlds presented cannot be classified categorically into shame or guilt cultures, at times marked attention is paid to one emotion to the exclusion of the other, and in the final novel, guilt even replaces shame. The worlds of *The Return* and *Tess* are also unmistakably public-shame oriented. This type of shame is not only evident in the way characters are judged negatively and ridiculed by an external audience, but also in the way that their sheer fear of this emotion (together with their conscience) is decisive in controlling their conduct. Time and again public judgement overthrows Thomasin, Tess and Angel's – and to some extent Eustacia's – self-judgements; minor characters such as *Tess'* John and Joan Durbeyfield, Felix and Cuthbert Clare, and *Jude's* Gillingham rely even more upon this public opinion, planning and measuring all conduct by its potential for public approval, and living in terror of losing face. Pride and reputation are also central here, reputation's preservation, destruction, and, where possible, restoration

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New York, 1996, p. 32. Taylor, pp. 54-56, also uses the terms as a basis for studying shame. For a direct rejection of Benedict, meanwhile, see Cairns, pp. 27-47.

a constant refrain, of which Thomasin's dogged attempt to salvage her name once it has been smudged, is a most pathetic example. The world of *Jude*, on the other hand, is most definitely guilt-oriented. Although remnants of shame structures still exist, the entire emphasis of the protagonists' actions concerns the exposure and defiance of these structures, and, apart from one occasion, public opinion is actively and systematically ignored. Instead of shame, guilt pervades the characters' thoughts and actions. Jude and Sue's personal sense of guilt succeeds the role of external sanctions, granting them a form of moral autonomy. Jude's self-evaluation often takes place in the eyes of God, hereby reviving the whole range of guilt's religious associations. As Benedict's claim that Puritanism is the father of guilt cultures shows, these associations are based upon a long cultural tradition. Benedict's adoption of the stock characterization of the early Puritan settlers in New England as a strictly moral folk who "tried to base their whole morality on guilt,"<sup>1</sup> means she automatically defines guilt in 'puritan' terms, the conscience being "an internalized conviction of sin."<sup>2</sup> Likewise the relationship with God, together with the notions of disobedience, confession, atonement and punishment are key issues in *Jude*.

All things considered, this correlation between the fundamentals of Benedict's theory and Hardy's writing enable us to speak of shame and guilt text-worlds in the novels, where shame is understood in public as opposed to personal terms. Important to remember, however, is that we are dealing here with a matter of relativity. As the classicist Hugh Lloyd-Jones writes, neither state rules out elements of the other<sup>3</sup>: in *Jude* we have an example of attempts at shaming and of ostracism; in *Tess* guilt plays a part. We have only to look at Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, set in seventeenth-century Puritan New England and probably the most well-known guilt-centred work in

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict's equation of North America with this long line of Puritanism and guilt is a view of twentieth-century North America shared by many writers. See for example Henry L. Mencken, *A Book of Prefaces*, New York, 1917 and *Prejudices: Fourth Series*, New York, 1924.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict, p. 223. Cairns, p. 27f., calls Benedict's definition, "narrowly and ethnocentrically conceived" and Lloyd-Jones, p. 25, concedes that guilt does not have to be restricted to this religious sense. A. L. Kroeber's verdict in *Anthropology*, New York, 1948, p. 612, is also revealing, arguing that "the reputedly independent and separate verdicts of Anglo-Saxon anthropologists on Asiatic, Oceanic, native American and African cultures, that shame is a far more influential motivation in them than a sense of sin, does not really specifically specialize these cultures nearly so much as its opposite – conscious sinfulness – characterizes Anglo-Saxon and Protestant culture."

<sup>3</sup> In direct response to Dodds, Lloyd-Jones, p. 25, claims that while Protestant-based countries can generally be classified as guilt cultures, and those eastern Mediterranean countries and Asia as shame cultures, no society is controlled purely through guilt or shame alone, but involves "an admixture of the other."

the history of English and American literature, to appreciate this. Here, the form that Hester Prynne's punishment takes, sentenced to stand on the scaffold in the market place and to endure her people's scrutiny and censure for three hours, and thereafter to wear the embroidered badge of shame upon her breast, shows clearly the role of the community in exposing and punishing sinners in what would normally be classed as a guilt culture setting.<sup>1</sup> What this novel also shows is that the method of shaming used at the time of its setting has also changed. Hardy's depiction of the public shaming process deviates substantially from the traditional puritan practice as depicted by Hawthorne. The scene of action is no longer the market place and there is no public vote or open declaration; Thomasin, Tess, Sue and Jude are not shamed openly by their neighbours but implicitly by them through a tacit system of signs. This marks the road towards the silent shaming and shunning found in western society today. A final modification of Benedict's theory which is also relevant here is made by the classicist J. M. Bryant. Arguing with Lloyd-Jones for a combination of internal and external sanctions, he also applies this inner and outer distinction to people's individual natures, stating that "inner- and 'other-directed' personalities" are equally important in controlling behaviour and that they make up "an interactive continuum rather than a rigid dichotomy" within society.<sup>2</sup> This rethinking of sanctions into personality types which focus either inwards towards the self or outwards to the individual's environment underlines once again the notion of an "inward and outward eye." It also picks up the notion of certain shame and guilt character types. Jude and Sue's introversion and self-absorption help to create the conditions within their characters for guilt's inward focus. The characters of shame, meanwhile, Tess, Eustacia and, in this respect even Thomasin, all look outwards towards their environment in some way, be it to a single fellow character, to family, peers or to the community as a whole. More responsive, to a lesser or greater degree, to public censure by nature, their personalities determine their sensitivity to shame. Again we may take this as further evidence of a typology of guilt and shame characters in Hardy.

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<sup>1</sup> Ausubel, p. 387, also cites the existence of "the stock, the pillory, and the ducking stool in the public market place" in early Puritan society as evidence that they did not rely on guilt sanctions alone.

<sup>2</sup> Bryant, p. 32.

## **b. Results versus Intentions**

Another relevant distinction which shame and guilt culture terminology has led to in the field of classics is that between intentions and results.<sup>1</sup> Because public opinion is primarily formed by appearance as opposed to fact, a person's conduct in a shame-oriented society can be said to be measured in terms of outward success or failure, where the emphasis is on success and the corresponding status and prestige it brings. Such a society is thus a 'results-culture'<sup>2</sup> where the outcome of an action is what counts, whatever the original intentions may have been. This description tallies particularly with the Victorian situation; we have only to think of Mrs. Grundy and the rigid external conformity and respectability she stood for to appreciate its fittingness. Hardy's aim, meanwhile, is to reveal its shortcomings. The damage done to the individual when only his outward 'result' is considered regardless of such finer considerations as to any original designs he might have had, is demonstrated in *Jude* by Gillingham's response to Phillotson's release of Sue; the farcicality and crushingness of the way an individual's aspirations are wholly nullified, for all their worthiness, if they are not successful, made poignantly clear by Jude's self-defence as a seeming failure before the Christminster crowd. In *The Return* and *Tess* it is precisely this feature of society that condemns Thomasin and Tess as fallen women. In the shame community in which Tess lives, it is irrelevant that nothing could have been further from her mind on accepting Mrs. d'Urberville's job than sleeping with her son and bearing his child. This does not alter the fact that she does and does not change the outward result which is all that counts. Similarly the truth behind Thomasin's cancelled wedding, a mere bureaucratic problem concerning the marriage licence's invalidity for Anglebury, is equally irrelevant. The fact remains that, having begun an attachment to a young man and failed to marry him, Thomasin is now branded a lost woman. Like the Evangelical approach to sin, there is no middle ground between the sheep and the goats; regardless of their original pure and worthy aims, neither Thomasin nor Tess can be saved. Thus, by evaluating behaviour in this way and judging "from false report," public opinion in all three novels is blessed with neither insight, understanding nor compassion. Jumping to conclusions and praising outwardly righteous but inwardly self-destructive conduct –

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<sup>1</sup> See Adkins (1960), pp. 46-57; Adkins (1972), pp. 12-20; Bryant, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Adkins, (1972), pp. 12 and 61; R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Studies in Aeschylus*, Cambridge, 1983, p. 97f.

congratulating Sue on her remarriage to Phillotson for “having performed a noble, and righteous, and mutually forgiving act” (*Jude*, 446) – it is vain, superficial, reductive and depersonalizing.

In a guilt-oriented society, where the worth of a person is measured by himself, the purpose of an action comes under greater scrutiny and is decisive in its evaluation. This can be seen in Jude’s deliberation about whether he should make himself known to Sue. Great attention is given to securing the intention behind this move, be it to simply get to know another member of his family as a relative, to gain her friendship and support as a married man, or to professes his devotion to her as a lover. The specific intention determines Jude’s guilt; the distinction is clearly between deliberate and accidental wrong, wrong we plan and wrong we commit which we ‘didn’t mean to.’ The characters, Clym and Sue, meanwhile, take this idea of intention to its extreme. They add an elaborate and deeper design in hindsight to their original innocent actions in order to make their self-professed guilt more convincing. For Clym this is his wicked neglect of his mother and wife which he takes to be the cause of their deaths; for Sue, her overindulgence of the flesh by living together with her cousin, Jude, which she takes to be the cause of their children’s deaths.

### **c. The Collapse of the Community: Guilt replaces Shame**

Just as classicists note a change from a shame-oriented to a guilt-oriented culture in Classical Greece, a trend is also traceable from a shame to a guilt-oriented world over the span of *The Return*, *Tess* and *Jude*. This change involves a transition from *The Return*, where both concepts prevail in various forms (though the emphasis is upon shame rather than guilt), via *Tess*, where shame is uppermost, to the last of Hardy’s fictional works, *Jude*, which culminates in guilt.

Taking shame and guilt as social sanctions, the diminishment of the outside world in *Jude* is, as the individual study of this novel shows, dependent upon a number of factors. *Jude*’s religious interest and the title character’s early (but not permanent) internalization of Church teaching automatically secures the new presence of God, reducing the influence of an external audience: all four of *Jude*’s key characters pay ultimately little or no attention to what other people think and say. But, like classical explanations of Homeric and fifth-century Greece, this trend towards guilt is not confined to features within the text, but is related to wider historical conditions outside



the novels. These wrought changes in the structure and nature of Victorian society between the 1840s and 1890s. This period, more than any other, sees the rise of the individual's physical and social mobility together with the expansion of large cities, both of which are reflected in the increasingly urban settings of the three novels. From the prehistoric, untameable heath of *The Return*, we move to the small villages and towns of *Tess* where the railway is only just extending its tracks across the landscape, to the strictly urban setting of *Jude* where the train is a common sight. Synonymous with this change is the destruction of public shame conditions: the breaking up of insulated and closely-knit rural communities through the population's desertion of the countryside for the cities. These cities offer in turn anonymity, the sense of belonging nowhere and answering to no one. The subsequent isolation of the individual destabilizes shame. The latter's ability to bind people together in that one can feel ashamed on someone's else's behalf, breaks down; public judgement and public shame is replaced by the individual's own moral value system based on his personal experience and conscience – guilt. In her cultural and class study of England in the late nineteenth century, Lynd describes such a shift within the working class. Here she argues for a replacement of working-class shame by classless, individual “guilt” caused by the economic liberalism of the 1880s, where the individual was made to feel responsible for his own fate.<sup>1</sup>

Together, then, *The Return*, *Tess* and *Jude* represent a growing estrangement of characters from their environment which leads to moral autonomy. This estrangement is presented in terms of the move away from the evaluation of the individual by an external body of people, to an increase in self-evaluation and self-judgement matched by an increasing disregard for others' opinion. Ultimately the degree of influence the moral environment has upon the individual, as opposed to the strength of his internal conviction and conscience, is dependent upon his degree of integration within it. As Lewis writes, an emotional connection must exist between the individual and the audience who observes him for even the possibility of shame to exist: “in order for shame to occur, there must be a relationship between the self and the other in which the self “cares” about the other's evaluation.”<sup>2</sup> The ‘caring’ of Hardy's characters,

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Merrel Lynd, *England in the Eighteen-Eighties: Toward a Social Basis for Freedom*, New York, 1945, pp. 241f. and 328.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis (1987) pp. 16-19. See also the discussion on p. 36.

established through familial or communal attachments which his characters do or do not have, plays an important part in situations concerning public shame. Characters who are firmly rooted in and who are products of their environments, such as Thomasin and Tess, care more and are therefore more susceptible to this type of shame than characters who are not, such as Eustacia, Alec, Jude and Sue. Furthermore, comparing Thomasin with Tess, it is clear that Tess marks a half-way point in that she wavers between taking on society's conviction of her and defending her innocence; although what other people think and say about her fills her with self-doubt, she only half-heartedly accepts their criticism. Jude, Sue and Phillotson, meanwhile, move progressively towards thinking and acting wholly independently from social convention. Here the notion of caring can equally be applied to the Fawley cousins' sense of guilt in the sense that its extent is determined by their degree of belief in God.

#### **d. Social Mobility and Class Shame**

Another issue affecting Hardy's treatment of shame and guilt which is linked to the socio-historical context in which he was writing, concerns class and class mobility. The above-named changes that industrialization wrought also brought great changes in social flexibility and class structure. The nineteenth century saw, for example, a great rise of the middle class as industrially-made business men and factory owners 'brought' positions in the gentry. Class is a burning issue in Hardy, to which the very first of his novels, *The Poor Man and the Lady* (completed in 1868, but unfortunately now lost), and later works such as *Woodlanders* and *Tess* bear witness. As the critic Peter Widdowson astutely sums up, a continual conflict and exploration of class goes on in the novels in the way in which "the plots, and much of the detail, pivot on cross-class relationships between male and female characters," with "the vast majority of the main characters [...] being displaced from their 'true' class *locus*, being between classes, or being in the wrong place or community for their class type."<sup>1</sup>

The social mobility and immobility of Hardy's characters and the cross-class encounters that result, invite a shame of a very specific kind. In her book on re-reading

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Widdowson, *Thomas Hardy*, Plymouth, 1996, p. 32f.

working-class fiction, Pamela Fox describes class shame as a “lack of cultural capital” – shame generated from a sense of inadequacy which class creates, caused by a deficiency in material or intellectual standing.<sup>1</sup> Drawing on Lynd’s own study, Fox claims that those people most likely to experience this type of shame are those made to feel “inappropriate by dominant cultural norms,” arguing that shame is an “oppressive social dynamic” that hampers and frustrates minority groups.<sup>2</sup> Examining texts by working-class authors writing from the 1890s to 1945, who are vying for acceptance within an essentially middle-class milieu, Fox’s definition is clearly oriented towards shame felt by lower-class people finding themselves in higher-class situations which makes them painfully aware of their shortcomings. Such relocations of characters upon a higher rung of the social ladder go hand in hand with shame in Hardy. Ever since a child, Grace’s father, Melbury, of *Woodlanders*, has been ashamed of the meagre schooling he received compared with the classical education his more affluent playmates had the privilege to enjoy. It is his attempt to undo this shame that forms a guiding structural principle of the novel. Similarly, despite her lover’s protestations, Tess’ socially-improving marriage to Angel covers her with class shame by placing her in a position for which she feels inadequate and socially unprepared.

Although not included in Fox’s definition, another form of class shame is that caused, not by social inferiority, but from an affront to social superiority. This takes its meaning from the sense of shame generated by being in a situation which offends one’s sense of modesty or decency. Applied to class, it is the threat of being relegated to a lower rung of the social stratum to that which one considers oneself worthy; a feeling that can be caused by anything from being involved in a fleeting breach of etiquette, to the more serious and permanent act of marrying beneath oneself. Giles’ inappropriate and profane remarks and acts of indelicacy in *Woodlanders*, for example, are a continual source of embarrassment and shame to the socially superior and sensitive Grace. In fact they are part of the reason why she finds it difficult to view him as her prospective husband. Parental pride and social ambition in regard to finding a suitable match for their offspring plays an even more central role in this novel in the form of Melbury’s efforts to find his daughter a more suitable partner. It is when these efforts are defeated by a child marrying beneath itself, as in *The Return* and *Tess*, that shame of

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<sup>1</sup> Fox, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13f.

a particularly acute kind arises in the hearts of the parent characters, and even in the children themselves. The double shame brought on Mrs. Yeobright by her niece's slapdash marriage to the socially-inferior Wildeve, followed by her son's choice of the socially-suspect Eustacia, is one of *The Return*'s major themes; this type of shame also prepares the ground for Angel's shame on his and his parent's behalf for his marriage to Tess, a cocktail of parental and filial shame which has devastating consequences. It is with more success that Melbury uses the threat of shame to secure his daughter's marriage to the socially-superior Dr. Edred Fitzpiers, thereby fulfilling his lifelong dream of socially improving his family.<sup>1</sup>

Altogether class shame has three related functions. In terms of plot, it reveals the hidden difficulties of characters coping and adjusting to class situations foreign to their own. In terms of character, it reveals, by being present when these adjustments fail, a character's social identity. And on a wider thematic level, wherever these experiences have serious and permanent consequences, it becomes a device by which the conventional limits of the text, be they moral, religious, sexual or propriety-centred, are explored, extended and maintained.

#### **e. Primitivism and Progress**

In linking shame to 'primitive' Asian, Oceanic and African cultures, and guilt to western European and North American ones, anthropologists have drawn a correlation between shame, immobility and industrial backwardness, and guilt, economic, social and moral development.<sup>2</sup> Classicists also speak of a shame culture to describe an earlier more primitive period of ancient Greece where the transition from shame to guilt marks the beginning of a higher level of cultural sophistication. This categorization even has its precursor in English literature, in Daniel Defoe's didactic puritan tract *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). For even when marooned for over twenty-eight years on a desert island – a primitive environment – it is the title character's sense of guilt and his interpretation

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<sup>1</sup> *Woodlanders*, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> Piers and Singer, p. 59. Surveying comparative cultural studies since Benedict, Singer describes how Max Weber's Protestant Ethic has been used as a model for modernizing 'backward' cultures, with 'Protestant personalities,' driven by a sense of guilt to work and achieve, being taken as the ideal for morally underdeveloped ones.

of his misfortune as God's punishment that prevents him from degenerating into a savage. Set alongside the heathen barbarity of his helper, Friday, guilt thus takes on a civilizing aspect: as we might expect, it appears in abundance on every page, whilst the notion of shame and fear of ridicule appears only once in the entire narrative.<sup>1</sup> Freud also links guilt to civilization and progress. In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) he describes the evolution of culture in terms of an ever increasing sense of unconscious guilt caused by the growing conflict between the needs and instincts of the body, and the repression and inhibitions of civilized society. Calling the sense of guilt "the most important problem in the evolution of culture," he argues that "the price of progress in civilization is paid in forfeiting happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt."<sup>2</sup> Even today guilt continues to be taken as a prevailing mark of civilization, with orthodox psychoanalytic theory still ranking shame the more 'primitive' or 'regressive' emotion.<sup>3</sup>

Although not applicable on all levels, a similar categorization of shame and guilt is evident in the novels. *Jude's* focus upon the conscience and its guilt in terms of the Christian tradition, together with its urban setting, creates the impression that, in pre-Christian times, guilt is yet to rear its ugly head and lodge permanently within characters' minds. This is supported in three respects by *The Return*. Not only does guilt feature less in this novel in comparison with *Jude*, suddenly being introduced at its end, but the novel's setting of Egdon Heath is also suitably primeval, with the single representative of the Christian faith being Christian Cantle (and a poor one at that). Similarly, in keeping with the association of guilt with progress, *The Return* also boasts the 'modern,' intellectually-advanced character Clym, who, like Sue, is sensitive to guilt. Placing this pattern within the context of Hardy's cultural and chronological primitivism, his preference for the 'natural' over the 'artificial,' and his association of social progress with cultural decline – "the chronic melancholy which is taking hold of the civilized races with the decline of belief in a beneficent Power" (*Tess*, 174) and the

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<sup>1</sup> This occurs when, after his very first trip to sea, the protagonist, Crusoe, considers whether to risk the laughter of his family, friends and neighbours by returning home, or whether to go to sea again, Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, Ware, 1993, p. 17f.

<sup>2</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents," in *The Major Works of Sigmund Freud*, Chicago, 1952, p. 796.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis (1987), pp. 1-5, 18 and 29-32. Lewis notes that adults often consider shame a primitive reaction associated with children due to the loss of control over the body. She states that it is frequently compared with infantile narcissism in psychoanalytic and behavioural theory, shame being seen as preoedipal and guilt oedipal.

“ache of modernism” – it would appear that guilt is a modern malaise. Connected with the mind as opposed to the body, to the disease, in Clym’s case, of thinking too much, the moral autonomy it grants *Jude’s* characters is not associated with any real sense of liberation. Signalling their lack of integration within the community, it raises the questions as to what future remains for those who reject the society in which they live.

On the other hand, and as if in recognition of its essential human inherentness as noted by Darwin, shame abodes in more primitive settings and characters. Not primitive in the negative sense of being crude and savage-like, it is the more ‘natural’ emotion, reserved for ‘natural’ characters. It follows that Thomasin and Tess, strongly associated with the land and nature and living according to their ways, are subject to it. And although Eustacia dislikes the Heath, ironically declaring, “’Tis my cross, my shame, and will be my death!” (*The Return*, 139), both she and Tess are representatives of an earlier, worthier and more prosperous age. Hellenic in nature, they belong to a time before the Christian conscience and its morality, its denial of everything that honours the body and its beauty, have left their mark, and the decline into artifice and inhibition, prohibition and discontent has begun. Facing extinction, it is fitting that, on one hand, Tess and Eustacia’s shame seems the most natural and intrinsic of human experiences.

Important in this mapping of guilt to a more advanced level of cultural sophistication, and shame to a more natural and worthier one, is that it is neither fixed nor all-encompassing. Although it certainly strengthens the typology of shame and guilt characters established thus far, it is simply one of several factors that explain shame and guilt in Hardy. Clym and Sue represent ‘modern’ elements by being racked with the ‘modern’ concerns of intellect, thought and conscience, but this point alone does not explain their guilt; shame can appear to be an inherent, ‘natural’ part of being human, but equally it can be as artificial and man-made a construct as guilt. Again we can only speak of trends rather than concrete definitions of guilt and shame, and some features that are valid in one novel cannot be applied to another.

### III. Conclusion:

#### The Dissociation of Shame and Guilt from Conventional Morality

Altogether, whilst conventional definitions of guilt and shame in terms of moral and social sanctions play a part in the Hardy novels examined, such definitions do not do justice to the elaborate and multifunctional rendering of these two concepts. And although many scenes which generate a sense of guilt or shame in his characters are taken from nineteenth-century everyday life as the author knew it, this context merely gives concrete form to emotional and physical human experiences which operate on a universal level. By covering such complex ideas as the human consciousness and perception, the self and identity, behaviour and its motivation, not to mention the literary representation and communication of these experiences, their social application and wider symbolic meaning, Hardy's use of shame and guilt goes beyond the socio-historical 'moral' context of the Victorian period. These ideas, worked out in later psychological and anthropological theories, beg a re-reading and reassessment of the form, language, and content of *The Return*, *Tess* and *Jude*. Traditional interpretations of the cause of Clym and Sue's guilt are hereby altered, just as the understanding of Tess' shame experience frames her tragedy anew.

Moving to the relationship of the three novels as a trilogy, it comes as no surprise that, despite both novels being about the violation of sexual code which challenges conventional morality, *Tess* is a study in shame, and *Jude* in guilt. In a novel that celebrates the body and its natural impulses (both Tess' relationships with Alec and Angel are depicted as a triumph of the flesh over the spirit), and in one whose heroine is a sensual, pagan prototype of an earlier race, rooted not only within nature, but also within a specific community, it is fitting that shame takes prominence; in one that depicts the spiritual, sexless and modern character, Sue, who makes the cruel choice to deny the body to the glorification of the spirit, and who is utterly estranged from society, it is fitting that guilt, and not shame, takes centre stage. The forerunner to this unfolding of guilt and shame, meanwhile, is provided by *The Return*. Setting up and exploring the conditions for public and personal shame, for the tragic implementation of guilt and for a typology of guilt and shame characters, it can be taken as a starting point for the two texts to follow.

### C. Specific Studies: A Trilogy of Shame and Guilt

#### I. *The Return of the Native*: The Launch of Shame and Guilt

In *The Return* shame and guilt are not only launched as distinct and serious concepts in themselves, their way is prepared for their later function in Hardy's two concluding major novels. As a result *The Return* mediates between *Tess* and *Jude*; the portrayal of the essence of shame in this novel stands to *Tess* as its portrayal of the signification of guilt stands to *Jude*.

Made an earnest issue here for the first time, shame not only endures thematically in such conventional issues as etiquette, scandal and repute, but a conscious attempt is made to secure its very nature. This attempt enquires at an early stage of the novel into its cause and effect and manifestation, and into the types of human and social determinants behind its experience. As the enquiry deepens we leave the public sphere for the more private realm of the individual where shame is presented as less involved with others' opinion, and concerned instead with personal, inherent values, felt by the most natural and untamed creatures in the most lonely and uncivilized of places. With this shift is the crucial recognition that shame is bound intrinsically to self-image and identity. Personal pretensions of social superiority, for example, determine the double shame of Mrs. Yeobright for the socially degrading marriages of her niece and son, as they do Eustacia Vye's shameful existence as Clym Yeobright's wife. At the same time their shame ordeals threaten to undermine these characters' very self-hoods by destroying these pretensions; gladly relinquished social pretensions, meanwhile characterize Clym's dealings with shame. This description of shame, its simultaneous dependency upon and threat to the personality and identity is thus unearthed for the first time, the full consequences of which *Tess* will lay bare.

The overwhelming presence of shame as opposed to guilt as a means of controlling characters' actions and determining their evaluation of these and themselves generates the seeming of a shame-oriented text-world. In spite of this, guilt is by no means absent. Integral to tragedy and disillusionment, *The Return* being Hardy's first (very) conscious attempt at tragedy, guilt is shown to be the effect of the lesson Clym learns about life, as Sue's will be, too. It is presented as a form of delusion to flee the futility and cruelty of life as Hardy understood it and as tragedy reveals it to be. Not only this but, connected to action, activity, communication, and identity, already the divergences between guilt and its sister shame are distinguishable. Whereas shame silences and immobilizes, and threatens the existing self-hood of the individual, guilt extends an image and identity,



providing Clym not only with a purpose, profession and a voice, but also with a new persona.

Last but not least these divergences are mapped into more expansive shame and guilt landscapes based upon wider hallmarks which the characters Clym and Eustacia are given. Such landscapes, be they Christian or primitive, intellectual or sensual, encourage the categorization of certain shame and guilt character types, which we will especially meet again in the characters of Tess and Sue. They also serve to widen the distinction between Hardyian shame and guilt as perfected in *Jude*.

## **1. The Dominance of the Public Sphere and Public Shame**

### **a. Etiquette, Scandal and Reputation**

Disgrace caused by breaking social and moral etiquette, and its repercussions on reputation cloud not only the first two books of *The Return*, but even those events prior to the novel's start. And although later, disgrace of a more personal nature assumes control, the public sphere and its potential to 'talk' and ruin characters is never far away. Newsmongering done by the novel's chorus audience, Egdon heath's inhabitants, accompany each new turn in the plot, be it Clym's homecoming, his extended stay and future plans, or Eustacia and Damon Wildeve's deaths. The focus of *The Return*, remains, though with deflection, upon the eye of the community.

The flop of Thomasin Yeobright's marriage in "Book First" is the climax to what has long since been a sensational story for Egdon and a test of niece and aunt's standing. As we learn through the villagers' flashback discussion on Bonfire Night, ever since her aunt publicly humiliated Wildeve by forbidding their wedding bans on the grounds of his unsuitability, Thomasin has been the subject of gossip. Her aunt has suffered the compromising position of being forced to take back her veto, embarrassment enough, according to Humphrey, to make the couple avoid Rainbarrow for the wedding ceremony, "after kicking up such a nunny-watch and forbidding the banns 'twould have made Miss Yeobright seem foolish-like to have a banging wedding in the same parish all as if she'd never gainsaid it" (70). Although this is disputed by Olly Dowden – "Supposing they were ashamed, I don't see why they shouldn't have done it here-right" (72) – her theory nevertheless confirms the awkwardness and sense of humiliation which veils the event.

Whilst the impression is created that, with the wedding, Mrs. Yeobright has resignedly put her objections to the match aside, the unhappy hiccup at Anglebury with which the novel begins re-establishes the conflict once again, taking it to new heights. Thomasin's transgression, her position as a 'plucked' woman whose sexual relations with a man have yet to be made legitimate, is explored from several angles, ranging from its social consequences and Wildeve's dilemma as to whether he should do the right thing by her, to the latter's predicament should he choose not to. From all angles clues are given as to the properties of shame as a social mechanism to reward and punish socially unacceptable behaviour.

The problem that Thomasin's failure to marry Wildeve on Bonfire Night presents is that, in a way which Eustacia will later act upon, and which will occur time and again in *Tess* and *Jude*, the incident is in danger of being misinterpreted.<sup>1</sup> Far from being seen for the careless mistake it really is – Wildeve simply does not take the trouble to check whether the marriage licence is valid for Anglebury – it is likely to be taken as a sign of Thomasin having been jilted, which questions the uprightness of her character.<sup>2</sup> As Mrs. Yeobright's says, "Strangers don't see you as I do [...] they judge from false report" (167); she is not only at risk at being permanently branded as a woman of loose morals, but also, like *The Scarlet Letter's* Hester, as being taken as an example, "a warning," to other young women. If Thomasin's reputation is to be saved, the innocent intentions behind the mistake must be proven, intentions which, typical of a shame-oriented society, are never considered, as her aunt point outs:

"Thomasin thinks, and I think with her, that she ought to be Wildeve's wife, if she means to appear before the world without a slur on her name. If they marry soon, everybody will believe that the accident did really prevent the wedding. If not, it may cast a shade upon her character – at any rate make her ridiculous." (151)

A ruined character and name can only be avoided by convincing people that "the accident did really prevent the wedding," which marriage to Wildeve will verify: "It was only after a second and successful journey to the altar that she could lift up her head and prove the failure of her first attempt a pure accident" (217). This condition, apart

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<sup>1</sup> Fear of being misunderstood spurs Eustacia not to open the door to her mother-in-law, automatically assuming the latter will imagine that there is something suspicious about Wildeve's visit, *The Return*, p. 346.

<sup>2</sup> Originally Thomasin was to be compromised even further by discovering, after living with Wildeve for a week, that the ceremony had not been legal, see John Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, Westport, Connecticut, 1978, pp. 10-13.

from providing a solution to Thomasin's dilemma, also introduces the notion of reputation-driven behaviour. Regardless of whether she wants to or not, Thomasin must marry Wildeve "if she means to appear" respectable.

Although Thomasin contests the way she is not judged by her true character and actions, but, as Tess will be, simply written off together with all sinners – "Why don't people judge me by my acts? Now, look at me as I kneel here, picking up these apples – do I look like a lost woman?" (167) – she is nonetheless a public character who places public approval above any personal conviction she may have. From the point of her introduction her behaviour is wholly directed to reobtaining the respectability she has lost, being, unlike Eustacia, unwilling to sacrifice her reputation at any cost, and highly sensitive to social censure. Her awareness of the delicateness of her situation prior to the attempted marriage causes her to choose Anglebury over Budmouth as the wedding site – "I proposed it because I was not known there" (94). Her subsequent predicament cuts her to the quick; the interlude between Anglebury and her final marriage at the end of "Book Second" are the "most sorrowful days of her life" (166), and her health suffers as a result.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, so great is her fear for her ruin that she is willing to lose face before Wildeve and beg him to make a second attempt to marry her as soon as possible. Having secured the fact that there is nothing to prevent them from marrying in Budmouth the following week, Thomasin is reduced to the humiliating position of pleading,

"Then do let us go! – O Damon, what you make me say!" She hid her face in her handkerchief. "Here am I asking you to marry me; when by rights you ought to be on your knees imploring me, your cruel mistress, not to refuse you, and saying it would break your heart if I did. I used to think it would be pretty and sweet like that; but how different!" (95)

Hiding her face, Thomasin is ashamed of how low she has sunk in her own esteem. Her naivety about how love should be, based on romantic courtly-love images of her playing the "cruel mistress" and Wildeve the devoted knight, is swiftly replaced by a pragmatic approach to marriage as she recognizes the ironic switch in their respective positions of power, control clearly having now passed to Wildeve's hands. It is a realization Eustacia never makes.<sup>2</sup> All other enviable conditions such as mutual respect and

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<sup>1</sup> *The Return*, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> Penny Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form*, Brighton, 1982, p. 52.

affection are forfeited to the higher goal of saving her reputation, and herself and family from shame. It is unlikely that Thomasin would marry Wildeve otherwise, as her refusal to answer her aunt's questioning of this fact proves.<sup>1</sup> As she admits to herself, she is willing to accept Wildeve on any terms, "I agreed to it [...] I am a practical woman now. I don't believe in hearts at all. I would marry him under any circumstances" (213).

Thomasin's actions are thus ruled by how they will be welcomed by her peers rather than by any inherent correctness or logic they contain. Her aunt is no different; calling the Anglebury escapade "disgraceful," "humiliating" and "galling,"<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Yeobright is primarily concerned with its scandalous implications. These, she tells Wildeve in a petition to redeem her niece's good name, are not confined to Thomasin but, typical of shame's pervasiveness, affect the whole Yeobright household:

"It's a great slight to me and my family; and when it gets known there will be a very unpleasant time for us. How can she look her friends in the face tomorrow? It is a very great injury, and one I cannot easily forgive. It may even reflect on her character." (94)

Shame's vicariousness, the way in which it is not limited to the single miscreant involved, but is felt by every other family member, echoed in Clym's comment, "It is too ridiculous that such a girl as Thomasin could so mortify *us* as to get jilted on the wedding day" (214; my italics), is one of its most destructive properties. Frequently it is equally in consideration of her family, in the form of an imaginary audience, as it is of herself that Thomasin regrets her plight, "It is aunt I think of [...] she will be cut down and mortified if this story should get abroad before – it is done. My cousin Clym, too, will be much wounded" (95). The attempt to fight shame's typical spread through a form of 'scandal management,' especially in regard to her cousin,<sup>3</sup> characterizes Thomasin and her aunt's behaviour from now till the close of "Book Second." Unable, typically, to "look her friends in the face" (94), and in order to minimize gossip, Thomasin spends this period hidden from public view. From the night of the unhappy incident, November the fifth, till the eve upon which Wildeve finally appears at her door and does the honourable thing, December the twenty-fifth, a total of seven weeks,<sup>4</sup> she

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<sup>1</sup> *The Return*, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90, 153 and 169.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 169 and 217.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219. There are large discrepancies in time in the first two books. Despite Eustacia's arrangement on 13<sup>th</sup> November to give Wildeve her answer as to whether she will elope with him a week later on Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> November, this day is later given in "The Two Stand Face to Face" as 24<sup>th</sup> December.

remains a recluse at her aunt's, only venturing outside once to collect holly for the Christmas party when she can be sure of not being seen.<sup>1</sup> Even earlier, on her way home from Anglebury, Thomasin remains concealed thanks to Diggory Venn's secret rescue operation and refusal to reveal her identity. The same night, during Rainbarrow's nuptial celebrations at the Quiet Woman, Thomasin and her aunt are forced like "prisoners" to wait partially hidden in an adjoining room till their passage is free, whereupon they escape through a back window to avoid being seen. Keeping Thomasin's predicament hidden from Clym, whose fame in and about Egdon counterpoises her disgrace, is a further priority which overshadows his homecoming. "If I am not made safe from sneers in a week or two I will tell him myself" (169), resolves Thomasin. Yet, characteristic of the ingenious way gossip spreads, Clym finds out about his cousin from another source, a "silly story" ensuring he hears of the scandal well before it has been resolved.

## **b. The Case of Eustacia**

### **i. Exposure and Indifference**

Thomasin's reaction to life as a "lost woman" is a start to unveiling some of the stock features of shame in general, its finality and pervasiveness, the desire to hide and the dread of exposure it generates, as well as to unveiling specific traits of public shame such as the power of public opinion and its threat to reputation. A further insight into the psychology of this type of shame is supplied by the experiences of Eustacia, the first of which takes place in an early chapter named "A Desperate Attempt at Persuasion." As its title suggests, this deals with a typical instance of Venn's interference in the affairs of his loved one, namely his urgent undertaking to convince Eustacia to give up Wildeve in order to save Thomasin from her impending shame. Venn's argument is based on the correct assumption that it is within Eustacia's power to prevail upon Wildeve to make an honest woman of Thomasin, and culminates by causing Eustacia to feel thoroughly, if temporarily, ashamed of herself.

Unwilling to directly expose the fact that he has proof of his assertions, Venn first appeals to Eustacia's sense of social vanity by naming her "the only lady on the heath"

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<sup>1</sup> *The Return*, p. 136 and 167.

(144). Next her aesthetic vanity is tickled in a particularly sensitive spot by being called “Handsome than Thomasin Yeobright” (145). These two attempts failing, Venn is forced to take a more direct approach, claiming “you could twist him to your will like withywind, if you only had the mind” (145). Met with Eustacia’s denial, he then attempts to shame her into admitting she is lying,

The reddleman wheeled and looked her in the face. “Miss Vye!” he said. [...] “Miss Vye, why should you make-believe that you don’t know this man? – I know why, certainly. He is beneath you, and you are ashamed.” [...] “I was at the meeting at Rainbarrow last night and heard every word,” he said, “The woman that stands between Wildeve and Thomasin is yourself.” (145)

The shameful unveiling of Eustacia shows that, in spite of her proud and condescending attitude and protestations of innocence, she is not only the seductress in the whole affair, but has the brazenness to deny it. This, together with the surprise and shame of discovering that every detail of her intimate conversation with Wildeve has been overheard by a stranger, is articulated in her blush that follows,

It was a disconcerting lift of the curtain, and the mortification of Candualet’s wife glowed in her. The moment had arrived when her lip would tremble in spite of herself, and when the gasp could no longer be kept down. “I am unwell,” she said hurriedly. “No – it is not that – I am not in a humour to hear you further. Leave me please.” (145)

The sense of self-exposure conveyed by the “lift of the curtain” is accompanied by an uncontrollable physical reaction. The heat and the deep colouring; the surprised gasp and sense of confusion; the flustered and unfitting, “I am unwell,” followed by the more seemingly correction of not being in the “humour” to listen further; and the desire to vanish from sight – all these are symptoms of shame. The image is extremely effective. The classical allusion to Candualet’s wife intensifies the feeling of nudity caused by the exposure of the self by awakening images of the queen discovering Gyges hidden in her chamber in order to see her naked, which also places Eustacia firmly within the tradition of beautiful Greek women.<sup>1</sup> Though hardly necessary, Eustacia’s blush also signals to Venn that he has hit upon the truth, hurrying him on with the second part of his plan. In the open discussion that ensues, Eustacia proves immovable, however, and the chapter now closes with the narrator’s reflection upon her indifference should her relationship

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<sup>1</sup> The allusion of Eustacia to Candualet’s wife is interesting. From Herodotus we learn that, sensing Gyges’ presence, the queen later gave him the option of dying himself or killing her husband and assuming power. This draws a parallel with Venn in the role of Gyges for causing the blush and later attempting to ‘kill’ Wildeve by shooting at him, who, as Eustacia’s lover, takes the part of Candualet.

with Wildeva become known, a reflection that is at the same time an exposition on the nature of public shame:

The reddleman's hint that rumour might show her to disadvantage had no permanent terror for Eustacia. She was as unconcerned at that contingency as a goddess at a lack of linen. This did not originate in inherent shamelessness, but from her living too far from the world to feel the impact of public opinion. Zenobia in the desert could hardly have cared what was said about her at Rome. As far as social ethics were concerned Eustacia approached the savage stage, though in emotion she was all the while an epicure. She had advanced to the secret recesses of sensuousness, yet had hardly crossed the threshold of conventionality. (149)

Those who fail to fear being spoken ill of, like Eustacia, risk the charge of shamelessness. As Thomasin has demonstrated, feeling public shame is thus indirectly associated with a sensitivity to public opinion and one's own reputation, to "rumour" and being shown "to disadvantage." At the same time, the distinction is made between the *ability* to feel shame, and the *susceptibility* to do so. As Darwin shows, the very ability to do so is something with which human nature is endowed. Eustacia's failure to possess "inherent shamelessness" is her redeemable quality; like Tess, the times she instinctively feels ashamed of herself without anyone having witnessed her behaviour are crucial for maintaining her standing in the novel and the reader's sympathy.<sup>1</sup> How sensitive one is to the sting of public disapproval and shame, on the other hand, is a question of experience. Given Eustacia's situation and unworldliness, she is wholly ignorant in this field. Not only ignorant, but primitive. Described as being at the "savage stage," the impression is given that sensitivity to public opinion is part of the civilizing process that the heroine is yet to undergo. This is hardly surprising given her isolation. Introduced as a solitary figure against the background of the heath, and living in the "loneliest of lonely houses," the last of a row of three making up the tiny hamlet of Mistover Knap, she is detached from Egdon and their social norms as Zenobia, ruler of Palmyra in Syria, was from Rome.<sup>2</sup> Thus unlike Thomasin and Tess, who are firmly lodged within specific communities and therefore subject to their codes of conduct, Eustacia is a law unto herself, and fails to feel beholden to the heath's conventions.

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<sup>1</sup> Eustacia demonstrates a healthy sense of shame over some of her blunders and shortcomings on four occasions, see *The Return*, pp. 157, 175, 201 and 202f. And despite the standard fire that Eustacia comes under concerning her selfishness, arrogance and caprice, she nevertheless retains the narrator's sympathy. In the "Queen of Night" chapter she is described as "not altogether unlovable," *ibid.*, p. 123, and later, on two separate occasions, we are informed of the universal pity her position would provoke in anyone who saw her, *ibid.*, pp. 317 and 420.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Eustacia does not even get to hear the Egdon news, see *ibid.*, p. 157f.

As well as her situation and inexperience, Eustacia's estimation of herself is also responsible for her indifference to the shame that public censure generates. As already discussed, wherever shame is influenced in some way by an audience, the relation of the individual to this audience is decisive in determining the experience. In Eustacia's case this relation is not marked by any sense of respect. Rather pride and a keen sense of superiority over the Egdon villagers makes her scornful of their maxims and customs much of the time; worry that her behaviour may make her the subject of disapproval and criticism is a far-off practicality beneath her, similar to how not having enough clothes, sheets or tablecloths seems to the lofty mind of a goddess. Thus Egdon gossip may irritate Eustacia, but ultimately it fails to dictate her behaviour greatly. Harbours "instincts towards social nonconformity" (122), she disregards convention, especially Church convention; like Sue, she acts on her own impulses, refusing to be bound to dogma and law. When, for example, she asks Charley to let her play his part as Turkish knight in the mummers' scene, a potentially compromising situation for a young lady in the event of discovery, she is unconcerned with the possible consequences,

On the question of recognition she was somewhat indifferent [...] detection, after all would be no such dreadful thing. It would be instantly set down as the passing freak of a girl whose ways were already considered singular. (183)

And later although, when asked to dance by Wildeve at the gipsy-party, she voices concern as to how it will be seen, hiding her face with her veil, she soon loses all reserve. A couple of pages afterwards she replies "haughtily" to her ex-lover's proposal of accompanying her home, "I shall accept whose company I choose, for all that may be said by the miserable inhabitants of Egdon" (325). Again the threat of gossip does not infringe upon her will, and again a sense of superiority is to blame; her refusal to stoop to her neighbours' "miserable" level. Returning, finally, to Venn's original plea at the beginning of the novel, it is purely through pride and the sense that "she had stooped in loving him" (155), that Eustacia concedes to relinquish Wildeve to Thomasin after all, and not, as Venn had hoped, as a result of the fear of being publicly criticized.

## **ii. Clym as Audience: Lessons in Sensitivity**

In spite of the above, Eustacia's greenness in the field of public shame at the start of *The Return* does not prevail. Although her unconventional disposition is indestructible and nothing prevents her from doing what she wants, experience, as the narrator



predicts, increases her sensitivity to the sting of public censure. It is a minor lesson compared to the other lessons of disillusionment she learns, but nonetheless an important one.

Susan Nunsuch's assault upon her neighbour in church with a stocking needle in order to validate the rumours of her being a witch is the first time Eustacia is to feel literally and painfully, and in her right arm (!), the consequences of her defective reputation, the "impact of public opinion." As she tells Clym, the incident is so humiliating that it discourages her from returning to church, "now I shall not go again for ever so long – perhaps never. I cannot face their eyes after this. Don't you think it dreadfully humiliating? I wished I was dead for hours after" (244). Being the first such experience it takes her completely by surprise; relatively speaking its harm is minimal compared with what is to follow.

For all the time there is no one of importance to be influenced by the rumours about her supernatural and seductive powers, Eustacia, though affronted, remains unhurt. But as soon as there is more at stake than just herself, a process of sensitization begins. When her dream husband appears on the scene, Eustacia fully appreciates the threat that gossip poses for the first time. Hearing of his mother's objection to the match, she fears that Clym's commitment to her is not sufficient to rebuff the untruths circulated about her and that she will therefore lose him, "I shall not be judged fairly, it will get afloat that I am not a good girl, and the witch story will be added to make me blacker!" (266). Luckily, or unluckily perhaps, this does not happen, Clym's immediate proposal enveloping Eustacia temporarily into the arms of marital impregnability.<sup>1</sup> Later, however, her suspicious reputation is turned into her husband's trump card in their separating quarrel. Having remained dignified and unyielding up to this point in their argument, Clym's insinuation that her bad name may be deserved – "How could there be any good in a woman that everybody spoke ill of?" (395) – breaks Eustacia, creating the turning point of the quarrel and her pitiful beg for mercy. Leaving Clym afterwards, Eustacia's newly acquired sensitivity is shown in her yearning for the kindness of the night, wishing "it had been night instead of morning, that she might at least have borne her misery without the possibility of being seen" (397).

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<sup>1</sup> *The Return*, pp. 354 and 366.

Clym's opinion of Eustacia is thus more important to her than Egdon's because, unlike her neighbours, she admires and respects him. This appraisal is based upon Eustacia's conception of herself, just as the discussion of shame as intrinsic to self-image and identity has already shown. It is this feature of shame, far more than any sense of ridicule or disgrace loaded upon the individual by society for breaking a law of etiquette, that now becomes decisive in Hardy's shame portraits.

## **2. Shame, Class and Identity: Losing the Sense of Social Superiority**

"I hate the thought of any son of mine marrying badly! I wish I had never lived to see this; it is too much for me – it is more than I dreamt!" She turned to the window. Her breath was coming quickly, and her lips were pale, parted, and trembling. (262)

These words, proclaiming an insufferable nightmare from which death is the only release, are nothing less than a mother's shame on discovering the social inferiority of her son's wife-to-be. Shame felt on the grounds of class, in this case for stooping to an inferior social level, is encapsulated in *The Return* by the love triangle between Mrs. Yeobright, Clym and Eustacia.

The passage's emphasis on Mrs. Yeobright's anguish goes to the heart of the issue of identity. Like Eustacia, Mrs. Yeobright's elevated sense of social superiority insulates her from Egdon opinion. But far from shielding her from shame, this actually sensitizes her. For it is when these female adversaries are in danger of losing their vital sense of refinement and cultivation, this integral part of their self-image, that shame strikes hardest and the whole of their identity is undermined. It is this nature of shame to affect not just a blow to one's reputation, but to penetrate the very self that is responsible for Mrs. Yeobright's distress and affliction, the quickened breath, the lips "pale, parted" and the deep mortification of wishing she was dead.

From the wider realms of public scandal and censure the focus has thus become infinitely more personal. Although as Eustacia will show, class shame finds its expression in terms of public shame, it is shown in *The Return* to be primarily a personal, private experience, involving the self, its weakening and its forced reappraisal. This shift is especially apparent in the contrast between Mrs. Yeobright's shame at the respective marriages of Thomasin and Clym. As we move from niece to son, shame's public significance fades and is replaced by a more personal focus as the matter becomes closer to Mrs. Yeobright's heart.

### **a. Mrs. Yeobright and Personal Shame**

Any sense of damage to one's social status depends upon the sense of having one. Like her dread daughter-in-law, Mrs. Yeobright does not take her moral cue from the heath's inhabitants but from the clerical family into which she was born. Better educated and possessing a "consciousness of superior communicative power" (83), she shows little regard for their opinion, just as she did not flinch at the embarrassing move of forbidding her niece's bans,

The air with which she looked at the heathmen betokened a certain unconcern at their presence, or at what might be their opinions of her for walking in that lonely spot at such an hour, this indirectly implying that in some respect or other they were not up to her level. The explanation lay in the fact that though her husband had been a small farmer she herself was a curate's daughter who had once dreamt of doing better things. (83)

As a result Mrs. Yeobright has a distinct idea of the social, intellectual and financial dowries that her niece and son's spouses must have. In regard to her niece, this is shown by the letter Thomasin sends Diggory Venn rejecting his suit, where she declares of her aunt, "She would not, I know, agree to it, even if I wished to have you [...] she will want me to look a little higher than a small dairy-farmer, and marry a professional man" (133). Ironically Venn does end up becoming Thomasin's husband in spite of the same reservations concerning his social inferiority that Clym expresses in his mother's name. Venn's saving grace is the fact that he has "manage[d] to become white" (451) by removing the red pigment that has stigmatized the lowliness of his trade up to now – not unlike the stone dust that marks Jude as a workman – thus securing his passage to the respectable middle class. For the meantime, however, Mrs. Yeobright is forced to be content with Thomasin's choice of Wildeve as a partner, who, despite having shown promise as a young man by becoming an engineer, has now dropped to the lowly occupation of inn-keeper, and is, as Olly crassly points out, "hardly solid-going enough to mate with your family" (86). As soon as this issue is resolved, the question of the next marriage takes over.

The landscape of frustrated social ambition, scandal and shame surrounding Thomasin's marriage, prefigures, not unlike a sub-plot, the deeper degradation of Mrs. Yeobright at Clym's. Theoretically, unlike her niece's choice of partner, Mrs. Yeobright has no reason to object to her son's match on class grounds. The Vyes and Yeobrights are evenly matched socially, the Vyes being described by the narrator as "the only genteel people of the district except the Yeobrights" (142). Indeed it is because "Clym's family is as good as hers" (163) that Sam and Humphrey can think of no better "pigeon-

pair,” no “better couple if they be made o’ purpose” (163). Nor in fact can the narrator, calling Clym Eustacia’s “perfect complement in attainments, appearance and age” (265).

In Thomasin’s view this absence of public outcry to the match should lessen the sting of her aunt’s shame, as Thomasin’s reproof of her shows,

“You are too unyielding. Think how many mothers there are whose sons have brought them to public shame by real crimes before you feel so deeply a case like this.” (273)

Calling on a whole line of sons who have brought their mothers to public shame before him, Thomasin’s plea to her aunt on Clym’s account is a plea for moderation. The relative negligibility of her aunt’s shame is secured on two accounts: it is neither “public” but private shame that she feels, nor has Clym committed a “real” sin, the extent of his “crime” being after all simply having chosen a career and wife contrary to his mother’s wishes. But Thomasin’s notion that public shame is infinitely worse than personal shame is not borne out by her aunt’s feelings, the very nature of their mother-son intimacy – they are, after all, like two hands of the same body – making this marriage infinitely more painful than Thomasin’s. Although Mrs. Yeobright claims otherwise, Eustacia’s social and moral inferiority is not the only reason for her resistance. In a manner that D. H. Lawrence is to pick up in the relationship between Paul Morel and his mother in *Sons and Lovers* (1913), Mrs. Yeobright, a lonely widow confined to the limits of Egdon Heath who has learnt to live out her dreams and ambitions through her son, cannot accept the fact that Clym has chosen a path which not only runs contrary to the one she has planned for him, but which replaces her by a younger, more attractive woman – Eustacia being referred to in the narrative as “his mother’s supplanter.”<sup>1</sup>

Clym, however, is not to know this third objection, the two counter arguments with which his mother presents him being of a different nature. First, Eustacia is the cause of Clym’s ultimate renunciation of his Parisian life by providing him with a reason to remain in Egdon and pursue the educational plans he would otherwise have long since abandoned, and second, being a poor specimen of womankind, proud, lazy and

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<sup>1</sup> *The Return*, p. 409. For a discussion of Mrs. Yeobright’s meddling, and her unnatural and unhealthy relationship with Clym see Marjorie Garson, *Hardy’s Fables of Integrity: Woman, Body, Text*, Oxford, 1991, pp. 60-63.

dissatisfied, she is morally and socially beneath him.<sup>1</sup> Just as her verdict on the unsuitability of her niece's match is proven correct, there is, despite her obvious prejudice, truth in Mrs. Yeobright's objection. This is not only proven by the narrator's comment that Clym's plan to teach people "the higher secrets of happiness" (377) has little hope of success, but also by Clym's own realization of his unsuitability as Eustacia's partner, and his occasional regret of ever having met her.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless he refuses to concede this to his mother. Not sharing her concern for social status and blinded by love, he is unable to appreciate her objections. In the first of their two arguments concerning this issue, he refutes her assertions that his plan to open a private school with Eustacia is simply a fanciful delusion to defend his having fallen in love, "merely a castle in the air built on purpose to justify this folly [...] and to salve your conscience" (252). Being unable to accept the adamant and unflinching denial of her son, Mrs. Yeobright attempts to shame Clym into admitting to the truth,

"Can you maintain that I sit and tell untruths, when all I wish to do is to save you from sorrow? For shame, Clym! But it is all through that woman – a hussy!" (252)

Alas, by going beyond the tacitly recognized limits of criticism between parent and child, reducing their argument to mere name-calling by branding his sweetheart a shameless and promiscuous woman, Mrs. Yeobright only succeeds in dealing a blow to Clym's sense of propriety. It is this immodesty and grossness in his mother, her having 'gone too far,' that Clym angrily objects to, so that he "reddened like fire and rose." His subsequent admonition, "I won't hear it. I may be led to answer you in a way which we shall both regret," underlines the necessity of respecting these boundaries and the damage his mother has done. These words however go unheard: in their next argument Eustacia falls even lower in Clym's mother's estimation, this time being called, "a voluptuous, idle woman" (263).

In their second argument two chapters later, which not only causes the final breach between mother and son, but precipitates Clym's premature marriage proposal, the precise blow Eustacia deals Mrs. Yeobright's social superiority through her son's association with her is detailed. Provoked by having heard of her son's engagement, and having pointed once again to the naivety of his schoolmasterly plans, Mrs. Yeobright

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<sup>1</sup> *The Return*, pp. 221 and 250f.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 231 and 259f.

sneers at Eustacia's lowly origins, casting aspersions on her respectability, and criticizing her unladylike conduct with all the prejudice of a member of the middle class,

"She is a good girl."

"So you think. A Corfu bandmaster's daughter! What has her life been? Her surname even is not her true one!"

"She is Captain Vye's granddaughter, and her father merely took her mother's name. And she is a lady by instinct."

"They call him 'captain,' but anybody is captain."

"He was in the Royal Navy!"

"No doubt he has been to sea in some tub or other. Why doesn't he look after her? No lady would rove about the heath at all hours of the day and night as she does." (262)

Eustacia does not have the hallmarks of a woman worthy to be Clym's wife; neither by birth nor behaviour. Her being born of a foreign bandmaster affiliates her in her prospective mother-in-law's mind to the dubious world of entertainment and bohemianism, a fact that her father's unconventional adoption of his wife's name only serves to concretize. This shadow over Eustacia is darkened by her grandfather who, though posing as a captain, fails to behave like one. Mrs. Yeobright diminishes his activities as a member of the Royal Naval by implying that the only sea he has ever sailed on was the water in his own bath "tub." Finally Eustacia incriminates her very self by failing to respect social convention in the way a lady should. Roaming the heath alone whenever she pleases, she is undisciplined and does whatever she likes – ironically it is doing precisely this herself, walking on the heath alone at a late hour, that Mrs. Yeobright is introduced.

Apart from its direct effect on the family, Mrs. Yeobright's excess of shame, based upon the threat to her self-image, plays a decisive part in the catastrophe to come. It increases and strengthens the gulf between mother, daughter-in-law and son, preventing Mrs. Yeobright from attending the wedding, and, together with damaged pride and condescension, marks the final words that she and Eustacia exchange. Later, too, it is the excess of her son's despair at her death that causes matters to precipitate into tragedy. Here, Eustacia's plea for moderation, "Other men's mothers have died" (373), falls, just as Thomasin's plea to her aunt before her, on deaf ears, too.

## **b. Cracks in Eustacia's Self-image**

Eustacia's experience of class shame originates within her self, but unlike her mother-in-law's, it involves a specific fantasy audience of persons in Budmouth and Egdon. As long as Eustacia feels secure in her superiority over these people, she is immune to their criticism. But as soon as she falls in her estimation of herself, she feels ridiculous in theirs, too. When cracks appear upon her fixed image of elegant lady and irresistible seductress, so does it give rise to feelings of humiliation. Clym delivers the first of these blows by becoming a furze-cutter, a grim departure from his wife's original hopes of it being in her power to persuade him to go back to Paris once they are married.<sup>1</sup>

"Shameful labour" is how Eustacia describes Clym's new occupation on the heath. Ironically reacting to the situation in the same way as her enemy mother-in-law whose first thought is to how she can help the couple out of such a quandary,<sup>2</sup> Eustacia feels that Clym is stooping far below the dignity of his class by condescending to do manual labour, his grubbing for a living on the heath making him loathsome to her. His worldliness, intellectual ability and flair for languages disqualifies him for such employment,

"But it is so dreadful – a furze-cutter! and you a man who have lived about the world, and speak French, and German, and who are fit for what is so much better than this." (317)

Her vehement protests being in vain, later she laments the physical change in her husband since his working under the midday sun, commenting on the "rough and brown" of his hands, which were once "white and soft," the sign of cultivation and good breeding, and his skin, "all of a colour with his leather clothes" (343).

It is weeping and with "sick despair" that Eustacia makes the realization that as his wife, everything that Clym is and does reflects directly upon her.<sup>3</sup> Touching again on shame's vicariousness, Clym's occupation is not only demeaning to him in Eustacia's eyes, but it is also "degrading to her, as an educated lady-wife" (313). By failing to "care much about social failure," Clym destroys simultaneously any sense of social ascendancy Eustacia has enjoyed up to this point, dragging her down to his new labourer level so that she is forced to feel "the blasting effect upon her own life of the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Return*, pp. 259 and 300.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 339.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.

mood and condition in him” (314). Suddenly, weakened, she imagines the mockery of her peers at Budmouth, to whom she has previously always considered herself vastly superior, “She imagined how all those Budmouth ones who should learn what had become of her would say, ‘Look at the girl for whom no one was good enough!’” (318). Defined by her husband, she is no longer the cultivated lady of the heath, but the “furze-cutter’s wife.” In spite of Wildeve’s protestation that his view of her has not changed since hearing of her altered position and his reassurance that “Nothing of that sort can degrade you: you ennoble the occupation of your husband” (324), his words do not convince his ex-lover, the “gay, bright future” he had originally imagined for her evoking in her the unbearable “picture of the neighbours’ suspended ridicule” (325). Even her grandfather’s opinion of her is not safe, with Eustacia colouring with shame at the idea he infers that money problems have made Clym resort to such a pastime, Captain Vye being unable to imagine any other reason for a gentleman doing such a job. His offer of financial assistance – “What’s mine is yours, you know” (362) – and his persistent question, “He is paid for his pastime, isn’t he? Three shillings a hundred I heard?” (362), is met with his granddaughter’s cold assertion that Clym is only doing the furze-cutting out of the nobler aim of wanting to be useful.

The shameful injustice Eustacia believes her husband has dealt her never leaves her. The single response she makes to the sum of Clym’s accusations during their separating quarrel, the last words they are ever to exchange, concerns his social degradation of her, his isolation of her from her kind and her debasement to being a peasant’s wife in a dirty hovel, “All persons of refinement have been scared away from me since I sank into the mire of marriage. Is this your cherishing – to put me into a hut like this, and keep me like a wife of a hind?” (394).

Her sense of cultivation, refinement and prosperity having been effectively destroyed up to this point, the only conception of herself with which Eustacia is now left concerns her magnetic sexual powers. But even these are at risk, as her meeting with Wildeve a year after the novel’s beginning shows. Having always played the part of the cold, unfeeling mistress who must be wooed and won, she is bitterly ashamed of breaking down before him. In Eustacia’s eyes this effectively destroys her cruel and pitiless image which has previously always secured her domination in their relationship. Attempting to hide from him “in some shame,” she asks, “Are you not ashamed of me, who never used to be a crying animal?” (406), and “Why didn’t you go away? I wish you had not seen quite all that; it reveals too much by half” (406). Unable to reconcile herself to this newly-felt vulnerability, Eustacia tries in vain to restore herself to her



former position of power by asserting desperately, “I did not send for you – don’t forget it Damon; I am in pain, but I did not send for you! As a wife, at least, I’ve been straight” (406).

As in the case of Clym’s furze-cutting, experiences of shame actively alter and, as in the last example, accompany changes in the character’s view of himself. By crying openly like an “animal,” Eustacia reveals a weakness she would prefer to keep hidden; its revelation changes her view of herself in Wildeve’s eyes, and for this she feels ashamed. Irrespective of the exact sequence, wherever shame is found, damage to the self and identity is never far behind. Synonymous, also, with the knocks which Eustacia’s self-image receives through her husband’s shameful exploits, is a growing respect for and fear of her audience’s opinion. Thus the susceptibility to being aware of, responding to and accepting society’s judgement is clearly dependent upon our estimation of ourselves.

### **c. Clym’s Transcendence of Shame: Lessons in Indifference**

The linking character between Mrs. Yeobright and Eustacia, Clym develops and unfolds in an entirely different way from his wife and mother. Admittedly, the identity question in regard to the protagonist is equally as pertinent since he also undergoes a similar kind of social diminishment from diamond trader to teacher to the poor, ending as a half-blind itinerant preacher. On the path of self-discovery that Clym embarks upon on his return to Egdon, having given up his wealthy position in Paris, he, too, loses his social and material superiority. But in contrast to his wife and mother, Clym does not do this painfully, but gladly and actively, keenly embracing a life based not on public esteem and social pretension but on human wisdom and spiritual richness. Consequently his dignity and pride suffer no shame, such mundane considerations being eclipsed for higher things. Thus although at first the reader may be forgiven for supposing Clym is no less scandal-sensitive than the rest of his family – indicated by his horrified reaction to rumours of Thomasin’s disgrace in a letter to his mother – his vexation is soon soothed on hearing the truth behind his cousin’s exploits, his sensitivity becoming

blunted in accordance with the strength of his existentialist views.<sup>1</sup> In this way Clym's development, the lesson he learns, could not be more diametrically opposed than that of Eustacia. The long-term problem this poses for their marriage is no better illustrated than in the chapter on his furze-cutting, "He Is Set Upon by Adversities; but He Sings a Song."

In this chapter, which culminates with Eustacia's witnessing of her husband at work upon the heath for the first time, the contrast between her care for social success and Clym's unconcern is shown to be the first bone of contention between them. Despite Eustacia's unfortunate statement to her mother-in-law that "It was a condescension in me to be Clym's wife" (303), all the time she may foster dreams of Paris, her situation is bearable. Now, opening with Clym's first explicit refusal to Eustacia's plea to leave Egdon, and ending on the cooling of her feelings for Clym – "And so love dies with good fortune!" (316), this chapter makes a direct link between the failure of Eustacia's social aspirations, her shame experience, and the first cracks in their marriage. Clym's question following her vehement protest, "Has your love for me all died, then, because my appearance is no longer that of a fine gentleman?" (314), is met with Eustacia's threat that he risks losing her love by asking such "unpleasant" questions, evidence enough that he has hit upon the truth.

Until this chapter the full intellectual disparity between Eustacia and Clym, and more importantly, the full effect of Clym's change in outlook has not been fully felt. Clym's altered view of life, his abandonment of all worldly wealth and conventional ideas of 'doing well' together with his need to be useful, has so far only taken the form of vague plans and frantic learning; now it is explored fully through his concrete decision to be a furze-cutter. In a way which is to become typical of Hardy, the shame experience is used to convey and underline this crucial point of the novel's direction. It does this by conveying the pair's incompatibility by showing their contrasting perspectives. As a result the gulf between the couple's estimation of each other and of their place in the world is laid bare: the attraction that Clym once held for Eustacia by seeming to embody the romantic and social status she aspires to, and Clym's emotional and spiritual transformation which disqualifies him as this person.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Return*, p. 219f.

Clym serenely accepts his disabling situation and fails to feel any sense of humiliation in his newly-found occupation; he is described going to it with gladness and even singing a love song while he works, as the chapter's title indicates. That he should do this instead of grimly gritting his teeth causes shock, followed by pity, deep humiliation and fury in Eustacia on seeing him. She angrily asserts to Clym in a way that anticipates Melbury's resolve in *Woodlanders* at being shamed as a child, "'I would starve rather than do it!'" (314). Clym's lack of shame is not due to him having lost all sense of propriety, but rather to him having discarded all concern for outward success or failure. The essentialist ideas about mankind which he fosters leaves him indifferent to externalities: "He's an enthusiast about ideas, and careless about outward things" (344). Clym's worldly experience means that he can distinguish between intrinsically and superficially worthy pursuits, explaining to Eustacia that "there is nothing particularly great in its [life's] greatest walks, and therefore nothing particularly small in mine of furze-cutting" (315).

The realization Clym makes about his occupation in the diamond trade is typical of the diagnosis of Victorian society made by such social critics as Thomas Carlyle and Matthew Arnold who considered it an economic minefield and an intellectual and spiritual desert. Clym's trade, "trafficking in glittering splendours with wealthy women and titled libertines, and pandering to the meanest vanities" (233), typifies Victorian values by being centred solely upon the acquisition of riches and externalities. Although his position in Paris makes him a man to be admired in Eustacia and Egdon's eyes, Clym finds it "the idlest, vainest, most effeminate business that ever a man could be put to" (229) since it has nothing to do with the real issues of the world. Thus in the true spirit of the age, Clym decides to become a teacher. It is through education that he believes the masses can be saved from the ennui and vanity that currently afflicts them; he will instruct the penniless and illiterate "to teach them what nobody else will" (233). Consequently Clym rejects those status symbols that have won him acclaim up till now, and with this, his last scrap of concern for his reputation.

### **3. Guilt and Delusion: Clym and the Refuge from Reality**

Although Clym is dissociated from shame, he is the single character linked to and immersed in guilt. It is thus to him that we must look for indications of guilt's meaning in *The Return*.

Unlike Sue who can be said to have a guilt-oriented character by demonstrating guilty tendencies from the moment of her introduction, it is not until the penultimate part of the novel that Clym is connected in the smallest way to guilt. This point, often overlooked by critics, is crucial to understanding guilt's meaning. Up to "Book Fifth," even having disappointed those closest to him, Clym is not moved by any sense of obligation towards them. Struck by weakened eye sight and forced to give up his scholarly activity, he does not feel responsible towards Eustacia in failing to provide for her in the way she has hoped, nor does he towards his mother for the unhappy words which have passed between them. In spite of these despondent facts, Clym remains absorbed, "cheerfully disposed and calm," by his labour on the heath. This infers that something must happen in order for Clym to change. This something is of course the passing away of Mrs. Yeobright. Overwhelmed by grief, "the pitiful sight of a man standing in the very focus of sorrow" (372), Clym makes himself responsible for his mother's death, declaring, "I cannot help feeling that I did my best to kill her" (372). Clym's self-condemnation is closely connected to bereavement at the loss of a loved one, and care is taken to describe this grieving process authentically, foreshadowing the remarkable portrait of Sue to come. And yet in spite of this, it is not so much Mrs. Yeobright's death, nor Eustacia's to follow, that strike Clym the hardest, but rather the truth about God and the world that their dying reveals. As the novel up to this point shows, the entire focus in regard to the protagonist so far has been upon his search for a worthwhile occupation and place in the world in keeping with his newly-made realization about the 'true' meaning life. It is this, set against the tragedy he suffers, far more than any intrinsic leaning towards guilt, that accounts for how he next develops.

#### **a. Fighting Futility and the "Ache of Modernism"**

"If there is any justice in God let Him kill me now. He has nearly blinded me, but that is not enough. If He would only strike me with more pain I would believe in Him for ever!" (375)

This entreaty, made on his sick-bed following the loss of his mother, goes to the heart of Clym's guilt-grief ordeal. Not only does it put the calamities with which he is struck into a wider emotional context involving God and the workings of the world, but it also epitomizes the nature of his guilt response, now and later. Struck by two seemingly senseless disasters within a short space of time, his impaired eye sight and his mother's death, Clym's faith in God's legitimacy begins to falter. Inherent to all tragic

happenings is the question of why things happen as they do; now, unable to see the logic behind them, Clym appeals for a sign from above to reassure him. His appeal is, as shown repeatedly in Hardy's poetry and prose, part of the human need to understand that things happen for a reason, the need to believe that suffering is not senseless but deserved, guided by some higher moral force that has our best interests at heart. The author, however, does not credit life with such logic. Instead, life in Hardy's eyes is haphazard and pitiless, an existence as described in the poem "Hap" of 1866 where the poetic 'I' makes the painful realization that "These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown / Blissess about my pilgrimage as pain."<sup>1</sup> Clym does not receive the confirmation from God he seeks, is not struck "with more pain." And yet despite the enlightening process he has undergone thus far, he cannot accept what failing to receive this confirmation means. Instead he excuses God's failure to respond by shifting the blame to himself, to his own guilt and worthlessness, answering the divine's neglect with the concluding words, "But I am not worth receiving further proof even of Heaven's reprobation" (375).

It is within this context that Clym's guilt concerning Mrs. Yeobright and Eustacia is to be understood. In addition to the standard grief associated with their loss, the bitter truth that son and husband cannot swallow, sampled by many a Hardy character, is the "ache of modernism." This is not only the painful awareness that the universe is flawed and that Nature is cruel, but also the creeping distrust that such a thing as a benevolent God exists, three factors about life that utterly destroy its purpose and logic. Rather than face these facts, facts which the merciless, undeserved loss of his mother and wife lay bare, Clym shields himself with guilt. As Lynd writes, "Acknowledgement of personal sin or confession of guilt may sometimes be a defence against the possibility that there be no meaning in the world"<sup>2</sup>: self-reproach is infinitely more preferable to Clym than the pain of disillusionment, and together with self-hatred and the wish to die, it knows no bounds: "he longed for death as a field labourer longs for shade" (372); "I wish I could be punished more heavily than I am" (375); "I don't want to get strong [...] It would be better for me if I die" (376).

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<sup>1</sup> *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. James Gibbon, London, 1976, p. 9. All further references to Hardy's poetry is from this edition, hereafter abbreviated as *CP*.

<sup>2</sup> Lynd (1958), p. 58, as discussed on pp. 40-42.

It is because, other than the demand of the plot, there is no reason why Mrs. Yeobright has to die that makes her death so difficult to endure. Apart from the mistakes of over-motherly concern and interference, she does nothing that makes her departure necessary. Dying from a snake bite, her death can be put down to nothing other than “Crass Casualty,”<sup>1</sup> sheer bad luck, being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The infinite list of other related factors which can arguably all play a part, the breach between mother and son, her morning conversation with Venn, the heat wave, her wounded pride, her exhaustion, even Johnny Nunsuch’s failure to call for help etc., are irrelevant. Mrs. Yeobright’s death is futile and serves no wider purpose than to expose to Clym the facts about life that he does not want to see. His subsequent transformation of the tragedy into an issue of filial negligence,

“Two months and a half – seventy-five days did the sun rise and set upon her in that deserted state which a dog didn’t deserve! Poor people who had nothing in common with her would have cared for her, and visited her had they known her sickness and loneliness; but I, who should have been all to her, stayed away like a cur,” (374-5)

proves his blindness.<sup>2</sup> By blaming himself, Clym is given a convincing explanation for its happening and, in the role of penitent, can also clear up the unresolved differences between them so that his mother is restored to a position of unrivalled glory. Clym’s eulogy prior to Eustacia’s flight to her grandfather’s demonstrates the extent to which this glorification has taken place,

“ – what goodness there was in her: it showed in every line of her face! Most women, even when but slightly annoyed, show a flicker of evil in some curl of the mouth or some corner of the cheek; but as for her, never in her angriest moments was there anything malicious in her look. She was angered quickly but she forgave just as readily, and underneath her pride there was the meekness of a child.” (393-4)

Blessed with the innocence of a child and the purity of a saint, and, even more distorting, the readiness to forgive,<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Yeobright is barely recognizable. Nor is this portrait tempered by time: after Eustacia’s death she is described as a “sublime saint whose radiance even his tenderness for Eustacia could not obscure” (473). Even annoying incidents of interference whilst she was alive are made by Clym into proof of her wisdom and loyalty now that she is dead, “events had borne out the accuracy of her

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<sup>1</sup> “Hap,” *CP*, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Further examples of Clym’s self-reproach are found on *The Return*, p. 372f.

<sup>3</sup> Clym has already attributed his mother with this particularly ironic quality some twenty pages earlier, *ibid.*, p. 373.

judgement, and proved the devotedness of her care. He should have heeded her for Eustacia's sake even more than for his own" (473).

Clym's self-deception, his irrational guilt on account of his mother's death and his idealization of her, is all part of the motif of delusion. Delirium and derangement loom over the beginning of "Book Fifth," the first scene revealing Clym in bed vacillating between consciousness and unconsciousness, mad and feverous,

Eustacia [...] ascended to the front bedroom, where a shaded light was burning. In the bed lay Clym, pale, haggard, wide awake, tossing to one side and to the other, his eyes lit by a hot light, as if the fire in their pupils were burning up their substance. (371-2)

The repetition of words associated with heat, "light," "burning," "lit by a hot light," "fire" and "burning up" do more than convey the patient's feverish state, they create the idea of infernal heat as if Clym is being burnt alive for his sins by a punitive God. The imagery, which could have been taken from Puritan scripture, underlines the extremity and madness of Clym's state. The picture is one of mental torture: Clym is run through by thoughts which stab at him "like swords" (372), denied rest, peace and sleep, "tossing to one side and to the other," and refused the redeeming light of Heaven – "I sinned against her, and on that account there is no light for me" (373). Described by the narrator as having an "illness" (372), which puts him "out of his senses" (375), Clym's self-condemnation is indisputably the light-headed ramblings of a bereaving man. Indeed the madness of Clym's guilt is substantiated later by the fact that, much to Clym's disappointment, not a single Egdon denizen is willing to condone it.<sup>1</sup>

Clym's accusation of Eustacia for his mother's death is simply an extension of his delusion and proof of his attempt to read more into what has happened than is actually there. The notion of his wife being involved in some underhand sexual dealings at the time of his mother's calling, preventing her from opening the door, provides him with a complex and treacherous cause of death which he welcomes, and which temporarily replaces his own self-reproach. Not content that she has died because of a snake bite and his own neglect, Clym's recovery from his grief is presented in terms of finding a 'better' reason for his mother's death; the chapters which follow tell of the detective work he undertakes in order to do this. Having questioned Christian and Venn, and interviewed Johnny Nunsuch, Clym, "darkened" by grief, believes to have found this

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<sup>1</sup> *The Return*, p. 448.

in his wife's behaviour. Provided now with a cause and effect of a significantly graver nature, he makes a single and direct connection between Eustacia's action and his mother's death: "you shut the door against my mother and killed her" (391). Typical of guilt, it is this sense of having *done* wrong that Clym dwells upon, rather than any notion of Eustacia's inherent wickedness as we might expect with shame,

"You shut the door – you looked out of the window upon her – you had a man in the house with you – you sent her away to die." (392)

The active verbs, "you shut," "you looked," "you had," "you sent," emphasize the notion of action that guilt requires. It is not what Eustacia is, but what she has done that matters; her not opening the door to his mother, this specific, definable act is what makes her blameworthy. Crucially, the charge Eustacia brings against her husband does not concern guilt but shame: the wrong Clym has served her has been his shameful degradation of her very person since marrying her.<sup>1</sup>

Clym's delusion is sealed with Eustacia's drowning. His claim, "She is the second woman I have killed this year. I was a great cause of my mother's death; and I am the chief cause of hers" (443), is resistant to all reason, his logic faulty, "I spoke cruel words to her, and she left my house. I did not invite her back until it was too late. It is I who ought to have drowned myself" (443). As Venn's *reductio ab absurdum* logic shows, the notion that Clym has "driven two women to their deaths" (464) is ridiculous:

"But you cannot charge yourself with crimes in that way [...] You may as well say that the parents be the cause of a murder by the child, for without the parents the child would never have been begot." (443)

The notion that crimes are not confined to the miscreant, but are all-encompassing and affect every family member is not, as Venn says, a fitting description of Clym's situation. Nor is it of guilt as a whole. As the definitive part of this study and Thomasin's experiences have shown, it is shame and its tendency to spread to all those connected to the shame subject that creates this knock-on effect that Clym describes.

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<sup>1</sup> This is discussed on p. 78f.



## **b. Enlightenment followed by Blindness and the Refusal to See**

Despite the revelations about God and Nature that the deaths of Mrs. Yeobright and Eustacia reveal, Clym never reaches the point of facing the truth of his situation. Even after the healing passage of time, his mental clarity is not restored and his blindness advances beyond all recovery. Unwillingly Clym notes the failure of God's justice system by the ironic injustice of his situation, "Those who ought to have lived lie dead; and here am I alive" (443), but still he lacks sufficient strength to concede to God's failure. Instead he falls back on his fabricated guilt since "Guilt in oneself is easier to face than lack of meaning in life"<sup>1</sup>:

He did sometimes think he had been ill-used by fortune, so far as to say that being born is a palpable dilemma, and instead of men aiming to advance in life with glory they should calculate how to retreat out of it without shame. But that he and his had been sarcastically and pitilessly handled in having such irons thrust into their souls he did not maintain long. It is usually so except with the sternest of men. Human beings in their generous endeavour to construct a hypothesis that shall not degrade a First Cause, have always hesitated to conceive a dominant power of lower moral quality than their own; and, even while they sit down and weep by the waters of Babylon, invent excuses for the oppression which prompts their tears. (448-9)

The degree of Clym's concession is distressing: whilst he occasionally goes as far as to admit that his suffering has been unfair, "He did sometimes think he had been ill-used by fortune," he cannot bring himself to maintain the view that fortune, God or a First Cause has deliberately and wickedly persecuted him and those he loved, "that he and his had been sarcastically and pitilessly handled." Although, as the narrator knowingly and confidently asserts, this is the case, it is too insupportable to entertain. Nor is Clym alone; his blindness is a universal problem since all human beings have an inherent need to have something morally greater than themselves to believe in. Clym's experiences starkly contradict this belief; his only way out is to "invent excuses" for God's failure by asserting, instead, his own.

Clym's refusal to see the defects of a world ruled by an incompetent First Cause that is neither benign nor compassionate is not the height of his delusion; this is saved for the novel's end. Nor is it the first case in the novel. Delusion and disillusionment underline the narrative throughout, from which no character, with the exception perhaps

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<sup>1</sup> Lynd (1958), p. 58.

of Wildeve, is saved. Just as Thomasin is forced to exchange her courtly-love ideals for rough practicality, so are her aunt's false ideas about her son's single-minded devotion to her destroyed, and Eustacia's illusions about married life with Clym shattered. Talking about the dreary outcome of her marriage, Eustacia tells Wildeve that her dream of life, of "music, poetry, passion, war, and all the beating and pulsing that is going on in the great arteries of the world" (345), all of which Clym once embodied for her, has never been realized. Being "half in love with a vision," her dream was of course based on illusion, as she later accuses Clym, "You deceived me – not by words, but by appearances, which are less seen through than words" (394). In spite of this, Clym's disillusionment is the greatest. As early as his introduction he is shown to have already made the discovery that it takes a tragedy for Jude and Sue to do. This is the bitter realization, shared by the narrator / Hardy, of the miserable truth about life, the realization that it is not the joyous and fulfilling experience it was once considered to be, but simply "a thing to be put up with" (225). Forsaking, as a result, his profession as a diamond dealer, Clym is described as having "reached the stage in a young man's life when the grimness of the general human situation first becomes clear; and the realization of this causes ambition to halt awhile" (247). In the light of this recognition, Clym's look is "a natural cheerfulness striving against depression from without, and not quite succeeding" (195), and like Jude and Sue, one that "suggested isolation."

But although Clym, like Jude and Sue, is ahead of his time intellectually, he has in fact only reached one of life's "stage[s]," and is yet to discover its bitter destination. For in spite of his realization about life's general grimness, he has not gone on to accept its consequences. Rather than committing suicide as is customary in France and as Jude and Arabella's son, Father Time, will do,<sup>1</sup> or submitting to his lot, Clym imagines instead that he can provide an answer to this problem. He will do this by becoming a teacher, to instruct the poor "how to breast the misery they are born to" (233). But his plan of enlightening the heath's denizens without their first experiencing any form of material advancement is, as the narrator takes care to tell us, "ridiculous" and not the product of a "well-proportioned" mind. It is at this point that Clym's intellectual blindness, symbolized later by his loss of eye sight, begins. Next, failing to see at close range what "a woman can see from a distance" (273), Clym mistakenly considers

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<sup>1</sup> *The Return*, p. 247; *Jude*, p. 410f.

Eustacia a suitable wife. False responsibility for his mother and Eustacia's deaths follow. Now, in the final section of the novel, Clym's delusion reaches its final stage of advancement and we are able to see just how distorted his version of the truth has become.

Characteristic of guilt's inward focus in Hardy, the closes of the novel have Clym withdraw from community life into isolation. Living as a recluse at Blooms-End, he fails to participate in the May Day festivities and his cousin's wedding celebrations, mistakenly imagining it is him his cousin wants to marry and not Venn.<sup>1</sup> And yet despite being confined to the outskirts of the novel throughout the majority of "Aftercourses," Clym makes a sinister comeback on the last pages. Just as guilt has provided him with a reason for his loved ones' deaths, so it provides him now with something to do, giving him a new profession and persona as "itinerant open-air preacher and lecturer" (474). It even secures the topic of his lectures on filial duty. Imagining his mother and wife to have died to show him the error of his ways – if this were not the case it would, after all, mean that they had died for nothing – guilt provides him with the moral for his preaching, thus securing guilt's religious undertone once again. The image is not a positive one. On the last page Clym is presented worn and scraggy beyond his years, delivering a sermon to an audience with such low concentration levels that its members fidget and fiddle with the heath's ferns and brackens while he talks. What is more, his audience only listens to him out of pity since "the story of his life had become generally known" (474). The motive behind Clym's preaching reflects guilt's confessional, communicative nature, the desire and ability of guilty people to express their guilt as a means of relieving it. Already attention has been drawn to the importance of this point – guilt being primarily a private ordeal confined to the conscience – in order to prevent remorse from eating one up inside:<sup>2</sup> to Eustacia's dismay, she is forced to listen to her husband's bitter self-indictments directly after his mother's death since "it was imperatively necessary to make him talk aloud, that his grief might in some degree expend itself" (374). She thus provides an ear to his

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<sup>1</sup> *The Return*, pp. 453 and 461-463.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor, pp. 97-107, distinguishes between guilt and remorse on the basis that guilt focuses on the doer of the deed and the burden he now has to right the wrong, together with his sense of unease, whilst remorse concentrates upon the actual deed itself and is connected with the wish to undo it. Regret differs from remorse in the way that it must not involve any responsibility however casual, nor the desire to undo the deed or undertake any new action. The example Taylor gives is that we can regret the passing of the summer. It is in this sense that I use the two terms.

ramblings in a way that Sue will lack. In contrast to his decaying body, then, preaching at the end of the novel, Clym's voice, the vessel of communication, remains "rich, musical, and stirring" (474), and he alternates his register to accommodate different audiences.

The sermon Clym is shown reading is also a grotesque manipulation of the original Old Testament passage. It only makes the sense Clym wants it to – as a means of atoning for his filial guilt – when it is quoted entirely out of context.<sup>1</sup> Thus in the course of his guilt Clym is not only shown manipulating events, but also words. Consequently, the new way in which he views the world as a result of the ordeals he must endure is clouded with ignorance and delusion. Instead of the insight and knowledge Sophocles' Oedipus gains through his tragic suffering, Clym only becomes one step further removed from reality. Rather than being a seeker of the truth about the world, God and the human condition, *The Return's* protagonist is connected with its misinterpretation and falsification.

#### **4. Wider Polar Landscapes and Identities: Shame and Guilt Characters**

Although Clym is not disposed to shame, he is, as the above illustrates, extraordinarily susceptible to guilt; although Eustacia is disposed to shame, she is wholly unsusceptible to guilt. Blows to Eustacia's self-image and the need for Clym to escape the pain of disillusionment explain Eustacia's shame and Clym's guilt, but explanations for Eustacia's complete lack of guilt is not as forthcoming. Altogether, the respective apportioning of guilt to Eustacia and Clym is illogical if we consider guilt in terms of moral responsibility: although Eustacia is indirectly in part accountable for her mother-in-law's death, and certainly more so than Clym, she demonstrates a complete lack of self-reproach, whilst Clym shows a keen sense of responsibility for it. In the long line of critical tradition, Eustacia's blaming of fate for her misfortune instead of herself is taken to be part of the novel's wider motif of tragedy, *The Return* being the author's first conscious attempt to write in the Greek tradition. But when we consider Eustacia's blatant want of guilt alongside Clym's unrelenting self-condemnation, the intensity of

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<sup>1</sup> Garson, p. 79; John Bayley, *An Essay on Hardy*, Cambridge, 1978, p. 146; Mary Ellen Jordan, "Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*: Clym Yeobright and Melancholia" *American Imago* 39 (1982), p. 117f.

her shame alongside Clym's indifference, another means of understanding this patterning becomes apparent.

This explanation looks beyond humanistic causes of shame and guilt and considers them on a symbolic level. Already, in the earlier discussion, wider, oppositional associations connected to these two concepts concerning the flesh and the spirit, paganism and Christianity, and primitivism and progress have been discerned and identified with certain characters. These can now be matched to Eustacia and Clym, furnishing us with a wider landscape and identity system and creating what can be called shame characters and guilt characters.

#### **a. Clarity of Conscience, Primitivism, Paganism and Sensuality**

True of a 'results' culture, Eustacia can hardly be said to devote time to considering the virtue of her actions. As an early reviewer recognizes, she "has no feeling [...] that such a thing as responsibility exists."<sup>1</sup> The most morally-free character in the novel, her reaction to the consequences of her action, or more precisely, inaction at her mother-in-law's visit is hardly estimable of its significance to her husband, had he known of it. After trying and failing to dissuade Clym from going to Blooms-End the same day, she surrenders to the situation with a passivity associated with shame characters, being one who "though willing to ward off evil consequences by a mild effort, would let events fall out as they might sooner than wrestle hard to direct them" (355). Feelings of "misgiving, regret, fear, resolution" (353), soon give way to simply the "disagreeable" idea of having to explain the situation to Clym and to the selfish question of how it will reflect upon her. This is then soon replaced by news of Wildeve's inheritance,

Eustacia went on her way mechanically; but her thoughts were no longer concerning her mother-in-law and Clym. Wildeve, notwithstanding his complaints against her fate, had been seized upon by destiny and placed in the sunshine once more. Eleven thousand pounds! (363)

When, on Mrs. Yeobright's death, Eustacia's part in it is revealed to her, she incriminates herself further by concealing the details of the incident from her husband. Eustacia is partly culpable on two accounts. The first is that, though she believed Clym

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hardy: *The Critical Heritage*, ed. R. G. Cox, New York, 1970, p. 58.

was awake to open the door himself, she should still have done so herself or checked this;<sup>1</sup> the second is that if she had told Clym of his mother's frustrated visit immediately, the latter's life might have been saved. And yet although Eustacia twice admits to her mistake,<sup>2</sup> she is lacking in all sense of remorse, her overall attitude being that a greater force is to blame, "Yet, instead of blaming herself for the issue she laid the fault upon the shoulders of some indistinct, colossal Prince of the World, who had framed her situation and ruled her lot" (361). Later, prior to her drowning, she sees herself a victim of this force, and laments ever having been born, "I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control! O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all!" (421), a view of herself as victim that Wildeve substantiates a number of times.<sup>3</sup> So much, then, for Eustacia's guilt.

As if to make up for this utter deficit on one side, Eustacia is firmly rooted within the landscape of shame, being the embodiment of all those associations of shame we have witnessed so far. Like Tess, she is linked to an earlier, primitive race facing extinction. Introduced standing on top of the barrow in the semi-darkness of Egdon heath, she seems like a Celt, "a sort of last man among them, musing for a moment before dropping into eternal night with the rest of the race" (62). This picks up on shame's linkage to a more primitive, natural era than guilt and its location in pre-Christian times. Further associations, such as Eustacia's "Pagan" eyes, her heathenism and heterodoxy, support and follow.<sup>4</sup> So, too, does her Hellenic beauty and sensuality; her mouth "formed less to speak than to quiver, less to quiver than to kiss" (119) and her 'Cleopatric' exoticness,<sup>5</sup> all of which are focused upon the desires of the body and thus aligned to shame. According to the narrator, the degree of Eustacia's beauty also cancels out any question of an Anglo-Saxon pedigree, evoking instead links to ancient Greece, or the ancient Anglo-Norman families, the Fitzalens and the De Veres.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the qualities with which she is endowed constitute a convincing background of shame. This wider landscape, symbolized by Eustacia's character, is not

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<sup>1</sup> *The Return*, p. 361.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 368 and 377.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 324, 377 and 406.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118. For an exposition of Eustacia's deliberate unorthodoxy see *ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118 and 119.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 119 and 121.

only recreated in the character of Tess, but also forms a vivid contrast to the guilt character Clym.

### **b. Guilt, Modernity and Intellectualism**

As Eustacia is primitive and Hellenic, Clym, the portrait of shame's reverse, is everything she is not. A 'modern' character, suffering from the modern disease of an overdeveloped conscience and the problem of thinking too much, the realization he has made about life is incompatible with a joyful, beautiful countenance. As the narrator explains, in earlier times, at the time of Greek civilization for example, no thought was spent to the misery of man's condition, and beauty could flourish freely without a care. Now, however, perpetual disillusionment regarding man's condition has made this impossible,

Physically beautiful men – the glory of the race when it was young – are almost an anachronism now; and we may wonder whether, at some time or other, physically beautiful women may not be an anachronism likewise. (225)

Thought, a product of civilization, has put an end to beauty and joy. Just as Angel's recognition of Tess is said to have "carried him back into a joyous and unforeseeing past, before the necessity of taking thought had made the heavens grey" (*Tess*, 176), thought has also left its mark upon Clym's face. In describing this face, the narrator generalizes upon Clym's features, so that he succeeds in changing him from a unique individual into a specific character type that represents a general movement in mankind:

The face was well-shaped, even excellently. But the mind within was beginning to use it as a mere waste tablet whereon to trace its idiosyncrasies as they developed themselves. The beauty here visible would in no long time be ruthlessly overrun by its parasite, thought, which might just as well have fed upon a plainer exterior where there was nothing it could harm. (194)

As a character, then, Clym stands for the end of an earlier, less strained and more beautiful stage of mankind, which, in accordance with his chronological primitivism, the author clearly singles out as a better age. Social progress since then, the grim realization of man's condition and the accompanying excess of intellectual activity and worry it has brought, is clearly presented as a form of cultural decline. Clym thus forms a stark contrast to Eustacia's beauty and sensuality, and her failure to think or be troubled by her conscience. An introverted thinker who sooner tends towards

aestheticism than sensuality, “my body does not require much of me [...] good things are wasted upon me” (234), and who ends up as a preacher of Christian doctrine, Clym’s association with the spirit, the mind and what Hardy took to be the “ache of modernism” all serve to strengthen his alliance to guilt.

Linking shame and guilt to character types not only makes the oppositional pairs of associations connected with guilt and shame (as established above in B. II.) more concrete, but also draws the two concepts further apart. Yet however neatly this mapping fits, it is not the first purpose behind these emotions. Clym does not feel guilt primarily because he is a modern character anymore than Eustacia does shame because she is a natural, sensual one. For such symbolic rendering of Hardy’s characters we must wait till *Jude*. In the meantime, these wider associations, helped by guilt and shame’s long cultural tradition, enrich the overall significance of these emotions, but are essentially secondary to their original function as inherent human experiences.



## II. Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Study in Shame

Of the six major novels examined, shame is not only treated to its most exhaustive enquiry in *Tess*, but put to its most elaborate use. A founding structural principle of the novel, it is woven into every narrative level, from plot to character, language and narrative technique. The tapestry of shame that emerges is scientific in approach and tragic in effect. Not only are different varieties of shame laid bare, from filial and parental shame to class-related and sexual shame, but an insight into its very workings in terms of point of view, consciousness and ways of being seen is provided. At the same time, though shame and guilt come under fire from the author as socially legitimate emotions, they are intrinsic to Tess' characterization as a 'pure' woman. The propensity to feel shame and modesty, together with a guilty conscience secure the heroine's essential innocence and thus our sympathy for her. It is this uniting of the public, personal, and psychological aspects of shame into a single portrait, that makes the treatment of shame in *Tess* unique.

Building upon ideas from *The Return*, shame is not only presented as being intrinsic to identity, but as having the power, at its extreme, to destroy the very core of a character's self. Shame episodes reveal and shape the protagonists' social, moral, economic, intellectual and sexual identities. Fear of shame prompts Angel to remould Tess' class identity; sexual shame makes Tess conceal the 'unpure' part of her identity; false identities, i.e. those built upon mistaken conceptions about each other, are not only responsible for the false expectation upon which Tess' shame is based, but also for the ensuing exposure of her misplaced trust in herself and the world. Society, or the external opinion of an audience, is also instrumental in making or breaking characters' identities. Their rooting within specific community environments together with their tendency to take their peers as a criterion for judging themselves, not only secure the foundations for public shame and a shame-oriented text-world in the novel, but also for the socially-determined characterization or labelling of characters. Tess' branding as an unpure woman by society and conviction as guilty, for example, affords her a guilty persona, which, like Clym's, is based on a false view of herself. Alternatively, external opinion in the form of Angel and his shaming of Tess decides her identity once and for all. Amidst a background of delusion and disillusionment, the dents to self-image and reputation that we have come to expect from shame so far pale into insignificance. Here Tess' identity does not just receive a knocking, but is destroyed forever. Consequently differences between shame and guilt begun in *The Return* are further realized. Whereas

Hardyan guilt confers the miscreant with a false identity or persona, giving him an occupation and direction, shame takes it away, reducing Tess to a nobody, to having nothing and to going nowhere. Silencing and immobilizing her, her shame cannot be absolved and remains with her until her death.

### 1. Shame Structures

Sketching this dominance of shame in *Tess* more exactly, shame is secured first and foremost by the novel's plot. Here it escorts the novel from start to finish. At the beginning, too ashamed of her father's drunkenness to apply to an admirer for help, Tess is compelled to make the beehive delivery to Casterbridge market alone. The result of the accident with Prince that ensues leads ultimately to her downfall – the loss of her virginity to Alec outside the legitimatizing bond of marriage. Tess' illicit interlude with Alec remains a matter of shame for the rest of her short life. It brings shame upon her family, impelling Tess' concealment and withdrawal from the outside world,<sup>1</sup> and leads finally to the family's eviction,<sup>2</sup> which reinstates their dependence upon Alec. It produces Sorrow, "that bastard gift of shameless Nature" (146), and is responsible for Angel's rejection of Tess and the failure of their marriage. It even drives Tess to contemplate taking her own life "on account of my shame" (303). Angel, aware that the escapade of their marriage would be "viewed in the light of a joke by nine-tenths of the world if it were known" (303), is too ashamed to tell his parents the truth about his blemished wife, whilst Tess is too ashamed to apply to them for help, ensuring again the exigency of Alec's financial aid. It is this offer of help when, shunned by Angel and society, all other roads are closed, that secures Tess as Alec's kept woman which is simultaneously her end.

Plot being dependent on character, Tess possesses precisely those qualities that make her susceptible to shame. Naturally self-conscious and self-critical, needing longer than average to wipe out her "keen consciousness" of the past, she instinctively imagines how others are feeling and thinking and empathizes with them. Describing Talbothay's

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<sup>1</sup> *Tess*, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 436.

theoretical knowledge of the unpromising start to her marriage, the narrator also explicitly makes her sensitive to gossip:

she would almost have faced a knowledge of her circumstances by every individual there, so long as her story had remained isolated in the mind of each. It was the interchange of ideas about her which made her sensitiveness wince. Tess could not account for this distinction; she simply knew that she felt it. (349)

The moment ideas change from being mere thoughts in the mind of the individual, to general topics of conversation, they not only develop a potential for scandal, but cut Tess to the bone. The protagonist's objection to gossip is an intrinsic and inexplicable part of her personality, her difficulty to ignore and defy the persuasion of others playing an intrinsic part in her downfall. She also possesses, like Eustacia, the typical shame characteristic of passivity, often considered to be her tragic flaw.<sup>1</sup> The result is that Tess consistently reacts with shame to potentially shameful situations, thus securing this concept as a key motivating principle of the plot.

Wider meanings and associations of shame are also capitalized upon, forming the medium through which the different events and stages of the narrative are presented. Tess' story in the first two phases, for example, concerns the loss of her virginity as their respective titles, "The Maiden" and "Maiden No More," show. In keeping with the 'maiden' state of Tess, "The Maiden" sees the highest frequency of blushing and the variant of shame conveyed is of a modest and bashful nature.<sup>2</sup> Tess blushes a total of seven times in this section, and the notion of being ashamed is mentioned no less than eight times, seven of which are situations involving the heroine. But on losing her virginity to Alec and turning "Maiden No More," blushing incidents drastically decrease and shame becomes disgraceful. Next, with the restaging of Tess in all her glory in "The Rally" and the commencement of her relationship with Angel in "The Consequence," the demands of courtship return to bring out the aesthetic and sexual signification of blushing and shame. "The Woman Pays," dealing with Angel's rejection of Tess on account of her shame, is again concerned with shame as disgrace. And lastly, the closing two phases lack all measure of shame as if Tess has become dead to the emotion. In "Fulfilment" guilt replaces shame on the level of plot by Tess' murder of

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of Tess' passivity see Virginia R. Hyman, *Ethical Perspectives in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, New York, 1975, p. 108f. and Hardy (1970), p. 233.

<sup>2</sup> The sexual purity which maiden signifies is taken up later in the novel by Dairyman Crick who calls Tess "maidy," a nickname which "he frequently, with unconscious irony, gave her," *Tess*, p. 191.

Alec, marking her transition from passivity to action. Having, up to this point, lost all sense of identity, Tess acts for the first time, whereupon the focus is no longer upon *who* she is, as in the experience of shame, but in *what* she does, as in the experience of guilt. Finally, language and imagery also play an important role in shame's envelopment of the novel; even the landscape becomes infused with shame on Angel's realization of what he has begun by embracing Tess for the first time.<sup>1</sup> Since these aspects are also found in other major novels, they shall be discussed separately below in D. II.

## 2. Shame, Guilt and Identity Crisis

The question of identity in *Tess* is one of the novel's central concerns. It operates on one level in the stack of ever-changing labels attributed to Tess by society and Angel. Taking identity in the psychological sense of the word in terms of a "continuity of identity," i.e. the state of remaining the same person throughout the different stages of life,<sup>2</sup> these labels challenge the heroine's attempt to establish and maintain her identity. In Tess' search for selfhood, a search without success, she is defined at first in terms of sexual purity and impurity. As the titles of the first two phases, "Maiden" and "Maiden No More" reflect, she is first virgin, then adulteress. At the same time, on the death of the Durbeyfield's horse, Prince, Tess is "murderess" – something which she does in fact become. Later, pregnant and unmarried, she takes on the persona of "Guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence" (135). Setting out for Talbothays she is "the dairy maid Tess, and nothing more" (151); marrying Angel she is defined through him as "a gentleman's wife." After this she is described feeling more like Alec's wife,<sup>3</sup> and in the closing chapters she goes by the name of Mrs. d'Urberville. The identity crisis that these different labels lead to is marked, to a great extent, by shame and guilt experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> *Tess*, p. 214. This is discussed on p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> *OED*, s.v. *identity*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Tess*, p. 442.

### **a. Tess and the Quest for Identity**

Tess is introduced in a powerful shame context. She publicly witnesses her father riding home in a carriage, boasting something incomprehensible, appearing overcome by the effects of his “market-nitch.” The spectacle makes him a subject of ridicule, and the audience enjoys a laugh at his expense. Tess’ shame is vividly described as a feeling which starts from within as “a slow heat [which] seemed to rise,” and radiates outwards over her body, “the colour upon her cheeks spread over her face and neck” (51). It fills her with confusion, induces her to make excuses for her father, and threaten to depart. Then it makes her cry.

Characteristic of many a Hardy opening, what seems no more than a silly and pretentious performance by John Durbeyfield and oversensitivity on his daughter’s part is in fact a careful introductory scene. Although the reason for Durbeyfield’s merrymaking, the uncovering of his knightly forefathers by Parson Tringham, brings little advancement for his family in the end (the extent use to which John and Joan Durbeyfield put the information amounting to some unsuccessful scheming and swaggering), it is crucial to Tess’ identity. The parson’s revelation introduces the first of the two conceits which will underpin Tess’ identity. This is the Durbeyfield / d’Urberville conflict, the second conceit being the pure / unpure woman. Tess’ struggle for self-assertion which takes place as a result of these two conflicting aspects makes the novel a quest for her identity. Being concerned with the self and self-image, shame, and to a lesser degree guilt, are intrinsic to this quest. Shame tacitly presents, shapes and confirms Tess’ identity in terms of self- and public estimation, and unites this struggle within single incidents. Public estimation and its effect on self-image also play a crucial part in the presentation of guilt.

Returning to the scene of Tess’ introduction, shame works on a series of levels. First, if we confine ourselves to the action at hand, it demonstrates Tess’ ‘Durbeyfieldness,’ her current social and economic standing. It does this by demonstrating the inappropriateness of John Durbeyfield’s behaviour. Being a poor peasant family, Durbeyfield is acting ‘above his station’ by riding home in a carriage. Carriage travel is reserved for gentlemen; according to the rules of propriety, this being Prince’s day off, Tess’ father should undergo the more physically exerting exercise of returning home on foot. Tess’ recognition of this, shown by her shame, establishes her social station by implication – we learn what this is through Tess’ recognition of what it is not. Durbeyfield’s audience substantiates this social standing by reminding her of her

allegiance to their group, reaffirming her identity as a member of the peasant community. Thus its members' laughter works against the parson's disclosure that Tess is a member of a renowned and distinguished family.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is because Tess is precisely this that the conflict of her identity is created.<sup>2</sup> It is because she is different from her Marlott peers, more refined and spiritually sensitive than any other peasant girl, "The cheeks are paler, the teeth more regular, the red lips thinner than is usual in a country-bred girl" (138); because she is a d'Urberville, "...a peasant by position, not by nature!" (302), that she does not fit within this mould, thus creating the underlying conflict of identity within her. This aspect of Tess not only becomes more pronounced with the passage of narration, but is a chief reason why her life unfolds as it does. It is this quality that attracts Alec and causes Angel to pick her from all the milkmaids at Talbothays; it is this that gives Tess reason to want more from life than that which her friends will settle for, to be attracted to an intellectually superior partner, to crave the stimulation Angel can provide. As a result, albeit highly embarrassing, Durbeyfield's euphoric recognition of his family's roots at the start of the novel is not quite as inappropriate as it would seem.

Returning to the audience's laughter, the second level on which this opening shame scene operates is through its presentation of the milieu in which Tess moves and its influence upon her. Tess takes part of her identity and behavioural cue from this audience. It consists of dancers celebrating the goddess of agriculture, Ceres. As one of the performers of this ancient country custom, not only is Tess' bond with nature established, but she is also associated with an earlier, worthier age which, like the ancient d'Urberville race, is facing extinction. This places her in the line of shame characters as established by Eustacia. Tess is also integrated within this specific group. The dance is an organized "proceSSIONal march of two and two round the parish," an activity performed by all Marlott women, young and old. Thus by participating in the festivities Tess is shown to be an active member of this village community which means she is subject to their behavioural code. As we have seen in several shame cases, if we did not 'care' about our audience's view of us, our sense of shame would be greatly

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed John Durbeyfield's ancestral claim is never believed by Marlott village, *Tess*, p. 436.

<sup>2</sup> See Widdowson, p. 61, who argues that Tess is "both of, and not of, her community," Brooks, p. 233, also takes the novel's title, "Tess" and "of the d'Urbervilles," to demonstrate the double aspect of Tess which she argues is the key tension determining the novel.

reduced. Tess' heeding of her companions' opinion of her here shapes her subsequent behaviour; so rooted is she within this environment that she tends to be affected by their judgement. And yet at the same time Tess' identity is not overwhelmed by the group of dancers. Attributed with physical features personal to her, she retains her identity, her "mobile peony mouth" and "large innocent eyes" making her stand out from the group, just as does the red ribbon in her hair. As a result Tess is not simply part of a group but a person in her own right. This enables her on occasion to reject her audience's judgement; even here her threat to leave the group and therefore disrupt the procession lest the dancers do not stop laughing shows she exerts some authority. This dual identity as individual and member of the Marlott community is presented in the rest of the novel in terms of a conflict between internal conviction and external opinion.

On a third and final level Tess' shame experience secures the moral nature of the environment. The dancers' catalysis of Tess' shame for her father's behaviour illustrates the collective punishment, directed primarily at Durbeyfield but borne by his daughter, when one of the village members fails to uphold a particular behavioural code. Although this punishment is only dispensed by the women members, who only make up half the Marlott community, it can be taken as the village standard. As the narrator comments when he describes the area of Trantridge shortly afterwards,<sup>1</sup> "Every village has its idiosyncrasy, its constitution, often its own code of morality" (105). Thus the communal environment has a capacity to endorse standards of right and wrong. No other event shows this more forcefully than the Durbeyfield's eviction from Marlott on account of Tess not being a "proper woman." And no other characters substantiate this more convincingly than Eustacia, Alec, Jude and Sue. Uprooted and detached from their environments, they are decidedly less sensitive to moral code and convention than other major characters. Alec, like Sue, is decidedly unstable, too.<sup>2</sup> The son of a self-made merchant, whose father buried his working-class extraction on retiring by settling in the country and securing the distinguished d'Urberville name, Alec lacks a fixed environment to define him and guide his behaviour. It comes, then, as no surprise that his actions in the novel frequently lack moral legitimacy: with the exception of one

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<sup>1</sup> The light-minded and excessive character of Trantridge makes it a fitting place for Tess' undoing, the district's very name sounding like 'treacherous,' by the assonance of the 'tr.'

<sup>2</sup> Posing initially as an impostor, Alec undergoes two transmutations: he not only changes from reckless dandy to fervid Methodist preacher and back again, but from abuser to abused.

occasion, Alec is insensible to shame, meeting Tess' fiery attack upon his swearing on their way to The Slopes, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself for using such wicked words!" (98) with a hearty laugh.

## **b. The Agonies of Class Shame**

The four strands of Tess' identity, Durbeyfield / d'Urberville; pure / unpure are fused under Tess' relationship with Angel where each is marked with shame. Neither Angel nor Alec recognize Tess' true identity,<sup>1</sup> especially that aspect of her social class. Class shame is dormant in the very match between Tess and Angel since, by acquiring a milkmaid instead of a lady, Angel is stooping to a lower social class. Similarly, by coming from the peasant working class and marrying into the clerical middle class, and therefore entering a world of wealth, refinement and learning beyond her means, Tess is also particularly vulnerable to this type of shame.

### **i. Angel and Avoidance: Making a d'Urberville out of a Durbeyfield**

"You are not ashamed of owning me as yours before them!" she said gladly.

"O no!"

"But if it should reach the ears of your friends at Emminster that you are walking about like this with me, a milkmaid [...] they might feel it a hurt to their dignity." (259)

Deny it as he may, Angel's association with Tess is socially degrading. His resolute "O no!" is not without two vital qualifications. Not only does he rely upon Tess' distinguished lineage to make his marriage to her more socially acceptable, "My dear girl – a d'Urberville hurt the dignity of a Clare!" (259), but also upon her virgin state to make up for the end of his social aspirations, "by giving up all ambition to win a wife with social standing, with fortune, with knowledge of the world" he had at least hoped to be compensated by "rustic innocence" (308).

Neither Angel nor his family accept Tess for what she is, but, driven by convention and class considerations, object to her peasant birth. And although Tess and Angel's

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<sup>1</sup> Shires, p. 155.



marriage does not fail on the grounds of class alone, the inequality of their social and material backgrounds, their according expectations and prejudices, and the tensions these create, hasten its disintegration. The question of whom her son has chosen for a wife is framed purely in terms of class by Mrs. Clare who interrupts Angel and his father's conversation with the poignant question – "Is she [...] a lady?" (224) – and it is because Tess is not, but is merely a "cottager's daughter" that Angel's parents are against his marriage. Thus Angel greedily seizes upon Tess' distinguished ancestry to help reconcile himself and his family to his marrying her,

"It is a grand card to play – that of your belonging to such a family, and I am reserving it for a grand effect when we are married, and we have the proofs of your descent from Parson Tringham." (259)

Although, after the fiasco of seeking her wealthy relations, done to make amends for the guilt she feels for Prince's death, Tess resolves to be "the dairy maid Tess, and nothing more" (151), Angel will hear nothing of it. It is upon the condition that she becomes more learned and refined, socially his equal, that he can conciliate himself to what in fact has been a hasty decision.<sup>1</sup> He has, after all, "yielded to an impulse of which his head would disapprove" (232).

Ashamed of the 'Durbeyfield' in Tess, Angel does all he can to uncover and encourage the 'd'Urberville' within her. Nor is being a d'Urberville in name enough. Tess must gain the according accomplishments in order to make the transformation complete,

he had concealed her lineage till such a time as, familiarized with worldly ways by a few month's 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. (276-7)

Travel and reading are required to rid Tess of her milkmaid manner and make her transformation convincing and "worthy of such an ancient line." Not only must she see more of the world than the small circumference of her wanderings so far, but she must increase her literary value. Although Angel makes society in general and even his own mother to blame for this,

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<sup>1</sup> *Tess*, p. 232.

Society is hopelessly snobbish, and this fact of your extraction may make an appreciable difference to its acceptance of you as my wife, after I have made you the well-read woman that I mean to make you. My mother, too, poor soul, will think so much better of you on account of it, (254)

he is also thinking of himself. If Tess does not gain the outlook, manner and education expected of a woman of the middle class, he must bear, as her husband, the shame of her deficiency. As the narrator suggests, there is more to Angel's motives than he admits, "Perhaps Tess' lineage had more value for himself than for anybody in the world besides" (277). Similarly an ulterior motive hides behind his wish to avoid having Tess "left anywhere away from my protection and sympathy" (269) after they are married. Her refinement already having begun under his influence at Talbothays, Clare is anxious that she does not revert to her former state:

His influence over her had been so marked that she had caught his manner and habits, his speech and phrases, his likings and his aversions. And to leave her in farmland would be to let her slip back again out of accord with him. [...] he judged that a couple of months' life with him in lodgings whilst seeking for an advantageous opening would be of some social assistance to her at what she might feel to be a trying ordeal – her presentation to his mother at the Vicarage. (270)

In giving up her peasant origins and becoming worthy of a d'Urberville, Tess must in short become like her husband: exchange her identity for his. Denied the ability to develop herself freely she must become in "accord with him," become "a gentleman's wife," "Mrs Clare – the dear wife of dear he!" (357).<sup>1</sup> His gestures she already imitates, his language she already speaks, and his taste she has already adopted: all that is left is to ensure a polished and successful debut at the vicarage.<sup>2</sup> Angel's acceptance of Tess thus rests upon her ability to discard her peasant identity and become a d'Urberville. Alec is no better. By transplanting Tess from her native Marlott soil to the fashionable seaside city of Sandbourne, and dressing her as a "well-to-do" lady, he too disguises Tess' peasant origins.<sup>3</sup> In both cases, although "being, though untrained, instinctively

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<sup>1</sup> The notion that marriage destroys an individual's identity is also found in *Jude*, p. 247, where Jude, talking to his cousin, welcomes the fact that "Wifedom has not yet squashed up and digested you in its vast maw as an atom which has no further individuality." Several characters also believe that Tess will be changed by marrying a gentleman, too.

<sup>2</sup> John Goode, *Thomas Hardy: The Offensive Truth*, Oxford, 1988, p. 126, refers to this refinement of Tess as a "process of socialization" and takes it to signify how Tess becomes a type of possession to Angel.

<sup>3</sup> Neither the vicarage nor Sandbourne are suitable environments for Tess; it is only at Talbothays that she finds the environment to which she is "physically and mentally suited" and which allows her to grow, *Tess*, p. 185.

refined” (246), Tess makes the ascent effortlessly, she is not without apprehension. Donning the jewels from Angel’s godmother at his bidding on their wedding night, she is uneasy about this new identity, aware of its incongruity with her real self, “I’ll take them off [...] in case Johnathan should see me. They are not fit for me, are they?” (288).

Finally, as Hardyan luck would have it, Angel’s rejoicing over Tess’ d’Urberville origins turns to regret on learning of her earlier affair with Alec. Blaming this for her “want of firmness,” he claims, “Decrepit families imply decrepit wills, decrepit conduct” (303). All of a sudden being a d’Urberville is no longer a blessing but a weapon he can use against her, “the belated seedling of an effete aristocracy!” (302). Now, losing interest in this aspect of her, the pure / unpure parts of her identity come to the fore.

## **ii. Tess’ Social and Intellectual Inadequacy**

Just as Angel struggles to circumvent the social degradation caused by marrying beneath himself, so does Tess struggle to avoid the inadequacy she feels by marrying above herself. Class shame for Tess can thus be understood in Fox’s terms, as shame caused by a feeling of inferiority which class creates.<sup>1</sup> Beholden to Angel for everything, Tess tries to reduce her inferiority in every way. Nonetheless, she is continually aware of how potentially shameful their situation is.

No episode illustrates this better than Tess’ pilgrimage to the vicarage to petition her parents-in-law for financial aid. Although she is not to blame for the disappearance of Angel’s allowance, having generously given it to her family, images of disdain and loathing from Angel’s parents flood Tess’ mind on account of her lowly status, poverty and need, “They probably despised her already; how much more they would despise her in the character of a mendicant!” (347). Indeed, what could have saved Tess from the slavish and poverty-stricken situation begun at Flintcomb-Ash, the hope she secretly harbours “to win the heart of her mother-in-law [...] enlist her on her side, and so gain back the truant” (373), fails now on account of her social and material inferiority. This inferiority is epitomized by Tess’ removal of her walking boots prior to her entrance

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<sup>1</sup> For the definition of class shame see pp. 57-59.

into Emminster. Tess exchanges her heavy boots for the more attractive ones she deems appropriate to be worn by the wife of Angel, not wanting her family-in-law to know she has walked the distance to Emminster, being unable to afford a coach or lift. Unfortunately these boots are confiscated later by none other than the woman Angel's parents would have liked him to marry, Mercy Chant. Mercy takes the boots "for some poor person" on the presumption that they have been left by "Some impostor who wished to come into town barefoot, perhaps, and so excite our sympathies" (377). That the poor person is Tess is highly ironic; in attempting to perform an act of charity, Mercy removes the only solid pair of walking boots Tess has.

Similarly there is no one to help Tess at the vicarage when she calls. The Clares' strict performance of their religious duty ensures that everyone is at church – another implicit criticism of the Church and Christian charity. Retreating from the vicarage to call again later, Tess encounters Angel's brothers. Dreading being recognized by them for fear of their disdainful examination of her, she tries unsuccessfully to outwalk them. Felix and Cuthbert Clare, wishing their brother had taken the socially-superior hand of the "good and devout" Mercy Chant and criticizing his "ill-considered marriage" well within Tess' earshot, only serve to confirm her worst fears: "Ah! poor Angel, poor Angel! I never see that nice girl without more and more regretting his precipitancy in throwing himself away upon a dairymaid, or whatever she may be" (376). To have her union with their brother described as though Angel has stooped by marrying her and to have herself dismissed as some ambiguous object, "or whatever she may be," is painful. This, together with being taken for a tramp or charlatan by Mercy Chant, is too much for Tess to bear. Feeling "almost as if she had been hounded up the hill like a scorned thing by those – to her – super-fine clerics" (377), she abandons her petition to call at the vicarage. Imagining her audience, Clare's father, to be of the same moral disposition as his sons,<sup>1</sup> she does not have the courage to re-enter Emminster and thus leaves the place empty-handed. Once again then, it is shame that is responsible for another notch upon Tess' decline. Failing to secure financial help from Angel's parents, the heroine falls next into the unscrupulous hands of Alec, it being on her way back from this aborted visit that she bumps into her old lover. This renews Alec's dominance over Tess

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<sup>1</sup> *Tess*, pp. 377 and 378.

once again, a dominance from which she can only escape at the novel's end by murdering him, which carries for her the death penalty.

### **c. Guilt, Delusion and the Distorted Identity: The Guilty Persona**

Whereas the d'Urberville question in relation to Tess is based on 'fact,' the pure / unpure aspect of her identity is presented as being a wholly irrelevant and artificial construction, forced upon her by moral convention. Like Clym, therefore, Tess' guilt is a distortion of her true identity; her belief in her guilt a form of delusion. The person she becomes and presents to the world through this belief, the guilty persona she adopts, is based on a mistaken understanding of what her position and role in society is. Capable, like shame, of affecting the view of the self and the world most distinctly, guilt hides Clym from the painful truth about life, just as it alters Tess' view of herself and the world.

Shunned by the Marlott community for bringing a baby unmarried into the world, Tess considers her plight on one of her nightly walks in the surrounding woods. The way in which she sees her surroundings has already begun to change; no longer capable of differentiating between herself and her environment, her feelings spill over and colour the world around her, changing its appearance to her and becoming a reflection of how she feels:

At times her whimsical fancy would intensify natural processes around her till they seemed part of her own story. Rather they became part of it; for the world is only a psychological phenomenon, and what they seemed they were. (134)

These "natural processes," the wooded fields and dales, are no longer seen for what they are but are worked into Tess' subjective consciousness and experience; they are now "part of her own story." Thus the boundary between herself, her feelings and the world in which she moves is no longer distinguishable; they do not exist as separate and finite entities, but merge into a single whole, and are an extension of her person. Not only this, but this single whole is now Tess' truth. As the narrator's states, our perception of the world is a wholly subjective and "psychological" process, what *seems* to us may just as well *be* to us since there is no way of distinguishing between the two; the

construction of a human 'reality' can only be done through human perception which is in itself a wholly subjective experience.<sup>1</sup> The narrator extends his idea,

The midnight airs and gusts, moaning amongst the tightly-wrapped buds and bark of the winter twigs, were formulae of bitter reproach. A wet day was the expression of irremediable grief at her weakness in the mind of some vague ethical being whom she could not class definitely as the God of her childhood, and could not comprehend as any other. (135)

Tess' powers of perception have been affected by her sense of guilt. She now hears, sees, and feels her surroundings with different ears, eyes and sensory receptors: the wind is "moaning [...] of bitter reproach," and "A wet day was the expression of irremediable grief." Diffused within the scene and linked to these natural phenomena like the gods of Greek mythology is also some other force. But unlike these gods, this force comes in the image of some Christian belief and is attributed with a moral power, "some vague ethical being" which seems to Tess to judge her. The narrator's evaluation of Tess' experience is independent of the judgement made by this moral being, whereupon we approach the notion of a distorted identity:

But this encompassment of her characterization, based on shreds of convention, peopled by phantoms and voices antipathetic to her, was a sorry and mistaken creation of Tess' fancy – a cloud of moral hobgoblins by which she was terrified without reason. It was they that were out of harmony with the world, not she. Walking among the sleeping birds in the hedges, watching skipping rabbits on a moonlit warren, or standing under a pheasant-laden bough, she looked upon herself as a figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence. (135)

The first part of the passage undermines Tess' guilt by diminishing it to mere irrational "fancy." Like Clym's, guilt is a mere delusion, and even given a touch of the absurd, "a cloud of moral hobgoblins." This is strengthened by the irony in the passage's second part, describing Innocence's domain as a woodland scene of creatures in their homes and resting places, from which Tess, imagining herself guilt personified, is now barred. That, of all characters, it is Tess, "daughter of the soil," who feels she is trespassing upon Innocence's terrain and out of sink with nature makes no sense. The scene's queer

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<sup>1</sup> In Florence Emily Hardy, *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy: 1892-1928*, London, 1930, p. 9, Hardy is said to have observed in a similar vein, "We don't always remember as we should that in getting at the truth, we get only at the true nature of the impression that an object, etc., produces on us, the true thing in itself being still, as Kant shows, beyond our knowledge." Opinion as to the source of Hardy's idea is divided, it being thought to have come from Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte or Percy Bysshe Shelley; see J. B. Bullen, *The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in Work of Thomas Hardy*, Oxford, 1986, p. 11, n. 17.

and phantasmagorical quality emphasizes the ridiculousness of the heroine's thoughts; in case we are in any doubt as to this, it is stated explicitly in the lines to follow:

But all the while she was making a distinction where there was no difference. Feeling herself in antagonism she was quite in accord. She had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly. (135)

The law Tess has broken by being about to bring an illegitimate child into the world, is only a law in society's eyes; by belonging to the world of Nature, it is not applicable to her.<sup>1</sup> A 'natural' interpretation of events as a coupling of male and female in order to reproduce, as opposed to a conventional interpretation as sinful adultery, is provided by Tess' mother, who, after venting her frustration on Tess, sighs philosophically, "'Tis nater, after all, and what do please God" (131). It is thus convention which is at fault with the natural world and not Tess; the two states are irreconcilable since convention's laws are based on unnatural laws. In doing what she has done, Tess has therefore had no choice but to transgress; she has not broken the law on her own accord but has been "made to break it."<sup>2</sup>

That conventional moral code finds Tess guilty against this natural setting confirms, in accordance with other Hardy critics,<sup>3</sup> that guilt is an artificial product of society employed to ensure the individual's obedience, nature being guilt free. And yet though guilt is artificial in the sense of being man-made, it is also artificial in the sense of being pretended or insincere. As the above passage shows, Tess' guilt is illogical and touches upon the ridiculous; though appearing real enough to her, it is nothing more than a figment of her imagination, no more part of "her story" than the other things she perceives around her. That it has originated in society's moral code is undeniable, but nevertheless secondary to its subjectivity and fictitiousness, the quality that secures the false conception of the self. In being described as "a figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence" Tess has assumed a distorted identity. Returning to Marlott after her stay at The Slopes she has become a stranger where she is none, "It is Tess Durbeyfield, otherwise d'Urberville, somewhat changed – the same, but not the same

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<sup>1</sup> This point is emphasized again on *Tess*, p. 353.

<sup>2</sup> In the earlier, serialized version of the text for the *Graphic* magazine, Hardy is more vague about the part Tess plays, writing that she "might have been a party with the tampering with" the law. Compared with the later version where she has been "made to break it," Hardy's alteration is evidently designed to clear up all uncertainty by acquitting Tess of responsibility in the affair.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Dave, p. 107.

[...] living as a stranger and an alien here, though it was no strange land that she was in” (139). It follows that the healing process Tess goes through at Marlott, emerging from her pregnant seclusion in the next chapter into the public eye, is presented in terms of the restoration of her perceptive powers and her original identity. Tess is described after having given birth as being able to see the world, not as it really is (since, as we have seen, there is no such thing), but as she saw it once before, “Meanwhile the trees were just as green as before; the birds sang and the sun shone as clearly now as ever. The familiar surroundings had not darkened because of her grief, not sickened because of her pain.” (141)

This understanding of guilt as existing in the mind of the individual only and having nothing to do with moral responsibility has already been seen in Clym, and will also characterize Sue’s guilt. Like Clym and Sue’s, Tess’ sense of guilt is synonymous with a change in her perception of the world and self. Unlike theirs, however, and unlike the situation following her confession to Angel once they are married, it is not a permanent state. This conviction of Tess comes earlier enough in the heroine’s life for her to surmount it. Later it will be shame and not guilt which, far from simply altering Tess’ view of herself and the outside world temporarily, will rob her of her identity forever.

### **3. Audience and the Observance of Public Opinion**

As Tess’ introduction shows, the outside world and its evaluation of her play a crucial role in this character’s estimation of herself. Audience is indeed central in *Tess* on two accounts. First, where shame of a public kind is concerned, it is the prime cause, catalyst or magnifier of this experience. In this context, behaviour is not so much evaluated by how it will directly reflect upon the self, but by how it will first be received by those who witness it. This can be applied to major and minor characters alike, with only Tess possessing sufficient personal conviction to challenge what the majority thinks of her. Secondly, the specific attitude and identity of this audience is crucial. Thanks to *The Return*, we have already become sensible of how decisive a character’s appraisal of his audience is for the shame experience. This issue gains pertinence in *Tess* given the different effect that the Marlott community and Angel have upon the heroine in their shaming of her.



### **a. John, Joan and the Importance of Reputation**

Starting with Tess' family, John and Joan Durbeyfield's single concern throughout the novel is with their reputation within their home village, Marlott, their one aspiration to advance this reputation as far as possible. This takes priority over all other matters, eclipsing economic struggles and, together with alcohol, affecting their conjugal happiness.

As a result both characters evaluate events by the nature of the response these are likely to receive from the outside world, be it positive, i.e. involving acclaim and approval, or negative, involving scorn and ridicule. This is shown through two events in their lives: the potentially advancing discovery of their d'Urberville heritage, and the potentially destructive discovery of their daughter's shameful state which works in precisely the opposite direction.

Although his worldly circumstances do not improve with the parson's uncovering of his knightly ancestry, nor are they likely to,<sup>1</sup> Durbeyfield's reaction to it is driven purely by the admiration and respect he imagines it will bring his family in the village. After the revelation, he immediately acts as though he is of superior stock, boasting "There's not a man in the county o' South-Wessex that's got grander and nobler skillentons in his family than I" (47). He calls for a carriage to take him home, tipping Fred a shilling and ordering him to send home word for a lavish supper of "lamb's fry." Such is his self-aggrandizement that he even imagines that the Cerealia celebrations taking place on his arrival in the village are "on account o' I" (47). Similarly although Joan attempts at times to dampen her husband's rodomontade,<sup>2</sup> she is essentially no better. Thoroughly pleased by the revelation, she raises a rather nettled objection on hearing of the humble mode of transport Tess must take to her new post in Trantridge Cross – "'A cart?' murmured Joan Durbeyfield doubtingly. 'It might have been a carriage for her own kin!'" (88). The marriage that she imagines to be the automatic consequence of Tess' acceptance of old Mrs. d'Urberville's job, is also a great source of pride to her; though aware of the financial relief it will mean, she is, for the moment, only concerned with the status it will bring her in the parish.

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<sup>1</sup> *Tess*, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> See for example *ibid.*, p. 67.

The Durbeyfield's reaction to the trials and tribulations of their eldest daughter takes a similar pattern. This is evident from two parallel scenes which describe Tess' returns home to Marlott empty-handed; the first occurring after her stay at The Slopes and the second after her marriage to Angel. The scenes' similarity emphasize Tess' failure to escape the place of her childhood, herewith creating the impression of a vicious circle. In the first case Joan reacts primarily in terms of her daughter's failure to provide a sensational scoop for the Marlott news, omitting to realize that if she had not relied upon local hearsay for information about her daughter in the first place, she would never have been disappointed,

"It would have been something of a story to come back with, if you had!" continued Mrs. Durbeyfield, ready to burst into tears of vexation. "After all the talk about you and him which has reached us here, who would have expected it to end like this!" (130)

It is only after this rebuke that Joan considers the economic implications of Tess' failure to marry her "gentleman-cousin," the order of her thoughts clearly indicating their priority. Typically her husband does not recover from the incident as quickly, being reported, months later, to have replied to Tess' entreaty to call for the parson to baptize her dying child that "No parson should come inside his door [...] prying into affairs, just then, when, by her shame, it had become more necessary than ever to hide them" (143). A similar response accompanies Tess' second return home. Again Joan's chief fear is not that her daughter may be in trouble, but how the news will be received by her husband and the parish. When she communicates the "mess of it" which Tess has made to her husband, John is crushed by the news, struck with a "sullen mortification," which even "the influence of the cheering glass" cannot expel. We read that "the intrinsic quality of the event moved his touchy sensitiveness less than its conjectured effect upon the minds of others" (330), an effect which, according to his subsequent self-pitying outburst, will consist of scathing criticism and mockery,

"And now to be sure what they fellers at Rolliver's and The Pure Drop will say to me! How they'll squint and glane, and say, "This is yer mighty match is it; this is yer getting back to yer forefathers in King Norman's time!" I feel this is too much, Joan; I shall put an end to myself, title and all – I can bear it no longer!" (330)

Although the humorous effect of the passage, created by the fact that such an ineffectual character as Durbeyfield can take himself so seriously, undermines its force, the underlying message is nevertheless serious. Though we expect John to bear the brunt of

the criticism, the notion remains that, so great is the fear of public scorn, that taking one's own life is a preferable option to bearing it.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, even at his wife's imminent death, John Durbeyfield can think only of his name and the blow it is in danger of suffering if he starts to work for a living. As Liza-Lu explains to Tess at Flintcomb-Ash, "Mother is took very bad, and the doctor says she's dying, and [...] father [...] says 'tis wrong for a man of such a high family as his to slave and drave at common labouring work" (425).

### **b. Felix, Cuthbert and the Danger of Dogged Obedience**

"Dancing in public with a troop of country hoydens – suppose we should be seen!" (53)

Like the Durbeyfields, Angel's brothers are highly sensitive to anything that may put their reputation at risk, their fear of being caught in what they consider a degrading act of frivolity preventing them from joining in the Marlott Cerealia celebrations at the novel's start. But whereas John and Joan are sufficiently shallow and artless not to be significantly influenced by anything or anyone for long, Joan responding to Tess' separation from Angel after the initial disappointment "as she had taken Tess' original trouble, as she would have taken a wet day or failure in the potato-crop," (329)<sup>2</sup> Felix and Cuthbert's regard for public opinion is stifling and unflinching in contrast, presenting a danger of a more earnest kind.

Such is the Clare brothers' conformity that they have lost all individuality and have become mere types. At their introduction in Marlott their physical appearance shows them fitting neatly into the respectable professions of the ecclesiastical middle class, as the use of the definite article and the words "regulation" and "normal" in their description show, "The eldest wore the white tie, high waistcoat, and thin-brimmed hat of the regulation curate, the second was the normal undergraduate" (52). Later they are indistinguishable from any other who has undergone the same education, being

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<sup>1</sup> A similar notion is presented by Isabel Archer in Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady*. When Henrietta Stackpole asks her friend why she does not leave her husband Gilbert Osmond, Isabel replies she would rather die than to face the shame of doing so, *The Portrait of a Lady*, Oxford, 1995, p. 521. Tess also considers this option as a means of escaping her shame on *Tess*, p. 303.

<sup>2</sup> The ease with which Joan accepts life is partly due to her superstition and belief in the ultimate power of fate and nature over mankind.

described as “unimpeachable models as are turned out yearly by the lathe of a systematic tuition” (219). They not only refuse to attend Angel’s marriage out of disapproval of the match, but are such slaves to convention that they behave like herd animals,

They were both somewhat short-sighted, and when it was custom to wear a single eyeglass and string they wore a single eyeglass and string; when it was the custom to wear a double glass they wore a double glass; when it was custom to wear spectacles they wore spectacles straightaway, all without reference to the particular variety of defect in their vision. (219)

Felix and Cuthbert are short-sighted in more ways than one. Their slavish following of fashion shown by their choice of eyewear is so extreme that it weakens their intellectual powers so that they are unable to think for themselves; current fads dictate their literary and artistic tastes:

When Wordsworth was enthroned they carried pocket copies; and when Shelley was belittled they allowed him to grow dusty on their shelves. When Correggio’s Holy Families were admired, they admired Correggio’s Holy Families; when he was decried in favour of Valasquez, they sedulously followed suit without any personal objection. (219)

Like the Dissidents and Non-conformers of Matthew Arnold’s social and political treatise *Culture and Anarchy*, each is a slave to his own ideology. This is, as Angel notes, taken to be their *unum necessarium*<sup>1</sup>: “Felix seemed to him all Church; Cuthbert all College. His Diocesan Synod and Visitations were the mainsprings of the world to one; Cambridge to the other” (219). Being locked in their own worlds of clericalism and academia, where anyone outside of this “were to be tolerated rather than reckoned with and respected” (220), has led to a blindness, mental stagnation and rigidity typical of the Victorian period. Angel notes their “mental limitations” and their subsequent oblivion of life’s wider picture; their inability to differentiate between “local” and “universal” truths and their failure to appreciate life in its endless twists and possibilities – “life as it really was lived” (220). And yet although sufficiently enlightened to recognize these failures in his brothers and to take Tess as his wife, Angel is not so very different from them after all. Being called, in his condemnation of his wife a “slave to custom and convention,” his link with Felix and Cuthbert is undeniable, the disastrous effects of which are shown in his treatment of Tess to follow.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Arnold, “Porro Unum ist Necessarium,” in *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. R. H. Super, Ann Arbor, 1965, pp. 176-191. Arnold coined this phrase, *unum necessarium*, the one thing needful, in order to

### c. Angel and Family as Audience

He loved her; ought he to marry her? Dared he to marry her? What would his mother and his brothers say? (216)

Just as Angel's efforts to mould Tess into a d'Urberville are not undertaken purely on his account, but to ease his family's acceptance of her, so does familial approval of his marriage take priority above all else, including personal feelings of affection. Before Angel can make up his mind to marry, aware of the objections his family will have, he returns home to Emminster to test the water. On the way his predicament is clear: marrying Tess is a question of having courage enough to go against his family and the conventions of his class – "dared." It is against these spectators, his conservative middle-class family with its strong puritan leaning, and particularly his mother,<sup>1</sup> that Angel measures himself; like a conscience it embodies the rules of convention which control to a large extent what he does.

Angel's return to Emminster, quite apart from enlarging upon the background to which he belongs, is chiefly constructed to show the wider social consequences of his union with Tess, and to demonstrate, despite the seeming gulf in manners and attitude between Angel and his family, their ultimate affinity.<sup>2</sup> Shame, conveyed by a blush, is worked into and forms the climax of the episode, betraying the true identity of Angel just at the point where his character is in danger of being mistaken, and showing where his sympathies ultimately lies.

The description we have received of Clare up to this point in chapters II and XVIII has been concerned with emphasizing his deviation from his family's beliefs, attitudes and tradition, and his rejection of convention and public opinion. Introduced defying his brothers by dancing with the club-walkers at Marlott, the independent study Angel subsequently embarks upon instead of following in his brothers' footsteps by going to Cambridge to take orders, leads him to reject traditional, conventional values such as class and affluence, to "evinced considerable indifference to social forms and

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describe the narrow-minded bigotry he observed in his middle-class contemporaries, an attitude he held responsible for the stagnation of Victorian literature, art and culture.

<sup>1</sup> Just as Mrs. Yeobright is to Clym, Mrs. Clare is a special concern to Angel, often taking priority in her son's considerations, see *Tess*, pp. 216, 254 and 270.

<sup>2</sup> A further function which this part of the narrative fulfils is that it releases the tension of the preceding climactical chapter in the final part of "The Rally" where Angel and Tess' embrace. A necessary interlude is thus ensured before the two lovers confront each other again in chapter XXVII.

observances" (172), a position to which becoming a farmer seems agreeable. At Talbothays Angel rids himself further of his middle-class prejudices about the peasant agricultural community, discarding "the conventional farm-folk of his imagination – personified by the pitiable dummy known as Hodge" (173), and recognizing these people as arresting individuals in their own right. He fails to share in the Clare's unquestioning commitment to the Church, questioning fundamental areas of theology and favouring instead what he considers "intellectual liberty." As a result Angel feels that the vicarage is "distinctly foreign" – returning to the dairy after his visit is like "throwing off splints and bandages" (230).

The social, spiritual and mental decline upon which Angel is thought to have embarked by his family since being at Talbothays, the change in his manner from scholar to agriculturalist,<sup>1</sup> and, as Felix puts it, his loss of "intellectual grasp," is now explored through the family's contrasting reaction to the gifts of black-pudding and mead that Angel has brought with him from the dairyman's wife, Mrs. Crick. In keeping with their puritan life style of self-sacrifice and abstinence typical of the religious landscape of nineteenth century Dorset, Mr. and Mrs. Clare give the black-puddings to another poorer member of the parish. A "frugal meal of cold viands" follows in which even the mead Angel has brought is confiscated and condemned to the medical chest, being "so extremely alcoholic" and "quite unfit for use as a beverage" (222). As we might expect Angel is thoroughly disappointed at being denied the savouring of a drink he has been looking forward to; typically Felix and Cuthbert reserve their judgement for his literary definition of the mead. Clearly, the Clares' sparse and joyless lifestyle, their elevation of the spirit and abnegation of the flesh together with their sons' snobbish and intellectual attitude forms a vivid contrast to the "aesthetic, sensuous, pagan pleasure in natural life and lush womanhood" (218) into which Angel has been initiated at Talbothays.

Yet for all Angel's rebellion it is essentially short-lived. Despite the clear difference between his own and his family's evaluation of Mrs. Crick's gifts, it is the son's alliance to his family's values, his indelible conventionality, which has the last word. As we have seen in the chapter on class shame, so indifferent to social convention and public opinion is Angel not; what would appear to be his irrevocable "divergence" from his

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<sup>1</sup> *Tess*, p. 219.

family is shown now to be no real divergence at all. The principal significance of the scene lies not in the difference in reaction, but in Angel's single reaction to his brother's words. In response to their challenging Angel's dialectal description of the mead as "a drop of pretty tippie," Angel turns red and attempts to lighten what he has said because he is ashamed of having used Talbothay slang in front of them,

"Oh – 'tis an expression they use down at Talbothays," replied Angel blushing. (222)

This not only conveys the young man's painful recognition of the gap between his brothers and himself, the cultural distance he has travelled since being away, but also the sense of shame he feels for using dialect sneered upon by them. Thus in spite of his apparent break with his brothers, Angel still values their opinion of him more highly than he would admit. Indeed, it is out of fear about what they will think about him, a fear which turns out to be well-founded, that prevents him from informing them about his marriage plans.<sup>1</sup> Thus although Angel has moved outside the spiritual and intellectual sphere of Emminster, he is still receptive to its influence. Doubt is thus cast over the extent to which he is able to pursue his own course free from the prejudice, custom and tradition of his class and family; in reality he has not progressed along the road of enlightenment as far as he would have us believe. The experience of shame in this seemingly insignificant incident thus restores our male protagonist to his proper position in the novel and prepares us ultimately for the role he is to play in his marriage to Tess; his rejection of her on the grounds of her unconventionality.<sup>2</sup>

Angel's overwhelming concern to maintain and secure his family's approval marks the rest of his petition at Emminster. Discussing the issue of marriage afterwards with his father, he dresses the truth about Tess in a way that is palatable to him, introducing his sweetheart in a cleverly constructed argument about his need of a skilled farmer's wife, and emphasizing her orthodoxy because it is what his parents want to hear.<sup>3</sup> As we have already seen, in attempting to create the optimum conditions for introducing Tess to his parents, he deliberately saves the fact of her distinguished ancestry as a ticket of approval till after they are married. It is the thought that he will surprise them with this

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<sup>1</sup> *Tess*, pp. 227, 276 and 279.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388. It is because of Tess' unconventional state that Brazil is not just attractive as a viable farming proposition to Angel, but as a place where his wife's moral blemish will be more kindly looked upon, *ibid.*, p. 333.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 225 and 226.

“grand card” that gives him courage to consummate his plans and consoles him at his family’s subsequent alienation of him, “This coolness in his relations distressed Clare less than it would have done had he been without the grand card with which he meant to surprise them ere long” (276). Furthermore, as Angel reasons, if Tess’ ancestry fails to win back their good opinion, the pair can always escape into anonymity home or abroad, “Apart from that, my future is to be totally foreign to my family – it will not affect even the surface of their lives. We shall leave this part of England – perhaps England itself – and what does it matter how people regard us here?” (259).

In spite of this Angel cannot forestall his family’s shame on his marrying Tess; they fail to attend the wedding so as to save, in his mother’s words, Angel the embarrassment.<sup>1</sup> Not only this, but later Angel cannot bring himself to tell his parents the truth behind their separation. Instead, and although he fails to think so himself, he vehemently insists to his mother that Tess is “spotless!” (337). Thus Angel’s shame is driven to a large extent by his family’s estimation of him.

#### **d. Tess: Conforming with Protest**

Like Angel, Tess’ audience begins with the smallest social unit second to her, her family. The first consideration which hits her on the way home to Marlott after separating from her husband, is “how would she be able to face her parents? (326). The focus then shifts to the next stage of her socialization, namely the Marlott community. Her second instinct, having learnt from the turnpike-keeper of her father’s embarrassing behaviour on her wedding day, which consists of a typically large dosage of boasting and ale, is to hide from the public eye and go home secretly to avoid being recognized.<sup>2</sup> It is thus Marlott and the quasi-Christian teaching it upholds that is Tess’ chief audience, to be replaced later by Angel who then becomes Tess’ sole spectator and judge.

Angel’s rendition of shame as being initiated or intensified by his family, i.e. an

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<sup>1</sup> *Tess*, p. 334. In contrast to Angel’s parents, Tess’ parents are immune to any sense of class shame, their delusions of grandeur on discovering their knightly ancestry preventing them from having any feelings of inadequacy.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 326.



external audience, is strengthened in many respects by the presentation of Tess. Although her character alone makes her particularly disposed to shame, audience or no audience, the impression is created that, if it were not for Marlott, Tess would be significantly less inclined to feel ashamed of her sexual misdemeanour with Alec. The reason for this, of course, is that Hardy wants to show that her 'crime' is not in fact a crime at all.<sup>1</sup> Although we have met with a similar phenomenon in *The Return* through Thomasin's acknowledgement that society is false in condemning her as a woman of loose morals, Thomasin nevertheless accepts her sentence by marrying Wildeve on any terms. With Tess however the situation has changed: public shame has become a social sanction used against the individual for his transgression of a moral law without his wholehearted belief in it. Hardy thus distinguishes more carefully between degrees of public shaming; being shamed by one's audience in terms of scorn and censure does not necessarily mean being ashamed, i.e. taking on and acting upon the conviction.

In accordance with Tess' natural sensitivity to gossip, on an everyday level the anticipation of being considered negatively by others constantly encroaches upon her consciousness and influences her behaviour. The incident of her father "making such a mommet of himself" on the day of the Cerealia continues to be a matter of pain to her until well into the evening as she exclaims to her mother, "I felt inclined to sink into the ground with shame!" (58). Her father's drunkenness spurs her to reject Joan's suggestion of asking someone she has danced with to undertake the overnight journey to Casterbridge, "O no – I wouldn't have it for the world! And letting everyone know the reason – such a thing to be ashamed of!" (68). Tess' pride makes her feel uncomfortable playing "the part of the poor relation" when seeking her wealthy relatives, and a sense of shame for her poverty and the awkwardness of her situation accompanies her when she applies to Alec for help. She dreams that her knightly suitor will scorn and ridicule her and is gratified to hear that Alec actually thinks highly of her.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of this it would be wrong to assume that Tess unceasingly heeds public opinion, as her response to her stigmatization as a fallen woman by Marlott shows. The conflict between society's evaluation of Tess and her own evaluation of herself,

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<sup>1</sup> As Dave, p. 109, writes, "Hardy could never understand why a sexual commerce which is regarded as normal within the monogamous marital limits, should seem so outrageous when it is premarital." He concludes that Hardy did not consider sex before marriage a sin, but simply, "a venial lapse, just amoral."

<sup>2</sup> *Tess*, p. 86.

introduced on her return from The Slopes, which places her situation within a 'social' context, continually fluctuates as Tess wavers between accepting and rejecting society's conviction of her. At first it would seem that society has had its way, that "the disastrous night of her undoing" will shackle Tess for the rest of her life. A woman who is unmarried and with child, and is living in the strict moral fabric of Victorian society is automatically a social outcast. Accordingly, at church, supposedly the heart of Christian faith and charity, Tess is the object of censure and gossip. Thus she embarks upon a period of "domiciliary imprisonments," avoiding all contact with the outside world and only venturing out after dark: "She knew what their whispers were about, grew sick at heart, and felt she could come to church no more" (134). Having borne the product of her sin into the world, it is a continual test for Tess not to hang her head in shame but to look "people calmly in the face at times, even when holding the baby in her arms" (142). After Sorrow's death, she leaves Marlott for the anonymity of another place where there are no "invidious eyes" to judge her.

If we confine ourselves to this area of narration, we must conclude that conventional morality, embodied by the Marlott community, has triumphed and Tess bowed to its pressure. And yet this is not entirely so. Whilst in her lonely misery Tess avoids providing more fuel to the gossip about her, in her heart she does not completely accept society's condemnation of her; unlike Thomasin she is not willing to buy its respect at any cost. Before all else, the "social salvation" she could have attained by marrying Alec as her mother suggests is at too high a price, and "even for her name's sake" the prospect of marriage with him is unthinkable. Two additional incidents involving specific tenets of Church doctrine substantiate this resistance. The first involves Tess' encounter with the painter of scriptural texts on her way home from The Slopes. Tess blushes when she reads the glaring, unfinished words "Thou, shalt, not, commit –" since they make her painfully aware of their implication for her. Nonetheless she resolves not to take them seriously, "Pooh – I don't believe God said such things!" she murmured contemptuously when her flush had died away" (129). Tess' second defiance of Christian teaching involves her do-it-yourself baptism of Sorrow and her argument that its place of burial is ultimately irrelevant, a point with which the vicar is inclined to agree. Nor does Tess remain hidden from the public eye for ever, but recuperates from her experiences and attempts a new start by leaving for the Vale of From, as the narrator explains,

The irresistible, universal, automatic tendency to find sweet pleasure somewhere, which pervades all life, from the meanest to the highest, had at length mastered Tess. Being even

now only a young woman of twenty, one who mentally and sentimentally had not finished growing, it was impossible that any event should have left upon her an impression that was not in time capable of transmutation. (157)<sup>1</sup>

Placing Tess' experience into a wider context of womanhood in general, the narrator attacks the notion that fallen women are irredeemable, "Let the truth be told – women do as a rule live through such humiliations, and regain their spirits, and again look upon them with interested eye" (158). Tess does not care enough about Marlott opinion to accept its condemnation of her permanently, a situation that changes when Angel enters the scene. Not only this, but her high spirits at this point of the novel are intrinsic to the tragedy to come. Without them no upsurge of hope and expectation could be created in Tess and Angel's meeting and falling in love, and thus none of the bitter disappointment afterwards. If Tess was to remain beaten by society's conviction of her from now till the novel's end, her life and story would already be over.

In spite of this, Marlott has the last word. In a way that foreshadows Jude and Sue's eviction from Springstreet, society, in the form of Marlott's villagers, decides ultimately over the individual in *Tess*, as the death of John Durbeyfield illustrates. After John has unexpectedly passed away, the surviving family members are not permitted to renew the lease on their house, its termination being seen as an opportunity to get rid of Tess and purge the village of its moral stain.<sup>2</sup> In this way, Tess' rebellion, her refusal to accept the villagers' conviction of her, comes ultimately to nothing; in the end the family is made homeless regardless of her efforts, securing the financial ruin which Alec will capitalize upon.

#### **e. The Vanity of Public Opinion**

Marlott's eviction of the Durbeyfields on the termination of their lease demonstrates the power of conventional morality over the convicted individual, but it is the only concrete example in the novel.<sup>3</sup> Far louder is the injunction that characters ignore and defy public

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<sup>1</sup> This statement by the narrator directly contradicts Giordano's argument, Giordano, p. 159, that Tess is flawed with a constant, inherent sense of guilt from the novel's start which is connected with her wish to die.

<sup>2</sup> *Tess*, p. 436.

<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Jude's losing his job decorating stained glass windows in a church near Springstreet is the only example of the same, *Jude*, pp. 369-373.

opinion and censure, because this, like guilt, is valueless and subjective. This message spurns the unwavering stare of the external eye in the novel and the tremendous value which all characters attribute to it.

Just as Joan Durbeyfield's disappointment on hearing that Alec has not married Tess shows how unreliable and misleading public hearsay is, so does Tess' peers' reaction to her return from The Slopes. Misreading their friend's situation, they treat her as though she has made a "transcendent conquest" and visit her in their Sunday best. In their eyes Tess has risen socially, the figure of admiration she cuts making a heavy ironic contrast with the hunted social outcast she becomes. Similarly, Angel's anticipation of his parent's disapproval of Tess is also paradoxically mistaken. Though he forecasts their reaction to his marriage accurately, he utterly misjudges their response to Tess' unpure state, it being precisely this aspect of her that makes them particularly sympathetic to her cause.<sup>1</sup> And, if we need a graver example, Tess is falsely convicted by the public for being a woman of loose morals. There is nothing, then, or very little store to be set by its opinion.

Such is the import of this idea, that its appreciation is not left to a level of implication. In a passage describing the hard penalty Marlott has dealt Tess we encounter an extended piece of reflection upon the relativity and fluctuation of public opinion, resulting in its ultimately meaninglessness:

She might have seen that what had bowed her head so profoundly – the thought of the world's concern at her situation – was founded on an illusion. She was not an existence, an experience, a passion, a structure of sensations, to anybody but herself. To all mankind besides Tess was only a passing thought. Even to friends she was no more than a frequently passing thought. (141)

Again the concept of perception is at play; like guilt, public opinion is nothing but an "illusion." "[T]he world's concern" gives a false impression of reality, in truth it is no more than an incorporeal, fleeting moment of mental activity, a "passing thought." The only entity which is real, existing as a feeling human being, as an experiencer of sensations, is Tess. Furthermore, this passing thought has no depth or authority, and is only capable of making surface judgements of her situation,

If she had made herself miserable the livelong night and day it was only this much to them – 'Ah, she makes herself unhappy.' If she tried to be cheerful, to dismiss all care, to take

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<sup>1</sup> *Tess*, p. 378.

pleasure in the daylight, the flowers, the baby, she could only be this idea to them – ‘Ah, she bears it well.’ (141)

The reduction of the whole of Tess’ experience, her thoughts, feelings, emotions and sensations, into an impersonal black and white observation, “Ah, she makes herself unhappy,” “Ah, she bears it well,” not only conveys the shallowness and crudeness of her audience’s methods of observation and judgement, its failure to differentiate between the varying stages of joy and sorrow, but also its essential indifference. Such a superficial and depersonalizing treatment of the individual is typical of Hardy’s text-worlds and reflects especially puritan or Evangelical attitudes towards sin. By the logic of predestination alone, there are only two categories into which man may fall and thus for Tess no middle ground between the pure and fallen woman.<sup>1</sup> Nor is thought given to intentions or individual circumstances, all sins, great or small, amounting to the same.<sup>2</sup> Thus the painter of scripture whom Tess encounters on her way home to Marlott explains that he cannot differentiate between different degrees of sinfulness; these are fine but needless distinctions, all sinners must be lumped together regardless of the relative gravity of their moral failings,

“But,” she said tremulously, “suppose your sin was not of your own seeking?”

He shook his head.

“I cannot split hairs on that burning enquiry.” (128)

The painter’s worship of dogmatic moral law above all other considerations – a practice that is “Crushing! Killing!” – reveals a total indifference to individual and personal circumstances. It not only fails to recognize the distinction between deliberate and premeditated wrong, but also the complexity of human nature, destroying all sense of Christian compassion and forgiveness and epitomizing Hardy’s criticism of the Church. His attitude is also symptomatic of a shame-oriented society where the intricacies and nuances behind Tess’ sin are wholly irrelevant: they do not change the final result which is all that matters. Thus the individual is lost within a wider dictatorial moral scheme and engulfed by the majority. Shortly after this incident the narrator comments upon this illogical gain of invincible power that the individual *en masse* assumes in

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<sup>1</sup> Houghton, pp. 171-173.

<sup>2</sup> As Hannah More, John Newman and Thomas Arnold were to believe, “In all that relates to God and to himself, the Christian knows of no small faults. He considers all allowed and wilful sins, whatever be their magnitude, as an offence against his Maker,” Hannah More, *Practical Piety; or, the Influence of the Relation of the Heart on the Conduct of the Life*, Boston, 1811, p. 142.

Tess' attempt to "shun mankind – or rather that cold accretion called the world, which so terrible in its mass, is so unformidable, even pitiable in its units" (134).

A final comment the narrator makes to underline the subjectivity of public opinion is through his construction of a hypothetical situation where Tess is placed within a typical primitive context outside the spheres of convention,

Moreover alone on a desert island would she have been wretched at what had happened to her? Not greatly. If she could have been but just created, to discover herself as a spouseless mother, with no experience of life except as a parent of a nameless child, would the position have caused her despair? No, she would have taken it calmly, and found pleasures therein. Most of the misery had been generated by her conventional aspect, and not by her innate sensations. (141)

Society's interpretation of Tess' experiences make her miserable. Had she been living in a natural environment free from the civilizing influence of people and convention, on a "desert island," her predicament would have been free from the devastating significance it bears in the world in which she now lives and moves. It would simply be confined to its factual essence, she would be no more than a "spouseless mother," or "parent of a nameless child." As the narrator says of Tess' involvement with Alec and sexual enlightenment, "but for the world's opinion those experiences would have been simply a liberal education" (150); altogether, typical of many of Hardy's other major novels, public opinion has nothing positive to offer.

#### **4. The Psychology of Shame: The Mental Process behind the Shameful Moment**

##### **a. The Individual and Audience's Views**

In *The Return* Thomasin questions society's shaming of her, but ultimately accepts its judgement by marrying Wildeve to clear her name; in *Tess* the title character does not fully consent to society's condemnation of her. This discrepancy between the audience's view and judgement of the individual and Tess' view and judgement of herself and her situation marks an attempt by Hardy to pin down the psychology of shame still further. As discussed above in B. II. 1. b., this psychology is based on the premise that, in a shame experience involving an audience, the individual does not simply automatically

adopt his audience's view of him, but makes an independent judgement of himself or situation which may or may not coincide with that of the audience's.<sup>1</sup>

Hardy's most earnest study of shame, it comes as no surprise to find this point clearly realized in *Tess*, in a scene describing the angry confrontation between Car Darch and Tess on their way home from Chaseborough. Having joined in the laughter with her peers about the funny sight of Car's spilt treacle, Tess refuses to take up arms against the former, recognizing that Car is picking a fight out of jealousy. A slanging match ensues in which Tess is set upon by the female members of the group and defended by its male members. We are told that the "war" escalates and that "Tess was indignant and ashamed." But what is Tess ashamed of? Although her audience scorns her for not fighting with Car Darch, she rejects this criticism and is not ashamed of this since it is a proper decision in her eyes. Hence her shame does not simply involve her adoption of her audience's disapproval, and her evaluation of herself is not identical to her audience's. Rather the root of Tess' shame lies in her lack of respect for her spectators and the feeling that she has stooped to their level. Offended by Car's provocation, she is indignant, disappointed with and ashamed of herself for associating with such a lowly group of commoners,

"Indeed, then, I shall not fight! [...] and if I had known you was of that sort, I wouldn't have so let myself down as to come with such a whorage as this is!" (112)

### **b. Shifts in Consciousness and Perception**

In B. II. 1. a. above we saw how, in keeping with modern psychological theory, one aspect of Hardyan shame is presented in terms of the refocus of a character's attention upon the self causing his recognition of a previously unconsidered interpretation of himself or his situation. In several shame scenes in *Tess*, this new view or information follows some state of self-absorption where the heroine is unheeding of her self and her surroundings; sometimes an audience is also present. Tess is frequently connected to the notion of consciousness, claiming not only to be able to transcend consciousness by her

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<sup>1</sup> See pp. 33-35.

out-of-body experiences, but often being described as being in a state of floating unconsciousness,<sup>1</sup> out of which shame arouses her.

As already discussed, the description of Tess' journey home from The Slopes after her first visit there depicts this process clearly. Travelling with "an inward eye" Tess is unaware of how her elaborate floral adornment must appear to the outside world. The cutting remark of another passenger causes her to awake from her reverie and take a detached view of herself. "Why, you be quite a posy! And such roses in early June!" (84) makes Tess see herself in a different light. Adopting an "outward eye" she suddenly realizes what a curious and ostentatious spectacle she is, and is ashamed. At the first available moment she takes some of the flowers from her person and hides them in her basket.

In the above scene, Tess' consciousness is not only awoken, but shifts to the outer sphere and back again upon herself, the blush and the feeling of shame marking this shift between the inner and outer consciousness. Connected to the detached view Tess takes of herself, is also the negative judgement her audience makes of her. For Tess' audience does more than simply make the heroine view herself from a different point of view. There is an ineluctable judgement of immodesty in the traveller's exclamation, "And such roses in early June!" This judgement is secured by the associations of wealth and extravagance that wearing so many cultivated flowers at this time of year have. Again, this negative judgement does not take the place of Tess' own judgement, but in this case the two coincide.<sup>2</sup>

The shift in consciousness and subsequent altered view of herself that Tess experiences above occurs again in a later scene in the novel, this time without the assistance of an actual audience. Awakening from her troubled sleep in the plantation on

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<sup>1</sup> The death of Prince, for example, takes place when Tess is in a "reverie," her seduction in The Chase when she is "sleeping soundly," just as, when Angel looks in upon her on their wedding night she is "reposing without care," and when the police arrest her at Stonehenge she is also sleeping. This sleeping or loss of consciousness can be understood to reflect positively or negatively upon Tess, to reduce her responsibility, or alternatively to increase her passivity. John Holloway in *The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument*, London, 1962, p. 285, links it to Tess' dangerous "dream-world spirituality."

<sup>2</sup> The wider function of the audience's judgement is to underline and foreshadow Alec's dominance over Tess. Though Alec's bestowal of gifts has already been described in the preceding chapter, its uncovering to the Shaston passengers exposes its full inappropriateness. This inappropriateness not only takes the form of Alec's lack of propriety – undoubtedly the fact that Tess' appearance is uncalled-for has never crossed his mind – but also embodies the dynamics of their subsequent relationship. Alec's excessive adornment of Tess presents his immoderate, overbearing manner towards her and the latter's powerlessness to deny him. This pattern will be repeated in their sexual encounter in The Chase, and in



her way to Flintcomb-Ash, Tess realizes that she has shared her bed with several bleeding pheasants which have fallen victim to a hunting party. This discovery makes Tess see her situation differently. Filled with self-pity the night before – “Was there ever such a wretched being as she in the world?” (351) – Tess sees herself from another point of view on seeing the pheasants’ suffering, “Poor darlings – to suppose myself the most miserable being on earth in the sight o’ such misery as yours!” and, as a result, “was ashamed of herself for her gloom of the night” (353). Thus through her comparison with the pheasants, Tess discovers that her depression and despair has been excessive, and subsequently no longer considers herself the most “wretched being” in the world.

The road to Flintcomb-Ash boasts another example of this change in perception in Tess. On the way back, this time, from Emminster, Tess remeets Alec for the first time since their affair at The Slopes and the following scene unfolds between them:

“Don’t look at me like that!” he said abruptly.

Tess, who had been quite unconscious of her action and mien, instantly withdrew the large dark gaze of her eyes, stammering with a flush, “I beg your pardon!” (388)

Although the feeling Tess experiences is arguably closer to embarrassment than shame, again it is described in terms of a gain in consciousness and redirection of attention and focus upon the self, whereupon some form of recognition takes place. Tess’ blush marks her shift of consciousness from gazing unthinkingly at Alec to suddenly realizing the sexual temptation she still is to him. Clearly, here, her view of herself is different from Alec’s. As Tess’ apology and the subsequent description of the “wretched sentiment” she feels that “in inhabiting the fleshly tabernacle with which nature had endowed her she was somehow doing something wrong,” proves, Tess has the sense of having committed some offence by appearing such a temptation to her ex-lover. Alec’s view of Tess, meanwhile, is more difficult to ascertain. Whilst he does not share her self-criticism, refusing her apology, “Don’t beg my pardon,” his attitude towards her, is not positive or admiring either. Alec appears to talk out of a sense of mere expediency; this is one of the rare scenes where he is able to regard Tess’ sexuality objectively.

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the renewal of their relationship in “The Convert,” culminating in Tess’ acquiescence to be Alec’s mistress.

A final scene which is equally as ambiguous describes Tess' listening unobserved to the notes of Angel's harp.<sup>1</sup> Setting and atmosphere are crucial to the scene's effectiveness. The outskirts of the garden where Tess finds herself lie outside the reaches of convention; wild and "uncultivated," the surroundings give the harp's music, normally heard indoors, "a stark quality like that of nudity." Within this primitive framework, the sanctions of realism and consciousness are temporarily suspended: Tess, "conscious of neither time nor space," loses herself in spiritual and sexual ecstasy. With a technique later to be used by D. H. Lawrence, her surroundings are infused with the same quality of her emotions. The grass's fertile juices, "damp and rank with juicy grass [...] and with tall blooming weeds emitting offensive smells" are reflective of the biological secretions of the love-making process. Tess is compared to a cat as she stalks Angel with the abandonment of someone in the height of sexual / animal passion,

gathering cuckoo-spittle on her skirts, cracking snails that were underfoot, staining her hands with thistle-milk and slug-slime, and rubbing off upon her naked arms sticky blights which, though snow-white on the apple trunks, made madder stains on her skin. (179)

The emphasis on the body and on the exposed bare skin through words like, "staining," "rubbing off," "madder stains," and "hands" and "naked arms," conveys the sexual element of the scene, to which the contrast of the colours contribute. The "snow-white" of the blights which turn red upon her skin, symbolize virginal purity, the "madder stains," originally described as "blood-red" in the serialized version for the *Graphic* magazine, signify sexuality. At the same time Tess' perception of external objects change, becoming imbued with her experience of the scene and adopting her sensations:

The floating pollen seemed to be his notes made visible, and the dampness of the garden the weeping of the garden's sensibility. Though near nightfall, the rank-smelling weed-flowers glowed as if they would not close for intentness, and the waves of colour mixed with the waves of sound. (179)

Different means of perception merge and become confused. Auditory perception is materialized into visual perception, the notes of the harp finding their expression in the

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<sup>1</sup> Among the many recent critics who have discussed this scene are Ian Gregor, *The Great Web: The Form of Hardy's Major Fiction*, London, 1974, pp. 185-188; H. M. Daleski, "Tess of the d'Urbervilles: Mastery and Abandon," *Essays in Criticism* 30 (1980), pp. 326-345; J. R. Ebbatson, *The Evolutionary Self: Hardy, Forster, Lawrence*, Brighton and Totowa, New Jersey, 1982, pp. 33-35; Bruce Johnson, *True Correspondence: A Phenomenology of Thomas Hardy's Novels*, Tallahassee, Florida, 1983, p. 104f.; Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, London, 1983, p. 256 and George Wotton, *Thomas Hardy: Towards a Materialist Criticism*, Totowa, New Jersey, 1985, p. 91f.

pollen of the grass, both forms of perception being no longer distinguishable as separate senses, “waves of colour” commingle with “waves of sound.” Sensory perception in the form of touch and smell, “dampness,” “rank-smelling,” become tainted with the whole experience. Then, having yielded to the scene and her passion, suspended from all consciousness other than that of her sensations, Tess is awoken by Angel’s approach:

He concluded his plaintive melody [...] and she waited thinking another might be begun. But, tired of playing, he had desultorily come round the fence, and was rambling up behind her. Tess, her cheeks on fire, moved away furtively, as if hardly moving at all. (179)

Tess neither sees nor expects Angel’s advance; coming from “behind,” there is an element of surprise in her reaction which is typical of shame, as is her instinct to flee. Becoming aware of his presence, she abruptly regains consciousness of herself, whereupon her view of her situation changes. But why does Tess blush? Although this scene is one of the most discussed passages of the novel, this question is difficult to answer. The reason seems to lie in the fact that Tess suddenly becomes aware of the sensations which the music inspires in her, sensations which are too intense and intimate to share. Caught and exposed in this wild and vulnerable state, Angel’s presence is thus an invasion of her privacy causing her to feel embarrassed or ashamed. This interpretation accounts for the way in which Tess responds to Angel’s subsequent question, “What makes you draw off in that way, Tess? [...] Are you afraid?” By sidestepping the question and talking instead about the general appearance of summer in the surrounding trees, Tess draws attention away from herself in order to cover her tracks. Typically, the attempt succeeds; Angel is easily misled and begins instead to ask Tess a series of philosophical questions about life.

### **5. Sexual Shame: Tess, Alec and the Boundary of the Body**

In II. 2. b. above, the close bordering of shame upon sexuality and the body was discussed; in the relationship between Tess and Angel this relation of shame to the human body becomes more specialized. On one level Tess’ shame in regard to Alec as being both physical and sexual is obvious; it is, after all, through a physical, sexual act with him that shame is brought upon her. But it is more than this. Tess’ shame does not

simply arise out of her sexual encounter with this man, but also out of his continual physical invasion of her private sphere.<sup>1</sup> In fitting with Alec's forceful and sexually-pressing nature, the limits he fails to respect regarding Tess are bodily boundaries: physical limits. By persistently throwing himself upon her, he constantly crosses the unspoken physical boundary between them; remeeting her in the novel section, "The Convert," for example, he hunts her out and forces their intimacy on no less than six occasions.<sup>2</sup>

On the journey to Tess' new workplace at The Slopes, when she and her 'cousin' are just acquaintances, Alec's aim is to get as close to Tess as is physically possible. After various attempts, he voices his condition, "Let me put one little kiss on those holmberry lips, Tess, or even on that warmed cheek, and I'll stop – on my honour, I will!" (96). This desire to kiss Tess is a request which goes beyond the tacit physical boundary which exists between them. Despite her inexperience, Tess recognizes that Alec's demand exceeds and contradicts his position as a member of the family, or even that of a stranger, "But I – thought you would be kind to me, and protect me, as my kinsman!" Tess is thus aware of being seen and treated in the wrong way. Eventually Alec's threat to "break both our necks!" forces Tess to submit and he implants "the kiss of mastery" upon her. The unspoken boundary is crossed, creating a forced degree of intimacy between them and a sense of shame, "No sooner had he done so than she flushed with shame, took out her handkerchief, and wiped the spot on her cheek that had been touched by his lips" (96). After this the heroine tries to keep her distance from him.<sup>3</sup>

This scene contrasts with a parallel scene at the beginning of "Phase The Second" where Tess and Alec are described travelling in the opposite direction. After their sexual relationship has dragged on a few weeks, Tess resolves to leave Alec and return to Marlott on foot, only to be overtaken by her lover, offering her a ride. The surface similarity of the scenes underscores the change in Tess' behaviour. Her body having literally now been violated beyond repair by their sexual relations, it is as though Tess is

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<sup>1</sup> For the role of shame in the protection and adulteration of privacy see Carl D. Schneider, *Shame, Exposure and Privacy*, Boston, 1977, pp. 40-55.

<sup>2</sup> See *Tess*, p. 396, where Alec attempts to take her hand; *ibid.*, p. 402 where he takes her by the shoulder and attempts to embrace her; *ibid.*, pp. 409-412 where he reaches towards her waist and holds her by the shoulders again; *ibid.*, p. 431 where he digs alongside her; *ibid.*, p. 437 whereupon, seeing her face against the cottage window, "he directed his horse so close to the cottage-front that his hoofs were almost upon the narrow border for plants growing under the wall." He also attempts to take Tess' hand here again.

<sup>3</sup> *Tess*, p. 102f.

dead to shame. Obeying Alec “like a puppet,” she climbs up into the dog-cart, the physical contact of sitting next to him being no longer an issue. Their relationship is dead, they hold “unemotional conversation” and Alec’s talks “coldly.” Subsequently his kissing of Tess is no longer a battle or a cause of shame, but something she passively submits to,

She thereupon turned round and lifted her face to his, and remained like a marble term while he imprinted a kiss upon her cheek [...] Her eyes rested vaguely upon the remotest trees in the lane while the kiss was given, as though she were nearly unconscious of what he did [...] She turned her head in the same passive way, as one might turn at the request of a sketcher or a hairdresser, and he kissed the other side. (126)

This notion that shame arises from the transgression of a physical boundary is taken up again when Alec tells Tess of his religious relapse. Here Tess tries to use shame as a sanction to control Alec’s behaviour. Typical of their relationship, Alec tries to make physical contact with Tess; refusing to accept her directive that they should now behave as mere strangers, he visits her in her lodgings with the fervour of a passionate lover. In a scene marked by a lack of physical boundaries and space, Tess desperately tries to keep her distance emotionally and physically from Alec; on hearing his knock she contemplates fleeing, on his entering the cottage she moves swiftly away from him. Alec persists in declaring his love for Tess in terms of the great physical temptation she is to him, demanding:

“And why then have you tempted me? I was as firm as a man could be till I saw those eyes and that mouth again – surely there never was such a maddening mouth since Eve’s! [...] You temptress, Tess; you dear damned witch of Babylon – I could not resist you as soon as I met you again!” (402)

Whilst speaking Alec has neared Tess and placed his hand on her shoulder. Now it is to his fear of shame at what further physical contact would mean that Tess appeals. Beseeching him to go by pointing to the dire social consequences for herself and Angel if she be seen with Alec in this way – “O leave his wife before any scandal spreads that may do harm to his honest nature!” (402) – Alec, torn between flesh and spirit “like a man awakening from a luring dream,” refuses to be checked. Instead he appeals to Tess using her nickname, “One clasp, Tessy! – one! Only for old friendship –” (403), whereupon Tess replies, “I am without defence, Alec! A good man’s honour is in my keeping – think – be ashamed!” Though Alec instinctively scoffs at the nature of this plea, it nevertheless works upon him and, threatened by a personal sense of shame which would arise from the knowledge of having done something wrong, “He went out

immediately.” In accordance with Solovyof’s theory, shame keeps Alec this time from his baser instinct. It does not, however, a second time. Revisiting Tess at Flintcomb-Ash at threshing time, he ignores her desire to avoid him again by clambering up the ladder to the rick where she has retreated from him. This time, however, Tess has learnt to defend herself more effectively: Alec’s persistent hounding of her – “D’Urberville rose and came nearer, reclining sideways amid the sheaves, and resting upon his elbow” (409), “stretching his arm towards her waist” (411) – prompting a reaction from her of a more brutal kind.<sup>1</sup>

## **6. Shame at its Gravest: The Loss of Identity and the Obliteration of the Self**

Preceding shame scenes aside, Angel’s shaming of Tess on her confession of her “un-intact state” on the night of their wedding casts the net of shame about the heroine still further with more sweeping and serious implications than before. Far more than simply an attack on Victorian prudery and convention by the author, this episode renews the shame cycle in a way that combines all its classic hallmarks into a single portrait, from surprise and self-exposure, to the destruction of assumptions about and trust in the self and the world. Shame is staged at its gravest here, not simply threatening identity, but destroying it altogether. Global, infinite and permanent, it encompasses and extends beyond Tess, affecting her entire estimation of life to such an extent that it is impossible for her to recover.

### **a. Surprise, Exposure and Disillusionment**

On confessing her earlier involvement with Alec to Angel, Tess does not expect her newly-wed husband to react as he does. Like Mr. Dimmersdale in *The Scarlet Letter*, she envisages relief by unburdening herself of her secret shame. Though she realizes the risk in not telling him about her past, that it “may kill him when he knows!” (242), she hopes and reasons that he will appreciate its irrelevance, mistakenly believing that he

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<sup>1</sup> *Tess*, pp. 409-411. Tess attacks Alec with her leather glove which causes his mouth to bleed.

loves her in the same unconditional way she loves him. Subsequently Tess is not ashamed of telling her story, “murmuring the words without flinching,” with “no exculpatory phrase of any kind,” and her sense of surprise and disillusionment afterwards is great. Had she known he would reject her as he does, that he would send her away, that she would be allowed only to write to him but never to go to him (and that he should be the first to write), and that she would even be doubted by her own family; if this had been the cold reality with which she had been faced in the sunny world of Talbothays, she would have had to dismiss all idea of a life with him from the start.<sup>1</sup> Instead, it is Tess’ trust in herself, in him and in the world, not a self-destructive impulse to ruin everything;<sup>2</sup> her belief in equality, that her fault “cannot be more serious” than Angel’s, but “just the same!” that makes her tell. And yet Tess’ confidence in Angel is proven to be utterly misplaced, the very exposure of which is shameful.

As we might expect, shame is not confined to Tess but infects all her radiating relationships. Her smudged state brings shame upon her husband making him a figure of ridicule – “this kind of case [...] is rather one for satirical laughter than for tragedy [...] It would be viewed in the light of a joke by nine-tenths of the world if it were known” (303). And it brings shame upon their unborn children. This is argument enough for Angel not to consummate their marriage to save children born from their union from the stigma which would automatically be transferred to them, “think of wretches of our flesh and blood growing up under the taunt which they will gradually get to feel the force of with their expanding years. What an awakening for them! What a prospect!” (313).<sup>3</sup> Shame is thus an unending cycle which can only be broken when Tess seeks blood revenge and kills the source of her and Angel’s shame, Alec.<sup>4</sup>

Tess’ confession also brings renewed shame upon herself, not only on the grounds of her unspotted state, but on account of her delay in telling, and her misconception that,

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<sup>1</sup> This foreknowledge must, of course, be withheld from Tess; it is a requirement of the tragedy.

<sup>2</sup> Thurley, p. 177; Giordano, p. 171, as discussed on p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> A similar notion occurs in *The Scarlet Letter* where Pearl is suspected of having inherited her mother’s sexual crime, and is watched anxiously by Hester for signs of this, *The Scarlet Letter*, pp. 75, 84 and 140.

<sup>4</sup> Blood revenge, where the victim’s close family or friends are bound to take matters into their own hands and avenge his death by killing the man responsible without any involvement of the state, continued to be practised in Ancient Greece until well into the fifth century BC. See Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: Seelencult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen*, Darmstadt, 1961, pp. 260-266. Important here is the fact that the avenger was considered ‘innocent’ by the state and left unpunished: an interesting notion when applied to Tess’ case.

if Angel wanted, he could get rid of her by putting an end to their marriage. On learning this is not the case “a quick shame mixed with the misery” (308) flashes across her face. It drives her to contemplate and even contrive taking her own life “on account of my shame,” by which she hopes to save her husband’s face,<sup>1</sup> in the same manner that Euripides’ Phaedra considers suicide the single honourable means of escape from the shame she will bring upon her husband when he discovers her love for his son, Hippolytus. And it makes Tess hide her shame. Just as the greater the expectation, the more acute the shame, the greater the discrepancy between the image Tess had of herself and the image Angel has of her, the more she has to ‘put on a brave face.’ Tess does this by presenting a picture of normality, a “united front,” to both sets of families and the outside world.<sup>2</sup> Her shame is thus, like guilt, isolating, but unlike guilt, alienating and incommunicable. To tell her parents the truth, “To let her parents know that she was a deserted wife, dependent [...] on her own hands for a living, after the éclat of a marriage which was to nullify the collapse of the first attempt” (348) is inconceivable to her; she must be saved the additional shame this would cause at all costs. It is for this reason that Tess does not return to Talbothays after separating from Angel, and puts off seeking financial help from Angel’s parents until she has to.

### **b. Mistaken Identities and Angel as Audience**

Tess’ surprise and disillusionment is caused by her misjudgement of Angel, his revelation to be other than she supposed him to be. Similarly Tess’ confession astounds Angel because he, too, has grossly misjudged her. Great discrepancies exist between how characters *seem* to one another and *are*, owing to their individual limitations and prejudices. This notion is reflected in the moral code of both *Tess* and *Jude* in that those found guilty by society only *seem* to be, being, according to the narrator / author’s code, innocent.

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<sup>1</sup> *Tess*, p. 303. See also *ibid.*, p. 309 where Tess explains that she planned such an act “entirely on your account – to set you free without the scandal of the divorce that I thought you would have to get. I should never have dreamt of doing it on mine.”

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312f., where Angel talks of their need to stay together at first to avoid a “scandal” and where Tess considers leaving Angel as being “the means of hampering and humiliating him yet more if it should become known.”



Despite the light and clarity which his surname infers, Clare fails to see Tess for who she really is, and has in fact been in love with an image of her and not her real person. On learning of her past, he realizes “the woman I have been loving is not you,” but “Another woman in your shape” (299). In keeping with his spiritual and finer nature, being “more spiritual than animal” (257), and judging by appearances only, Angel imagines Tess, from the very first moment he becomes conscious of her presence, to be “a fresh and virginal daughter of Nature,” though, as Marjorie Garson comments, “There are no virgins in nature.”<sup>1</sup> In the semi-light of dawn Tess loses her human shape in Angel’s eyes and appears to him as a spirit, with the stature and nature of a superior being from another world,

At this dim inceptive stage of the day Tess seemed to Clare to exhibit a largeness both of disposition and physique, an almost regnant power [...] Whilst all the landscape was in neutral shade his companion’s face, which was the focus of his eyes, rising above the mist stratum, seemed to have a sort of phosphorescence upon it. She looked ghostly, as if she were merely a soul at large. (187)

Angel’s perception of Tess is far removed from reality, his love “doubtless ethereal to a fault, imaginative to impracticability” (315). Blinded by love and his own prejudice, his view of her removes her humanness and wraps her in incorporeal and heavenly terms. She is elevated in his eyes to a Greek goddess, “She was no longer the milkmaid, but a visionary essence of woman – a whole sex condensed into one form. He called her Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names” (187).<sup>2</sup> “Call me Tess” is how his lover responds.

Having judged Tess by what she seems to be and discovered what she is, Angel’s powers of perception fail him again. For he is unable to see beyond this label to the ‘real’ person. Typical of the subjectivity of the perceptive eye which tends to distort what it sees or sees fragments rather than wholes, on being faced with one aspect of what she is, he loses sight of her whole aspect, “In considering what Tess was not, he overlooked what she was, and forgot that the defective can be more than the entire” (338). And when, finally, Angel admits to his mistake in their penultimate encounter

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<sup>1</sup> Garson, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> On their wedding day, Tess is also described as, “a sort of celestial person, who owed her being to poetry – one of those classical divinities Clare was accustomed to talking to her about when they took their walks together,” *Tess*, p. 279.

with words which mark the very problem of perception – “I did not *see* you as you were!” (466; my italics) – ironically Tess has now become the person Angel mistakenly took her for.

Tess’ view of Angel is equally as misconceived. Blinded by her adoration of him, she bestows divine powers upon him, “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. [...] He would sometimes catch her large, worshipful eyes [...] looking at him from their depths, as if she saw something immortal before her” (257). Such is her devotion that, instead of to God, it is to him that she prays,<sup>1</sup> failing to recognize his human fallibility. As the narrator takes care to tell us, Angel, “the breath and life of Tess’ being” (260), is in fact “far from all that she thought him in this respect; absurdly far” (257).

And yet although this is revealed to her by Angel’s response to her confession, Tess is unable to accept it. It is this that makes this shame ordeal different from all the others. Shame does not simply spell disillusionment and the exposure of mistaken views and ideals; Tess is not simply shamed before Angel for being “maiden no more” a second time. For although her crime has not changed, her audience has. More to her than husband or fellow human being, “an intelligence rather than [...] a man” (181), “godlike in her eyes” (246), whereas Tess was able to challenge Marlott’s judgement of her, this time she cannot. Tess cannot dismiss the sentence Angel passes because he is her moral master, “if she could once rise high enough to despise opinion. But that she could not do so long as it was held by Clare” (354). Dismissing Angel’s judgement would mean rejecting him as a person, and since Tess defines herself through her husband and lives only for him, this is inconceivable. It is preferable to take on his condemnation of her as guilty than to admit he might have failed her; as with Clym, guilt is a helpful delusion when the truth is too painful to bear. As a result, unable to retain her own self-image, irreconcilable with Angel’s condemnation of her, Tess’ estimation of him remains intact at the cost of her own. It is partly in order to preserve this image of Angel that Tess kills Alec. Furthermore, fear of Angel’s view of her remains right up to the novel’s end,<sup>2</sup> as

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<sup>1</sup> *Tess*, p. 281.

<sup>2</sup> Even after having admitted his mistake, when they are on the run together, Tess fears “that what you think of me now may not last,” proclaiming, “I would rather be dead and buried when the time comes for you to despise me,” *ibid.*, p. 481. Because of this it is with a sense of relief that she meets her arrest at Stonehenge: “I have had enough; and now I shall not live for you to despise me!” *ibid.*, p. 487.

does the intactness of Angel's image as being "all that was perfection, personally and mentally" (475). But in order to secure this, Tess must pay the price with her own identity.

### **c. The Degeneration from a Personality to a Nobody**

Like her earlier experience of guilt, Tess' shame causes a change in her estimation of herself and her surroundings. But whereas guilt extends an identity, shame takes it away. Rather than leading to the temporary adoption of a new role or persona which can be lifted and absolved at some point, however false it may be, it leads to the permanent forfeiture of identity which is infinitely more painful. In Angel's shaming of Tess her positive expectation and confident commitment to this world and her "sublime trustfulness" in Angel not only fails to be met, but is shamefully exposed as being totally inappropriate. As a result the basic trust that Tess has in the way of life of her social group and her place within it, in the personal and physical worlds that surround her, both of which are vital to her sense of who she is, is jeopardized.<sup>1</sup> When Angel shames Tess for the information she has withheld, it almost kills her. Later it is this sense of mortification that brings about her death, first by physically incapacitating her and then by obliterating her completely,

He looked upon her as a species of impostor; a guilty woman in the guise of an innocent one. Terror was upon her white face as she saw it; her cheek was flaccid, and her mouth had almost the aspect of round little hole. The horrible sense of his view of her so deadened her that she staggered. (299)

Not only is Tess changed by her realization of Angel's view of her, but her view of her surroundings are changed, too. No longer a happy, sympathetic place, it is now indifferent and alien to her, as her view of the room in which they sit directly after her confession demonstrates, "The fire in the grate looked impish – demoniacally funny, as if it did not care in the least about her strait. The fender grinned idly, as if it too did not care. [...] All material objects around announced their irresponsibility with terrible iteration" (297). Similarly the subsequent world at Flintcomb-Ash is also alien to Tess,

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<sup>1</sup> For the discussion of the link between shame and identity loss in the field of psychology, see Lynd (1958), pp. 43-49, as discussed on pp. 39-42.

and one of persecution and toil, the farm's very name not only foreshadowing the monotonous and arduous work Marion and Tess will do combing the bleak and barren landscape for the feeble swedes, but also death's burnt remains.

Up to this point, and as we have already seen, a chief issue of the novel has been Tess' quest for identity. Now, shamed by Angel, it ceases to be a concern. The latter's vision of Tess as an impostor together with his preference for the idealistic abstraction of the "un-intact" state over her person – "she you love is not my real self, but one in my image; the one I might have been!" (281) – begins the process of her depersonalization.<sup>1</sup> No longer minutely described as to the colour of her lips or eyes, Tess is now simply an anonymous "lonely woman with a basket and a bundle in her portage" (346). "Dead! Dead! Dead!" in her husband's eyes and living only for him,<sup>2</sup> all her subsequent actions work against and undo her previously sought identity. Instead of continuing to establish herself and her position in the world with the knowledge and skills she has acquired thus far, betrayed and proven utterly wrong in her faith and conviction, Tess slips down the evolutionary ladder to a lower rung of creation. Setting out for Flintcomb-Ash, she disengages herself from any consciousness of who she is, and, like an animal, rejects the higher human concern for happiness by being bent upon mere survival:

With the shortening of the days all hope of obtaining her husband's forgiveness began to leave her; and there was something of the habitude of the wild animal in the unreflecting instinct with which she rambled on – disconnecting herself by littles from her eventful past at every step, obliterating her identity. (349)

Feeling, shortly afterwards, "hunted" like a wild animal by the man who recognizes her on the road to Flintcomb-Ash, Tess takes refuge in a corpse. Although she is able to distinguish between the fate of the pheasants suffering and her own, "I be not mangled, and I be not bleeding, and I have two hands to feed and clothe me" (353), she is unable to assert herself as a human being. Not wanting anyone to know where or who she is, she discards her married name, and mutilates her good looks which were originally the source of her distinctiveness, but which are now worthless to her.<sup>3</sup> Arriving at

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<sup>1</sup> Alec depersonalizes Tess, too, reducing her explanation of her personal encounter with him to a standard statement of hypocrisy which "every woman" makes, *Tess*, p. 125. His view of her as the "crumby girl" she appeared at first sight also endures to the last.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 417. The sleepwalking incident also shows that, by insisting on their separation, Angel is acting upon reason rather than feeling, evidently still harbouring a strong affection for Tess.

<sup>3</sup> *Tess*, pp. 354, 378 and 417.

Flintcomb-Ash, the impersonality of the sky and land engulf her. The swede field is “a complexion without features, as if a face, from chin to brow, should be only an expanse of skin,” the sky, “a white vacuity of countenance with the lineament gone” (360), Tess and Marian reduced to that smallest and most insignificant vermin of the insect world, “crawling over the surface [...] like flies.”

Tess never regains her identity. In the glittering world of Sandbourne she becomes dissociated from her own body, existing only as a soul in a human frame, which, reminiscent of *Hamlet's* Ophelia, is “like a corpse upon the current,” allowed “to drift in a direction dissociated from its living will” (467). Sinking into the sidelines, the centrality she has enjoyed in the novel up to now is handed to Angel; at Alec’s murder she is merely a voice that speaks through a closed door that the landlady, Mrs. Brooks, overhears. At Stonehenge her fatal degeneration from human to animal is concluded. From a woman of “bright intelligence” to one accustomed to associating with “natural phenomena” (269),<sup>1</sup> Tess has declined to some lower creature, her breathing before her arrest in her final appearance being more animal-like than human, “quick and small, like that of a lesser creature than a woman” (487). All that is left to do is to obliterate her completely. Replaced by Liza-Lu in the last chapter,<sup>2</sup> she is no more than a single piece of cloth; the red ribbon which distinguished her at the beginning at the local Cerealia being poignantly replaced by the fluttering of a formal black flag on the novel’s last page.

## 7. Sympathy and Distance: Mitigating Tess’ Guilt

Although the question of guilt in regard to individual blame and responsibility is not central to *The Return* and the narrator’s sympathy for each character infinitely less defined than in *Tess*, if we were to evaluate Eustacia’s dealings with shame on a sympathy scale, we would have to conclude that they impair her character. Rooted in

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<sup>1</sup> This degeneration begins on the setting of Tess and Angel’s wedding date.

<sup>2</sup> The significance of Tess’ request to Angel that he marry Liza-Lu is problematic. Shires, p. 158, writes that Hardy’s creation of a “mini-Tess” for Angel is “designed to outrage”; J. Hillis Miller, *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1970, p. 154f., understands Liza-Lu as the ultimate expression of repetition in the way that, by Angel marrying her, the cycle which is hoped to have ended with Tess’ death is renewed. For further interpretations see Gregor, p. 201f. and Boumelha, p. 125f.

pride and an exaggerated sense of social superiority, they withdraw rather than bestow sympathy upon her. The opposite is true for Tess. Challenging the Victorian moral of the fallen woman by attempting to convince of Tess' innocence is no easy task: Hardy must make use of every possible means to increase the degree of his reader's involvement in her plight. All the aspects of shame and its associations admirable to a Victorian reader are employed in her characterization, together with guilt, to create maximum sympathy for her. At the same time those two characters responsible for Tess' decline, Alec and Angel, are shown wanting regret, guilt and remorse in comparison, which transfers any sympathy for them back to its rightful place with Tess, leaving no doubt as to where our loyalties should lie.

#### **a. Modesty in the face of Immodesty**

By using shame within this capacity of creating sympathy, its signal in terms of the blush takes on a special significance. The persistency of critics to dwell upon Tess' "sensitivity" could lead us to understand the frequency with which she blushes as simply one of her character traits, as a sign of her shyness. It would not be wrong to draw such a conclusion, for example, from a typical incident at Talbothays. After describing her out-of-body experience, "The general attention being drawn to her, including that of the dairyman's pupil, Tess flushed, and remarking evasively that it was only a fancy, resumed her breakfast" (176). This illustrates a connection between Tess' blushing and a desire not to be the centre of attention, and would suggest that the blush is used to demonstrate her shyness.

The function of the blush in regard to Tess, however, is more complex. Tess' blushing is not simply about showing her to be shy, it is essential to the novel's underlying purpose of presenting her as a pure woman.<sup>1</sup> The exactness with which the physiological process of blushing is described and the frequency with which the protagonist blushes throughout the novel not only shows her awareness of the

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Goode, p. 137, notes that the practice of a husband marrying his deceased wife's sister is also one of the objects of Arnold's attack on liberalism in *Culture and Anarchy* and, at the time of the novel, was illegal.

<sup>1</sup> For an opposing reading of the subtitle, "A Pure Woman Faithfully Represented," see Widdowson, p. 62, where he argues that the subtitle should be understood in its full irony which does not concern the

shamefulness of her situation, but also, through the wider associations of the blush, emphasizes her modesty and sexual virtue, thus adding force to the credibility of her purity. Consciousness of shame, i.e. the fact that, although Tess has done something shameful in society's eyes, she is not *shameless*, together with modesty, far more than shyness, are what lend the blush its purport, and contribute to the novel's wider concern.

This need to defend Tess' respectability in the face of events and in the eye of the reader is thus one reason for the prevalence of blushing in the narrative, it being particularly critical at points when Tess' moral standing is in danger of appearing dubious or is directly challenged. Such a point occurs when the product of Tess' sinful liaison with Alec is introduced. This chapter telling of the baby, Tess' baptism of it and its death, is not found in the *Graphic* version of *Tess*. The dictates of Mrs. Grundy forced Hardy to rewrite the scenes at Chaseborough and in The Chase and to have Tess tell in chapter XII instead how she was tricked into a false marriage ceremony with Alec. In this way the fact that Tess enters into sexual relations with Alec is limited to pure implication to the perceptive reader and is not made into an undeniable, palpable fact in the shape of a child, as it is in the 1912 Edition. One of the consequences of this subsequent alteration is that, whilst it renders the narrative psychologically more valid, it has the negative effect of putting the sympathy created for Tess at risk. By removing all thoughts of marriage from the equation – "Get Alec d'Urberville in the mind to marry her! He marry *her*!" (130) – the degree of Tess' moral responsibility is increased; by bringing the existence of a child into the equation, Tess' crime is more fully exposed. It follows that the application of the blush in its function as presenting shame and modesty is of particular value here. In the chapter in question it is introduced only after the sympathy elicited for Tess has been carefully construed. In keeping with the Victorian work ethic where work was "the second most important word to 'God,'"<sup>1</sup> Tess is introduced toiling with "clock-like monotony" in the Marlott fields at harvest time, far longer than her fellow workers. Not only this, but she attempts to be as inconspicuous as possible: she shields her face with her bonnet and sits "her face turned somewhat away from her companions," failing to join in with their animated conversation. At the same time Tess reveals an appropriate maternal instinct for her

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question of Tess' purity, but rather whether there is such a thing as a 'pure woman,' and if so, whether it is within a novelist's power to 'faithfully present' her.

<sup>1</sup> Houghton, p. 242.

child, being, upon the expected hour of his arrival, unable to concentrate as well. The appearance of the baby is enough to ensure that “the face of Tess flushed slightly,” which not only demonstrates the shamefulness of her situation, but also Tess’ recognition of this. It is also reminiscent of the scene in *The Scarlet Letter* where, exposed to public view with her baby of shame, Hester is also described with a “burning blush.”<sup>1</sup> When Tess next begins to feed the baby the intensity of her blush deepens,

Tess, with a curiously stealthy yet courageous movement, and with a still rising colour, unfastened her frock and began suckling the child. (140)

Tess’ self-consciousness in feeding the child openly in front of her work mates, shown by her “stealthy but courageous movement” and her blush, is her saving grace. The modesty with which she administers to the child counteracts the shameful nature of the existence of “Sorrow the Undesired [...] that bastard gift of shameless Nature.” Thus Tess’ propensity to blush maintains her moral standing in spite of the overwhelming impropriety of her situation.

A similar case is found in the preceding chapter on Tess’ memorable encounter with the painter of religious texts on her way back to Marlott. Although the protagonist vigorously defies the seventh commandment that he has written on the wall – “Pooh – I don’t believe God said such things!” (129) – it is only after the all-important measure of shame has been apportioned to her and after her “sudden flush” has died down that she defies convention in this way. Thus, again, at a crucial point in Tess’ portrayal describing the very first public and moral evaluation of her sojourn with Alec, she is shown not wanting in shame. As a result, Tess’ guilt is reduced by her shame: the experience of shame helps Hardy’s double purpose in creating a guilty woman who is inherently innocent by allowing Tess to break the moral code, but at the same time, counteracting charges of immorality by emphasizing her honour and modesty.

Later, during Angel’s courtship, Tess continues to display these necessary mitigating signs. The frequency of her blushing, conveying a mixture of female modesty and passivity, and self- and sexual consciousness, mark the course of their relationship. Such is Tess’ modesty that she even has difficulty displaying and acknowledging her

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<sup>1</sup> *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 45. Although the only Hawthorne work Hardy is known to have read is *The House of the Seven Gables*, this scene and another in *Jude*, discussed on p. 208f., recall passages from Hawthorne’s masterpiece. This would suggest, in fitting with Charles Swann’s suspicion in “A Hardy Debt to Hawthorne,” *Notes and Queries* 6 (1992), p. 188f., that Hardy was in fact familiar with *The Scarlet Letter*.



relationship with Angel in public. When seen with his arm around her waist by workmen in the fields about Talbothays she is uncomfortable and avoids meeting their gaze with “the look of a wary animal” (259). And discovered sitting at her lover’s side by some members of the dairy, “Tess sprang like an elastic ball from his side to her feet, while her face flushed and her eyes shone in the firelight” (262). Characterized, thanks to the blush, by a larger than average dosage of female modesty, she is thus secured sympathy in the Victorian reader’s heart.<sup>1</sup>

### **b. Nature, Fate and Pathos**

Like shame, Tess’ expression of guilt is part of the novel’s machinery to diminish her moral responsibility and preserve her good standing in the eye of the reader. The protagonist’s consideration of the ethicalness of her actions underlines her virtue; her question as to encouraging Angel’s affections when she hears of the other milkmaids’ interest in him, “But the grave question was, ought she do this?” (194), shows her seriously considering its moral consequences. If Tess did not deliberate upon her actions in the way that she does – “She was Angel Clare, indeed, but had she any moral right to the name? (281); “She had deserved worse – yet she was the chosen one. It was wicked of her to take all without paying” (290) – she would be more deserving of the end she receives.<sup>2</sup> Undeserved guilt simply extends this effect by replacing sympathy with pathos. Far from being a self-destructive trait, Tess’ exaggerated guilt at Prince’s death for example, “’Tis all my doing – all mine!” (72) is simply a means to create pity for the heroine. It makes painfully clear how, being “mentally older” than her mother and father, Tess is the mainstay of the whole family. It is for this reason and her parent’s incompetence that Tess ends up with a broken carriage and a dead horse, her falling asleep bringing home the fact that this burden is too heavy for such young shoulders.

Apart from providing Tess with a guilty conscience, Hardy also employs nature to engage the reader’s sympathy for his heroine. In case the presentation of Alec’s sexual

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<sup>1</sup> This use of the blush to create sympathy is not confined to Tess; for its discussion in relation to other female characters see pp. 243f. and 248-250.

<sup>2</sup> This runs contrary to Mary Childer’s argument in “Thomas Hardy, The Man Who ‘Liked’ Women,” *Criticism*, 23.4 (1981), p. 329. She takes Tess’ deliberation as a sign of indecision and makes Hardy’s focus typical of his presentation of the inconstancy of women and their incapability of making up their minds. Angel’s equal indecisiveness, Childer argues, remains conveniently forgotten.

triumph over Tess in no other terms than his having taken advantage of her, combined with the sympathy invoked for Tess by her naivety and helplessness, is not enough to convince the reader of her innocence in the unhappy affair,<sup>1</sup> the fact that Tess is not to blame is openly declared through an explicit evaluation of social and natural law. Comparison between society and Nature mitigates Tess' crime. By emphasizing the natural aspect of an event, the event itself is conferred with an inherent innocence which is transferred in turn to the character involved. This can be seen in the narrator's description of the milkmaids' affection for Angel. Writing of the "full recognition of the futility of their infatuation, from a social point of view" and "its lack of everything to justify its existence in the eye of civilization (while lacking nothing in the eye of nature)" (205), the fact that their feelings are only natural removes their blame. For it is only according to etiquette that they are wrong, etiquette reproving marrying out of one's class, such social climbing being only laudable in the eyes of he who is advancing. Similarly Tess' "gravitation" towards Angel is "the natural result" of their meeting. Fight against it as she may, she cannot deny what nature has set in motion, "All the while they were converging, under an irresistible law, as surely as two streams in one vale" (185).<sup>2</sup> Thus the source of their love is not only natural, but is fostered and encouraged by Nature herself. The landscape at Talbothays during their stay actively encourages the lovers' passion and encroaches upon them in such a way that they cannot resist, "Amid the oozing fatness and warm ferments of the Var Vale, at a season when the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fertilization, it was impossible that the most fanciful love should not grow more passionate" (207). It is thus ultimately with irony that we read Tess described as "she who knew herself to be more

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<sup>1</sup> Tess is tricked and pressurized into submitting to Alec's sexual advances; shortly before this scene she is blackmailed into increasing intimacy with him by his insinuation that she is ungrateful for the help he has given her family – it is upon this basis that Tess submits to Alec. This is substantiated by the narrator's own comment, "She had dreaded him, winced before him, succumbed to adroit advantages he took of her helplessness; then, temporarily blinded by his ardent manners, had been stirred to confused surrender for awhile," *Tess*, p. 130. This point is also confirmed on *ibid.*, pp. 125 and 140. In spite of this, and because of its deliberate obscurity, the scene of Tess' undoing remains controversial. For different readings of it see John T. Laird, *The Shaping of Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Oxford, 1975, p. 72; Mary Jacobus, "The Difference of View," in *Women Writing and Writing about Women*, ed. Mary Jacobus, London and Sydney, 1979, p. 13f.; J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1982, pp. 116-146.

<sup>2</sup> See also *Tess*, p. 241.

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” (206).<sup>1</sup>

With the question of Tess’ guilt in becoming a fallen woman now successfully disposed of, the next episode to cast doubt on her blamelessness looms: her failure to inform Angel of her past before their wedding. This mistake is of a different league than the one before and, for fear of losing credibility, Hardy cannot remove all sense of responsibility from Tess’ part. Instead he achieves a delicate blend of innocence and blame by making use of accident, fate and human fallibility. Pathos and the idealization and praise of Tess’ love help to minimize her guilt, eclipsing any wrong she might be accused of, as does the figure of Angel. With the form his proposal takes and his attitude towards her, Angel reduces Tess’ guilt by reaping it himself, becoming fully responsible after their marriage for the way events turn out.

Angel presses Tess into accepting him, refusing to take no for an answer, until, weakened and with a sense that she is dealing with forces greater and more powerful than herself, she finally submits.<sup>2</sup> Her primary refusal to the first of his nine overtures is done in such a way as to create maximum sympathy for her. The author divides the focus of narration between Tess’ essential virtue and the despair and pain of her situation in denying him. Described as an “honourable woman” (233), her voice “sweet and honest,” she is overcome with a sense of hopelessness. Her face “bowed [...] in her grief,” her decision “seemed to break Tess’ very heart”: she is so distressed that she no longer has the steadiness of heart and mind to continue her work. Her failure to tell Angel directly of her “Bygone Trouble” and her refuge in some other pretext is couched as neither a conscious nor deliberate decision to falsify, but as the unavoidable consequence of his questioning. “Driven to subterfuge,” the passive construction posits her a helpless subject, forced into trickery through no choice of her own. Her second failure to tell him – ““And is that all the trouble, dear Tess?” ‘Yes,’ she answered faintly” (253) – is also underplayed; it passes without immediate comment and is later justified by fear of censure from her lover and an instinctive sense of self-preservation.<sup>3</sup> “[T]he woman’s instinct to hide” (261) is the motive behind her third omission.

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<sup>1</sup> This passage also reveals one of the functions which the three “homelier” milkmaids fulfil, namely to show up Tess’ moral “smudge” by their contrasting purity.

<sup>2</sup> See *Tess*, pp. 232, 241 and 248.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

By concentrating upon Tess' suffering, we are taken beyond the bounds of sympathy to pity. Reading about her conscience's conflict, "The struggle was so fearful; her own heart was so strongly on the side of his – two ardent hearts against one poor little conscience" (238), the unequal odds stacked against her, 'two against one,' and the pathos-laden adjectives, "poor little," increase her pitiableness. Two further scenes, each of which are strategically placed at the close of a chapter, heighten the effect. Chapter XXVIII ends with Tess' raw, hysterical outburst, "I shall give way – I shall say yes – I shall let myself marry him – I cannot help it! [...] Yet it is wrong to him and may kill him when he knows! O my heart - O - O - O!" (242). And chapter XXXI with the more controlled but deadlier pain of "salt, stinging tears" which silently saturate Tess' pillow as she resolves to tell Angel the truth, regardless of the risk of rejection.

Two further factors prevent this resolution, however. The first is the propitious arrival of her mother's letter bidding Tess to hold her tongue. Though naively ignorant of the deeper issues which her daughter's question touches upon, the influence of Joan over Tess as "the one person in the world who had any shadow of right to control her action" (257) renders her advice an important part of Tess' silence. The second is Angel's failure to take Tess' earnest attempts to confess seriously. Instead he carelessly dismisses her avowal to tell him of her experiences, history and failings in a patronizing tone, "Your experiences, dear; yes, certainly, any number" (240); "This precious history then. Yes, I was born at so and so, Anno Domini – " (252); "No, no – we can't have faults talked of – you must be deemed perfect today at least, my Sweet!" (278). This failing of Angel, together with his pressurizing of Tess into accepting him marks the beginning of his responsibility in the affair.

The total effect of these descriptions thus far is to demonstrate that when Tess finally does agree to Angel's marriage proposal, without having first relieved herself of her shameful secret, it is not without a noble fight. Even the manner of her verbal acceptance is couched as though she is agreeing more for her lover's sake than for her own:

"If it is sure to make you happy to have me as your wife, and you feel that you do wish to marry me *very, very* much –"

"I do dearest, of course!"

“I mean, that it is only your wanting me very much, and being hardly able to keep alive without me, whatever my offences, that would make me feel I ought to say I will.” (254)<sup>1</sup>

The Angel-orientated sentences, “make you happy,” “your wanting me” and “hardly able to keep alive without me” convey the sense that Tess is placing her lover’s demands before her own, the word “ought” being as though she is under some moral obligation. If this does not suffice to sanction Tess’ agreement, its transformation from a wilful, man-made decision into the result of an omnipotent, universal force will:

She had consented. She might have well have agreed at first. The ‘appetite for joy’ which pervades all creation, that tremendous force which sways humanity to its purpose, as the tide sways the helpless weed, was not to be controlled by vague lucubrations over the social rubric. (255)

The “appetite for joy,” greater than her and more powerful than any laborious deliberations about convention mean that, even if she had wanted, Tess could not have refused. Within the wider framework of mankind Tess is merely an ineffectual stem fighting in vain against the stronger currents of life. This helplessness marks the rest of Tess’ behaviour. The wedding date having been set, a sense of fate causes her to drift into permanent passivity, typical of a shame character,

Tess was now carried along upon the wings of the hours, without the sense of a will [...] Her naturally bright intelligence had begun the fatalistic convictions common to field-folk and those who associate more extensively with natural phenomena than with their fellow-creatures; and she accordingly drifted into that passive responsiveness. (269)

Later it is also Fate’s (un)helping hand that ensures Angel does not receive Tess’ written confession by having it land under the carpet instead of the door where it remains unread. Forces are at work here which are beyond the protagonist’s control.<sup>2</sup>

At the wedding, the climax of Tess’ adultery from a moral point of view, again attention is diverted from her wrongdoing.<sup>3</sup> A description of the rare and wonderful love Tess nurtures for her husband, heightened by his obliviousness, takes the place of a

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<sup>1</sup> Tess’ request for unconditional love, “whatever my offences” – added in the 1912 Wessex Edition – is ironic since it is precisely this unreserved acceptance of her that Angel is incapable of reciprocating.

<sup>2</sup> Further examples of fate’s workings are on *Tess*, pp. 280 and 282. For the wider role of fate in Hardy’s novel writing and poetry see the *Oxford Reader’s Companion to Hardy*, ed. Norman Page, Oxford, 2000, hereafter abbreviated as ORCH, s.v. *fate*.

<sup>3</sup> This attempt to brush over parts of Tess’ life which could be seen to reflect negatively upon her can also explain the lack of detail in other areas of the novel, such as at Tess’ confession to Angel or her decision to become Alec’s mistress.

description of the ceremony, “Clare knew that she loved him – every curve of her form showed that – but he did not know at that time the full depth of her devotion, its single-mindedness, its meekness; what long-suffering it guaranteed, what honesty, what endurance, what good faith” (279). Although Tess’ unique devotion to Angel does not make her failure to tell him about her past inexcusable, it does make it understandable. And although we are aware of the embarrassment of Angel’s position after her confession – “The cruelty of fooled honesty is often great after enlightenment, and it was great in Clare now” (301) – the sympathy of the scenes at the Wellbridge farmhouse is also undoubtedly reserved for Tess. Again the gravity of her mistake in not telling him is counteracted by her rare love for him. Whereas a more calculating woman may have won Angel round, Tess is prevented from doing so by her honest and enduring devotion which is elevated to a spiritual plane through her comparison to Charity in the Corinthians.<sup>1</sup> As a result the freshly married couple agree to go their separate ways, which accelerates Tess’ decline.

One final episode remains in which Tess’ innocence is tested: her killing of Alec at the novel’s end. After two failed convictions Tess is finally made to act in a way that significantly reduces room for mitigation and manoeuvre, murder being a universally recognized crime. On one level the plot demands this murder: Tess’ shame would not be authentic if it could be absolved; she must kill Alec and be hung for doing so because she has no other future. And yet although the conviction succeeds on a plot level, in that Tess gets the punishment she is liable to under the law and is hung for her crime, again it fails in the eye of the reader. In accordance with the sympathy structures established so far and the height to which Tess has suffered by this stage, Alec is deserving of the end he receives, and Tess’ act is understandable. Stabbing Alec amid his painful taunts, she has, after all, only provided the natural answer to Angel’s original question, “How can we live together while that man lives?” (313). Tess kills Alec primarily out of love for Angel – “I owed it to you, and to myself, Angel” (474) – killing at the same time any moral sense she has in that she totally fails to feel any guilt for this.<sup>2</sup> Later it is particularly ironic that, of all the characters in *The Return*, *Tess* and *Jude*, although Tess is the most ‘guilty’ in terms of mortal sin, her guilt is not mentioned in the last three

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<sup>1</sup> *Tess*, p. 312. See also *ibid.*, p. 324, where Tess’ simplicity and long-suffering attitude again facilitates Angel’s unjust treatment of her.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 475. Patricia Ingham also notes this point in *Thomas Hardy*, New York, 1989, p. 88.

chapters of the novel, guilt in terms of moral responsibility clearly failing to be one of Hardy's chief concerns.

### **c. The Miscreants Angel and Alec**

Foreshadowed by his aggressive offensiveness and failure to listen to Tess prior to their marriage, Angel's guilt in the novel comes to the fore after her confession. So that we are in no doubt about this, he is explicitly described as being mistaken in his judgement of her:

No prophet had told him, and he was not prophet enough to tell himself, that essentially this young wife of his was as deserving of the praise of King Lemul as any other woman endowed with the same dislike of evil, her moral value having to be reckoned not by achievement but by tendency. [...] In considering what Tess was not, he overlooked what she was, and forgot that the defective can be more than the entire. (338)

By focusing on a single detail of Tess' life to the neglect of her whole person and disposition, Angel fails to recognize Tess' true identity. Thus it is he who must take the blame for their separation and the breakdown of their marriage. With this admission blame is not only further removed from Tess for her smudged state, but shifted to Angel. Sympathy for her herewith increases, accentuated by the fact that Angel fails to recognize his responsibility until it is too late. Each character's likeableness is thus dependent upon the other: the less admirable Angel's treatment of Tess is, the more sympathy she obtains.

The suffering Tess endures at Flintcomb-Ash after her last shred of hope of receiving help from her in-laws is destroyed, wins pity for her and antipathy for Angel, distancing the reader from him. The double torture that Tess bears in this part of the narration, emotionally hounded by Alec and physically abused by Farmer Groby, presented in alternating scenes within the space of a single day and culminating in the desperate letter Tess writes her husband that night,<sup>1</sup> takes her suffering to greater heights than Clare's. That even now she still protects him and accepts his conviction of her, "The punishment you have measured out to me is deserved – I do know that – well deserved – and you are right and just to be angry with me" (417), shows the painful depth of her

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<sup>1</sup> *Tess*, pp. 404-418.

devotion. It is not until the eve of her family's eviction, and following Alec's visit, not until the threat of the latter's offer of 'help' looms dangerously close, that Tess finally breaks and recognizes Clare's injustice.<sup>1</sup> Her delay in giving him the blame he well deserves increases it.

As shown above, the more Tess suffers at Clare's hands, the crueller he becomes; the more she protests his innocence,<sup>2</sup> the guiltier he appears; the more she believes in his generous character, the less generous he seems. Even when Tess' illusion of her husband is destroyed and she finally admits he has done wrong, her condemnation of him is short-lived. When Angel does return, the blame for what has happened quickly passes to Alec, and it is he who is made responsible for Angel's failure: "He has come between us and ruined us, and now he can never do it anymore" (474). Clare is absolved of blame as though Tess has created her own moral system to accommodate his faults so that they may never be fully exposed and she may never have to face her disillusionment concerning him.

Alongside the suffering and devotion of his wife, then, Angel's discomfort pales into insignificance. Strategically placed in chapter XLIX, circumscribed by chapters dealing with Tess' momentous physical and emotional hardship, her exhaustion upon the threshing machine and the news of her parents' ailing, Angel's troubles are chiefly of an intellectual type. His share of hardships in Brazil is like every explorer's on finding his bearings in a new and foreign terrain. Speedily dealt with in the space of three and a half pages,<sup>3</sup> hardly any attention is given to the "severe illness" which befalls Clare on his arrival. His change of heart is nothing extraordinary but simply a reversal of the opinion he had of Tess before:

Who was the moral man? Still more pertinently, who was the moral woman? The beauty or ugliness of a character lay not only in its achievements, but in its aims and impulses; its true history lay, not only among things done, but among things willed. (421)

Though Angel experiences a sense of shame, it is not connected with remorse for the pain he has inflicted upon her, but involves instead the blow to his self-image on discovering that he is not as open-minded and intellectually liberated as he thought he

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<sup>1</sup> *Tess*, p. 440.

<sup>2</sup> Shown for example when she corrects Marian's insinuation that her husband is to blame for her sadness, *ibid.*, p. 358. Also upon Izzy's criticism of him, *ibid.*, p. 368, and upon Alec's, *ibid.*, pp. 396, 402 and 411.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 420-423.



was. The “large-minded” comments of his deceased companion cause him to take a detached view of himself whereupon he becomes aware of his hypocrisy in rejecting Christianity, but still remaining enslaved to its “abhorrence of the un-intact state”: “His own parochialism made him ashamed by its contrast. His inconsistencies rushed upon him in a flood” (422). In spite of this Angel’s embarkation on his search for Tess is hardly a lesson in humiliation. And when, on finally finding her, he admits in four single words that he is to blame for what has happened, “Ah – it is my fault!” (467), it fails to create sympathy for him. He cannot rectify the wrong he has dealt his wife; it is, as Tess all too painfully points out “Too late, too late!” (466).

Just as Angel’s confession of his guilt does not make him more likeable, nor does Alec’s. Although making a clean breast of his responsibility for Tess’ undoing in “The Convert”: “Scamp that I was to foul that innocent life! The whole blame was mine – the whole unconventional business of our time at Trantridge” (393), Alec’s confession does not evoke notions of remorse or even regret. Our incontrovertible antipathy for Alec accompanies this character at every stage of the narrative: generated at the beginning by his plain deceit, selfishness and brutality, it is resecured later by the keen self-interest behind his marriage proposal to Tess<sup>1</sup> and pestering of her, and is finally sealed by his repossession of her at the end of the novel and his cruel taunts at her husband’s return.

The fact that both male protagonists’ sense of guilt in *Tess* falls drastically short of their wrongdoing reduces the reader’s compassion for them, which intensifies Tess’ share. Consequently the assessment of guilt in *Tess* cannot be confined to its recurring intensity in Tess, but must also include the corresponding *lack* of it in Angel and Alec. Only then does it become clear that Hardy’s apportioning of guilt, far from being a genuine psychological trait in Tess, is essentially a means of engaging and controlling sympathy and distance for and from his characters.

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<sup>1</sup> *Tess*, p. 394. Angel is no better. He proposes to Izz Huett that she accompanies him to Brazil out of nothing but a sudden whim of selfishness, being quite ready to take advantage of her love for him, regardless of the ruin it will bring her.

### III. *Jude the Obscure*: A Study in Guilt

*Jude*'s aim "to tell, without a mincing of words, of a deadly war waged between flesh and spirit,"<sup>1</sup> two antitheses which are in a "constant *internal* warfare" (251; my italics), promise a never-ending conflict for the conscience, just as the issues of character, plot and narrative technique secure guilt at every turn. Jude, torn between an illicit love for a woman he can neither legitimately possess nor conclusively forsake, and his ambition to become a licentiate of the Church, is plagued by a guilty conscience. The Church's practice of distinguishing sharply between spiritual and carnal love, being a religion, "in which sexual love was regarded as at its best a frailty, at its worst damnation" (279), makes life a constant struggle to resist and master sexual desire.

The concluding novel of the trilogy, *Jude*'s focus upon guilt goes above and beyond its treatment and meanings in *The Return*. In addition to their religious aspect, the prominence of the conscience and guilt are presented as fresh products of the novel's social setting. The isolation and introversion of the individual that social change has wrought by the breakdown of the community secure the conditions in which the conscience's inmost thought and deliberation as the basis for guilt are optimized. Just as *Tess* creates the image of a shame-oriented society, *Jude* confronts us with a guilt-oriented one. The focus on the private as opposed to the public sphere, on the individual conscience and its burden, and on moral questions internally and eternally deliberated but never spoken; the open defiance of social convention and the replacement of a world judged by a community audience by one ruled by God, occasion both the conditions and atmosphere for guilt-oriented thinking and doing in *Jude* from the start.

Antitheses with shame also help characterize guilt further. Guilt and shame's polarization, begun in *The Return* and advanced by *Tess*, is no longer simply an after effect of their depiction, but a defining aspect which brings them to a point of mutual exclusivity. Sue symbolizes guilt's essential spiritual, mental, sexless and modern state, as opposed to shame's intrinsic physicality and primitivism. As a result shame in terms of the body and its sexuality disappears; guilt-evoking in itself, *Jude*'s neo-puritan setting kills any form of body awareness. Divorced from guilt and distanced from the conscience, shame remains strictly within the public sphere and is increasingly

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<sup>1</sup> Preface to the First Edition, *Jude*, p. 39.

dependent upon the presence of an external audience. Ultimately conquerable, it has none of the despotism, intensity and finality of *Tess*.

One final message remains for *Jude* to tell. Contrary to what we have been led to expect from *Tess*, the rejection of convention which Tess does not fully manage and these characters do, does not deliver any lasting sense of liberation. Rather, having relinquished their beliefs, principles and, in part, their identities, and become alienated from society, Jude, Sue and Phillotson become lost and disoriented; some other answer must be found for those members of society who refuse to bear its yoke of conventionalism. It is also in this final state of disorientation and disillusionment, after tragedy has struck, that guilt reappears. In true ‘Clymean’ style, Sue’s guilt is depicted as a crutch in a world devoid of meaning which provides her with a new direction and occupation in her hour of need, an infinitely less painful alternative than accepting the verdict about life which the children’s deaths proclaim. Thus by presenting guilt to be more than simply a product of Christian faith or a social sanction but, as in *The Return*, as a human response to the cruel truth about life, God and Nature as Hardy saw it, guilt transcends all historical and cultural boundaries.

### **1. The Death of the Audience: Conditions for the Conscience and Guilt**

The departure of the school master from Marygreen with which *Jude* begins is, like so many of Hardy’s openings chapters, symbolic of the novel’s central themes. Quite aside from the notion of study which Phillotson’s leaving plants in Jude’s mind, Christminster being introduced discretely in the second sentence as a “city [...] about twenty miles off,” it launches the issues of isolation and transition. These issues provide the breeding ground for the conscience and guilt. In Hardy, isolation causes introspection, introversion and self-absorption; the reliance on personal values rather than those upheld by society. The audience in terms of the moral spectators of the protagonists’ actions hereby loses its sway. Continually changing through the characters’ constant transit and rootlessness, it fades into insignificance and is ignored. An emphasis on the private sphere, in terms of self-evaluation and self-judgement naturally follows in which the function of the conscience in terms of its representation, foundation and prominence is secured.

### **a. Aloneness, Isolation and the Modern Condition**

The schoolmaster's departure from Marygreen signifies the painful loss for Jude of a companion, friend and mentor which leaves him ultimately alone. Jude is attached to Phillotson: he is the only pupil to help pack on the day of the latter's departure, the other pupils being "indisposed to any enthusiastic volunteering of aid" (48). He receives a book from his master as a parting present and cries when he is gone. The schoolmaster's parting words to Jude to love God's creatures and read as much as possible are instructions Jude takes to heart. This is proven by the succeeding chapters where the latter lets the rooks feed on Farmer Troutham's seed, and avidly pursues his learning. After Phillotson has gone, Jude, returning to the village well to fetch water, begins what will be an infinite series of personal reflections. Standing at the drawwell, he says to himself "in the melodramatic tones of a whimsical boy" (49) that, at the very spot where he is now standing, the schoolmaster has stood many a time before, never to do so again. Suddenly he is rudely awoken from his reverie by his great-aunt's shrill instruction: "Bring on that water, will ye, you idle young harlican!" (49). The command's directness together with its verbal abuse sharpen the interruption and introduce the painful gulf between Jude's private feelings of sorrow, and the coarse, uncaring attitude of his aunt, jolting him back to harsh reality. Failing to understand him, she imagines her grandnephew to be idling when he is in fact simply feeling the effects of his patron's desertion.<sup>1</sup> Solitude, the notion of being misunderstood, and forced introspection through the lack of like-minded companions with whom to communicate form the foundation of Jude's existence.

Jude's alienation has two sources. The first concerns the modern human condition and social and geographical change. As an orphan with only a disinterested "crusty" great-aunt to look after him, Jude lacks a family. The product of a broken home, the protagonist is a victim of modern disruptive forces, the breaking up of family ties and structures being the outcome of a general breakdown in Victorian family values. Changes in the natural environment, presented through the characters' emotional response to the landscape after the acts of enclosure, magnify this isolation. The countryside's new face of uniformity caused by the levelling and clearance of the land

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<sup>1</sup> Jude is often woken from some form of reverie, as his first night looking round Christminster, for example, *Jude*, p. 127, shows.

of all natural obstacles and boundaries in order to increase its yield, evokes an overwhelming sense of loneliness in Jude by its infinity and nakedness. Farmer Troutham's fields are devoid of tree or hedge, "The brown surface of the field went right up towards the sky all round, where it was lost by degrees in the mist that shut out the actual verge and accentuated the solitude" (52). And the outskirts of Marygreen, seen when Jude attempts to catch a glimpse of Christminster as a young boy, generate a similar sentiment, "Not a soul was visible on the hedgeless highway, or on either side of it, and the white road seemed to ascend and diminish till it joined the sky" (59). Aloneness is also synonymous with a general loss of life's meaning. Changes in agricultural management have not only destroyed the identity and heritage of each field, but also the social activity and life which used to thrive there:

The fresh harrow-lines seemed to stretch like the channellings in a piece of new corduroy [...] taking away its gradations, and depriving it of all history beyond that of the few recent months [...] Every inch of ground had been the site, first or last, of energy, gaiety, horse-play, bickerings, weariness. Groups of gleaners had squatted in the sun on every square yard. Love-matches that had populated the adjoining hamlet had been made up there between reaping and carrying [...] But this neither Jude nor the rooks around him considered. For them it was a lonely place. (53)

Later, another product of modernization, the train, affects a similar response in Jude and Sue by its having killed the passageway of traffic along the London to Land's End road, making them comment on "the desolation which had come over this once lively thoroughfare" (190).<sup>1</sup> The destruction of ancient buildings and the natural features of the landscape, together with their ancient traditions and rituals, and their replacement with new, meaningless monstrosities is one of the novel's continuing themes.<sup>2</sup>

The second source of Jude's isolation concerns the tragic make-up of his personality, his having a character that maximizes his difficulty in making human contact. Jude is not only shy, but a misfit. As a boy, the villagers' interest in him on hearing his juicy family history feels "like slaps upon his face" (51). Like Tess and Sue, he is of a different strain from his fellow villagers. Unusually sensitive and intellectually

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<sup>1</sup> A condemnation of the railway on the same grounds is found on *Jude*, p. 357, at the description of the deserted great western highway that passes through Stoke-Barehills.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 59 and 358. The description of the eyesore of Marygreen's new church in the novel's first chapter, spelling nothing but senseless destruction and desecration, is underlined by it later being made the site of Jude and Sue's final meeting, *ibid.*, p. 467.

interested, and burdened with a wisdom and sorrow beyond his years, he stands out from his rough and simple Marygreen neighbours. Later he and Sue even stand out from their own generation and fail to relate to others by having ideas that are before their time.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, as early as the novel's third chapter, Jude's thorough insulation is complete. Having withdrawn from the villagers for their failure to understand or have anything to offer him, he is described as "he who never communicated with anybody at Marygreen now; who was as if dead for them here" (63).

As a result Jude's sense of loneliness becomes a constant refrain. Embarking upon the occupation of delivering bread he is the "hampered and lonely itinerant" (74), and even once he has begun his apprenticeship in Alfredston, his way is "lonely" (84), his walks "lonely," and he must try to fill them with "imaginary conversations" (78). Nor does the situation change in Christminster, where he relates not to Christminster people, but to the figures of art in the city's architecture and paintings.<sup>2</sup> Upon the plot's subsequent denial of Jude's intellectual plans due to the university's bigotry and discrimination,<sup>3</sup> this state becomes permanent. Confined forever to the ranks of lowly labouring circles, he cannot find like-minded people with whom he can communicate; although he works and drinks with men, he makes no friendships with them. Back at Marygreen, having exchanged his intellectual aspirations for religious ones, Jude is still "shabby and lonely" (181). And though his isolation is alleviated when he begins living with Sue, the telepathic nature of their relationship in which they are "almost the two parts of a single whole" (361) only increases their self-absorption, failing to open up other new friendships.<sup>4</sup> On their fruitless attempt to marry, Mrs. Edlin is their only guest, "the only friend we have in the world!" (391), "the only person remaining on earth who was associated with his [Jude's] early life at Marygreen" (348-9). Not only this, but the respite with Sue is only temporary; when she leaves her cousin at the novel's close he spends his time wandering to the places they had visited together, utterly miserable and alone. At all the crucial stages of Jude's life, at the end of his married life with Arabella, at the failure of his academic plans and his religious

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<sup>1</sup> *Jude*, pp. 354 and 482.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> As Sue sums up, "You are one of the very men Christminster was intended for when the colleges were founded [...] But you were elbowed off the streets by the millionaires' sons," *ibid.*, p. 205. The validity of this statement is confirmed at various points in the novel, see *ibid.*, pp. 131, 165 and 170-173.

<sup>4</sup> Garson, p. 166f., also notes Jude and Sue's isolation and lack of friends of the same sex, calling their relationship, "downright claustrophobic."

aspirations, at the tragedy of his children's deaths, and even on his death bed, he is alone.

With the exception of Arabella, who is never long without someone at her side, be it husband, friend or father, Sue and Phillotson are equally as isolated as Jude. Though Phillotson has a friend in Gillingham, the physical and mental distance between them limits their friendship. Indeed Phillotson is well-trained in bachelor-life, being described on the day of the Kennetbridge spring fair as, "one who was his own housekeeper, purveyor, confidant, and friend, through possessing nobody else at all in the world to act in those capacities for him" (387). Sue is equally alone. When Jude first gets to know her she declares to have "hardly any congenial friend" (147), and at the training college she is "utterly friendless" (183). Father Time also fails to mix with and befriend other children.

### **b. The Problem of Communication**

Jude's isolation undermines his very existence by denying him human contact and communication. The rooks he lets feed on Farmer Troutham's seeds as a boy are "the only friends he could claim to be in the least degree interested in him" (53) and signify some form of contact with the outside world: by letting them feed "A magic thread of fellow-feeling united his own life with theirs" (54). Jude searches for this contact all his life; it not only spurs him to seek the conversation of the quack-doctor Vilbert in the novel's first section, but prompts him later to pursue his cousin Sue and look up Phillotson,<sup>1</sup> and afterwards to seek out the musician of Kennetbridge. "Perplexed and harassed [...] about Sue and Arabella, and troubled as was his conscience by the complication of his position" (252), Jude naively imagines the latter to be able to help him in a way that underlines his craving for communication and understanding, "'He of all men would understand my difficulties' [...] If there were any person in the world to choose as a confidant, this composer would be the one, for he must have suffered, and throbbed, and yearned" (252).

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<sup>1</sup> See *Jude*, pp. 137, 139 and 146.

Ultimately all Jude's efforts fail. The shady Vilbert not only plays a suspicious role in Arabella's trapping of Jude,<sup>1</sup> but also flirts with her while Jude lies dead at home. And the warmth of the Kennetbridge composer's welcome of Jude quickly dwindles when he learns of the latter's impoverished circumstances, ruling out all chance of further contact. Nor do the schoolmaster or his cousin provide Jude with lasting friendship and communication. Phillotson's involvement with Sue, which Jude accidentally witnesses, rules him out as a possible confidant,<sup>2</sup> just as, at least at first, Jude's feelings for Sue do the same. One immediate result is that, when Jude's dream to become a university member is destroyed, he is entirely severed from the two people in whom he would otherwise have confided. This, together with the Heads of colleges' silence, means that he is entirely friendless with the effect that "the young man was thus thrown back entirely upon himself" (165). The same expression is used by Sue in her first note to Jude where she explains how she is "thrown much upon herself, and had hardly any congenial friend" (147). Indeed, though Sue continually tries to resist it, she shares Jude's need to communicate. Despite her cousin's unsuitability as a confidant, she divulges the unhappy facts of her marriage to him because, "I have nobody. And I *must* tell somebody" (276), the italics emphasizing her desperation. The lack of human contact, of a friend or confidant, at the destruction of Jude's academic dreams cause him to actually break down. "Deprived of the objects of both intellect and emotion," (170) the protagonist cannot continue: this "human interest" later being made "indispensable" to all human intentions "most spiritual and self-sacrificing" (182).

Even where supposedly close relationships exist, communication is laboured and fraught with hesitation and silence, tending more frequently to stutter than to flow. This applies to both Jude's relationships with women. Precisely at the points in their marriage where discussion is imperative, it is blocked by Arabella's strange power of robbing Jude of his voice. "I have no more to say!" (106) is his response to the news that she is not pregnant, just as "I have nothing more to say!" (243) is his reply to the news of her bigamy. Secrets and the unfulfilled desire to talk mark their relationship. Despite originally wanting to, Arabella fails to tell Jude of their son in person and must

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<sup>1</sup> The exact role Vilbert plays here is unclear. All that we are told on *Jude*, p. 101 is that, after conversing with the quack doctor, Arabella claims to Jude to be pregnant. It would appear, then, that Vilbert (mistakenly) convinces Arabella, despite her doubts, that she is pregnant, or, alternatively, that he actively encourages her to claim to be so in order to get Jude to marry her.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.



do so in a letter. In the closes of the novel, communication stops altogether with Jude's silencing of Arabella where Sue is concerned, "Promise never to speak of her" (466), and his refusal to ask whether she has posted his letter to his cousin.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Jude's relationship with Sue is marked by their being unable to talk freely and openly with each other. Having got over the difficulty of introducing himself to her, Jude is unable to communicate to Sue how he feels,<sup>2</sup> failing to openly address this issue until he is forced to make the admission after Sue has found out. Their subsequent conversations around this matter are stilted and marked by strict perimeters as to how much each of them can reveal. Though Jude attempts openness, Sue fails to give explicit, detailed answers to her cousin's questions regarding Phillotson.<sup>3</sup> Even living together before her marriage "their conversation was mechanical" (227) and fails to cover the crucial topic of the approaching wedding. And although afterwards Sue perceptively recognizes her communicative role in their relationship, her evasiveness prevents her from fulfilling it. Speculating as to why her cousin has failed to keep their arrangement to visit their sickening aunt, Sue makes a connection between her cousin's depression and his want of a friend to confide in, thinking, "you were upset at – at thinking I was – married, and not there as I used to be; and that you had nobody to speak to; so you had tried to drown your gloom" (244). But later, living together at Aldbrickham, she continually refuses to discuss subjects close to Jude's heart. Instead she makes her cousin avoid talking of the possibility of their marrying, forcing him to exchange the subject for the superficial topic of the countryside, "during the rest of the walk we'll talk of the meadows only" (325), with the result that "the subject of marriage was not mentioned by them for several days, though [...] it was constantly in their minds" (325). Later still, after the death of their children, again communication stops altogether as the couple "sit silent" rather than pronounce and share their grief and despair.

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<sup>1</sup> *Jude*, p. 466.

<sup>2</sup> The reason for this is because Sue clearly does not and, of course, cannot yet share Jude's feelings of love, *ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

### c. Introspection and the Stream of Conscience

“Mrs. Edlin – don’t be frightened at my rambling. I’ve got to talk to myself lying here so many hours alone.” (481)

Just as the drawwell scene in the opening chapter documents, Jude talks to himself because he has no one else to talk to. Lack of contact and conversation with others together with problems in communicating when a potential listener is present, force communing with the self: isolation fosters introspection. Characteristic of the obscurity and remoteness that his title epithet implies, the protagonist’s state is one of forced introversion. Jude’s interest is directed inwards towards his own thoughts and feelings rather than outwards towards the external world. What is more, this problem of communication is not only an emotional problem confined to Jude, but also affects the narrator in terms of narrative technique. Without other characters to converse with, another way must be found to reveal Jude’s thoughts and feelings to the reader. This means provides a direct insight into the inner thoughts, feelings and impressions of the protagonist, thoughts and feelings that become distinctly moral in tone as the narrative progresses.

*Jude* is marked by long passages of introspection, by thoughts which remain unspoken simply because there is no one there to hear them, and by thoughts which cannot be expressed for fear of them not being understood. Although by no means in the refined sense of the 1920s and of writers like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, the beginnings of a stream of consciousness is present in Hardy’s novel writing, existing in its most refined form in *Jude*.<sup>1</sup> Just as Sue is presented largely through Jude’s perception and experience of her, the events of the novel are presented and evaluated to a great extent through their mental, emotional and physical impact on the same. And although this impact in the form of the flow of Jude’s perceptions, thoughts and feelings does not remain unbroken, events are nonetheless frequently presented through the way they pass through his awareness, informing the reader of Jude’s emotional, spiritual and mental development. The first of these occasions takes place after Jude’s scolding by

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<sup>1</sup> I take stream of consciousness to be the aegis-term, covering all the various means to communicate a character’s state and process of consciousness. The beginnings of this technique are evident in *Tess*, in the way the narrator switches from the third-person mode of narration to narrating from her point of view as though he has entered into her mind. In contrast to *Jude* however, the intrusions of the omniscient narrator are still frequent in *Tess*.

Farmer Troutham. Unable to share this experience with another character, aunt Drusilla only reprimanding him, Jude goes off to contemplate its wider implications alone:

Growing up brought responsibilities, he found. Events did not rhyme quite as he had thought. Nature's logic was too horrid for him to care for. That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another sickened his sense of harmony. As you got older, and felt yourself to be at the centre of your time, and not in a point of its circumference, as you had felt when you were little, you were seized with a sort of shuddering, he perceived. All around you there seemed to be something glaring, garish, rattling, and the noises and glares hit upon the little cell your life, shook it, and warped it. (57)

Though it is not Jude's mental process in the form of a mingling of sense perceptions with conscious and semi-conscious thoughts which is being reproduced here, and though there are clear interruptions of his thought pattern by the narrator – "he found," "he had thought," "he perceived" – we are nonetheless dealing with a serious attempt to present Jude's line of thought in the natural order in which it occurs to him and as though it is coming directly from him. The transition from the narrator's third-person point of view to the second-person, commencing with "As you got older..." signals the narrator's encroachment upon Jude's consciousness. At the same time the former no longer mediates between character and reader because Jude takes over this role directly. Though the passage's authenticity is questionable, reflecting on nature's ruthlessness and discord, and using words like "circumference" being unusually sophisticated for a boy of eleven, it is nonetheless a worthy attempt at simulating the protagonist's consciousness. Later, when Jude tries to catch a glimpse of Christminster, the experiment is undergone again, this time the uncertainty about the power of praying to make wishes come true being a more realistic question for a small boy,

He ascended the ladder to have one more look at the point the men had designated, and perched himself on the highest rung, overlying the tiles. He might not be able to come so far as this for many days. Perhaps if he prayed, the wish to see Christminster might be forwarded. People said that, if you prayed, things sometimes came to you, even though they sometimes did not. (60)

Unsurprisingly, the nature of Jude's thoughts presented in this way do not remain mere impressions and suspicions about the nature of life for long, but soon become centred upon a specific conflict, and moral and debating in tone. The introduction of the flesh in the form of Arabella, later to be replaced by Sue, marks the beginning of the war between the flesh and the spirit, as Jude's academic, and later religious aims, are challenged by his alliances with these two women. It is a war that Jude does not fight openly, raging instead on the internal battle ground of his conscience, as his first dilemma concerning Arabella demonstrates. Having been 'caught' by her, he deliberates

whether he should keep his arrangement to call on her or whether he should stay at home to study as originally intended,

He would not go out to meet her, after all. He sat down, opened the book, and with his elbows firmly planted on the table, and his hands to his temples, began at the beginning [...] Had he promised to call for her? Surely he had! She would wait indoors, poor girl, and waste all her afternoon on account of him. There was something in her, too, which was very winning, apart from promises. He ought not to break faith with her. Even though he had only Sundays and week-day evenings for reading he could afford one afternoon, seeing that other young men afforded so many. After to-day he would never probably see her again. Indeed, it would be impossible, considering what his plans were. (87)

The shift of the narrative from the third-person to third-person indicative, “Had he promised to call for her?” (*erlebte Rede* and a forerunner to the stream of consciousness), marks the narrator’s intrusion upon Jude’s mind, whereupon the character’s thoughts are revealed in an order and language which seem to be his own and to originate directly from him. By being directly addressed by Jude’s question, and subsequently exposed to his actual thought process as it occurs in his mind, the reader is also brought closer to the conflict, whilst at the same time objectivity is maintained through the sustainment of the third-person. Jude’s reflection and the steps of his self-justification take on a sense of immediacy and realness by seeming to arise before our very eyes: first his conscience in the form of his sense of decency assails him, making him reluctant to break his promise as though it would be a cruelty to do so, “poor girl.” Then his attraction to Arabella tempts him. And finally he consciously manipulates the event into something wholly natural and even prudent – “seeing that other young men afforded so many” – and into merely one exception in an otherwise long and steady rule of study.

As Jude’s moral situation becomes more grave, so does the nature of his thoughts become more moral, and the debate of his conscience more frequent and intense. His consequent adoration of his cousin Sue despite them both being legally but lovelessly bound to another, together with his Christian faith which forbids these feelings, and his isolation and difficulty in communicating with his cousin, combine to secure a moral internal debate of the most acute kind. For this reason *Jude’s* stream of consciousness cannot be said to encompass the whole range of the protagonist’s conscious experience. Rather it is limited to its moral aspect. It is thus not with the beginnings of a stream of *consciousness* that we are dealing, but with a stream of *conscience*; the consciousness of the conscience presented in a flow within the character’s mind. That consciousness should begin in the conscience in Hardy is natural given his characters’ great awareness

of their moral positions, and the word's etymology. One of the conscience's original meanings current in the nineteenth century is "inward knowledge or consciousness."<sup>1</sup> Even today it is taken as a sign of consciousness for when we become unconscious, we are not considered fully responsible for our actions. As this stream develops, fuelled by Jude's developing relations with his cousin, the conscience takes on another function, in addition to its role of communication, which concerns the regulation of behaviour.

#### **d. The Conscience: Its Deliberation, Relief and Foundation**

From the moment Jude chances to see Sue in the street where he is working outside Crozier College and, inspired by the *genius loci* of Christminster, she becomes the receptacle of his loneliness and emotional need, so begins the war between the flesh and the spirit anew. The entire concern in the second and third parts of the novel is subsequently with Jude's conscience and the battle that rages, pulls and niggles until it is eventually lost when the Fawley cousins move in together in "At Aldbrickham and Elsewhere." This battle provides a unique insight into the nature and function of the conscience. Although the conscience as a concept occurs in all six of the novels examined, its workings are explored most extensively in *Jude*, in the conscious decision-making of our title character, and in Sue and Phillotson. Arabella is, of course, the only exception, given her shamelessness and disregard for right and wrong. The conscience in *Jude* is multi-functional: as we might expect, it is, together with guilt, linked to action, by either discouraging or preventing action by underlining the moral consequences of some act, or encouraging action as a means of relieving a guilty conscience. At the same time a further distinction between guilt and shame becomes clear. Whatever decisions about their moral future that Jude, Sue and Phillotson make, these characters are shown to be making active choices through their moral deliberation and their guilt is thus premeditated. No such warning exists with shame: sudden and surprising it is not something the individual can actively opt for, but something he must painfully and passively bear. On a deeper level, the complex moral deliberation that his characters undertake allows Hardy to explicitly examine and expose the intellectual

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<sup>1</sup> OED, s.v. *conscience*, I. 1.

complexity and therewith illogicality of convention and Church teaching. Here the emotional focus upon the cruelty of moral law as we find in *Tess*, is replaced by an intellectual focus on its absurdity.

In the first of a long series of introspection concerning Sue, Jude's conscience is seen to provide a well-reasoned argument as to why their relationship must remain platonic:

The first reason was that he was married, and it would be wrong. The second was that they were cousins. It was not well for cousins to fall in love even when circumstances seemed to favour their passions. The third: even were he free, in a family like his own where marriage usually meant a tragic sadness, marriage with a blood-relation would duplicate the adverse conditions, and a tragic sadness might be intensified to a tragic horror. (137)

The argument is based upon three reasons of graded priority. First, falling in love simply "would be wrong." Next "it was not well" for such a thing to arise, and finally, marriage "usually meant" and "would duplicate" some tragedy. With this list of reasons why Jude should not love his cousin, "three enormous reasons [which] loomed as stubbornly as ever" (145), the assignment of wrongdoing, and his accompanying guilt should he choose to ignore them is made unmistakably clear. The notion is thus one of choice and foresight, with guilt proceeding from the explicit and conscious awareness of the wrong that a specific act involves. The role of Jude's conscience here is essentially preventative; like a cold shower it dampens and cools his desire for Sue, deterring him from entertaining the idea of a sexual relationship with her. Instead, as the final note of the chapter closes, "he would have to think of Sue with only a relation's mutual interest in one belonging to him [...] she would be to him a kindly star, an elevating power, a companion in Anglican worship, a tender friend" (137).

Despite this vow, admittedly suspicious in its fervour, it becomes clear two pages later that Jude's conscience has not been successful in containing his feelings for Sue to mere friendship. We learn that Jude's attention to Sue has not only progressed to "an extraordinary tenderness," but, a few pages after this, into an interest "unmistakably of a sexual kind" (145). The voice of his conscience thus speaks again, this time in the form of the moral question as to whether he should introduce himself to her: "ought he to do so with the kind of feeling that was awakening in him?" (139). The question is immediately succeeded by an internal, live debate within the character's mind,

For though it had seemed to have an ecclesiastical basis during the service, and he had persuaded himself that that was the case, he could not altogether be blind to the real nature of the magnetism. She was such a stranger that the kinship was affectation, and he said, 'It can't be! I, a man with a wife, must not know her!' Still Sue *was* his own kin, and the fact of his having a wife, even though she was not in evidence in this hemisphere, might be a help in

one sense. It would put all thought of a tender wish on his part out of Sue's mind, and make her intercourse with him free and fearless. (139-40)

A stream of conscience in the form of a dialogue between conscience and desire, again clearly from Jude's point of view though narrated in the third-person, unfolds. Jude's conscience forces him to acknowledge his delusion that his attraction to Sue is based on mere kinship. As a result he tries to resist his overwhelming desire to meet her as shown in his direct speech, "It can't be! I, a man with a wife, must not know her!" Yet it is to no avail. Narrating now directly from Jude's mind, we witness how he legitimizes his desire. With self-deceiving logic, Jude not only turns the fact that he is already married into an advantage, but almost into a reason for his introducing himself to Sue, transforming the restriction for him into a liberation for her, it being perhaps "a help in one sense" by securing "free and fearless" conversation.

Self-delusion contrasted with moments of moral insight provided by his conscience constitute the battle of Jude's conscience as he fluctuates between duty and decorum, and delight and desire. In the space of a single page we read first that "he found himself, to his moral consternation, to be thinking more of her instead of less of her" (146), then that "his conscience was likely to be the loser in this battle," and thirdly that, whilst "to know her would be to cure himself of this unexpected and unauthorized passion. A voice whispered that [...] he did not desire to be cured." Consequently his conscience springs into action warning him of the immorality of his behaviour from the Church's point of view,

There was not the least doubt that from his own orthodox point of view the situation was becoming immoral. For Sue to be the loved one of a man who was licensed by the laws of his country to love Arabella and none other unto his life's end, was a pretty bad second beginning when the man was bent on such a course as Jude proposed. (146)

So strong is his conscience that, happening to be working in a village church alone, Jude attempts to relieve it by turning to God to "pray against his weakness." Desire being greater than duty however, his attempt fails dismally, "It was quite impossible, he found, to ask to be delivered from temptation when your heart's desire was to be tempted unto seventy times seven" (146). Thus Jude excuses himself with the delusion that all he is seeking by pursuing Sue is a little mental and emotional companionship. Finally and ironically, the decision of making himself known to Sue is taken out of his hands by the latter taking the step herself. The first part of the battle, as all subsequent parts will be, is lost.

Once Jude has resigned himself to loving Sue, the relief of his guilty conscience comes to the fore. Having acted as a preventative measure and therefore advocated inaction so far, guilt now encourages action in the novel's fourth section by offering a specific means by which Jude can redeem himself. This is the renunciation of his faith. Up to this point, though aware of his inconsistency, Jude has resolutely stuck to his religion, claiming to be "reading Divinity harder than ever" (264). But the long parting kiss the cousins engage in after the death of their great-aunt (the single evidence for Sue's desire for Jude), secures a victory for the 'flesh' which is too much for his conscience to bear. Realizing that "...to persist with headlong force in impassioned attentions to her, was all he thought of, he was condemned *ipso facto* as a professor of the accepted school of morals" (279), Jude burns all the religious and moral works in his possession. The act affords him an inner peace for which he is grateful, "the sense of no longer being a hypocrite to himself afforded his mind a relief which gave him a calm" (280). There is thus something Jude can do to relieve himself of his guilt; unlike shame, guilt is not permanent, but can be removed by a specific act of penance.

By ridding himself of his faith, Jude rids himself of his guilty conscience. Founded upon internalized Church teaching, the salving of Jude's conscience as shown here is therefore simultaneously a rejection and criticism of the Church. All the while the protagonist's feelings for Sue are developing, his moral sense is strong; the simple fact that loving her is "wrong" or "immoral" is enough to deter him. Now, however, more critical in the field of love, marriage and religion, Jude questions the validity of his guilt, a move that places it and his faith in severe doubt. Attempting to make sense of his thwarted ambitions, Jude wonders whether "...the artificial system of things, under which the normal sex impulses are turned into devilish domestic gins and springs to noose and hold back those who want to progress?" (279), are their cause. Though no direct answer is given, the narrator's subsequent exposition upon the honesty, selflessness and dedication of Jude's ecclesiastical aims, and their collapse due to his lack of respectability give a clear signal as to how this issue should be understood. Jude's loss of respectability, the sequel to a complex love life, is neither absolute nor everlasting, but only "according to regulation views." Thus Jude, like Thomasin and Tess, is only guilty as far as convention is concerned. His interpretation of the Church as having perverted natural sexual feelings into "devilish domestic gins and springs" signals how his affection for Sue is not wicked, but precious and natural, sex being as yet to be transformed into one of the highest spiritual experiences as found in D. H.



Lawrence's work. Subsequently, Hardy's guilt, like Hardy's shame, undermines conventional morality and Church teaching.

#### **e. The Private Sphere, Rootlessness and Moral Autonomy**

Although in the end Jude's conscience fails to prevent him befriending and loving Sue, its arguments and objections are far more influential upon him than the opinions of other characters. All measures from without in the form of his aunt's instructions, have no ultimate effect upon Jude. Aunt Drusilla's disinclination to give information about Sue, her outright request that "he was not to bring disturbance into the family by going to see the girl or her relations" (132), followed shortly by her "nervously anxious letter" bidding him "to keep away from Sue Bridehead and her relations" (134), fall on deaf ears; the latter even brings about Jude's first sight of Sue by telling him where to find her. Even the more emotional and detailed appeals which Aunt Drusilla makes to her great-nephew during his interview of her, fail to impress him. Her list of social and emotional reasons why Jude should avoid Sue – "She was brought up by her father to hate her mother's family; and she will look with no favour upon a working chap like you – a townish girl as she's become by now" (160); "...there'll be a worse thing if you, tied and bound as you be, should have a fancy for Sue" (161), and "...anything more than a relation's good wishes it is stark madness for 'ee to give her. If she is townish and wanton it med bring 'ee to ruin" (161) – go unheeded, as does her dramatic appeal from her sick bed – "'Jude!' cried his aunt, springing up in bed. 'Don't you be a fool about her!'" (161).

Subsequently the conscience's prominence and the moral dilemma and secret nature of the cousins' attachment in parts two and three of the novel before they move in together in the penultimate chapter of "At Shaston," together with the isolation and introspection with which "At Marygreen" begins, and after the brief interlude of marriage with Arabella, ends, places the scene of action of *Jude* firmly in the private sphere. After this, though the cry of public protest is sometimes heard, at its loudest in Aldbrickham town, concealment and solitude continue to close in upon the characters to the very end, helped by their essential singularity and unconventionality. Each event of Tess' life is handled in terms of its impact upon society; society remains on the edge of *Jude*, only once advancing as far as to impinge upon the characters' action, even if it does upon their conscience, the focus remaining throughout upon the individual.

As a result, everything of significance in *Jude* occurs privately. Even when morally questionable events reach the ears of society causing scandal, such as Jude's drunkenness and blasphemy in a Christminster tavern, Sue's escape from the training school, or her husband's public revelation of the state of his marital affairs, it fails to have any serious effect on the characters. Although tales of the night of Jude's breakdown in Christminster reach the ears of the Melchester Training School, destroying his respectability and blackening his character,<sup>1</sup> they neither affect Jude's emotional disposition, nor do lasting damage to his professional reputation. Five chapters later, we read of a letter Jude receives, "from his previous employer at Christminster, who offered him permanent work of a good class if he would come back" (234). This not only rules out any possible breach between employer and employee, but implies that Jude Fawley is in demand. Similarly, having escaped from the training college, it is neither the nature of the teachers' advice nor the damage to her reputation that Sue objects to and that causes her break in communication with Jude, but her realization that the latter has failed to be honest about his feelings for her.<sup>2</sup>

Just as Jude's conflict not to love Sue is a private and not a public one, so is Sue's marriage to Phillotson a personal problem, one involving "a personal feeling against it – a physical objection – a fastidiousness or whatever it may be called" (271), and her conscience, "I ought – perhaps – I ought not to have married him" (249). Even her husband backs this up by ascribing Sue's decision to leave him to her own moral sense in his remark that, "it was a question for her own conscience – not for me" (311). This non-public treatment of Sue's marriage is underlined by the disastrous personal effects it is shown to have on Jude (III, VIII). Similarly the legal release of Sue from her marriage is a matter for her conscience and not convention. Far from being met with a sense of relief at her and Jude's restored respectability, a sense of deceit and illogic marks Sue's reaction. Though she recognizes the social freedom and legitimacy their respective divorces grant them – "we needn't be so particular as we have been about appearances" (323) – she is more concerned about the fact that it has been "obtained under false pretences" (322), and that now there is nothing to stop her marrying and therewith commencing sexual relations with Jude. After having finally given herself to her cousin in V, II, she admits, "I am easier in my mind than I was, for my conscience is

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<sup>1</sup> *Jude*, p. 195.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

clear about Richard, who now has a right to his freedom” (337). Finally, again, when Sue separates from Jude for the last time she says, “You don’t see that it is a matter of conscience with me, and not of dislike to you!” (430).

Similarly, the night Jude spends with Arabella at Aldbrickham before learning of her bigamy is also a matter for his moral sense. Far from being presented in terms of its scandalous potential, the implications of his wife’s second illegal marriage are entirely private and presented solely in terms of their physical and emotional effect upon Jude. Becoming “pale and fixed” at the news, we read of his “sense of degradation at his revived experiences with her” (244), and how the memory of her sleeping beside him causes “a look of one accurst” upon his face. What is more, Jude does not need to experience the social condemnation to feel the strength and moral sting of what has happened. Looking “accurst,” and feeling “heartily ashamed of his earthliness in spending the hours he had spent in Arabella’s company,”<sup>1</sup> he rebukes himself. After this lapse he returns to his religious study with “feverish desperation,” scolding himself for his neglect of his studies for his absorption in Sue and his temporary sexual gratification with a keen sense of guilt and hypocrisy. Even his diminished responsibility – “even though she had not told him of her Sydney husband till afterwards” (251) – does not mitigate Jude’s guilt. Thus the conscience takes over the role of punishing dissident behaviour. Earlier, in the Cathedral-church of Cardinal College, it functions in a similar way in regard to Jude’s first marriage: “What a wicked worthless fellow he had been to give vent as he had done to an animal passion for a woman, and allow it to lead to such disastrous consequences; then to think of putting an end to himself; then to go recklessly and get drunk” (138). The voice of his conscience, the “wicked worthless” epithet together with his “animal passion” and his sinful contemplation of suicide is unmistakably puritan in tone, underlining the increasing presence of God in Jude’s thoughts as opposed to the presence of an external audience.

Finally, Jude and Sue’s geographical and emotional rootlessness also diminishes the audience’s moral presence in *Jude*. The seeds of this rootlessness, like those of isolation, are found in the novel’s start. The novel’s opening line, “The schoolmaster was leaving the village” (47), signals a sense of dislocation characteristic of Jude and Sue’s life. For although the cousins live together in Aldbrickham for some year and a

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<sup>1</sup> *Jude*, p. 245. For the significance of this quote in regard to shame’s connection to the body and sexuality, see p. 47.

half in a house that Jude owns, the remainder of their life together is a “shifting, almost nomadic” one. This transitory nature of their existence is also taken up in the headings of the novel’s different sections. Each contains the preposition “at” alongside the places mentioned, as though the latter are not permanent homes or settings, but temporary places of stay. Further, Jude is introduced, not in the place of his birth like Tess – who is firmly rooted within a specific environment – but as already having moved once in his young life, and that not long ago, “He come from Mellstock, down in South Wessex, about a year ago” (51).<sup>1</sup> Indeed the protagonist’s mode of arrival in Marygreen intensifies this sense of isolation and alienation, “Deposited by the carrier from a railway station southward, one dark evening some few months earlier” (59) being a description more fitting for the delivery of a parcel than a human being.<sup>2</sup> Later, seeking work at the stonemason’s in Christminster, Jude rejects anything permanent, a refusal the narrator criticizes, naming it a manifestation of “the modern vice of unrest” (131). As well as geographical, the cousins lack familial ties. As already mentioned, since his parents’ parting and death Jude has been left in the hands of his quasi-guardian, great-aunt Drusilla, which, given her lack of interest and age gap, hardly makes for a close attachment. The tie between Aunt Drusilla and Sue is even weaker, the former being a relative whom Sue “had hardly known in her life” (247), Sue being forced through her parent’s separation to leave Marygreen which has also left her contact with her father barely existent.<sup>3</sup> Thus the strong familial and communal network that defines and supports Tess is entirely missing. As demonstrated in *Tess*, family and environment dictate and uphold the behavioural code to which the individual must adhere if he is to remain a member of the community, particularly where shame is concerned. Without such a fixed setting to anchor them and an expanding familial or communal circle to enclose and define them, the Fawley cousins, like Eustacia and Alec, are morally freer

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<sup>1</sup> We are often reminded of the fact that Jude is not from Marygreen, see *Jude*, pp. 57 and 62.

<sup>2</sup> Reminiscent of Jude’s own arrival in Marygreen, Little Time is also deposited upon the platform in Aldbrickham late one night in winter.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 203 and 226.

to move and more autonomous than characters like Thomasin and Tess. As the end of the novel shows, this freedom brings serious implications for Jude and Sue.

## **2. Wider Guilt Landscapes: The Guilt Character Sue**

In addition to the external factors above, a wider landscape of guilt is drawn by the character Sue. Like Tess' proclivity to shame, Sue's bias towards guiltiness fosters the predominance of the conscience and guilt in *Jude*, whilst at the same time exploring guilt's nature and distancing it further from its counterpart shame. Unlike Clym's, Sue's guilt is evident well before its onset at the tragedy that befalls her and combines both realism and symbolism in its presentation.

### **a. Temptation, Remorse and Self-criticism**

The tendency to feel guilt is intrinsic to Sue's characterization. It contributes to her instability by being responsible for her changing mental states. Guilt's lack of finality, the way in which mistakes can be repaired and rectified, means Sue (and to a lesser extent Jude) is continually fluctuating between innocent, guilty and penitent states. She continually withdraws or regrets an act, resolves not to do it again, and then breaks this resolve. Guilt thus creates constant movement in the novel. As well as this, Sue is given an overactive conscience and a leaning towards remorse, self-criticism and self-punishment, the ingredients for a guilt-ridden character.

Sue's guilty conscience takes a different mode of literary presentation than her cousin's; its workings leave the inner confines of her mind and find expression in spoken and written form. Whilst this is primarily due to the method of narration used, the reader being denied an insight into Sue's mind by her being presented chiefly through Jude, and to the fact that, such is her complexity, that she frequently escapes explanation, it also displays guilt's communicative facet. Already attention has been drawn at the beginning of this study and in the analysis of *The Return* to the initially private nature of guilt the moment it is felt, and thus to the need to express it. This is borne out by Sue's correspondence to her cousin which, being largely confessional, is motivated by her need to communicate her guilt in order to alleviate it. Typically, in accordance to guilt's link to action and shame's to the self, Sue's guilt arises from

something she has done or, more precisely, something she has said, rather than something that she is. Apologising for her instruction that Jude is not to love her in her second note to him, she writes, “when you were out of sight I felt what a cruel and ungrateful woman I was to say it, and it has reproached me ever since” (210). Being self-critical, deeming herself “cruel and ungrateful,” she closes the letter with a second reference to her cruelty and with a plea for forgiveness, “You do forgive your thoughtless friend for her cruelty? and won’t make her miserable by saying you don’t?” Although the note has an exaggerated and winning tone, and the narrator makes clear that it is not to be taken too seriously, which is of course precisely what Jude does, it sets the tone for Sue’s constant sense of self-reproach in the novel. It is followed directly by words in a similar vein,

Forgive me for my petulance yesterday! I was horrid to you; I know it, and I feel perfectly miserable at my horridness. It was so dear of you not to be angry! Jude, please still keep me as your friend and associate, with all my faults. I will try not to be like it again. (214)

Remorseful and bidding for forgiveness, Sue belittles herself and typically ends with the new resolve not to commit the same fault again. Subsequent notes follow the same pattern, the finest example being the “contrite little note from Sue, in which she said [...] that she felt she had been horrid in telling him he was not to come to see her; that she despised herself for having been so conventional” (254).

Sue’s approach to male relationships is also based on guilt. Hearing of Jude’s relinquishment of his trade and the Church because of her, she exclaims, “O I seem so bad – upsetting men’s courses like this!” (301). She also blames herself for her unhappy marriage to Phillotson,<sup>1</sup> her explanation for marrying him depicting all the stages of guilt-driven behaviour from temptation and the battle of the conscience, to its defeat by indulging in that which it has forbidden, the sense of guilt and remorse that follows, and the desperate attempt to relieve these feelings by some form of reparation,

sometimes a woman’s *love of being loved* gets the better of her conscience, and though she is agonized at treating a man cruelly, she encourages him to love her although she does not love him at all. Then when she sees him suffering, her remorse sets in, and she does what she can to repair the wrong. (305)

Similarly, Sue feels guilty for denying Jude sexually once they are living together. On hearing of her lover’s complaint about her reticence and reserve, she is described having

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<sup>1</sup> *Jude*, p. 273.

a “guilty look” upon her face, and exclaiming, “I suppose I am so bad and worthless that I deserve the utmost rigour of lecturing!” (325).

In accordance with Sue’s self-critical and regretful attitude,<sup>1</sup> the epithet ‘wicked’ appears most frequently in association with her than in any other of *Jude*’s characters. A key word in her vocabulary, Sue brings the charge of “wickedness” against herself throughout her failed marriage with Phillotson: “If I were unhappy it would be my fault, my wickedness” (273); “there is nothing wrong except my own wickedness” (274); “It is wrong and wicked of me, I suppose!” (283); “I am in the wrong. I always am!” (285); “You can’t have me back now I have been so wicked – as to do what I have done!”; “I am very bad and unprincipled – I know you think that!” (306). Returning to Phillotson at the novel’s end she describes herself as “a poor wicked woman who is trying to mend” (437); preventing Jude from going after Arabella when the latter calls at their door, she feels, “I was wickedly selfish last night!” (333); on freeing her pet pigeons, “I’ve done such a wicked thing!” (378). Even the narrator calls Sue wicked,<sup>2</sup> and Little Jude asks her, “How *ever* could you, mother, be so wicked and cruel as this” (407) But as wicked as Sue deems she is, her feelings are always complemented by remorse to balance the scales, there being “no limit to the strange and unnecessary penances which Sue would meekly undertake when in a contrite mood” (333). This characteristic marks her decision to return to Phillotson, as Jude says, “I never knew such a woman for doing such impulsive penances as you, Sue!” (438).

### **b. Spirituality, Sexlessness and Modernity**

The associations of guilt identifiable on the periphery of Clym’s character actively generate and determine Sue’s guiltiness. Her guilty identity is not based on Clym’s associations alone, but also upon her contrast with the shame characters Eustacia and Tess. This not only underlines the importance of reading *The Return*, *Tess* and *Jude* as a trilogy, but also contributes to the increasing distinction between these two types of emotion.

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<sup>1</sup> For examples of this see *Jude*, pp. 350, 351, 396 and 397.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 334.

Of the “war waged between the flesh and the spirit” Sue clearly represents the spiritual cause, a cause that is underlined by its vivid contrast with her counter character Arabella. Like so many of Hardy’s characters, Sue’s surname is symbolic of her person, “bride” signifying her ultimate sexual purity, “head” the way that she is ruled by her mind rather than her body.<sup>1</sup> Described as “the ethereal, fine-nerved, sensitive girl” (281), Jude thinks her a creature “living largely in vivid imaginings, so ethereal a creature that her spirit could be seen trembling through her limbs [...] so uncarnate as to seem at times impossible as a human wife to any average man” (245), calling her later, “you spirit, you disembodied creature, you dear, sweet, tantalizing phantom – hardly flesh at all; so that when I put my arms round you I almost expect them to pass through you as through air!” (309). Furthermore Sue is presented as a modern thinker, preferring to sit in the railway station than the cathedral, and criticizing the bigotry of the Christminster dons and the Church.<sup>2</sup> This modern and intellectual aspect of her character together with her spiritual and sexless nature affiliates her to the realms of guilt, just as Eustacia and Tess’ physical beauty, sexuality and naturalism affiliate them to shame. It thus comes as no surprise that the closest Sue gets to feeling “something of shame” or “a *faint* shamefacedness” (my italics), are insignificant moments in her life.<sup>3</sup> This distancing of Sue from shame is later increased through her active criticism of this emotion.

### 3. The Result: Resisting Ridicule and Shame

The entire current of *Jude* courses towards the concerns and structures of a guilt-oriented text-world. Armed with isolation, introspection and moral autonomy, and fortified with the presence of God, Hardy leaves the realms of a shame oriented-society behind, creating instead a setting where guilt-oriented action takes centre stage. The overriding dominance of the conscience, its, in part, God-given authority in judging and

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<sup>1</sup> The choice of Sue’s name is also thought to have lain in its association with the virgin martyrs, see Michael Millgate (1982), p. 353.

<sup>2</sup> *Jude*, pp. 187 and 207.

<sup>3</sup> The first instant occurs when Sue confesses to Jude on their first meeting in Melchester that, instead of some small gift, she would prefer him to buy her a warm meal, *ibid.*, p. 185; the second when, on visiting Phillotson sick in bed, Sue imagines how ineffectual she would seem to him were he to know of her “thus far, incomplete relations with Jude,” *ibid.*, p. 316.



regulating behaviour – albeit with different degrees of success – deprives society of the enormous sway it enjoyed, reducing its influence upon the individual to a bare minimum. Not only this, but shame experiences are typically public and confined to a specific place and community environment: the village of Marygreen and the smaller towns of Shaston and Aldbrickham.<sup>1</sup> No longer mentioned without the presence of an external audience, shame curiously lifts as soon as the culprit leaves this area.

With the demise of the audience and the transfer of its power to the individual, the resistance to public shame as a sanction for regulating behaviour is automatic. Other people's opinions are suddenly not only less interesting, but their disapproval less cutting, their censure less powerful; debatable even, or downright mistaken. Decisive instead is the individual's opinion of himself, dependent to a greater or lesser degree on his sanctity in God's eyes. For this reason the community's attempt to shame its miscreants into obedience is ultimately unsuccessful. Although in three skilful sketches the attempt is made, the experience neither changes the offenders' moral views, nor scathes them permanently. The ruin of Phillotson's teaching career, the excommunication and ostracism of Jude and Sue, and the attempted humiliation of Jude for the failure of his academic dreams, though difficult experiences, all leave the characters morally untouched. The latter case even becomes a forum for Jude's detailed attack on the workings of a shame-oriented world, a cause Sue takes up in her attack on conventional and female shame.

#### **a. Jude and the Defeat of the Shame of Failure**

The closely-knit peasant village of Marygreen with which *Jude* begins, where the departure of the schoolmaster is attraction enough to interest blacksmith and bailiff, is predominantly home to the public shame experiences Jude has. The first of these is comparable to any early shame incident in *Tess*, Hardy's adaptation of the shame experience as having little or no effect on the individual only becoming apparent later on in the novel. It concerns Jude being caught and beaten by Farmer Troutham for

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<sup>1</sup> The search for the anonymity that a larger place offers is one of the impetuses behind Jude and Sue's movements, their experience of the small-town mentality of Melchester making Jude choose the anonymity of the larger town of Aldbrickham to begin his life with Sue, and the same experience at the latter place causing them to think again in even bigger dimensions, *Jude*, pp. 301 and 376.

failing to defend his crops. Returning home, weeping “not from pain,” but “with the awful sense that he had wholly disgraced himself before he had been a year in the parish” (55), which causes him to bypass the village to avoid being seen, Jude’s sense of shame is placed at the head of his experience. His aunt’s reaction to the incident is reminiscent of Mrs. Yeobright’s response to the flop of Thomasin’s attempted marriage in Anglebury. Her family having lost its superior standing over Farmer Troutham, she is chiefly concerned with the damage that Jude’s offence has caused to her dignity and social status.<sup>1</sup> The experience sticks in Jude’s mind; although the chance to escape ridicule is not his only motivation for moving to Christminster, it is one of the factors he associates with leaving Marygreen, “Would it be a spot in which, without fear of farmers, hindrance, or ridicule, he could watch and wait, and set himself to some mighty undertaking like the men of old of whom he had heard?” (66). Meanwhile, delayed from doing this by his marriage to Arabella, Jude must first experience more ridicule from the Marygreen front. Calling him “a simple fool,” they gleefully enjoy witnessing the reduction of his lofty intellectual plans to plain domesticity, “All his reading had only come to this, that he would have to sell his books to buy saucepans” (102).

Academic failure is the forum upon which the ordeal of being publicly ridiculed is fought and won. This forum is constructed upon two mirror scenes which, though similar in setting, contrast each other vividly in outcome. In the first scene, living in Christminster and being on his way home from visiting his sick great-aunt, Jude happens upon a group of Marygreen villagers who enquire after the success of his academic plans. The nature of the enquiry, led chiefly by the villager John, is underlined with heavy irony and sarcasm and an element of jealousy. On seeing him, John salutes Jude as though the latter has finally achieved the position of social superiority he was seeking, exclaiming,

“Ye’ve got there right enough, then! [...] Why, to the sear of l’arning – the “City of Light” you used to talk to us about as a little boy!” (162)

John continues his attack by asserting that Christminster is nothing but a collection of deserted, impoverished buildings, “auld buildings, half church, half almshouse, and not much going on at that.” Jude’s pompous and unnecessarily learned reply where he calls Christminster “the intellectual and spiritual granary of this country,” and explains its

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<sup>1</sup> *Jude*, p. 56.

lack of bustle and silence as “the stillness of infinite motion – the sleep of the spinning-top to borrow the simile of a well-known writer” (163) makes him, in a sense, deserving of the ridicule he receives. This occurs when he is forced to admit that, due to his pecuniary circumstances, he still has not succeeded in entering one of the colleges. In a told-you-so tone and speaking for the entire group, John gloats, “Just what we thought! Such places be not for such as you – only for them with plenty o’ money” (163).

The crowing and triumphant tone of this comment cuts Jude. Though he retorts that John is mistaken, the words have a powerful effect upon him, and begin a series of events that ultimately bring about his harsh realization of the hopelessness of his dreams. They bring Jude down to earth with a bump, and he is set “regarding his prospects in a cold northern light” (163), a light which makes a stark contrast with the warm eastern luminescence that once radiated from Christminster. Suddenly, “It was necessary to consider facts a little more closely than he had done of late” (163), to “get special information” (164), and to make “indirect enquiries” as to the practicality of his plans. The resulting truth, capped by the Master’s unmerciful letter from Biblioll College, is that Jude’s scheme has burst “like an iridescent soap-bubble, under the touch of reasoned enquiry” (166).

Jude’s fear of scorn from the Marygreen parish concerning his failure to live up to the intellectual ideal he built for himself never leaves him. Years later, living and working freelance as an exile, he ventures no closer than twelve miles to Marygreen for fear of bumping into someone he knows: “he had a sensitive dread of being questioned as to his life and fortunes by those who had been acquainted with him during his ardent young manhood of study and promise, and his brief but unhappy married life at that time” (379). In spite of this, Fawley’s shame, unlike Tess,’ is not all-sweeping, but strictly confined to this Marygreen audience and area. Although this would appear to contradict our original definition of shame as failing to be dependent on an audience, this is not so. In order for Jude to feel shame he, too, must have internalized the standards by which his audience judges him. The distinction is simply that his sense of failure is only stimulated when he comes into contact with this audience. Thus because shame is essentially a public / audience-related experience in *Jude*, outside of Marygreen Jude does not directly feel it. Ultimately, and as we might expect, the shattering of his dream is not a public but a private humiliation. Back in Marygreen,

directly after his realization of his broken dream, it is his personal sense of failure presented as a mental agony felt upon awakening from a sleep, “the hell of conscious failure,” that makes him want to scream with despair, frustration and misery.<sup>1</sup> Not only this, but we are explicitly told that upon the collapse of his academic hopes, all Jude’s concerns for social success and approval, like Clym’s, leave him.<sup>2</sup>

The overthrow of this public ridicule system which attempts to stop Jude’s “social restlessness” (399) and prevent him from breaking out of his social order by pursuing the higher road to academia, is now played out in the contrasting parallel scene to the above scene at Marygreen. Saved until the final part of the novel, it takes place at precisely the spot in Christminster where the end of Jude’s academic dream sinks in, and where he now watches the procession of university Doctors who have succeeded where he has failed. Awaiting the ceremony, Jude is recognized by former masonry workmates. Making assumptions about his progress based on since the last time they saw him and his appearance, they openly taunt him in a manner that mirrors the earlier Marygreen scene,

“An’ you don’t seem to have done any great things for yourself by going away?” [...]

“Except found more mouths to fill!” [...]

“Yer powers wasn’t enough to carry ’ee through.” (397-8)

But unlike before, these taunts are unsuccessful and Jude does not feel humiliated: “finding himself the centre of curiosity, quizzing, and comment, Jude was not inclined to shrink from open declarations of what he had no reason to be ashamed of” (398). Instead he uses the moment to expose the superficiality of a shame-orientated society where individual action is evaluated in terms of outward success or failure, intentions are forgotten and public opinion easily swayed. Addressing the crowd, he defends his original aspirations:

“I don’t admit that my failure proved my view to be a wrong one, or that my success would have made it a right one; though that’s how we appraise such attempts nowadays – I mean, not by their essential soundness, but by their accidental outcomes. If I had ended up by becoming like one of these gentlemen in red and black that we saw dropping in here by now, everybody would have said: ‘See how wise that young man was, to follow the bent of his nature!’ But having ended no better than I began they say: ‘See what a fool that fellow was in following a freak of his fancy.’” (398)

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<sup>1</sup> *Jude*, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177. For the discussion of the similar change in Clym see pp. 80-82.

Looking poor and bedraggled in the rain, with a woman well advanced in pregnancy and three children in tow, Jude appears a failure. But this he claims is only due to the practice of his day and age of judging the value of a man's opinion by its apparent success or failure, "their accidental outcomes." As he points out, the inherent virtue or value of his undertaking to become a "son of the University" is of no interest to the crowd, who judge purely in accordance with whether his plan functions. It is this, and nothing else, that draws the line between "wise" and "fool," between being a "young man" or simply a "fellow," between the infinitely superior and worthy luxury of following "the bend of his nature," or the spontaneous, ill-considered craze of following "a freak of his fancy." Jude's original intention, revealed by explaining the reasons behind his failure, is inherently worthy and does not fail through any fault of his own. Though advanced in learning by his ten-year study struggle, he is not only financially handicapped and intellectually ahead of his time, but also lacking in the necessary drive to get ahead, not being "cold-blooded as a fish and as selfish as a pig" (398-9). It is this 'truth' behind Jude's failure, knowledge that, as we see time and again in Hardy's work, the general public never has, that changes his seemed failure into a personal tragedy, evoking pathos instead of ridicule: "You may ridicule me – I am quite willing that you should – I am a fit subject, no doubt. But I think if you knew what I had gone through these last few years you would rather pity me" (399).

Although, becoming overwhelmed with self-pity, the remainder of Jude's apologia deteriorates into a general bemoaning of the modern condition, ending with him being cautioned by a policeman, the remainder of his speech must not be dismissed. Jude describes how, slowly over the years, he has lost every one of the moral principles he once shared with the world at large. Whilst this obviously makes him unaffected by its criticism, dulling him from public shame, it has also left him bereft of all guide or standard by which to live his life. This, as we shall see later, has serious consequences upon his and Sue's lives.

One other area remains in which shame features in Jude's life. This concerns his relationship with Sue and recalls one of shame's fundamental principles, namely that in cases where the sense of shame is increased by the audience's judgement of the individual, the latter must care about its opinion of him. In the early stages of their courtship, having seen and in effect fallen for Sue, making a good impression upon her counts more to Jude than at any other time. Securing, maintaining and, if necessary, recovering her good opinion marks Fawley's every move. It stops him introducing himself to her at first sight for fear she will look with scorn upon his workmanly

appearance,<sup>1</sup> while “being dressed up in his Sunday suit” (139) the second time, encourages him to do so. It makes him regret his hasty proposal to meet outside for, though this is common practice in the country, it “might not seem respectable to a dear girl like Sue” (148). It makes him delay telling Sue about his marriage to Arabella, being ashamed to do so just as Tess is ashamed of her liaison with Alec before Angel.<sup>2</sup> And finally it covers him with shame for turning up drunk and desperate at her lodgings after the collapse of his academic dreams:

She knew the worst of him – the very worst. How could he face her now? She would soon be coming down to breakfast, as she had said, and there would he be in all his shame confronting her. He could not bare the thought, and softly drawing on his boots, and taking his hat from the nail on which she had hung it, he slipped noiselessly out of the house.

(174-5)

Typical of shame, the dread of exposure and the vulnerability it means, “there would he be in all his shame confronting her,” means Jude cannot face her, causing him instinctively to want to flee and take cover. Thus Jude dresses and secretly leaves the house, his plan being “to get away to some obscure spot and hide...” (175). His “self-disgrace” in Sue’s eyes is also slow in leaving him. Such is his preoccupation that he considers it a possible explanation for Sue’s changed and distanced manner towards him when he meets her again in Melchester, “You don’t – think me a demoralized wretch – for coming to you as I was – and going so shamefully, Sue?” (184). Luckily Sue’s sympathetic response, “O, I have tried not to! [...] I hope I shall never have any doubt of your worthiness, my poor Jude!” signals that, although his fears were perhaps grounded, Sue does not think this of him. And thus Jude is restored to his cousin’s good opinion.

### **b. Sue’s Criticism of Convention and the Shameful State**

Jude’s exposure of the flaws of a shame-oriented society begins an attack on conventionality and shame in which Sue plays a crucial part. Already distanced from shame, Sue not only actively criticizes convention, but challenges especially the

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<sup>1</sup> *Jude*, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222. For the corresponding discussion of Tess’ shame before Angel, see pp. 133-140.

shameful state in regard to women and its sway as a social sanction to control their behaviour.

On one of the rare moments where, Jude being absent, we are free to behold Sue without his distorting lens, she is shown to have pagan, and therefore unconventional, tendencies. Long since having abandoned her Anglican views, and critical of Church teaching, she purchases statues of Venus and Apollo from a travelling salesman, and admires them in her room.<sup>1</sup> “[T]hey submit, and I kick” (276) is how she describes her reaction to mistakenly having married Phillotson: the difference between herself and other unhappily married women is that she does not accept her fate. As a result, brushing aside Church ruling that marriage is forever and that wives obey their husbands, she leaves Phillotson to live with her cousin. She bears two illegitimate children to him, miscarrying the third, and refuses to legitimize their relations by marrying again out of a combination of disregard for marriage, fear and sexual indifference.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Sue is the greatest critic of marriage in the novel.<sup>3</sup>

In Aunt Drusilla’s single account of her as a child, Sue is not only depicted as being rebellious – “Many’s the time I’ve smacked her for her impertinence” (160) – but as deliberately resisting and flouting the conventional behavioural code for members of the female sex that uses shame as its compliance:

“Why, one day when she was walking into the pond with her shoes and stockings off, and her petticoats pulled above her knees, afore I could cry out for shame, she said: ‘Move on, aunty! This is no sight for modest eyes!’” (160-1)

Going barelegged and footed is not done by girls; exposing these parts of the body is shameful business. And yet although Sue does not share Drusilla’s due reaction, “I could cry out for shame,” this does not mean she is inherently shameless. The distinction between herself and other shame characters is that, while she can recognize the shameful element of a situation, she is also able to look beyond it and differentiate between inherent and conventional / public shame, the latter being an artificial mechanism constructed by society to ensure ‘correct’ female behaviour. Unlike Hardy’s other female protagonists, Sue challenges female shame and traditional notions of modesty. In place of “modest eyes” she possesses a “curious unconsciousness of

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<sup>1</sup> *Jude*, pp. 141, 156 and 204-208.

<sup>2</sup> The source of Sue’s fear of marriage is two-fold. First she is afraid their mutual love will thereupon disappear, and second she feels that the Fawleys are not meant for marriage, *ibid.*, p. 323.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

gender” which makes her resist gender-typed behaviour. Continuing the account from Aunt Drusilla, a neighbour explains how though “not exactly a tomboy,” Sue used to participate in those activities traditionally reserved for boys, rowing with them, “All boys except herself” (162).

Sue’s instinctive rejection of conventional, gender-oriented codes of behaviour controlled by shame is not simply a childish impulse. Although Jude tries characteristically to soften the impact of his aunt’s stinging account, “She was a little child then,” his cousin’s critical insight develops into mature analysis as an adult. This is shown when Sue escapes from the training college to Jude’s lodgings. In a scene that mirrors Jude’s earlier bolt from Christminster to Sue’s, the heroine is described exchanging her wet clothes for Jude’s Sunday suit, putting her own clothes in front of the fire to dry. On Jude’s re-entrance into the room and sight of Sue and her clothes, Sue blushes as the following scene describes,

Sitting in his only arm-chair he saw a slim and fragile being masquerading as himself on a Sunday, so pathetic in her defencelessness that his heart felt big at the sense of it. On two other chairs before the fire were her wet garments. She blushed as he sat down beside her, but only for a moment. (198)

Sue’s blush is caused by a mixture of self-consciousness and modesty; the sense that she is not only breaking the rules of convention for women by wearing Jude’s clothes, but also the awareness of her sex through the exposure of her own garments. And yet although she blushes as Jude sits down beside her, the narrator makes clear that this is an instinctive reaction only and that it contravenes Sue’s basic philosophy. Blushing fleetingly, “but only for a moment,” she immediately proceeds to rationalize and criticize the impulse and the situation that has caused her to,

“I suppose, Jude, it is odd that you should see me like this and all my things hanging there? Yet what nonsense! They are only a woman’s clothes – sexless cloth and linen.” (198)

The unconventionality of the situation she dismisses as “nonsense!” attempting to demystify the situation by reducing her hanging clothes, conventionally seen as symbols of womanly intimacy, to simply pieces of material to cover a woman, “sexless cloth and linen.”

Denials of shame and attempts to dismantle its systems by differentiating between false and deserved shame mark remaining episodes. “It is not that I am ashamed – not as you think!” (382) Sue tells Arabella at the Kennetbridge fair, explaining her reserve about being pregnant as simply the sense of being overwhelmed by the enormity of what she is doing by bringing children into the world. Discussing the marriage between



the soldier and his expectant girlfriend in the registrar's office in Aldbrickham, Sue criticizes shame caused by breaking social convention, positing that it is only when a person shows disregard for his own self-worth and dignity as a human being that he has reason to be ashamed. As she explains, financing the wedding herself despite her lover's reluctance and the fact that he beats her, is a desperate last "snatching at social salvation," not worthy of "real" shame,

"How terrible that scene was to me! [...] the other poor soul – to escape a nominal shame which was owing to the weakness of her character, degrading herself to the real shame of bondage to a tyrant who scorned her – a man whom to avoid for ever was her only chance of salvation." (352-3)

Marrying to avoid being shamed by society for having illicit sexual relations brings, according to Sue, more shame upon the soldier's girlfriend. The public, conventional shame the latter attempts to avoid is negligible compared with the personal shame and humiliation she brings upon herself by marrying a man who neither loves nor respects her. And yet although, encouraged by the scene's vulgarity, Sue's words find sympathy with the reader, they are stained with irony. Sue's return to Phillotson at the novel's end is glaringly similar to this same woman's behaviour in terms of personal degradation. As if to underline the complete volte-face that Sue goes through at *Jude's* close, it is here that she also talks seriously of being ashamed. Assisted by Mrs. Edlin in the kitchen at Marygreen, having remarried her ex-husband, she exclaims, "I *must* practise myself in my household duties. I've shamefully neglected them!" (474). Uttered against her consistent attack on shame throughout the novel, these words have a tragic poignancy: the progress Sue has made up to this point in exposing and criticizing shame-directed and gender-based behaviour is herewith undone, the full extent of her breakdown laid bare.<sup>1</sup>

### **c. Phillotson's Triumph over Public Censure**

As a character Phillotson has two functions in our study: to continue to expose the workings of a shame-oriented society by showing what happens to characters who defy convention, and to assert, in spite of this, their moral intractability. Considering the sum

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<sup>1</sup> For the discussion of Sue's statement in terms of work and punishment, see p. 209.

of Phillotson's behaviour, the ruin of his reputation on letting his wife leave him and its restoration on taking her back, it is tempting to understand his action as a lesson in conformity and public shame. But this is not so. Although Phillotson discovers how pitilessly cruel society is to its dissenting members, his impulse behind regaining Sue does not come from a reformed moral belief, nor is he broken into submission. Keeping with the trend established by Jude and Sue, the schoolmaster is driven by personal conviction which is independent of conventional moral code. Like the cousins he, too, is ahead of his time, possessing the moral autonomy of a conscience-driven character living in a shame-oriented world.

Phillotson's agreement to Sue's leaving him is, typically, one which his conscience has caused him to make, and one which goes contrary to accepted matrimonial practice. Though at first he objects to her request on the basis of its scandal, writing to her in a note that he "cannot agree to such a preposterous notion [...] You would lose everybody's respect and regard; and so should I!" (287), his conscience soon gets the better of him. Abandoning conventional concerns for the higher sake of humanity, he realizes Sue's life with him is a living hell, and that she and Jude belong together: "They seem to be two people split in two!" (293). The social implications of this decision are revealed through the character of Mr. Gillingham. In discussing the matter with his old school friend, his role is to expose Phillotson's views more explicitly and to place them within a wider social context.

Gillingham's response to his friend's decision to let his wife leave him is characteristic of a member of a shame-oriented society: he reacts purely in terms of how unfavourably the decision will publicly be received. In doing so Gillingham forgets 'intentions' and concentrates upon 'results,' utterly failing to appreciate the finer subtleties of the case. The fact that Sue's "unconquerable aversion" to him is more than Phillotson can bear, the mixture of awe and jealousy with which his friend regards the cousins' intimacy, and the sense of inadequacy and powerlessness he feels in being unable to eclipse or even meet Sue's arguments – all these aspects are lost upon Gillingham. Instead the latter reacts to his friend's painful confessions with banal, superficial protests, "She'll get over it, good-now?"; "I think you are rafted, and not yourself [...] Do go back and make up your mind to put up with a few whims" (295). Public disgrace is his sole concern, "But – you see, there's the question of neighbours and society – what will happen if everybody –"; "It will upset all received opinion hereabout. Good God – what will Shaston say!" (295), all of which is made more scandalous by the involvement of a third party, "Loving the other?" (292); "What you'll

let her go? And with her lover?” (293); “But to go attended by a cavalier – that makes a difference.” Nor is Gillingham interested in Phillotson’s higher aims. The nobler motivation behind the latter’s decision, “it is wrong to so torture a fellow-creature any longer; and I won’t be the inhuman wretch to do it, cost what it may!” (293), and Christian charity, “If a person who has blindly walked into a quagmire cries of help, I am inclined to give it, if possible” (294), fall on deaf ears since it is only the end result that matters.<sup>1</sup> Gillingham even makes light of Sue’s suffering, thinking privately that she “ought to be smacked and brought to her senses” (296), and later condemning her as a “tantalizing, capricious little woman!” (317). The fact that Phillotson’s resolution will be met with strong disapproval and severe reprisals by the community, together with the fact that it would be a shame to lose such a “charming young thing” is reason enough for Phillotson to continue the “daily, continuous tragedy” that his unhappy marriage means. “Stick to her!” are Gillingham’s parting words of advice to his friend.

Above all Gillingham’s narrow, inhuman response confirms to Phillotson the legitimacy of his plan. When the two friends part, the latter reflects on the reaction of his friend in a way that shows he holds no store by it, “So, Gillingham, my friend, you had no stronger arguments against it than those” (296). Although he finds no precedent for his action in the Church or in the world at large,<sup>2</sup> Phillotson’s instinct nonetheless convinces him that he is right, upon which he is now prepared to act: “I am only a feeler, not a reasoner” (295).

Having agreed to Sue’s desertion, its immediate and long-term implications are now explored. Unhappily, every detail of Gillingham’s arguments are substantiated. We are presented with the schoolmaster’s social collapse, first to a figure of ridicule, then to a pitiful social outcast. In order that its full horror is appreciated, all that Phillotson stands to lose is first presented. Chapter VI of “At Shaston” begins with an account of the social standing he has enjoyed in the town up till now. Not only a well-known member of the community, Phillotson is a native of Shaston and is held in “sincere regard” by its inhabitants, a regard that his acquisition of such a “pretty wife” has increased. This idyllic picture of public esteem and ease that Phillotson enjoys is now destroyed on the exposure of his domestic situation. On the grounds that he is a bad moral example to all present and future pupils, Phillotson is forced to give up his office as headmaster. Try as

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<sup>1</sup> Gillingham’s only other wider concern involves the break up of the family unit, see *Jude*, p. 295.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

he might to resist the school authorities, he is easily overruled, his attempt to do right by Sue being seen as the tolerance or even encouragement of immoral sexual relations instead of as the humane and generous sacrifice that it is: "They have requested me to send in my resignation on account of my scandalous conduct in giving my tortured wife her liberty – or, as they call it, condoning her adultery" (311). The public meeting Phillotson calls in response to this conviction degenerates into a farce. Though the very fact that he finds support for his unconventional stance points to a relaxation of moral code, it is still in its teething stages. Phillotson's supporters, a mixed troop of circus travellers that include, "a steam-roundabout manager, two travelling broom-makers, [...] a ginger-bread-stall keeper, a swing-boat owner, and a 'test-your-strength' man" (313), and the picture of comical chaos that results from their over-eager support, destroy all hope of fruitful debate and undermine any serious meaning the meeting could otherwise have had.

The next we see of Phillotson is "plodding along" the road to Marygreen in the final chapter of "At Aldbrickham and Elsewhere." Being some years after the scandal, sufficient time has passed to show the full extent of his ruin. This together with its practical and emotional effects is now presented through a description of his physical person and a conversation he chances to have with Arabella, who is travelling in the same direction. "[A]n elderly man of spare stature and thoughtful gait" (387), Phillotson makes a pathetic figure, appearing tired and careworn. On foot and carrying a basket, he is unable to afford any form of transport or household help, a fact that the "touch of slovenliness" about him confirms. As he informs Arabella, he has not only suffered a severe blow to his reputation putting an end to any career he might have had,<sup>1</sup> but has also lost his livelihood, with the result that he has been forced to face a life of "dire poverty" for his remaining days: "a returning to zero, with all its humiliations" (388). Phillotson is now living and working at Marygreen at the mercy of the village vicar, who "having known me before my so-called eccentric conduct towards my wife had ruined my reputation as a schoolmaster, he accepted my services when all other schools were closed against me" (388). Four chapters later, the narrator affirms the social and financial depths to which Phillotson has plummeted, emphasizing his awkward and humiliating position of having to depend upon another's charity,

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<sup>1</sup> As Gillingham points out to Phillotson later on, "You might have been a school inspector by this time, or a reverend, if you hadn't been so weak about her," *Jude*, p. 443.

No man had ever suffered more inconvenience from his own charity, Christian or heathen, than Phillotson had done in letting Sue go. He had been knocked about from pillar to post at the hands of the virtuous almost beyond endurance; he had been nearly starved, and was now dependent entirely upon the very small stipend from the school of this village (where the parson had got ill-spoken of for befriending him). (433)

“Knocked about from pillar to post,” it is as though Phillotson’s battle has been a physical one, as though he has been battered and wounded, and then “nearly starved.”

Crucially, however, although he has paid far and wide for disobeying society’s moral code, it has not caused Phillotson to retract or abandon his views about the correctness of his action, for “such was his obstinance and illogical disregard of opinion, and of the principles in which he had been trained, that his convictions on the rightness of his course with his wife had not been disturbed” (433-4).<sup>1</sup> Unlike Tess, Phillotson’s belief in the moral correctness of his action and his innocence wavers at no point in the novel. Just as we learn here that he has not changed his mind, so does he declare in resolute terms on meeting Arabella, “I am convinced I did only what was right, and just, and moral. I have suffered for my act and opinions, but I hold to them” (388). Similarly, Phillotson’s willingness to take Sue back at the novel’s end does not signify a weakening of his morals.<sup>2</sup> Although he is certainly not blind to the gain of respectability that it will bring, and in this sense he *has* learnt how cruelly society deals with non-conformers, the reason for him doing so is again a private one. In direct contrast to his original motivation, his decision is governed by self-interest alone. Morally speaking, given, like Jude, his complete loss of principles to guide him, he can still consider Sue his wife. This, together with his selfishness, and the felicitous fact that the latter believes herself to be so, secures the decision for him,

Principles which could be subverted by feeling in one direction were liable to the same catastrophe in another. The instincts which had allowed him to give Sue her liberty now enabled him to regard her as none the worse for her life with Jude. He wished for her still, in his curious way, if he did not love her, and, apart from policy, soon felt that he would be gratified to have her again as his, always provided that she came willingly. (434)

What follows is a plan of such deliberate cunning, that the sympathy and admiration developed for Phillotson up to this point is instantly withdraw. Wanting Sue back, he

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that the narrator is not in support of Phillotson’s cause here, nor does he approve of Jude and Sue’s failure to marry, *Jude*, p. 357.

<sup>2</sup> For a contrary interpretation of Phillotson’s change in behaviour see Garson, p. 177, who argues that Phillotson is unconvincing as a character, and that he “shifts according to the needs of the plot.”

tries to find a way of resolving his desire for her in society's eyes so that he may gain both materially and socially:

But artifice was necessary, he had found, for stemming the cold and inhumane blast of the world's contempt. And here were the materials ready made. By getting Sue back and marrying her on the respectable plea of having entertained erroneous views of her, and gained his divorce wrongfully, he might acquire some comfort, resume his old courses, perhaps return to the Shaston school, if not even to the church as a licentiate. (434)

The idea of Phillotson becoming a man of the Church is ridiculous given his lack of religious conviction. But, describing Sue to Gillingham as “a luxury to an old fogey like me,” he thinks their marriage will “set me right in the eyes of the clergy and the orthodox laity, who have never forgiven me for letting her go” (442). Although this proves to be the case, it is done upon the basis of a lie. In order to publicly redeem himself, Phillotson must acknowledge that his original action was wrong, something that he does without believing it himself, “I can see her views on the indissolubility of marriage well enough, and I know where she got them. They are not mine; but I shall make use of them to further mine” (434). Phillotson thus writes a “carefully considered epistle to Sue,” designed to encourage the sentiment she has been developing with its Old Testament judgementalism, “carefully hiding his heterodox feelings” (435). Later he is described “acting up to his position,” before Gillingham although the narrator states explicitly that “his taking Sue to him again had at bottom nothing to do with repentance of letting her go, but was, primarily, a human instinct flying in the face of custom and profession” (443). However Phillotson is a convincing actor, having remarried Sue it appears to the outside world that both have “performed a noble, and righteous, and mutually forgiving act” (446).

#### **d. Arabella, Shamelessness and the Manipulation of Convention**

As Phillotson fakes a change of heart to regain his ex-wife and with this, social approval, Arabella manipulates convention to meet her own wants and needs. Of all the characters of *Jude* she is the greatest defier of sexual and moral mores, but at no point is presented as being any worse off on this account.

Arabella is, as Patricia Ingham aptly calls her, a “fallen woman who refuses to fall.”<sup>1</sup> Unlike all women characters before her, she is shameless and guiltless; the single time she manages to recognize that shame is called for, she explicitly revels in the fact that she is wanting in it. Occurring at Tinker Taylor’s discovery of the twenty-four hour betting and drinking orgy she has been running to make Jude remarry her, she laughingly admits, “We ought to be ashamed of ourselves, oughn’t we! But it is a bit of a housewarming, you see; and our friends are in no hurry” (459).<sup>2</sup> As Leontes’ allegation of adultery against Hermione in *The Winter’s Tale* runs, “As you were past all shame –, / Those of your fact are so – so past all truth,”<sup>3</sup> we are given the similar impression that in being shameless, Arabella is beyond all reaches of integrity. This lack of integrity is shown by her disregard for privacy. Whereas Jude begins a silent, melancholic reverie on passing the spot of their first kiss, his lover, in the company of two friends, not only shares, but, “chattering freely on the subject to the other two,” relates in great detail all that has passed between herself and Jude, telling “almost word for word some of his most tender speeches” (93). Arabella’s failing in human decency is also epitomized by her callous double desertion of Jude on his death bed for the frivolities of the Remembrance Day celebrations. Nor does she take responsibility for her actions, her dishonest means of tricking Jude into marrying her and her son’s death failing to infringe upon her conscience.

Contrary to what we might expect, this lack of shame and guilt in Arabella is not entirely negative. According to established sympathy structures in the novel, the suffering she causes Jude – with whom we sympathize – clearly reflects negatively upon her, quite apart from the fact that, by lacking in a sense of shame she is lacking an inherent human quality. As Solovyov’s work claims, a shameless person is one whose material animal nature has permanently or temporarily defeated his spiritual side; being herself a “complete and substantial female animal,”<sup>4</sup> and established purely on a sexual

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<sup>1</sup> Ingham, p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> The only other point where Arabella is connected to shame is when, seeing Jude and Sue happily absorbed in one another at the Great Wessex Agricultural Show, she declares, “I would be ashamed of making myself so silly if I were he,” *Jude*, p. 361. The truth of this comment, however, is strongly undermined by Arabella’s jealousy and the facts we already know about her character.

<sup>3</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale*, III, ii, 82-83.

<sup>4</sup> Hardy’s substitution of “female animal” here in place of “female human” which was used in the serialized text for *Harper’s Monthly Magazine* and the First Edition, is noteworthy since it increases Arabella’s sexuality, the word “animal” having the connotation of basic instincts as opposed to the higher mental processes associated with “human.”

level, Arabella fails to rise “above the bestial stage” and thus lacks all manner of spirituality.<sup>1</sup> By opposing all Jude’s mental goals, be they spiritual, religious or intellectual, “schemes of [...] a man’s one opportunity of showing himself superior to the lower animals” (107),<sup>2</sup> she belongs to a lower level of evolution. Subsequently her sexuality is of a more base nature than Tess’. On another level, however, when we compare Arabella’s damage to Jude alongside his cousin’s at the novel’s close, it is tempting to conclude that Sue’s conduct is equally as cruel. And, by failing to care about right or wrong, Arabella is significantly freer than the Fawley cousins to pursue her own happiness. Unlike them, she does not consider the moral correctness of her actions, so that when, like them, she rejects convention, she is saved the resulting sense of loss of self and disorientation that Jude and Sue experience. Ultimately it is she, also, who, at the novel’s end, survives in the most positive fashion.

Arabella’s exploitation of convention is shown, for example, when she attempts to secure Jude as her husband. Both times she relies on conventional attitudes towards sexual relations and marriage to ensure the ceremony takes place. The first time, believing to have made his lover pregnant, marriage is the only respectable outcome for a man in Jude’s position,<sup>3</sup> just as it is the end the second time, after he has spent the night with her. In both cases respectability could not be furthest from Arabella’s mind.

Similarly, the bigamy Arabella commits by marrying Cartlett is of no account to her. She scoffs at Jude’s horrified reaction to what he considers a criminal act, declaring illegal marriage common practice in the colonies, “Crime! Pooh. They don’t think much of such as that over there! Lots of em do it [...] He was very fond of me, and we lived honourable enough, and as respectable as any married couple in the Colony!” (243). Arabella justifies her bigamy by cleverly arguing that that which is considered a crime by one culture is not necessarily one by another. Finding herself in a similar situation as Tess, being, on her arrival in Australia, with child but without husband, she is able, unlike the latter, to take advantage of the colonies’ moral laxity to secure herself a new breadwinner and companion. Thus Arabella has not internalized the moral code of Victorian England to such an extent that she only behaves according to it, no matter

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<sup>1</sup> Solovyof, pp. 32, 47-48, 138 and 143-145. For Arabella’s sexual physicality and Jude’s attraction to her see *Jude*, pp. 81, 93 and 95.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98 and 114.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102. Arabella even defends her plan to make Jude marry her as being every woman’s right, *ibid.*, p. 113.



where she is. Ironically, in contrast to this character and despite their intellectual advancement, Jude and Sue find it impossible to completely rise above the problems that defying convention brings.

#### **e. Excommunication and Ostracism**

Phillotson's undoing, his loss of reputation, livelihood and friends at the hands of society illustrates, much in the style of *Tess*, what the individual can expect when he defies social law; our final example, involving the Fawley cousins at Aldbrickham, shows precisely how this takes place. Aldbrickham's attack on the cousins on account of their unconventionality is an account of how shame's agents, excommunication (in the Latin sense of being excluded from the community), and ostracism (in the classical Greek sense of being temporarily banished as a moral expedient to protect public well-being) work, albeit and as we might expect, without long-term success. Again the focus is upon the way society functions, a whole chapter being dedicated to the process, instead of its emotional effect upon the character as we find with *Tess*. Again, too, the entire experience fails to change the cousins' moral views.

As a result of their failed marriage attempt, and their subsequent unorthodoxy – living together unmarried in the company of a young child and shrouded with rumours of undefended divorce cases – the Aldbrickham community begins a series of attacks on the Fawley pair. Just as in *Tess*, it gravely misconstrues the cousins' situation, being unable to see beyond the apparent immorality that their unconventionality spells.<sup>1</sup> As the narrator explains, an enormous, impenetrable gulf exists between the individual, the private realm and the world at large, “The society of Spring Street and the neighbourhood generally did not understand, and probably could not have been made to understand, Sue and Jude's private minds, emotions, positions and fears” (367). Instead, convinced of the threat the Fawleys are to the moral good of the community, they attempt to banish them.

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<sup>1</sup> This narrow-minded presentation of the world at large is typical of *Jude*. Other examples include the way the Marygreen villagers take Jude's first Sunday walk out with Arabella to mean that he is the latter's “intended partner,” *Jude*, p. 91, Sue's comment that society only recognizes sexual relations between male and female, *ibid.*, p. 223, and the conjecture that her disappearance from the school at Shaston has been caused by her running away with another man, *ibid.*, p. 310.

What follows is a professional campaign of ostracism. First, Father Time is scorned by pupils at school, then the direct neighbourhood is mobilized. Not only are social formalities such as friendly greetings dropped, but Sue is outrightly ignored by the artisan's wives, with whom she would normally enjoy contact. Forming the all-important united front, these wives fail to acknowledge Sue's presence by avoiding eye contact with her in an attempt to communicate their disapproval,

The baker's lad and the grocer's boy, who at first had used to lift their hats gallantly to Sue when they came to execute their errands, in these days no longer took the trouble to render her that homage, and the neighbouring artizan's wives looked straight along the pavement when they encountered her. (368)

Done silently and gradually, this shunning gets under the Fawley's skins and is exacerbated by their own sensitivity, "their temperaments" being "precisely of a kind to suffer from this atmosphere, and to be indisposed to lighten it by vigorous and open statements" (368). Matters are next brought to a head by Jude's sacking from a job relettering the Ten Commandments in a nearby church. Needless to say he can find no further work in Aldbrickham.

The neighbourly contact that Jude enjoys is now the last tie to be broken, occurring at the Artizan's Mutual Improvement Society. Being enthusiastic and unusually well-read in literature and religion, Jude has enjoyed a well-respected position within the society up till now, and even has a seat on the committee. Now, on the grounds of immorality, similar to Phillotson's fate, his reputation is destroyed in a matter of seconds. In a scene noteworthy for its authentic portrayal of the universal experience of being snubbed, we read,

as he entered they looked dubiously at him, and hardly uttered a word of greeting. He guessed that something bearing on himself had either been discussed or mooted. Some ordinary business was transacted, and it was disclosed that the number of subscriptions had shown a sudden falling off for that quarter. (374)

The members' withdrawal, their refusal to greet him or to communicate what is on their minds, is the first step to Jude's isolation, the use of the passive construction, "had either been discussed or mooted," "was transacted, and it was disclosed" conveying the depersonalization that has begun. The hint of the underhand argument that follows, the drop in members, means that Jude, like Phillotson again, is given anything but a fair trial. Everything takes place on a level of implication only; nothing is said outright, but is wrapped up in such a way as to make Jude, sensitive man that he is, understand,

One member – a really well-meaning and upright man – began speaking in enigmas about certain possible causes: that it behoved them to look well into their constitution; for if the committee were not respected, and had not at least in their differences, a common standard of *conduct*, they would bring the institution to the ground. (374)

No further words are necessary, and Jude resigns. Financially and intellectually starved and excluded from community life, the family has no choice but to leave Aldbrickham. Hounded from their home, it would seem that they have been taught a lesson in defying convention. Yet again, as with the schoolmaster before them, this is not the case, their submission being not in heart and their ostracism only temporary. After two and a half years of a “shifting, almost nomadic, life,” and helped by the fact that they have left the area and therefore left the experience behind, Jude’s self-assurance and disregard for public opinion soon re-establishes itself in his desire to return to Christminster. Having thought long and hard, he sees no reason for them to be affected by others’ opinions any more or to object to being recognized. With the rise of his self-conviction, so increases his indifference and evaporates his sense of shame, “Why should they care if they were known? It was over-sensitive of them to mind so much. They could go on selling cakes there, if he couldn’t work. He had no sense of shame at mere poverty” (391).

#### **4. The Danger: Losing Sense of the Self and the World**

##### **a. Outsiders bereft of Guide and Principle**

Although in principle Jude, Sue and Phillotson’s non-conformism is welcomed and supported by narrator and reader alike thanks to the narrator’s exposure of convention’s absurdity, in practice, their dissension has serious drawbacks. Hints of these are already discernible upon the cousins’ arrival at Aldbrickham; their full effects are explored in the latter’s banishment from the town and in Phillotson’s re-acceptance of Sue, both of which constitute the countdown to *Jude*’s end.

Since the institution of marriage is the central point of criticism in the novel,<sup>1</sup> we can well understand the cousins’ refusal to make their attachment legitimate. All four legal marriages in *Jude*, in the form of Jude and Arabella’s, and Sue and Phillotson’s first and

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<sup>1</sup> As Hardy explains about his writing of *Jude* in his postscript to the 1912 Wessex Edition, “My opinion at that time, if I remember rightly, was what it is now, that a marriage should be dissolvable as soon as it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties – being then essentially and morally no marriage,” *Jude*, p. 41.

second marriages, are stifling, cruel and demeaning. Only the cousins' "natural" but unofficial marriage is admirable and, if only for a short time, blessed with happiness. In spite of this, neglecting to marry brings immediate and long-term problems for the cousins. Even the narrator cannot stop himself criticizing their decision not to, his attempt at neutrality in claiming the needlessness of "express[ing] his personal views upon the grave controversy" (357), automatically exposing his disapproval by his calling it a "grave controversy." The direct problem caused by the Fawleys not marrying is their increased isolation. Totally self-absorbed and lacking in community spirit, their failure to conform to Aldbrickham code and subsequent banishment signals the end of their last chance of integration within the community. The family's hiding upstairs in a room marked "Private" on the day of their departure from Aldbrickham, whilst their furniture is auctioned below, epitomizes this. Banishment also means the beginning of reduced financial circumstances, the Kennetbridge spring fair – working as a parallel to the earlier Great Wessex event – providing a crass contrast to life before their nomadic existence, for instead of enjoying the show together, Sue is alone selling cakes to scratch a living and Jude sick at home.

But still worse is to come. In addition to isolation, poverty and ill health, Jude loses the sum of his moral principles. By becoming involved with Sue and failing to marry her when he can, he rejects the final shreds of Church teaching which he previously upheld, thereby destroying the very foundations upon which his conscience is built.<sup>1</sup> The consequence for Jude, and for Phillotson, who undergoes a similar experience by relinquishing all his previously-held views on marriage by allowing Sue to leave him, is that both characters are essentially lost. Although the reader is able to extract a wider moral from the values they reject, directly involved in their situations, these characters are unable to see beyond their immediate experience and, having no alternative to the principles they reject, are left unanchored and at sea. Standing before the crowd at Christminster defending the failure of his university dream, Jude deplores the position in which he now finds himself, having lost the "neat stock of fixed opinions" he once shared with the world at large. Though he does not regret his abandonment of these

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<sup>1</sup> The process of Jude's loss of faith is a gradual one. Whilst he only vaguely questions the justice of marrying Arabella, *Jude*, p. 107, and defends his views on marriage and the Church at the start of his friendship with Sue, he begins to doubt their validity on hearing of Sue's unhappy marriage given the Church's views on divorce, *ibid.*, p. 271. On beginning a life together with Sue the process is complete, with Jude declaring, "The Church is no more to me," *ibid.*, p. 301.

opinions, realizing that the social code is inherently flawed is one thing, and knowing where to turn and what to do about it is another, “I perceive that there is something wrong somewhere in our social formulas: what it is can only be discovered by men or women with greater insight than mine” (399). As a result he is blind, and vainly tries to find his way forward, “a chaos of principles – groping in the dark – acting by instinct and not after example” (399); “the further I get the less sure I am.” The only road open to him is to simply do what he likes so long as it brings enjoyment and no damage to others, “following inclinations which do me and nobody else any harm, and actually give pleasure to those I love best” – a practice Matthew Arnold would surely have looked most critically upon, had he been alive to do so.<sup>1</sup> In spite of this, thanks to Jude’s natural kindness and dread of hurting fellow creatures,<sup>2</sup> though lacking in a firm set of morals, he still continues to treat his fellow creatures with basic Christian charity and compassion.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for Phillotson. Without principles to direct him, selfishness takes command of the latter’s heart, enabling him to perform with a clear conscience the unmistakable cruelty of urging Sue to return: “instincts which had allowed him to give Sue her liberty now enabled him to regard her as none the worse for her life with Jude” (433). Bereft of a guide, Phillotson can freely encourage a fellow human being who has lost all reason, to do precisely that most destructive to herself and the one person she loves; suicide in a metaphorical sense for Sue and in reality for Jude. And although his “judicious severity” is not lost upon Gillingham, Mrs. Edlin or even Sue, no character is able to prevent Phillotson from acting in this way.<sup>3</sup> The message that remains is that, as admirable as their resistance to convention may be, the subsequent moral nihilism that it spells is fraught with equally serious problems.

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<sup>1</sup> In “Doing as One Likes,” in Arnold (1965), pp. 115-136, Arnold argues that it is precisely this unguided following of one’s own inclinations that is responsible for the moral and cultural decline of Victorian society.

<sup>2</sup> From a very young age, Jude cannot bear to hurt anything, which makes him shrink from seeing trees being cut or from walking on earthworms, *Jude*, p. 55f.

<sup>3</sup> For Gillingham’s objections, see *ibid.*, p. 443. Sue shares these doubts about Phillotson, more than once feeling, “he was not quite following the humane instinct which had induced him to let her go,” *ibid.*, p. 446. Mrs. Edlin even attempts to persuade Phillotson to cancel the wedding, calling it “a wicked shame to egg her on to this, poor little quivering thing!” *ibid.*, p. 444.

## **b. Sue, Instability and the Problem of Identity**

Phyllotson and Jude's moral principles are gradually subverted by their experiences over the course of the novel, leaving them lost and in a state of instability; instability is, as we have already seen, Sue's natural state. Unlike Jude, whose identity, as in the course of a Bildungsroman, undergoes clear developments, and Arabella who, though changing from wife to widow a total of three times, remains essentially the same, Sue's character is fluid, and contrary to persistent attempts by critics, cannot be tied down.<sup>1</sup> Jude's first impression of her outside Crozier College likens her eyes to a liquid, "She looked right into his face with liquid, untranslatable eyes" (136), a description which is substantiated by the narrator a few pages later by his calling Sue a "pretty, liquid-eyed, light-footed young woman" (140). The eyes being the windows of the soul, and a liquid being able to change its shape easily, Sue's nature is in constant motion, just as another of Jude's observations verifies: "There was nothing statuesque in her; all was nervous motion. She was mobile, living, yet a painter might not have called her handsome or beautiful" (137). Nervousness and sensitivity, and the way in which "everything she did seemed to have its source in feeling" (151), contribute to the effect. As a result Sue is an impulsive and paradoxical character, who continually contradicts herself and changes her mind.<sup>2</sup> Explicitly said to have a "curious double nature," her "inconsistency" and "contradictoriness" mean that she is difficult to understand and continually misunderstood: a "conundrum" to Jude, and "puzzling" and "unstateable" to Phyllotson, even the narrator fails to have a clue as to "the state of that mystery, her heart."<sup>3</sup>

Sue's instability means her life is characterized by impulsive changes of direction, of which her sudden decision to marry Phyllotson and her disorganized life before meeting

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<sup>1</sup> See Dutta, p. 116, who writes about Sue that it is "to Hardy's credit that he presents us a vivid, volatile and unpredictable human being rather than a clinical case which can be objectively analysed, neatly labelled, and conveniently filed away in a medical journal."

<sup>2</sup> Sue's correspondence to Jude is a fine example of this, see p. 172f. Another is her concern for Phyllotson's reaction to her escape from the training college, where, almost in the same breath, she first expresses fear of his wrath and then declares rebelliously, "He may think what he likes – I shall do just as I choose!" *Jude*, p. 209. A further example are the reasons Sue gives for marrying Phyllotson, first blaming the training school scandal, see *ibid.*, p. 284, only to retract this statement and make her inner insecurity to captivate men responsible, see *ibid.*, pp. 265 and 305.

<sup>3</sup> See also *ibid.*, p. 156, where neither men understand her comments at the Jerusalem exhibition and *ibid.* p. 202, where Jude fails to understand her earlier relationship with the Christminster graduate. This lack of misunderstanding has fed feminist arguments for the male's misunderstanding of the opposite sex, see William M. Morgan's "Gender and Silence in Thomas Hardy's Texts," in *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art*, ed. Anthony H. Harrison and Beverley Taylor, Dekalb, 1992, pp. 161-184.

Jude are excellent examples. Having moved from Christminster to London to live with her undergraduate friend, Sue loses her inheritance in an unsound investment scheme and returns to Christminster to work as an art-designer. But not for long. Quarrelling with her employer Miss Fontover, she loses her job and, as she informs Jude on their first meeting, is forced to seek employment and lodging elsewhere. Her readiness to start as a teacher apprentice at Mr. Phillotson's underlines her lack of direction, having already once tried teaching but given it up, she now agrees to try it again for want of an alternative. As Jude says to her on their penultimate parting, "No sooner does one expect you to go straight on, as the rational proceeding, than you double round the corner!" (438).

Having married Phillotson and taken what in convention's eyes is a permanent and stabilizing step, it is no surprise that Sue is faced with a form of identity crisis, "I am called Mrs. Richard Phillotson, living a calm married life with the counterpart of that name. But I am not really Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies" (266). As a married woman she is automatically conferred with a conventional label with which she cannot identify. In rejecting it, she, too, is lost and shipwrecked, without identity or direction, in a similar manner to how Jude finds himself when he forsakes the Church. The difference is that, whilst Jude's experiences have slowly caused his bewilderment and confusion, it takes a tragedy to properly destabilize Sue. This tragedy takes the form of Jude and Sue's children's deaths and when it happens, the level of disorientation in Sue is far greater.

### **c. The Collapse of Sue and Meaning**

Sue's collapse at *Jude's* close is a controversial issue, critics being divided as to with which of the two protagonists we are to sympathize. Suggested interpretations range from the author's illustration of the destructiveness of the female upon the male, to his attempt to represent the standard fate of the heroines of the New Women novels of the 1880s and 90s who could not cope with the new intellectual freedom of attending

college, with the result that “nervous illness marked the transition from domestic to professional roles.”<sup>1</sup>

The effect of the children’s deaths upon Sue is one of the most moving and perceptive portraits of bereavement in the history of English literature, especially for its specific handling of women’s grief in the light of their social and domestic situation. That these deaths themselves are less important than their effect upon their parents (excepting Arabella) is proven by the brevity of their description. Occurring in the second chapter of “At Christminster Again,” the children disappear from the novel as swiftly as they die, the remaining nine chapters dealing with what is the greater concern of *Jude*. This is, foreshadowed by Jude’s loss of “a neat stock of fixed opinions,” and Clym’s loss of faith in the world and God, the destruction of everything Sue has stood for up till now. Consequently, without guide or principle of any kind by which to live, evaluate and appreciate her life, and isolated from society, she breaks down.

Like Phillotson’s transformation, it is easy to see Sue’s as the act of a woman reconciling herself with convention and God.<sup>2</sup> For, contrary to how religiously dissentient she has been up till now, she now appears to embrace the Church’s teaching in a way that goes against our knowledge of her as a character, as Jude tauntingly sums up:

“Can this be the girl who brought the Pagan deities into this most Christian city? – who mimicked Miss Fontover when she crushed them with her heel? – who quoted Gibbon, and Shelley, and Mill? Where are dear Apollo and dear Venus now!” (427)

However, again, like her ex-husband, the social redemption Sue’s transformation affords her is secondary. The respectability she will gain from remarrying as she explains half-heartedly, “I would go back to Richard without repeating the sacrament, if he asked me. But ‘the world and its ways have a certain worth’ (I suppose): therefore I concede a repetition of the ceremony” (437), is only a by-product of her decision to return to him, her transcendental belief that they belong together as husband and wife and have never been otherwise being her primary motivation. Just as Clym’s decision to become an itinerant preacher is a private decision of his conscience, Sue’s is one she

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture*, New York and London, 1985, p. 137. See also Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*, New York and London, 1978, p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> This is a common interpretation of Sue’s transformation. For its most recent representation see Dutta, 2000, who writes that “Sue is cowed into social conformity by the deaths of her children,” p. 125.



makes wholly independently of external opinion. Any concession on society's part is superfluous anyway; typical of its fickleness, it just as suddenly loses interest in the unmarried couple after the children's deaths, "People seemed to have forgotten that he [Jude] had ever shown any awkward aberrancies: and he daily mounted to the parapets and copings of colleges he could never enter [...] as if he had known no wish to do otherwise" (419). This and the main object of society's censure, her unborn, illegitimate child and the other three children now being removed, a life with Jude is theoretically more socially acceptable for Sue than ever before.

The discovery of the hung children, far from signalling to Sue that she must now conform to society's laws, mean primarily that her expectations of life are not met, destroying its meaning to her, throwing and destabilizing her, and leaving her disoriented and lost. Being an unstable character at the best of times, she, too is now "groping in the dark," searching for something to cling to, to give her back her purpose, identity and role in life. Like Clym in the depths of his bereavement, it is guilt that provides Sue with the means of obtaining this and restoring order to her life.

### **5. The Solution: Guilt against Futility and Chaos**

that the First Cause worked automatically like a somnambulist, and not reflectively like a sage; that at the framing of the terrestrial conditions there seemed never to have been contemplated such a development of emotional perceptiveness among the creatures subject to those conditions as that reached by thinking and educated humanity. (417)

Sue and Jude's realization of the truth about God and the world as a result of the tragedy they suffer, a realization that God never credited them to be able to make, is similar to Clym's. By his incompetence, his lack of foresight and wisdom, God or the First Cause ultimately fails man. Wandering robot-like, with the indistinct aim of one in a deep sleep, he brings disorder, chaos and suffering wherever he goes, utterly destroying the essential human belief that things happen for a reason. It is as an antidote to this and life's resulting senselessness and futility, just as it was with Clym, that guilt now appears. Fittingly, it does so in connection with the guilt character, Sue.

Just as in *The Return*, the trigger for the cousins' realization about life and disillusionment is the death of loved ones; the background to guilt, bereavement and grief; its advent a defence against the fact that there is no meaning in the world; its function to produce a new view of the world and the individual that explains and

accommodates these deaths. At the same time, the divergence between guilt and shame culminates. Whilst the flesh-spirit dichotomy has provided the material for the conscience's conflict thus far, it is now used as an outlet for Sue's guilt. That guilt requires an outlet, that it is essentially an active as opposed to a passive state, has already been shown by Clym's chosen occupation at the end of *The Return* and the passivity of Tess' shame; now, however, it reaches its greatest and most tragic extreme by Sue's course of action. The flesh-spirit conflict provides a specific direction in which Sue can embark, where all guilt's associations with redemption, and particularly in Christian terms, of atonement and sacrifice, are fulfilled. The resulting triumph for the spirit which is secured when Sue denies her body and "takes the higher road" provides the final touch to the picture, fittingly being a triumph for guilt through its affiliation to all things spiritual and its removal from the physical- and sexual-orientation of shame. Thus the contrasts between guilt and shame are defined and crystalized for the final time, with shame becoming by default everything that guilt is not. Not disorientated, Sue finds a reason for her suffering; not silenced, she finds an expression for her guilt; not sinking into anonymity, she takes on a new identity in the form of a new persona; not degenerating, she finds a purpose in life. Altogether, in spite of its tragicness, it is a gain Sue secures and not, like Tess, a loss. Finally, and on another level, Sue's guilt warns against the danger of a society where natural human impulses are sacrificed to higher spiritual or intellectual aims.

#### **a. Making Sense of the Hanging: Finding Meaning where there is None**

Like *The Return*, guilt in terms of moral responsibility is of no relevance to this episode of the novel.<sup>1</sup> As the doctor, called to examine the bodies explains, no one is to blame for the children's deaths; Sue's failure to give a full account of the facts of life to Father

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<sup>1</sup> Many attempts have been made to ascertain who is to blame for the children's deaths in *Jude*. Some critics put them down to Jude's selfish behaviour on Remembrance Day, his insistence of staying to watch the procession worsening the state of his health which ruins their chances of finding accommodation. Yet this can only be taken as one of the many indirect links which constitute the tragedy and certainly not the single cause, see Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist*, London and New York, 1971, p. 329 and Bayley, 1978, p. 210. Alternatively, Sue's subsequent suffering is seen to signify Jude's retribution upon her for the way she has teased and tormented him, Garson, p. 177.

Time is simply the final straw for a child who, from the very first, has been explicitly shown to have an abnormally negative and depressive outlook, characteristic of a new generation who cannot cope with the awful truth about life's suffering and futility.<sup>1</sup> Yet, again, far from making matters easier, the very lack of reason, the failure of the deaths to serve some wider purpose, makes them impossible to bear. In keeping with the pattern set up by Clym, and typical of her "scintillating intellect" and keen sense of reason, Sue's recovery from her breakdown in which she "had hoped for death," is presented in terms of the different stages of her attempt to make sense of the deaths and imbue them with a meaning which they do not have.

Sue first does this by interpreting them as a signal that there is something essentially against the cousins which thwarts their every plan, "There is something external to us which says, 'You shan't!' First it said, 'You shan't learn!' Then it said, 'You shan't labour!' Now it says, 'You shan't love!'" (412). But this is too simplistic and too vague. Searching for a more specific reason, she next attempts to place the incident within the wider context of their lives, purposes and aims. Sue finds what she is looking for in her words at the Great Wessex agricultural show. These describe the cousins' belief that they have rid themselves of the modern aches and pains of mankind, the "ache of modernism," and have reverted to a more natural, glorious and happier age: "we have returned to Greek joyousness, and have blinded ourselves to sickness and sorrow" (366). With this in mind Sue now reasons:

"We went about loving each other too much – indulging ourselves to utter selfishness with each other! We said – do you remember? – that we would make a virtue of joy. I said it was Nature's intention, Nature's law and *raison d'être* that we should be joyful in what instincts she afforded us – instincts which civilization had taken upon itself to thwart. What dreadful things I said! And now Fate has given us this stab in the back for being such fools as to take Nature at her word!" (413)

Sue feels that the happy trust they placed in Nature and the world has been cruelly broken. In words of betrayal, "stab in the back," her understanding, happy expectation and joyfulness of life has, like Tess', been destroyed. Looking back she feels this belief was fundamentally wrong, one reason being, as we have already seen, because they

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<sup>1</sup> *Jude*, p. 410f. In spite of this it is ironic that the failure to speak openly about reproduction and matters of the body should act as the final trigger to Father Time's tragedy. A critic of Victorian prudery, it is as though Hardy wants to show just how fatal such an approach is.

have been too absorbed in each other to be aware of the outside world, “indulging ourselves to utter selfishness with each other.”

Responsibility shifts again, and the next interpretation Sue comes up with is set in terms of rebellion and conforming, involving the idea of an all-powerful God whom they are forced to obey, “We must conform! [...] All the ancient wrath of the Power above us has been vented upon us, His poor creatures, and we must submit. There is no choice. We must. It is no use fighting against God” (417). Now the Fawley cousins are simply passive victims of God; already the connection to a higher, more powerful entity is made which will become the crutch to carry Sue to the novel’s end. That the sense that Sue is searching for does not exist is underlined by Jude’s crucial reply to her, “It is only against man and senseless circumstance” (417), and yet, although this momentarily checks Sue – “‘True!’ she murmured. ‘What have I been thinking of! I am getting as superstitious as a savage!’” (417) – it is ultimately lost upon her.

The alternating apportioning of guilt from Jude to Sue that follows is nothing other than an attempt to find an explanation as to why events have happened as they have. Guilt, being about blame for specific acts, allows the cousins to create a neat and coherent scheme of cause and effect. First it is Jude’s turn; he blames his lack of sexual restraint for the way events have turned out, “I seduced you [...] You were a distinct type – a refined creature, intended by Nature to be left intact. But I couldn’t leave you alone!” (418). But Sue will hear nothing of it, “No, no, Jude! [...] Don’t reproach yourself with being what you are not. If anybody is to blame it is I.” Again Jude retorts, “I supported you in your resolve to leave Phillotson; and without me perhaps you would not have urged him to let you go,” to which Sue replies, “I should have just the same.” Finally the first inkling of what form Sue’s guilt will take is introduced, namely her belief that she is still Phillotson’s wife. Changing what up till now has been her view of marriage as a sordid contract between two people, she is now thankful she and Jude did not remarry when they had the chance since “We have thereby avoided insulting, as it were, the solemnity of our first marriages” (418). Like the reversal of fortune we expect within the falling action of a tragedy, a complete reversal of attitudes between herself and Jude thus takes place, with Sue taking on the very view that Jude, after having tried his utmost to retain, has since forsaken – “My good heavens – how we are changing places!” (422).

The concretization of this allotment of guilt, and thus the climax of Sue’s delusion, follows a few pages later, before the cousins part company. Building on her transcendentalist views, Sue understands the children’s deaths in terms of God’s

punishment for the trespass she has committed by failing to honour her marriage to Phillotson and living in sin with Jude. In this way she is able to find a reason for them dying, “I see marriage different now. My babies have been taken from me to show me this! Arabella’s child killing mine was a judgement – the right slaying the wrong” (425). By seeing their deaths as a means for God to show her her sins, “those who died to bring home to me the error of my ways” (438), the children have not died for nothing: “My children – are dead – and it is right that they should be! I am glad – almost. They were sin-begotten. They were sacrificed to teach me how to live! – their death was the final stage of my purification. That’s why they have not died in vain” (440). Sickeningly, guilt almost even gives Sue cause to rejoice.

As we have seen in *The Return*, guilt involves isolation and the increasing withdrawal from the outside world. Thus the public sphere now drops still further away, guilt being an entirely private matter between Sue and God, from which both Jude and the reader are excluded. The advanced stage of Sue’s delusion, the fact that her guilty thoughts have clearly been developing for a long time before we hear of them, and have already been turned into a complex argument based on puritan tenets, underlines this fact. So, too, does Sue’s response to being questioned about St Silas’ which she has already been visiting for “some weeks.” With her visits to this church Sue retires into a closed world of her own into which Jude can no longer penetrate, “What – do you want with me here, Jude? [...] You shouldn’t come! I wanted to be alone! Why did you intrude here?” (425).

The practice at St. Silas also introduces a second aspect of Sue’s bereavement which places it into wider dimensions. Just as Pamela Boumelha argues that it is only natural for Sue to feel the loss of her children more than Jude given the biological fact that she has carried them,<sup>1</sup> so does Hardy show that it is natural for Sue to find her grief ordeal more difficult, given women’s domestic situation. Sue informs Jude that one reason behind her new church-going is that she is confronted with her grief alone. Already, Hardy has underlined the necessity of communicating and confessing grief and guilt in order to mitigate it, as Clym does to Eustacia; in *Jude*, where verbal intercourse is frustrated on every level, it follows that Sue’s need to do so is even stronger. Yet, in contrast to Clym, Sue has no one with whom she can share her feelings and, with

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<sup>1</sup> Boumelha, p. 153.

nothing else to do, having, unlike Jude, no occupation or profession, she tries to find another outlet for her grief. Confessing to Jude that she has started visiting St Silas' church, she says, "it is lonely here in the week-day mornings, when you are at work, and I think and think of – of my –" (421). Taking up this practice and religion thus gives Sue essentially something to do, tying in with guilt's action-oriented nature and supporting feminist readings which argue that Sue's collapse is primarily linked to her sex and gender.<sup>1</sup>

### **b. Clym Revisited: Intellectualism and Enlightenment, then Blindness**

"O you darling fool; where is your reason? You seem to have suffered the loss of your faculties!" (468).

Like Clym, Sue's guilty thinking is a form of self-delusion, a belief held in the face of contrary evidence, resistant to all reason. And like him, she has particularly intellectual and enlightened ideas which create a vivid contrast with her subsequent loss of mental clarity. Presented as a 'modern' character, Sue is the epitome of Arnold's *sweetness and light*.<sup>2</sup> Described as "Voltairean," she is critical and discriminating. Reading Gibbon and Swinburne, she criticizes the old, stale thinking of the Church and does not doggedly practise its tenets as Jude does, but reconstructs her own meaning from them. She cannot praise the Jerusalem model exhibited at Christminster for purely "what it is to us" (156), as Phillotson does, mentioning other, pagan, "old cities" of equal importance such as Athens and Rome. And she accuses Jude of taking "so much tradition on trust," precisely what Arnold accuses the Hebraists of doing in his social criticism, *Culture and Anarchy*. Her intellect eclipses Phillotson's classroom learning by far – "Her intellect sparkles like diamonds, while mine smoulders like brown paper" (293) – with Phillotson's name sounding suspiciously like Arnold's Philistines.

The change Sue now makes, in keeping with Arnold's terminology, is from

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Mary Jacobus, "Sue the Obscure," *Essays in Criticism*, 25 (1975), p. 320f., where she argues that it is "precisely Sue's femaleness which breaks her," her "experience as a woman" which "brings her from clarity to compromise, from compromise to collapse."

<sup>2</sup> Arnold uses the terms *sweetness and light* to describe a general mental flexibility and openness which he considers vital to revive proper cultural awareness and appreciation, see "Sweetness and Light," in Arnold (1965), pp. 90-114.

*spontaneity of consciousness*, where the mind is free to consider all possibilities, to *strictness of conscience*, where it is tied to one law. Jude notes that Sue is “no longer the same as in the independent days, when her intellect played like lambent lightning over conventions and formalities which he at that time respected, though he did not now” (419). Instead she begins to take the words of the Old Testament literally, doggedly following her transcendentalist beliefs as a law, exchanging her open-minded intellect for the obedience to this law. The one and only thing which now counts, her *unum universum*, is her marriage to Phillotson. This overwhelms her skills of discernment so that, reminiscent of Clym’s blindness and falsification of facts, she is no longer aware of the truth of her situation.

Whilst the tragedies they suffer are presented as the cause of their loss of reason, it is nonetheless highly ironic that Sue and Clym, given their shared enlightenment and intellectualism, should become so deluded. Relating this to the flesh-spirit dichotomy, we notice a significant divergence from its traditional dynamics. Symbolically, Sue’s change is a triumph of the spirit over the flesh as she imposes the will of her mind and her spiritual beliefs upon her instinctive and natural urges, just as Jude tried and failed to do. And yet the magnification of the mind which we associate with the spirit is missing. Not only missing but entirely reversed. The fanaticism with which Sue subdues her flesh and uplifts her spirit presents a mind devoid of reason: her spirit triumphs but it is certainly not in conjunction with an enlightened mind. Thus the connection of the mind with the spirit breaks down, and the stock dichotomy of the spirit versus the body turned on its head. This indicates the author’s criticism of the Church and intellectualism,<sup>1</sup> something which the novel’s original title supports.<sup>2</sup> More generally the similarity between Sue and Clym’s guilt turns guilt’s presentation in *The Return* from a unique and isolated incident into a general predicament of mankind.

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<sup>1</sup> It is ironic that of all the characters to embark upon this thorny road of duty and obedience it is Sue, the open-minded, free thinker, who does so. The very qualities which Arnold would have us admire in Sue, her critical thinking and freedom of thought, are thus undermined by her later transformation.

<sup>2</sup> This original title, *The Simpletons*, that Hardy was forced to discard, sheds an ironic, bitter light on the extent of the cousins’ intellectual standing and achievement. For the discussion of this title and further provisional titles Hardy used for *Jude*, see R. L. Purdy, *Thomas Hardy: A Biographical Study*, London, 1954, p. 87.

**c. Gaining an Identity and having a Mission:  
The Puritan Adulteress and her Punishment**

Having secured her isolation and saved herself from the pain of permanent disillusionment, the final stage of Sue's guilt involves her adoption of a new identity, direction and course of action. Destabilized and disoriented by the children's deaths and robbed of her understanding of herself and the world, labels and laws prove indispensable for affording Sue the stabilizing comfort of a mission, goal and occupation.

Guilt's inherent involvement of action in the form of atonement or punishment secures this; even though there was no hope for the fallen in the Evangelical religion, Sue's occupation is clearly chosen to make up for her wrong and alleviate her guilt. As Clym becomes a preacher to absolve his sins, make up for his loved ones' deaths and give him something to do, so does Sue take on the role of adulteress in order to return to Phillotson and 'put things right.' Puritan in its extremity, and a (trans)mutation of the woman she used to be, this persona also depersonalizes Sue, thus distancing her from her pain. Its further function is to allow Hardy to criticize this type of puritan thinking prevalent in Victorian society, and create endless tragic possibility. The enormity of Sue's supposed wrongdoing makes the payment she believes due equally enormous and practically impossible to meet. It is this, together with her lack of self-forgiveness, that makes her guilt so tragic and takes it to such extremes.

Sue's assumption of her role as sinner is all-encompassing, affecting changes in every area of her life including the language she uses. Suddenly puritan-sounding words such as "sacrifice," "purification" and "sin" pepper her vocabulary. Preaching and philosophizing like Clym to communicate and thus confess her guilt, she talks to Jude as though reading a sermon from the Pilgrim Fathers, "I have thought that we have been selfish, careless, even impious, in our courses, you and I. Our life has been a vain attempt at self-delight. But self-abnegation is the higher road. We should mortify the flesh – the terrible flesh – the curse of Adam!" (419). Just as *Jane Eyre's* St. John despises the feelings he has for Miss. Oliver, "I scorn the weakness. I know it is ignoble; a mere fever of the flesh; not, I declare, a convulsion of the soul" (419),<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, Harmondsworth, 1996.



fulfilment of the body's natural desires is degrading; they are not to be respected or enjoyed, but, as "terrible flesh," to be hated, squashed and disciplined:

"We ought to be continually sacrificing ourselves on the altar of duty! But I have always striven to do what has pleased me. I well deserved the scourging I have got! I wish something would take the evil right out of me, and all my monstrous errors, and all my sinful ways!" (420)

The Victorian slogan "duty" frequently occurs hereafter, Sue considering it her "duty" to renounce Jude for Phillotson, her change of course being described by the latter as a "new sense of duty or religion," and her behaviour repeatedly being associated with obedience.<sup>1</sup> The notion of punishment is also introduced, "Self-renunciation – that's everything! I cannot humiliate myself too much. I should like to prick myself all over with pins and bleed out the badness in me" (420). And the narrator's language alters, Sue's physicality suddenly being referred to as the value laden concept "flesh" rather than body.<sup>2</sup> Similarly her remarriage to Phillotson is described as "the self-sacrifice of the woman on the altar of what she was pleased to call her principles" (445); a life with Jude is something forbidden, a temptation to be resisted.<sup>3</sup>

The puritan philosophy that Sue supports to bring her body "into complete subjection" clearly helps alienate guilt from the body still further, and thus from shame. Her guilt precludes all sensuality and beauty, as is made painfully clear in the night before her remarriage. Discovering in her luggage the elegantly embroidered night-gown worn throughout her life with Jude, an embroidery reminiscent of the skilful and elaborate workings of Hester's needle in *The Scarlet Letter*, Sue grabs and tears it to pieces, throwing the strips upon the fire. It is symbolic of the last shred of feminine beauty and sensuality that Sue sacrifices before she submits to Phillotson: "She took it, and began rendering it with all her might, the tears resounding through the house like a screech-owl" (441). The alternative meaning of "tears" as in *to cry*, as opposed to *to rip*, together with the high-pitched painful scream of the "screech-owl," could just as well describe Sue's mental agony as the damage rendered to the gown. The sexual significance the night-gown has for her is made clear through her puritan cry, "It is adulterous!" – which is the way she now views her relationship with Jude. Like Hester,

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<sup>1</sup> *Jude*, pp. 415, 441 and 437.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 440 and 445.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 470.

Sue now puts on a Spartan, rough article, “a new and absolutely plain garment, of coarse and unbleached calico,” a “sackcloth o’ scripture” in place of the richly embroidered night-gown. It is clearly the cloth of self-chastisement.

By following her strict plan and finally remarrying Phillotson, Sue is undeniably given enough to do. As his wife she may run his household, organize the servants and work hard, even participating in the cleaning – “I *must* practise my household duties!” Sue’s understanding of work is a mixture of Old Testament and Victorian. Though driven to work by a sense of guilt, work being, according to the Old Testament, a God-inflicted punishment to expiate original sin, and not, in the puritan sense, as a means of glorifying God and achieving salvation, she nonetheless, like fellow Victorians, finds comfort in the mission that work sets her and in the way it helps combat despair. At Marygreen she is described being extremely active in the household although she has no need to be. In a scene here, Sue is shown telling Mrs. Edlin that she has worked hard that day in order to discipline herself into shape, “I did it to discipline myself. I have scrubbed the stairs since eight o’clock. I *must* practise myself in my household duties. I have shamefully neglected them” (474).<sup>1</sup> The cleaning Sue has been performing is both an activity and a punishment: it gives her something to do, and yet at the same time it is mindless and superfluous work, done not because the stairs are dirty, but because it is a clear and definable duty: Sue does not scrub the stairs until they are clean, but rather until a certain number of hours of labour have been fulfilled. When Mrs. Edlin protests, and urges Sue to avoid such hard, manual tasks to save her “pretty hands,” she replies in self-chastising terms, “Don’t talk of my pretty hands, Mrs. Edlin. This pretty body of mine has been the ruin of me already” (474).

The scene culminates in the maximum measure of self-chastisement for Sue in her dreadful decision to break the pact she originally made with her husband and give herself physically to him, “I am going to make my conscience right on my duty to Richard – by doing a penance – the ultimate thing. I must” (475). The setting is suitably menacing; it is night, dark and stormy, the rain and the wind rattling around the house, emphasising the sense of foreboding and reflecting the tormented state of Sue’s soul. Sue considers the liberty allowed her so far an “indulgence” she does not deserve. Three times she talks of her “duty,” and, like a death cry, it is the last sentence she is to utter

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<sup>1</sup> For the significance of Sue’s reference to shame here, see p. 184.

before her departure from the novel.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the scene of Sue's submission to Phillotson is symbolic of her death. Her last appearance, being hereafter only ever talked about by other characters, having mastered herself and conquered her aversion for Phillotson, she is as good as dead. Reminiscent of Tess' final, almost unconscious submission to Alec as a body without a spirit, Sue slips into utter passivity. "[C]rouched before him in her night-clothes" (478), she is physically guided into Phillotson's bedroom, his domain, and then carried, with the foreboding sense that he is to devour her, "he led her through the doorway, and lifting her bodily, kissed her" (479).

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<sup>1</sup> *Jude*, pp. 475 and 479.

## **D. Wider Patternings across Major Novels**

### **I. The Prominence of Shame in regard to Self and Character**

The rendering of shame and guilt in *The Return*, *Tess* and *Jude* is unique in that it shows an interrelated development of these concepts over a specific time span. This development is reinforced by the two intermediary novels, *The Mayor* (1886) and *Woodlanders* (1887). In these works, some of the basic forms which guilt and shame have taken thus far are easily recognizable. Guilt's connection with the repayment of a 'debt' and the idea of exoneration features in both novels, setting up at each start the demand for action, since something specific must be 'done' in order for guilt to be absolved. In contrast, shame is infinitely more global and destructive. Not confined to isolated outbreaks, it strikes to the cores of the characters' selves, thus having a greater effect upon their well being and behaviour. The study of these two additional novels thus provides a stronger case for the more serious role of shame compared with guilt in Hardy's fiction.

#### **1. Guilt and Public Shame in *The Mayor of Casterbridge***

Typical of guilt's link to action, it drives the two key axes of *The Mayor's* plot, after the protagonist, Michael Henchard's, reckless 'sale' of his wife Sue in the first chapter. These two axes mark, years later, the successive entrance into Henchard's well-respected and prosperous life in Casterbridge as "Mayor of the town, and churchwarden, and [...] all" (*The Mayor*, 72), of two women. Guilt for the way Henchard has treated Susan for 'selling' her to Newson at Weydon-Priors fair together with the desire to make amends, makes him welcome her and his supposed daughter Elizabeth-Jane back into his life. Similarly, guilt for the wrong the protagonist has done the second woman, Lucetta Templeman, by their affair in Jersey makes him attempt to right it by proposing to envelope her into the respectable folds of marriage. Thus a heavy conscience, not only on Henchard's, but also to some extent on both women's parts, brings and binds these women to the scene of the action at Henchard's home. The latter's presence sparks off the rest of the chain of events in Henchard's life. They deal him bitter doses of disappointment on his discovery that Elizabeth-Jane is not, in fact, his daughter, and that Lucetta has fallen in love with another man. These disappointments and their consequences help, together with Henchard's immoderate

and unstable nature and the social and economic rise of his rival Donald Farfrae, fate and circumstance, to secure the hero's downfall.

Yet it is the experience of shame rather than guilt which moulds the finer details of both Henchard and Lucetta's lives, and which is specifically instrumental to these characters' ends. Affecting the self and being of a more permanent aspect than guilt, it cannot be removed or mitigated by marriage proposals or plans, and thus wrecks a damage of a more serious kind. This damage takes the shape of Henchard and Lucetta's social and personal ruin. Returning to Henchard's mistreatment of Susan, his thoughts on awakening from his drunken sleep at the fair are thoughts of shame. Forcing himself to "put up with the shame as best he could" (*The Mayor*, 17), it never leaves him. As he tells Farfrae, his treatment of Susan is something "I shall be ashamed of to my dying day" (*The Mayor*, 48); indeed so great is it, that it makes him swear never to touch alcohol again for as many years as he is old. Susan also takes the fact that Henchard is ashamed of his behaviour as a positive and encouraging sign, "[S]hame for a past action," and "shame for a past transaction of his life" (*The Mayor*, 49; 58) strengthening her resolve to make herself known to him. At the same time, fear of public shame remains keen. This not only makes Henchard's search for his wife and child the day after their sale far too subdued to be of any use,<sup>1</sup> but also forms his and Susan's main concern when they secretly remeet at the Roman amphitheatre remains in Casterbridge. Here Henchard must consider his reputation, echoing the call for shame's concealment which we have already heard in *The Return*; their 'daughter' must be kept "from learning the shame of her case" (*The Mayor*, 73). Again, the connection of shame with the self and its vicariousness are responsible for this, the telling of Elizabeth-Jane clearly threatening to reflect badly upon Susan and Henchard by revealing them to be precisely the type of immoral and unprincipled people she would despise. Indeed it is precisely this shameful revelation of Henchard by the furmity-woman to the people of Casterbridge, striking to the core of his selfhood and proving "that I am no better than she!" (*The Mayor*, 200), that marks "the edge or turn in the incline of Henchard's fortunes" (*The Mayor*, 216). Typical of a shame-oriented world, despite all the good he has done since this dreadful act, the shameful fact remains that he once sold his wife, which is all that matters. The loss of Henchard's "good name" and transformation into a

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<sup>1</sup> *The Mayor*, p. 18.

figure of ridicule follows so that, from now on, and typical of shame, he must gaze “more at the feet and leggings of men, and less into the pupils of their eyes” (*The Mayor*, 216). Farfrae, meanwhile, profits by the scandal. This creates a reversal of the two rivals’ fortunes, and feeds Henchard’s morbid self-pity and all-consuming hate for the Scotsman.

In contrast to Henchard, Lucetta’s shame for her affair with the mayor is confined to a public level and does not penetrate deep enough to affect her view of herself. Instead, being more aware and articulate than Tess of the discrepancy between conventional and ‘real’ guilt, she is convinced of her innocence in the whole affair, as she informs her ex-lover Henchard,

“How can you speak so! [...] Knowing that my only crime was the indulging in a foolish girl’s passion for you with too little regard for appearances, and that I was what I call innocent all the time they called me guilty, you ought not to be so cutting!” (*The Mayor*, 176)

Subsequently, as long as her sexual liaison with Henchard does not get out into the world, it fails to bother her. Writing to the latter in a letter upon hearing of Susan’s death, she is not inherently ashamed of herself, but simply aware of the stain that her indiscretion has brought to her name, so that “it was brought home to me very forcibly by my conscience that I ought to endeavour to disperse the shade which my étourderie flung over my name, by asking you to carry out the promise to me” (*The Mayor*, 144). But Lucetta’s conscience is weak and ultimately, so long as she is not found out, she does not care. In the end, despite her original intentions of marriage, she rejects the chance to regain social respectability by refusing Henchard for Farfrae. This, however, does nothing to allay shame’s wrath. Although Lucetta’s paralysing fear on seeing the ‘skimmington-ride,’ organized by Jopp in order to “shame her!” is not directly on account of herself, but due to the fact that it will utterly destroy her husband’s love for her, “it will break his heart – he will never love me anymore – and oh, it will kill me – kill me!” (*The Mayor*, 275), this incident nevertheless secures her end by throwing her into a fit, causing her to miscarry and die.

## **2. Class, Shame and Motivation in *The Woodlanders***

Even with such a transparently guilt-driven novel as *Woodlanders*, shame, in keeping with the trend in *The Mayor* above, plays an equally, if not more important, part. Indeed,

it is ultimately shame, not guilt, that proves itself the stronger emotion in terms of directing and determining a character's behaviour.

At first the standard line of guilt as the force that puts the plot into motion appears clear. So heavy is the conscience of the heroine's controlling father, Mr. Melbury, that it occasions him insomnia. In response to his wife's enquiry, we learn the background to the novel's beginning: before Grace's birth Mr. Melbury stole his friend's intended, a wrong he now hopes to right by giving his daughter's hand in marriage to the latter's son.<sup>1</sup> Guilt for a wrong committed, albeit a long time ago, and Melbury's planned reparations now become a central theme.<sup>2</sup> Guilt also occurs in the closing chapters of the novel, in connection to Grace. Here the need to ascertain blame brings about the reconciliation between the heroine and her estranged husband. Anxious to know whether she is responsible for Giles Winterborne's death, Grace agrees to meet Edred Fitzpiers, a meeting leading to successive meetings, and their final reunion.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of this, guilt does not constitute the whole equation, nor can matrimony be taken to be the novel's main theme. The question as to whom Grace will be joined in wedlock simply provides the grounds upon which a more crucial issue is played out. This is the issue of class and is explored in terms of the value of education and refinement, the consequences of transcending one's social, material and intellectual origins, and the criticism of the aristocracy. If Melbury were simply to follow his conscience and have Grace marry Giles, there would be no plot: what stops this character from simply doing the 'right thing' by his friend and thus solving the conflict, are his vainer aims to have his daughter marry someone from a higher social class. These aims are based, in turn, upon the shame of social inadequacy. Thus shame not only provides the other side of the conflict, but goes to the root of the issue of class in the novel. Class shame has made Melbury educate his daughter "so far above the level of the daughters hereabout," the root of which, as Melbury explains, goes back to an indelible childhood memory:

"When I was a boy another boy – the parson's son – along with a lot of others, asked me, 'Who dragged Whom round the walls of What?' and I said, 'Sam Barrett, who dragged his wife in a chair round the tower when she went to be churched.' They laughed at me so much that I went home ashamed, and couldn't sleep for shame; and I cried that night till my pillow

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<sup>1</sup> *Woodlanders*, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 33, 69, 80-82 and 226.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 336.

was wet; till I thought to myself – ‘They may laugh at me for my ignorance, but that was father’s fault, and none o’ my making, and I must bear it. But they shall never laugh at my children, if I have any; I’ll starve first!’ Thank God I’ve been able to keep her at school at the figure of near a hundred a year; and her scholarship is such that she has stayed on as a governess for a time. Let ’em laugh now if they can: Mrs. Charmond herself is not better informed than my girl Grace.” (*Woodlanders*, 29)

Melbury’s want of a classical education as a child, his mistaking of what is arguably *the* key scene of Homer’s *Iliad* for a comic incident from his own life, makes him into a figure of ridicule. Never having read the description of Achilles’ sacrilegious mutilation of Hector’s corpse about the walls of Troy, he is unable to place the scene and must suffer his playmates’ scorn. Such is the depth of his shame – he feels “ashamed,” “couldn’t sleep for shame” and his pillow becomes saturated with this tears of humiliation – that he resolves to save his children from suffering such an ordeal – “I’ll starve first!” Despite the difficulty of finding “near a hundred a year” to pay for Grace’s boarding school fees, no mean sum for a man of Melbury’s financial means, he has faithfully kept this resolve. Clearly, then, it is the early experience of shame for his ignorance as a child that is at the seat of Melbury’s social aspirations. It makes him (over)compensate for his sense of inadequacy by bringing Grace up to be a lady and prevents him from relieving his conscience for the wrong he has done Giles’ father, thus ensuring the plot remains unresolved and setting up the conflicts of class to follow.

Far from being, then, an isolated incident in Melbury’s past, class shame plays a decisive part in directing *Woodlanders*’ events. This is proved again when it rears its ugly head later at a crucial point in the plot. This point follows a number of unfortunate social blunders Giles makes in the presence of the Melbury family, which crystalize Melbury’s resolve to have Grace marry someone more suited to her newly-cultivated manners and tastes. Strolling along on a morning walk, Grace and her father are met by an excited huntsman who, on hearing that Grace has seen the fox but failed to give the necessary signal, exclaims rudely, “Then why the devil didn’t you, or get that old buffer to do it for you?” (*Woodlanders*, 85). Being ashamed for his daughter’s sake, Melbury blushes “quite red” and complains of the insult the huntsman has dealt her,

“He ought not to have spoken to ye like that!” said the old man in the tone of one whose heart was bruised, though it was not by the epithet applied to himself. “And he wouldn’t if he had been a gentleman. ’Twas not the language to use to a woman of any niceness. You so well read and cultivated – how could he expect you to go shouting a view-halloo like a farm tomboy! Hasn’t it cost me near a hundred a year to lift you out of all that, so as to show an example to the neighbourhood of what a woman can be?” (*Woodlanders*, 85)



Then he reasons why the huntsman acted as he did:

“’Twas because *I* was in your company. If a blackcoated squire or pa’son had been walking with you instead of me he wouldn’t have spoken so [...] a woman takes her colour from the man she’s walking with [...] You sha’n’t be treated like that for long, or at least your children sha’n’t. You shall have somebody to walk with you who looks more of a dandy than I – Please God you shall!” (*Woodlanders*, 85)

The idea of saving the next generation from being despised for their lack of cultivation resurfaces. And rather than tackling the problem by instilling a sense of healthy pride and self-worth in Grace and giving her to Winterborne, Melbury attempts to erase his inadequacy by raising her above her humble origins and finding “somebody to walk with you who looks more of a dandy than I.” Thus it is the irrepressible sense of shame, galling and unforgettable, that makes Melbury aim for better things, ensuring Grace’s marriage to Fitzpiers, and prompting the trail of heartbreak and tragedy to follow. Subsequently, shame is central to the development of plot in both *Woodlanders* and *The Mayor*, just as it also plays an influential part in Hardy’s narrative technique, as the subsequent study demonstrates.

## II. Shame and Narrative Technique

### 1. The Visualization of Shame: The Blush

A blush is no language: only a dubious flag-signal which may mean either of two contradictories. (*Daniel Deronda*, 391)<sup>1</sup>

Although *Deronda* does not realize the full extent of Gwendolen Grandcourt's thoughts when she blushes for claiming to prefer the stables at the Abbey than those at Diplow, he guesses part of them. Indeed, whilst decoding a blush can be a complicated, or, as Eliot asserts, almost an unachievable business, it is nevertheless possible to distinguish certain types of information which the reddening of Hardy's characters' cheeks present. In his fiction, the blush is a value-laden sign with a great information potential. The principle sign of shame (though, as we have seen, we may redden for other reasons), it conveys visually what Hardy's characters are thinking or feeling. The blush thus transfers the private experience of a thought or an emotion from an internal state within the character to the public sphere where it is not only available to other characters, but also to the reader.

The effects of this function of the blush are manifold. First, the blush generates a creative, visual world which functions above and beyond the text. That Hardy should use the blush as a means of creating visual images in his writing is no surprise; he was not only a keen painter and professional architect, but was also greatly interested in the visual arts. He informed at least two of his biographers that his ideas appeared to him primarily as mental pictures which he first took down before transforming them into written form.<sup>2</sup> His interest in painting, especially in the theory behind Turner's art and in Ruskin's work, is taken by the critic J. B. Bullen in his work *The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in Hardy's Work* as one of the key bases of his narrative technique, just as much critical study has been spent on its pictorial aspect.<sup>3</sup> As Hugh

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<sup>1</sup> George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, Oxford, 1984.

<sup>2</sup> See Ernest Jr. Brenneke, *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, New York, 1928, p. 113f. and Clive Holland, *Thomas Hardy OM*, London, 1933, p. 60, both quoted by Bullen (1986), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Bullen (1986). For studies on the pictorial nature of Hardy's writing see Alastair Smart, "Pictorial Imagery in the Novels of Thomas Hardy," *Review of English Studies* 12 (1961), pp. 262-280; Richard C. Carpenter, "Hardy and the Old Masters," *Boston University Studies in English* 5 (1961), pp. 18-28; Joan Grundy, *Hardy and the Sister Arts*, London, 1979, pp. 18-28; Arlene M. Jackson, *Illustration and the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, Totowa, New Jersey, 1981. See also David Lodge's article, "Thomas Hardy as a Cinematic Novelist" in *Thomas Hardy after Fifty Years*, ed. Lance St. John Butler, London and Basingstoke, 1977, for Hardy's use of filmic effects.

Witemeyer writes in his book on George Eliot and the visual arts, the art of making an event visual to the reader's mind-eye was an important literary requirement of the Victorian age in the way that the reader "liked to 'see' its fiction," a preference we also see reflected in the prevalence of literary illustration.<sup>1</sup> Not only this, but believing that "realism is not Art,"<sup>2</sup> Hardy was not concerned with reproducing reality mimetically, but with producing an "impression" of life. This word occurs repeatedly in his critical remarks about his fiction and poetry. Hardy said that he hated "*wordpainting* [...]" I never try to do it; all I endeavour is to give an *impression* of a scene as it strikes me."<sup>3</sup> His poetry he describes as "mere impressions of the moment, and not convictions or arguments," and in his Preface to the Fifth and Later Editions of *Tess*, the same sentiment is echoed when he professes to have meant the novel "to be oftener charged with impressions than with convictions."<sup>4</sup> Again, in the preface to the First Edition of *Jude*, Hardy writes that this novel is no systematic attempt to portray fixed laws or truths, but is rather "simply the endeavour to give shape and coherence to a series of seemings, or personal impressions."<sup>5</sup> As already mentioned above in B. II. 2. a. and proven by the subsequent text analyses, Hardy still attempts to include a realistic element in his presentation of shame, guilt and blushing; together with his visual philosophy, the author thus transforms the blush into an artistic phenomenon in his fiction which still retains an impression of biological realism.

Another function of the blush as a visual sign is to set up an implicit level of communication between narrator, character and reader. This presents the author with an ingenious way to surmount the literary conventions and hurdles of his time by allowing him to show, through the blush, things they forbid him to say. Within this latter function it must be noted that the blush is not only caused by characters' shame, but also by milder emotions such as embarrassment or shyness, or by modesty.

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Witemeyer, *George Eliot and the Visual Arts*, New Haven, 1979, p. 1f.

<sup>2</sup> Florence Emily Hardy, *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy: 1892-1928*, London, 1930, p. 299.

<sup>3</sup> *The Bookman* 2, April (1892), p. 6; Hardy's italics.

<sup>4</sup> *Tess*, p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> *Jude*, p. 39.

## 2. The Imagery and Poetics of Shame and Blushing: Some Examples

In Hardy's fiction, the blush not only furnishes the author with visual and pictorial possibilities, but also poetic ones. "Blushing may be styled the poetry of the Soul!" exclaims Burgess in the opening sentence of his study, dedicating its first chapter to illustrating the enormous potential it offers the artist in reference to such great classical writers as Homer and Virgil.<sup>1</sup> This fact is certainly done justice by the poetry of Keats, possibly the greatest student, presenter and "discriminator" of blushes,<sup>2</sup> and whose poetry made a great impression on Hardy.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, some of Hardy's finest imagery is built around the blush. In *Madding Crowd*, the link between visuality and painting is shown by the way the author draws on analogies from art to describe the colour of Bathsheba Everdene's blushes. When Gabriel Oak reprimands Bathsheba for her conduct towards Mr. Boldwood, her blush is described in terms of the vivid red employed by the landscape artist Francis Danby or his son James in depicting nightfall, "In an instant Bathsheba's face coloured with the angry crimson of a Danby sunset" (*Madding Crowd*, 185). Or its colour is taken from the world of horticulture where the different species of cultivated roses mark the different shades of reddening and levels of embarrassment or shame, "not a point in the milkmaid but was of the deepest rose-colour. From the Maiden's Blush, through all varieties of the Provence down to the Crimson Tuscany the countenance of Oak's acquaintance quickly graduated" (*Madding Crowd*, 68). This link between blushing and the "vegetable kingdom" is also made by Burgess. In his chapter "Sensibility of Plants," he cites flowers whose names have poetic allusions such as the "Blush rose," the "Carnation" and "Rubens uva," placing Gray's famous lines, "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, / And waste its fragrance on the desert air" at the opening of this chapter.<sup>4</sup> The blush thus brings colour to the text ensuring that the whole spectrum of red, from the deep purplish tone of crimson (linked to Eustacia and reflective of her fiery, passionate nature), through Grace's bright scarlet, to Sue's paler shades of "roseate," is visible. Meanwhile, in

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<sup>1</sup> Burgess, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ricks (1974).

<sup>3</sup> For Hardy's interest in Keats see *ORCH*, s.v. *Keats*.

<sup>4</sup> Burgess, p. 12. The lines are 55-56 from Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751).

accordance with the simple colouring of *Tess* in terms of the symbolic red and white,<sup>1</sup> Hardy's description of the blush in this novel is less visually explicit, and more poetic and subjective, the physiological experience of the blush becoming the subject of the author's most poetic and imaginative descriptions.<sup>2</sup> When Angel's lips touch Tess' arm, for example, her physical reaction is not only described extremely accurately, but also extremely creatively in terms of touch, taste and sight,

Although the early September weather was sultry, her arm, from her dabbling in the curds, was as cold and damp to his mouth as a new-gathered mushroom, and tasted of the whey. But she was such a sheaf of susceptibilities that her pulse was accelerated by the touch, her blood driven to her finger-ends, and the cool arms flushed hot. (*Tess*, 239)

Like the roller coaster emotions of love, the scene switches from hot to cold to hot again: "sultry" September is set in opposition to the cold mushroom softness of Tess' arm, tasting of the globulous milky curds she has been stirring, from which, like the other dairy products Tess eats, Angel "drew sustenance" (*Tess*, 312). At the same time, the description remains physiologically realistic: upon Angel's touch Tess' heart beat accelerates, blood rushes to her finger-tips and the spot of the kiss reddens of its own accord, the "cool" arms turn "hot." Thus the fine balance between the poetic and the physiological is cleverly maintained.

Two other blush images also combine the physiological with the poetic. The first describes the dying embers of Eustacia's fire on Bonfire night,

From these no appreciable beams now radiated, except when a more than usually smart gust brushed over their faces and raised a fitful glow which came and went like the blush of a girl. (*The Return*, 107)

The simile's visual and tactile effectiveness lies in its duality. The embers' likening to a blush not only enriches the description of their glow as they suddenly flare up and die down; the lighting up of the embers themselves impart an added 'biological' dimension to the blush, expressing the sudden flash of heat, "fitful glow," of a blushful moment, whose prickliness almost creates the sense of the face being touched, "brushed over their faces." At the same time, male-oriented ideas about gender creep in, the embers

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<sup>1</sup> Brooks takes these two colours to point to the opposing forces of passion and purity; guilt and innocence in the novel, see Brooks, p. 237. She also takes them to signify that Tess is a ritual victim, Brooks, p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> Hardy's use of 'scientific' physiological aspects in his creation of blushful images fits with Ann Whitlock's theory that Hardy uses his detailed knowledge of complex scientific phenomena as the basis for poetic imagery, see Ann Whitlock, "Science and Symbolism in the Language of Thomas Hardy," *Thomas Hardy Journal* 16.1 (2000), pp. 84-92.

being compared to a blush “of a girl” rather than a boy, prefiguring the discussion of the feminization of shame and blushing in this study’s next section. In *Tess*, meanwhile, an equally subtle device is used to describe Angel’s newly-felt love for Tess. Talbothays, formally, “so humble, so insignificant,” suddenly emanates an uncanny magnetism, being now the dwelling place of Angel’s sweetheart,

The aged and lichen-ed brick gables breathed forth ‘Stay!’ The windows smiled, the door coaxed and beckoned, the creeper blushed confederacy. (*Tess*, 214)

Even the foliage on the side of the dairy-house partakes in Angel’s experience. The “creeper” not only covers the side of the dairy-house as a climbing plant, covering up the place of Tess and Angel’s as yet unsanctioned union, but also imitates the way a blush spreads from its origins and ‘creeps’ over the skin. The image is successful and captures, in the minimum of words, Angel’s passion for Tess, the moral delicacy of the lovers’ situation, and the blush’s biological practice of spreading to other parts of the body.

### **3. Body Language and Sign Reading: Visual replaces Verbal Communication**

“And during my few minutes of unconsciousness I dreamt – what do you think? – that you stood in the room.”

Should she tell? She merely blushed. (*Woodlanders*, 131)

Hardy’s fundamental interest in the creation of visual images in his work, his “translation of observed phenomena into verbal ‘visible essences’”<sup>1</sup> as part of his wider aim to capture in words the essential nature of life and art, has a direct impact on communication in the texts. By creating and relying upon these images in his fiction, direct verbal communication by the narrator or by a character is made redundant: as the above extract from Grace and Fitzpier’s first meeting shows, the blush takes the place of words. Like the painter-instinct in the poet Gerald Manley Hopkins, whose aim was “demonstration,” and not “argumentation,” communication by way of visual images, as opposed to concrete words, is one of Hardy’s key narrative techniques.

Although visual communication is more vivid and ‘artistic,’ it is an infinitely less

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<sup>1</sup> Bullen (1986), p. 1.

explicit means of information transfer than verbal communication, i.e. that which is told by the narrator, or that which is revealed to us through the dialogue of two or more characters. This is especially so with the body language of the blush which, as the narrator of *Daniel Deronda* notes and as already mentioned, sometimes escapes our interpretation. Altogether, the blush has the effect of *showing* implicitly rather than *telling* explicitly something about a character or situation; as Burgess says, the blush of shame has “the salutary effect of enabling our fellow-beings to *know* whenever we transgressed or violated those rules which should be held sacred” (my italics).<sup>1</sup> As a sign, it thus helpfully unmasks without being overly explicit, and is part of the language of inference in the novels. This aspect of the blush accords with Hardy’s general tendency to withhold and imply information rather than explicitly provide it, his greatest examples being his lack of narration of the Chase scene and Tess’ confession in *Tess*, the heroine’s decision to become Alec’s mistress, and his murder. One interpretation of this lack of explicitness is that Hardy is attempting to show the subjectivity and multiplicity of perspective involved in the human experience.<sup>2</sup>

Hardy’s attempt to avoid categorical storytelling is supported by his use of the blush whose subjectivity and inference increases over the span of his novel writing. So fully and consciously are the blushes explained by the narrator in the early novel *Madding Crowd*, for example, that there is never any doubt as to their cause.<sup>3</sup> Thus although we witness the most elaborate descriptions of the blush in this novel, where the colour of the sufferer’s face is likened to the different shades of cultivated roses or to the colour of a Danby landscape, the blush in *Madding Crowd* lacks the inference it develops in the later novels where, at times, its precise cause is hard to pinpoint or even unfathomable.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Burgess, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Shires, p. 153f., writes that the Chase scene in *Tess* “resolutely resists any interpretation founded on logic, cause and effect,” concluding that its ambiguity is a deliberate attempt by the author to question simple stereotypical black and white judgements as to blame and character categorization, and to show instead that these are ultimately both “socially” and “historically shaped.”

<sup>3</sup> The first of two examples of this conscious, detailed explicitness is found on the description of Bathsheba at pay day at her farm where she is said to have “blushed slightly at the sense of being generous in public,” *Madding Crowd*, p. 128. The second is Farmer Oak’s later description in connection with the latter, who is said to have “coloured simply at the consciousness of sounding her name,” *ibid.*, p. 162. Further examples abound, see *ibid.*, pp. 145, 173, 215, 222, 251, 257, 331, 387 and 452.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Grace’s blush in *Woodlanders*, p. 108, where she seems to blush out of a mixture of shock, pain and shame all at once, and Thomasin’s blush in *The Return*, p. 95, as discussed on p. 232, whose cause even escapes the narrator. One reason for the blush’s ambiguity is that some of the emotions that cause it often come from the same family.

### a. The Face and Emotion

a thousand ideas pass through a [...] woman's head; and they indicate themselves on her face.  
(*The Return*, 172)

The face and its representation has a long tradition in the history of English literature and fulfils several functions in Hardy. In addition to simply showing what a character is feeling or thinking at a given moment, it can symbolize the inner idiosyncrasies of his character and trace physically the twists and trials of his life. It is thus often used as an introductory device, with colour and shape being important indicators of character and disposition.<sup>1</sup> With regard to blushing, Darwin explains the blush's manifestation in the face as the effect of receiving years of "more earnest self-attention than any other part of the body,"<sup>2</sup> it being, more specifically, the cheek upon which the blush focuses, "that external arena of the emotions of the soul," as Burgess puts it, "that focus of every involuntary exhibition of internal feeling and sympathy."<sup>3</sup>

The blush is thus one type of sign which manifests itself on a character's face and can signal any number of emotions. In its simplest, most general form, it can introduce or add intensity to a character's thought or emotion without actually describing it. When she suddenly recognizes Thomasin as a potential rival in her pursuit of Clym, "heat flew to Eustacia's head and cheeks" (*The Return*, 200), a reddening which the sensitive reader recognizes results from the jealousy she feels. When Tess scolds her mother for making the younger children believe she is leaving Marlott to marry a rich gentleman instead of to work, her "flushing" (*Tess*, 90) conveys her irritation at such a fallacious notion. And when Sue finally arrives back at the Training School after her day and night out with Jude, "looking flushed" (*Jude*, 195), this, together with the context, communicates a mixture of overexertion and discomposure in Sue, especially given the reprisals she is now made to suffer. Of all the emotional states and thoughts that a blush may manifest, it is especially sexual consciousness that takes advantage of this implicit means of communication.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example *The Return*, pp. 194 and 225 for the description of Clym's face which is symbolic of his inner emotional and spiritual state; *Tess*, p. 383, where Alec's religious transformation is described in terms of the change in his facial features, and *ibid.*, p. 167 where Angel's religious and emotional development is similarly described.

<sup>2</sup> Darwin, pp. 325-329.

<sup>3</sup> Burgess, p. 115.



The blush may also be placed at the beginning of some coming event or exposure of information to act as a form of augury to the reader. When Thomasin enters Blooms-End after having been outside on the doorstep with Wildeve in chapter VIII, her “cheek was flushed to a pitch far beyond that which it had reached before her troubles” (*The Return*, 213), indicating that something has happened to make her anything from excited or angry, to pained or surprised. As the subsequent narrative reveals, this turns out to be Wildeve’s confirmation of their new wedding date. Similarly, in addition to showing her modesty, Tess’ blush on the appearance of her younger brothers and sisters whilst she is working in the fields at Marlott anticipates the moral delicacy of her situation, later revealed to be due to her illegitimate child which her siblings are bringing.<sup>1</sup> And when Grace finally receives the letter from her father bearing promises of release from her unhappy marriage to Fitzpiers, we read that “She tore the envelope, unfolded the sheet, and read; when a creeping blush tintured her white neck and cheek” (*Woodlanders*, 275). Grace’s blush thus not only underlines the importance of the moment by signalling its emotional pitch, but also forewarns of the surprising (but, alas, fabricated) news that Grace is as good as free to marry Giles.

As they stand, Thomasin, Tess and Grace’s blushes do no more than vaguely signal ‘something’ which cannot be interpreted exhaustively, their exact cause in all three cases only becoming clear by the context and continued reading. It is then that we notice that their messages are relatively harmless as opposed to the other types of revelations the blush can deliver.

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<sup>1</sup> *Tess*, p. 139. This scene is discussed separately on p. 142f.

## **b. Exposure and Truth in *The Woodlanders* and *The Return of the Native***

In respect of character a face may make certain admissions by its outline; but it fully confesses only in its changes. (*The Return*, 107)

Of all the changes of expression on the faces of Hardy's characters, the blush is undoubtedly the greatest revealer of hidden thoughts and feelings. This is particularly true of the blush of shame where, in accordance with shame's association with exposure and the desire to hide, it betrays a response which would otherwise remain concealed. In Hardy, blushes of shame and embarrassment frequently signal that the character who has catalysed or caused them in the other, has hit upon a truth in what he or she has said or done. Already this link between shame and truth has been seen in the attempts characters make to shame their adversaries into telling the truth, in Venn's attempt to shame Eustacia into admitting her secret involvement with Wildeve, and in Mrs Yeobright's attack upon Clym to make him face the truth about Eustacia's nature.<sup>1</sup> Indeed it is, as quoted above, Leontes' words to Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* that imply that, without shame, there can be no truth.<sup>2</sup> Not only this, but the truth which such blushes expose is inferred with a unique, incontestable authority. This is secured by the fact that a blush cannot be feigned. As Darwin notes, "We can cause laughing by tickling the skin, weeping or frowning by a blow, trembling with the fear of pain, and so forth; but we cannot cause a blush."<sup>3</sup> Happening automatically and independently of will, uncontrollable and unconcealable, the 'truth' is ruthlessly exposed, regardless of whether the character likes it or not. Truths that blushing reveal are thus distinguishable from the personal and subjective truths that characters and narrators assert. Serving as points of orientation, they may either support a suspected or known fact on the reader's part or introduce a wholly new piece of information that may or may not run contrary to what we have been told so far.

This function of the blush, evident in several of Hardy's major novels, is particularly appreciable in *Woodlanders*, a classical example being when Barber Percomb petitions Marty South for her hair. On Marty's insistence that she will not part with her chestnut locks, Percomb finally describes the reason why,

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<sup>1</sup> These two incidents from *The Return* are discussed more closely on pp. 68f. and 76 respectively.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 190.

<sup>3</sup> Darwin, p. 309.

Percomb had retired as far as the door; he came back, planted his cane on the coffin-stool, and looked her in the face. "Marty South," he said with deliberate emphasis, "*you've got a lover yourself*, and that's why you won't let it go!"

She reddened so intensely as to pass the mild blush that suffices to heighten beauty; she put the yellow glove on one hand, took up the hook with the other, and sat down doggedly to her work without turning her face to him again. (*Woodlanders*, 14)

Marty's blush substantiates the truth in what Percomb says, rendering any further communication between them, or explanation on the side of the reader unnecessary. Turning away from the barber, she returns to her spar making in silence, the secret regard and tenderness which she harbours for someone – later revealed to be Giles Winterborne – having been roughly exposed. The blush thus functions as an uncoverer of personal, secret or awkward truths. Liasing between the closed and private sphere of the character's emotional existence and the public world of the printed text, it acts as intermediary between reader and text, delivering information in a way that makes the narrator's explicit explanation superfluous. As a result, two levels of narration are distinguishable in the text, the explicit narrative text which we read, and the subtext which we imagine and which the blush implies: the fact that Marty blushes and does not give up her hair, as opposed to the reason why. Whilst this subtext does not go as far as to contradict the narrative, it is distinguishable from it in the way that it implicitly delivers additional facts about the cause, motivation and organization of events which make up the overall plot.

Although Marty's blush exposes the fact that she is in love with someone, it does not reveal the whole truth, and it is not until later that we find out who this character is. In another scene in *Woodlanders*, although the information the blush signals still remains on an implicit level, it confirms rather than exposes information, both character and reader already being acquainted with the facts. Concerning, this time, the love Giles has been privately harbouring for Grace, the former blushes when, on offering Marty a ride in Melbury's carriage, she declines: "That's the right of another woman. I wonder what you are thinking of! Thank you for the lift in that handsome gig. Good-bye" (*Woodlanders*, 35). The cause of Giles' blush is two fold. First, it indicates that Marty has touched upon a secret of his, revealing that there is indeed "another women" who, as his sweetheart and wife-to-be, is more entitled to sit beside him than Marty. Second, it responds to the implicit hint in Marty's words that Giles is somehow now in a better social position than herself through his connection to this woman. He is now able to ride in a "handsome gig," a vehicle he himself could not afford. Both aspects cause Giles

some awkwardness and embarrassment whilst, at the same time, the truth of his tacit devotion to Grace is both acknowledged and kept safely unspoken.

Such is the blush's doggedness to reveal the truth, that it can even do so in the face of deceit. In *The Mayor*, the "quick red shooting over her face" (*Mayor*, 151) contradicts Elizabeth-Jane's denial that she is "particularly interested in anybody" in the market which she and Lucetta are watching from the window at High Street Hall, causing the latter to scrutinize her friend and repeat the question, "Quite sure?" Turning to *The Return*, Mrs. Yeobright's address to Wildeve concerning his failure to accompany her niece to Clym's wedding, "'You did not go with her?' said she, as if there might be good reasons why" (*The Return*, 277), is a question and presumption that strikes home. Wildeve's reply that he was prevented from doing so on account of his landlordly duties could be convincing if it were not for the fact that he blushes somewhat while explaining them: "'I could not,' said Wildeve, reddening slightly. 'We could not both leave the house; it was rather a busy morning, on account of Anglebury Great Market'" (*The Return*, 277). This blush signals to the reader and to Mrs. Yeobright (though it is unclear whether she sees or understands it), that he is lying. The real reason Wildeve does not attend the wedding is his late love affair with the bride. Similarly, but more explicitly, a moment of insincerity concerning Eustacia is also exposed by a blush in the chapter "Sharp Words Are Spoken, and a Crisis Ensues." Here, instead of finding Clym on the heath in the company of his mother, she discovers him alone, whereupon she expresses a disappointment "whose hollowness was proved by her rising redness and her half-guilty low laugh" (*The Return*, 264). Typically, it is Eustacia, hardly known for her moral uprightness, who distorts the blush to her advantage. Pretending to feel overheated to explain her "burnt crimson" face to Clym one evening at Alderworth, she herewith hides her excitement at having heard Wildeve's sudden and unexpected signal outside their cottage. The need for fresh air then creates an excuse for her to go outside in the hopes of meeting him.<sup>1</sup> Finally, a less direct signal of truth is given by Thomasin's blush on her cousin's questioning of her husband's whereabouts, shortly before Wildeve and Eustacia's deaths. Thomasin's blushing assertion that Wildeve has "merely gone out for a walk" (*The Return*, 412) cannot automatically be taken as a lie for, although the reader knows that Wildeve is on his way to meeting Eustacia at this

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<sup>1</sup> *The Return*, p. 331.

precise moment, he cannot be sure that Thomasin is also party to this information. As a result, her blush may signal anything from a general awkwardness that her cousin should ask such a question, to definite knowledge as to where her husband is, which she attempts to conceal. Later we find out that Thomasin only speculates that her husband is with his old lover by her having secretly followed him on part of his journey. Here, however, she attempts to hide her suspicion because, as she later explains, she does not want Clym to think badly of Wildeve.<sup>1</sup> But regardless of Thomasin's efforts, she is unable to stop herself reddening at the question. Thus her blush, though not exposing the whole truth, helps it to be revealed, hinting, at the very least, that something else is going on beneath the surface of the text.

Further truths that blushing reveals and that words substantiate are found in other novels. On Retty's exposure of Izz's affection for Angel, "I zid you kissing his shade" (*Tess*, 193), it is her blush, the "rosy spot" that colours "the middle of Izz Huett's cheek," that gives her away, her subsequent declaration of the harmlessness of her affections, "'Well, there was no harm in it,' she declared with attempted coolness" affirming her friends' claims. Similarly, in a conversation between Sue and Arabella the night after the latter has called without success at their home on Spring Street, it is Sue's blush that confirms the truth of her rival's presumptuous observation. Goaded into declaring that Jude is 'her's,' i.e. that they have had sexual intercourse, Sue claims, "He is mine, if you come to that!" (*Jude*, 334), whereupon her antagonist retorts, "He wasn't yesterday!" In response, we read that "Sue coloured roseate, and said, 'How do you know?'" her blush revealing that Arabella has hit upon the sensitive truth, her subsequent question, more an admission than a challenge, providing further corroboration of this.

### **c. Character- and Reader-oriented Exposure and Inference in**

#### ***The Return of the Native and other Novels***

The moments of truth revealed or implied in the different novels above constitute just a part of a complex communication system in Hardy's fiction based upon the blush's ability to expose information. This system raises two central questions: what is the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Return*, p. 426.

precise nature of this information? And to whom is it being revealed? The example of Thomasin and her straying husband above demonstrates that, although some exposed facts are easily inferred by the context, the information the blush reveals must by no means be a straightforward truth. Rather, it can be a hint or sign of a totally unknown nature whose meaning is not only postponed, but even withheld altogether. Nor must it be clear to whom the blush, as a means of communication, is directed. On one hand, and as the examples in *Tess* and *Jude* imply, blushing can be seen and interpreted by another character present and even directly commented upon or silently incorporated into the dialogue, thus becoming part of the inter-character communication in the novel. Here the information revealed may or may not be new or relevant to the reader. An excellent example of this process is at the exposure of Marty's feelings for Winterborne before Grace Charmond in *Woodlanders*. Approaching Marty at her work in Little Hintock wood, Mrs. Charmond enquires after the identity of the young man who is in conversation with Grace, whereupon, being, unlike the reader, ignorant of Marty's feelings, she is forced to interpret and understand the cause of the young woman's blush:

"And the man she is talking to?"

"That's Mr. Winterborne."

A redness stole into Marty's face as she mentioned Giles's name, which Mrs. Charmond did not fail to notice. "Are you engaged to him?" she asked softly. (*Woodlanders*, 235)

Because the reason for Marty's blush is unclear to Mrs. Charmond, simply hinting to her that Marty is emotionally affected by the mention of this young man's name, Felice is forced to do her own detective work and draw the albeit false conclusion that the two are romantically attached and therefore betrothed. Clearly the exchange of information is taking place purely on a character level. As reader, we already know that Winterbourne's love is reserved for Grace, and that Marty's devotion to him is therefore unrequited. Reading on, then, it becomes clear that Marty's blush functions as a means by which Mrs. Charmond can learn about Grace's relations with Giles and the two love triangles which she herself is involved in through her love for Fitzpiers. This revelation to Mrs. Charmond is aided by Marty's answer to her above question regarding her engagement where she explains that it is Grace, not she, who was formerly attached to Giles.

But what happens when these characters miss these signs? Admittedly this is unlikely to happen to Tess. Astutely noticing Retty blushing under Angel's gaze, she

correctly diagnoses this reddening as the milkmaid's self and sexual consciousness and therefore interest in her lover:

"She is colouring up," continued Tess heroically.

"Who?"

"Retty Priddle,"

"Oh! Why is that?"

"Because you are looking at her." (*Tess*, 197)

Eustacia is equally as sensitive, immediately reading the "ashy, haggard, and terrible" face of Clym as a signal that he has finally uncovered the finer details behind his mother's fateful visit, causing her own face to lose its colour and to make any explanation between them unnecessary.<sup>1</sup> Fitzpiers, on the other hand, like Angel, is not such an astute reader of signs, as evinced on his first meeting with Grace. Having heard the purpose of her visit, the doctor expresses his sense of déjà vu in finding her in the room. Although Grace confirms the truth of Fitzpier's suspicion by blushing, he is explicitly made to miss this sign, the narrator telling us directly after Grace's blush that Fitzpiers is instead "now persuaded that it had indeed been a dream" (*Woodlanders*, 131). Indeed, he is only made the wiser a page later when Grace finally admits to her earlier presence. Similarly, when Thomasin blushes at her cousin's question regarding her husband's walking habits, although Yeobright, suspecting something is wrong, scrutinizes his cousin's face more closely, he fails to be able to pin down what this blush is telling him.<sup>2</sup>

Other signs, meanwhile, are clearly not meant for characters at all. As already mentioned, when Wildeve blushes at Mrs. Yeobright's question about his absence from Clym's wedding, no mention is made as to whether Mrs. Yeobright has noticed the colouring of the other's cheeks. Yet whilst these reddenings can often either fail to be of interest to, or noticed by other characters, they are nevertheless of great value to the perceptive reader. Altogether they help him to anticipate or realize the finer details which go on beneath the explicit plot.

*The Return* hosts three further notable examples of the above varieties of communication, each of which uses a different degree of character and reader involvement. The first occurs at the scene of Mrs. Yeobright's discovery of Thomasin in

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<sup>1</sup> *The Return*, p. 389f.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 412.

Diggory's van after her flee from Anglebury. Recognizing Diggory Venn as the son of a local dairy farmer, Mrs. Yeobright asks him why he has changed his trade "from the nice business your father left you?" (*The Return*, 90), implying it was a superior occupation than his current one as reddleman. Her question is met with the mysterious, "'Well I did,' he said, and looked at Thomasin, who blushed a little." The meaning of Thomasin's blush, and therefore the underlying significance of this moment is wholly lost upon the reader, its cause being possibly mere embarrassment for her general situation, or sensing perhaps her helper's regard for her, self-consciousness. Five chapters later, however, we learn through a letter Diggory received from Thomasin, that he is a rejected suitor of hers, rejected first because Thomasin does not tender feelings of love for him, and second because she knows her aunt would never agree to her marrying someone of such low rank.<sup>1</sup> It is this letter of rejection that is the cause of Diggory's change of trade, the collection of reddle requiring his removal from Egdon and creating a physical distance between himself and his loved one conducive to a bruised heart. By now blushing at her aunt's question, Thomasin signals these very facts, and herewith the background of matrimonial and class issues which are central to *The Return*. Thomasin's blush is thus caused by a combination of awkwardness and irony; awkwardness because she is chiefly the reason why Diggory has changed his trade, and irony because Mrs. Yeobright little knows that she is partly to blame for this change. The fact that we are not in the position to know this at this stage in the narrative, and that only Thomasin and Venn can understand the question's significance, signals a level of communication in the text granted to specific characters and withheld, not only from others, but also from the reader.

The second blush example works in exactly the opposite way. Involving Eustacia at the East Egdon dance, it occurs *without* her knowledge of its cause and meaning, whilst the reader is aware of what it signifies. Being unable to participate for want of a partner, Eustacia observes the dancing couples till the sudden appearance and proximity of her ex-lover causes her to blush,

While she abstractly watched them spinning and fluctuating in the increasing moonlight she suddenly heard her name whispered by a voice over her shoulder. Turning in surprise she beheld at her elbow one whose presence instantly caused her to flush to the temples.

It was Wildeve. (*The Return*, 321)

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<sup>1</sup> *The Return*, p. 134.



The structure of the passage, with the staccato sentence, “It was Wildeve,” increases its dramatic impact. The blush signals to the reader Eustacia’s surprise and excitement at the implication of meeting her old lover under these circumstances, both of them being at a dance without a partner. Yet, overwhelmed by her emotions, Eustacia is unable to consciously recognize these facts so that they remain unknown to her, “why the sight of him should have instigated that sudden rush of blood she could not tell.”

The blush’s meaning having eluded reader and character alike, only the narrator remains to be baffled by the reddening of a character’s cheeks. This takes place during a conversation between Wildeve and Thomasin on the evening of their cancelled wedding and at Wildeve’s barely disguised criticism of her family:

“My cousin Clym, too, will be much wounded.”

“Then he will be very unreasonable. In fact, you are all rather unreasonable.”

Thomasin coloured a little, and not with love. But whatever the momentary feeling which caused that flush in her, it went as it came, and she humbly said, “I never mean to be if I can help it.” (*The Return*, 95)

Although the narrator knows that it is not out of love that Thomasin has reddened, he is forced to admit that the real cause of her blush escapes him. As a result, we are left trying to ascertain its root, which is no easy task.<sup>1</sup> One possible cause is Thomasin’s pain or surprise at hearing her family spoken of so critically given the transparent difficulty of her unmarried state; another is shame at Wildeve’s obvious disrespect in criticizing her family at such an early stage of their relationship; another, shame on behalf of her aunt for her scathing blame of Wildeve for the whole event. Ultimately, whilst the last scenario accords most convincingly to Thomasin’s “humble” reply, the question remains open, with the blush retaining an element of mystery and ambiguity typical of Hardy’s narrative style.

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<sup>1</sup> Morgan (1992), pp. 168-171, contrasts this habit of Hardy’s narrative voice to admit ignorance about characters’ feelings and thoughts with its simultaneous tendency to make sweeping, overly-confident claims based about the nature and behaviour of men and women, which do not ring true. This discrepancy he relates to the inadequacy a male language has to express the feelings and thoughts of women.

**d. Transcending Literary and Social Convention:**  
**Sexual Consciousness and Showing the Unsayable in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles***  
**and other Novels**

No happy pair of lovers [...] probably ever courted each other without many a blush.  
(Darwin, 327)

In spite of the glaring exposure which it has caused till now and in accordance with the final example in *The Return* above, the blush as a sign remains fundamentally a device of inference. This brings us to its final function in the novels, namely as a sign to convey thoughts and feelings of a sexual nature in Hardy's characters. The success of the blush in this area relies on its fixed associations of sexual consciousness and attraction, which, as Darwin states above, makes it a standard feature in all issues of love and courtship. In the novels, blushing frequently conveys, without being explicit, the sexual undercurrent of a relationship between two characters. The well scene in *The Return* is one of many examples. Constructed to deal exclusively with the development of Clym and Eustacia's romantic interest in each other, being their first open meeting since their encounter on the day of the mummers' performance, it is marked by several blushful moments on Eustacia's behalf, signalling the underlying sexual attraction and self-consciousness developing between them.<sup>1</sup> The "quick red" (*The Mayor*, 108) of Elizabeth-Jane's face on imagining that, instead of Henchard, it is Farfrae who has written to her, functions in a similar way by indicating her romantic feelings for the Scotsman, just as the way in which the sheer idea that the person at Felice's window could be Fitzpiers, "burnt her cheek" (*Woodlanders*, 265), implies feelings of a similar intensity in Felice. In *Jude*, too, the description of Sue's "flushed cheeks" after the cousins' long parting kiss on the road to Alfredston helps to convey its passionate intensity, as Tess' frequent blushing before Angel helps to convey their mutual sexual attraction.<sup>2</sup>

Although the blush reflects Hardy's interest in visual images and his preference to write in a veiled way, it is impossible to ascribe its use as a sign of sexual consciousness to personal style alone, given the context in which the author wrote. The blush's unique

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<sup>1</sup> *The Return*, p. 241f.

<sup>2</sup> *Tess*, pp. 176, 178, 179, 201, 203 and 209. These scenes are also discussed separately under their different categories.

way of inferring without being explicit provides the author with an ideal weapon against the strict censoring of Victorian literature. Novels, especially, were censored since these were supposed to have a didactic function and be suitable for all family members, particularly young girls. Taking the place of words, the blush thus furnishes Hardy with the possibility of conveying visually something which, on the grounds of its sexual explicitness, was normally considered unsuitable for print. His fiction having suffered charges of immorality and blasphemy and been subject to strict editorial demands and changes since the beginning of his literary career, the blush is thus a device used by Hardy to combat the literary constraints with which Victorian novelists were faced.<sup>1</sup>

A typical example of this use of the blush is found in a scene notorious for its scandalous nature in *Tess*, where Angel carries Tess across the flooded lane which is obstructing the milkmaids' passage to Mellstock church. Social convention forced Hardy to rewrite this passage for the original *Graphic* serialization, substituting a wheelbarrow for Angel's arms to avoid the close physical contact otherwise ensuing between the milkman and the maidens.<sup>2</sup> Here the narrator describes the moment as Clare carries Tess in his arms,

Clare stood still and inclined his face towards hers.

"O Tessy!" he exclaimed.

The girl's cheeks burned to the breeze, and she could not look into his eyes for her emotion.  
(*Tess*, 203)

Instead of Angel and Tess' sexual attraction to each other being explicitly described, which convention would hardly have allowed, the reader is left to imagine its nature and intensity. This is possible through the picture created of Tess' cheeks being on fire and her inability to meet Angel's gaze. The blush alone is sufficient to convey the intensity of the emotion felt; it not only stands for this emotion, but it also arrests and contains it within a single expression, allowing it to go no further. This restriction which the blush places upon the text is also mirrored in Angel's behaviour. Angel looks at Tess, makes a move towards her face, and speaks her name in terms of endearment, "O Tessy!" but he

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<sup>1</sup> See Mary Ellen Chase, *Thomas Hardy from Serial to Novel*, New York, 1964, for the enormous editorial changes Hardy was forced to make in all of his major novels before they were accepted for publication. Hardy himself writes that it was precisely these attacks which made *Jude* his final novel. Ingham, p. 67, also talks of an implicit "sub-erotic register" begun in the early novels and worked right through to *Tess*.

<sup>2</sup> See Chase, p. 85f.

does no more. As Angel realizes, this would exceed the bounds of courtship's etiquette. Although, later, desire will overwhelm their better judgement – Angel embraces Tess and hastily proposes to her – Angel respects the restrictions placed upon him here, “No definite words of love had crossed their lips as yet, and suspension at this point was desirable now.” Thus the entire scene is bounded by convention; just as Angel is restrained from kissing Tess while she lies helpless in his arms, Tess' reciprocal feelings for him are restrained into nothing further than an intense blush. The effect of this constraint is that tension is created; far from failing to create the fitting degree of emotion by failing to describe it fully, the blush constrains and contains the existing passion up to this point, passion which will finally erupt in Angel's spontaneous embrace of Tess. Thus, in an age which, as Rosemarie Morgan writes, deprived women characters “of a lexical means of expressing sexuality,”<sup>1</sup> Hardy has Tess respond visually to Angel's advances instead of verbally. What is more, the blush's useful association with modesty also means that the sum of Tess' sexual expression always comes with a healthy serving of this virtue; if Tess were really exposed to be sexually active, she would risk losing the Victorian reader's sympathy.

Another scene which works upon a similar basis but which is arguably more subtle given the scene's increased implicitness, is found in *Jude* – a novel also known for its inference in passages of a sexual nature.<sup>2</sup> This concerns Arabella's seduction of Jude through a game of cat and mouse they play with a bantam egg. Although the sexual implications of the game, the physical proximity it demands and the sexual innuendo in Jude having to ‘master’ Arabella by obtaining the egg together with a kiss, are not lost upon a sensitive reader, they remain at the level of implication only and are totally lost upon Jude. It is only when the characters suddenly blush: “Her face flushed; and becoming suddenly conscious he flushed also” (*Jude*, 100) that the game's sexual undertone is exposed. Taking advantage of the fact that Jude has finally realized what

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<sup>1</sup> Rosemarie Morgan, *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, London and New York, 1988, p. 92. Morgan takes Tess' physicality as a means Hardy uses to make up for her lack of sexual verbalization, writing, “Tess utters herself by means of physical action, which in terms of sexual responsiveness most aptly articulates authentic erotic ‘utterance.’” This physicality in Tess is used to explain the Chase scene, which Morgan puts down to a lack of physicality on Tess' part, i.e. exhaustion.

<sup>2</sup> A good example of *Jude's* sexual implicitness is when Jude and Arabella spend the night together at Aldbrickham on Arabella's return from Australia, where their renewed sexual involvement is conveyed by the spare fact that they “entered a third-rate inn near the station in time for a late supper,” *Jude*, p. 240. Another is Sue's sexual submission to Jude which must be deduced from her final, forced agreement to ‘be his,’ and her following comment the morning after that “The little bird is caught at last,” *ibid.*, p. 332.

she has been striving towards, signalled to her by his blush, Arabella's final challenge is to disappear upstairs. Typically, this is all we are told. That the two characters now become sexually involved is to be inferred from this incident alone. Even the opening of the subsequent chapter does not make matters clearer, it beginning with a temporal jump of two months and the simple statement that "the pair had met constantly during the interval" (*Jude*, 101). Thus in a scene whose sexuality is kept firmly to a level of implication, the blush silently signals the sexual realization necessary for Jude's inferred seduction.

Altogether, then, whilst in the above examples the explicit text remains within the recognized boundaries of what is conventionally permissible, the blush belongs to a sexual subtext forbidden by social convention. In this function the blush is the bridge between both levels, linking the text's surface meaning, 'he / she blushes,' to its subtext, 'he / she experiences feelings of a sexual nature.' Again this aspect of the blush is part of Hardy's overall narrative style and message. In reading Hardy's work, the reader is constantly encouraged not to take what is written at face value, but to look beyond the explicit meaning of the text to something conventionally more complex and more challenging. The best examples of this challenge are Hardy's fallen women, who, though appearing guilty on the surface, are in fact inherently innocent and pure.

### III. Shame and the Question of Gender

The associations of shame with female characters, passivity and blushing which have become apparent (with the exception of Sue) over the course of this study bring us to our final area of consideration concerning shame and gender. The study of shame in Hardy has a serious contribution to make to the discourse of gender in his work. In this area, established notions of realism and 'scientificness,' created through the author's drawing upon seemingly 'neutral' and abstract fields such as psychology, anthropology and religion in his presentation of shame and guilt give way to outright subjectivity.

The long critical tradition has tended to ascribe Hardy alternatively to the feministic or misogynist cause,<sup>1</sup> but, as recent criticism has shown, it is more accurate to say that he belongs to neither one nor the other, but to a mixture of both.<sup>2</sup> Sympathetic and misogynistic utterances about women can be found throughout the author's work; extraordinary awareness and compassion for the difficulty of women's situation run hand in hand with what are now taken to be standard reductive generalizations about women and their natures made from a male point of view. Women can either be positive, life-giving entities or victims, or cruel and destructive entities who bring ruin to men. Hardy's depiction of Tess, for example, is a sympathetic rendering of her suffering; his assertion of her innocence a clear protest against the Victorian double standard and an appeal for sexual equality. His portrayal of Sue and her attack upon the stifling expectations which convention places upon women, and their demeaning role in wifedom, echoes this call. At the same time both of these novels are speckled with intrusive narratorial comments about women which reveal a narrow and standardized conception of them.<sup>3</sup> *The Mayor*, meanwhile, casts a darker light on womankind, Henchard's tragic downfall being suspiciously and consistently linked to the women characters in the novel.

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<sup>1</sup> For advocates of Hardy's sympathy towards women see Jacobus (1975), Penny Boumelha (1982), Goode (1988), and Morgan (1988). The latter sees Hardy "transcending" gender stereotypes of his period to create "active, assertive, self-determined women." For critics in support of Hardy's misogyny or negative stereotyping of women see Kathrine Rogers, "Women in Thomas Hardy," *Centennial Review* 19.2 (1975), pp. 249-258; Mary Childers, "Thomas Hardy: The Man Who 'Liked' Women," *Criticism* 23.4 (1981), pp. 317-334; Janet Freeman, "Ways of Looking at Tess," *Studies in Philology* 79.3 (1982), pp. 311-323; Kaja Silverman, "History, Figuration and Female Subjectivity in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*," in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles / Thomas Hardy*, ed. Peter Widdowson, New York, 1993, pp. 129-146.

<sup>2</sup> See Dutta (2000) where she discusses the ambiguity of Hardy's attitude towards women.

<sup>3</sup> See for example *Tess*, p. 378; *Jude*, p. 194.

Of these two opposing streams, the overall thrust of Hardy's shame places it clearly within the 'misogynistic' tradition, providing feminist critics with heavy ammunition. Rather than transcending the male prejudices and preconceptions about women of his time, Hardy's rendering of shame generally serves to reconstruct patriarchal power structures within the novels, and reconfirm standard gender stereotyping concerning women's character, behaviour and aesthetic value. What is more, this standardized image of women is also given a moral price. Thus a value system is created upon which sympathy for women characters depends and by which they are ultimately measured and judged.

#### **a. The Feminization of Shame**

"Every gatepost and barn's door you come to is sure to have some bad word or other chalked upon it by the young rascals: a woman can hardly pass for shame sometimes."  
(*The Return*, 163)

Conceived as a grievance about the population's increasing literacy, Captain Vye's remark about graffiti is a loaded comment for the discourse on gender. The severity of the problem of vandalism, he says, is illustrated by the according discomfiture it causes women; women are not only naturally sensitive to anything obscene, but explicitly linked to shame.

The almost exclusive mapping of shame to female characters in Hardy is striking. Thomasin, Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright's explicit experiences of shame far exceed their male counterparts: of the men characters in *The Return*, Fairway, Venn and Clym are each ashamed once, although, in the case of Fairway and Clym, this is not even on their own behalf.<sup>1</sup> In creating *Tess*, Hardy dedicates an entire work to a woman's shame. And whilst the heroine is continually subject to this emotion, there are only two points in the novel where Angel experiences it, although he does enough wrong to feel thoroughly ashamed of himself.<sup>2</sup> Alec is likewise associated with shame just three times.<sup>3</sup> Fitzpiers,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Return*, pp. 84, 206 and 244 respectively.

<sup>2</sup> The first incident involves Angel's use of Talbothays slang in front of his brothers, *Tess*, p. 222, discussed on p. 117f. The second his realization of his narrow-mindedness in comparison to his dead companion's outlook in Brazil, *ibid.*, p. 422, discussed on p. 151f.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 399, 403 and 438.

meanwhile, reaches the brink of shame all of once in *Woodlanders*, compared to the countless times his wife does.<sup>1</sup> *Jude* is the only break in this pattern, the title character being associated with shame more than Sue due to the reversal of men and women character roles.<sup>2</sup> Further, whilst, at a stretch, men characters may feel shame, they certainly do not show it. Clym may redden out of the ‘manly’ emotions of passion and anger, but he does not out of shame,<sup>3</sup> just as Henchard reddens several times from fury and inebriation, but only once from shame.<sup>4</sup> Fitzpiers never reddens at all, and Angel and Alec’s cheeks turn red from shame once respectively in the entire novel.<sup>5</sup>

If we consider this feminization of shame alongside Hardy’s focus upon shame’s physicality, we could conclude along the lines of Rosemarie Morgan’s argument, that Hardy’s concentration on the physicality of female shame is a means by which he can reveal the workings of the female body. In her study, Morgan writes that the author’s detailed description of his female characters’ physical experiences and ordeals is part of his attempt to strip away the mystery shrouding the female body in the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Hence Hardy concentrates on depicting the exact physical experience of shame in an effort to unveil the woman’s body and show it for the natural organism that it is. Yet understanding the depiction of shame as simply another instance of Hardy’s desire to depict “real, flesh-blood” women meets with difficulties. Whilst this can most certainly be taken as one of the consequences of his rendering, we cannot separate these physical reactions from the fixed idea about women they reaffirm. This fixed idea is that women should and do experience shame sooner than their male counterparts. Ultimately, this gender-based rendering of shame works against, rather than for women’s liberation. Indeed on a wider scale, Hardy’s feminization of shame reflects the campaign of oppression of women throughout western civilization where shame, especially sexual shame, has always been linked more closely to them than men. In *The Scarlet Letter* Pearl is explicitly described as the child “of its father’s guilt and its mother’s shame;”<sup>7</sup> indeed it is precisely because of the second-class status that women

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<sup>1</sup> *Woodlanders*, p. 188, where Fitzpiers admits his former romantic attachment to Mrs. Charmond “rather shamefacedly.” For the evaluation of Grace’s shame see p. 250.

<sup>2</sup> This exception to the rule is discussed on p. 242f.

<sup>3</sup> *The Return*, pp. 250 and 252.

<sup>4</sup> *The Mayor*, p. 128.

<sup>5</sup> *Tess*, pp. 222 and 438.

<sup>6</sup> Morgan (1988), p. xi.

<sup>7</sup> *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 96.



have always had in a world ruled by men that, according to recent psychological research, shame is experienced sooner by women than men.<sup>1</sup>

### **b. Patriarchal Structures and Power Struggles: The Face and the Male Gaze**

The most sinister result of limiting shame to the female sex is that it constructs and secures patterns of male dominance over women. In recent discussions on gender and narrative technique in Hardy, a number of studies have examined this point in terms of perspective and the female, drawing particular attention to the male gaze. The contemplation of the female by the male is used to describe what several critics understand as the construction of women characters from a male point of view, creating in turn a narrative technique which is “distinctly masculine.”<sup>2</sup> In her article, Judith Bryant Wittenberg identifies the male gaze in Hardy’s earlier work *Desperate Remedies* (1871) as “a weapon that threatens vulnerable females.”<sup>3</sup> It does this by reducing the female to an object of the male gaze, rather than an active entity in her own right. At the same time this gaze is often prejudiced, labelling and violating, and prevents her from moving and interacting freely,

Trapped and captured by the masculine gaze each of Hardy’s women is enmeshed in a conflict of perceptions, a complex of visions of herself. She is constituted as the observed subject whose existence is determined by her reactions to the conflicting acts of sight of the men by whom she is observed.<sup>4</sup>

It can also signal male sexual fantasy about women characters. In *Tess*, for example, attention has been drawn to the way in which the narrative gaze is constantly focused upon the title character’s body, which is “openly eroticized and made to pulsate under the male gaze.”<sup>5</sup> Lyn Pykett and other critics take this focus, which revolves particularly around Tess’ mouth, to signal Hardy’s “erotic involvement with his creation”<sup>6</sup>: Bullen

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis (1987), p. 29 and Lisa R. Silberstein, Ruth Striegel-Moore and Judith Rodin, “Feeling Fat: A Woman’s Shame,” p. 90, in the same. For a more detailed examination of the reasons for this see Lewis (1971), pp. 144-164.

<sup>2</sup> Kristin Brady, “Thomas Hardy and matter of gender,” in *TCCTH*, pp. 93-111.

<sup>3</sup> Judith Bryant Wittenberg, “Early Hardy Novels and the Fictional Eye,” *Novel* 16 (1983), p. 159.

<sup>4</sup> Wotton, p. 172f. See also Silverman (1984), pp. 129-146.

<sup>5</sup> Bullen, “Figuring the Body in the Victorian Novel,” in Bullen (1997), p. 259.

<sup>6</sup> Lyn Pykett, “Ruinous Bodies: Women and Sexuality in Hardy’s Late Fiction,” *Critical Survey* 5.2 (1993), p. 158f.

goes as far as to describe Tess' introduction as taking place "under the eye of a nympholeptic, anonymous traveller and artist [who] has an eye for young girls."<sup>1</sup>

Of all the parts of the female body available to male eyes, the face is an obvious receptacle of his gaze. It is thus the ground upon which male dominance and preconceptions about women are played out in Hardy. What is more, the face, the gaze, and the experience of being observed is also highly relevant for shame. For although characters may feel ashamed without an audience, fantasy or real, it is predominantly the male gaze upon the female that catalyses or causes this reaction.<sup>2</sup> Being at its extreme an immobilizing, isolating and destructive experience that destroys the individual's identity, Hardyan shame is thus further proof of the threat the male gaze poses for the female. In his book, Goode describes this threat in terms of male appropriation and ownership of the female body which reflects the way women are denied the right over their own bodies.<sup>3</sup> By feeling shame Hardy's women characters are continually made to lose control over their bodies by their contemplation by men, and thus the male's position of power is maintained. Just as it is the male who formulates and establishes the moral and social rules upon which shame is based, so does he carry out their implementation: in Hardy it is chiefly men who are given the power to shame.

The novel in which the male's mastery over the female is most categorically presented, this patriarchal power structure which the male gaze enforces can be appreciated most fully in *Tess*. In the highly-charged scene of Tess and Alec's first encounter, Alec's dominance is shown by the way his very contemplation of Tess has the power to make her feel uncomfortable. Learning of her mother's resolve to contact what she thinks to be a branch of their family, we read,

"Very kind of your mother, I'm sure. And I, for one, don't regret her step." Alec looked at Tess as he spoke in a way that made her blush a little. "And so, my pretty girl, you've come on a friendly visit to us, as relations?" (*Tess*, 80)

The twisting of Tess' words to imply that her mother has done Alec a service by sending her daughter to him implies Alec's personal interest in her, emphasized by the repetition of the personal pronoun "I" and its prominence in the second sentence. But it

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<sup>1</sup> Bullen (1997), p. 259.

<sup>2</sup> Even when gender roles are reversed, the same power system remains, the experiencer of shame finding him or herself in an inferior position to the one who catalyses, causes or observes this emotion.

<sup>3</sup> Goode, p. 121f.

is not so much the words Alec says as the look he gives Tess which reduces her to a state of shy embarrassment. Surveying her in such a way as to signal her sexual attraction to him, Alec's gaze alone is capable of placing Tess in a position of awkwardness and vulnerability.

Fittingly, although men may gaze at women, women may not gaze at men. If they do, they are made to feel thoroughly ashamed of themselves. On the road home to Flintcomb-Ash, Tess encounters Alec in his new position as Methodist preacher, whereupon the following scene unfolds:

"Don't look at me like that!" he said abruptly.

Tess, who had been quite unconscious of her action and mien, instantly withdrew the large dark gaze of her eyes, stammering with a flush, "I beg your pardon!" (*Tess*, 388)

The reason for Alec's directive is not immediately obvious; the fact that it is Tess' charm, displayed by her gaze, that causes it only becomes clear in the lines which follow. Here Alec recommends Tess to hide her good looks by covering her face, since seeing her too often "might be dangerous." In effect, Alec is commanding Tess to conceal her sexual attraction to him to compensate for his own weakness. Tess' confusion and shame, "stammering with a flush," is increased by the imagining that Alec may think she has stared at him deliberately. What is more, the threat that observing Tess could be "dangerous" is a very real one; this is not the first time that her attractiveness has made her a victim of male passion, it already having caused her rape by Alec at the novel's beginning. Thus although done unintentionally, "quite unconscious of her action and mien," Tess is not only made to feel ashamed of looking at Alec, but also of her own figure and face. And by withdrawing her eyes, apologising for looking and agreeing to cover up, she passively submits to his authority and control.

Compared with *Tess*, patriarchal narrative structures appear less stable in *Jude*. This is due to Jude's visible susceptibility to shame over his female cousin, and the latter's explicit criticism of conventional patterns of female shame.<sup>1</sup> It would be wrong, however, to conclude that Hardy dismantles patriarchal structures in this final work. Admittedly Sue's resistance to shame and dominance in the relationship as instigator of action and decision-maker, together with Jude's passivity and suffering at her hands, reflects the exchange of power from male to female. It is, after all, Sue who has the

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<sup>1</sup> See *Jude*, pp. 55, 174f., 184, 222, 245 and 301 for shameful moments involving Jude, compared with the rare instances when Sue is connected to shame, see *ibid.*, pp. 185 and 316.

power to make Jude feel so ashamed of himself that he tries “to get away to some obscure spot and hide” (*Jude*, 175). In spite of this, although Hardy goes as far as to swap gender roles, he cannot be said to transcend them. The simultaneous interchange of all other male and female characteristics that takes place between Jude and Sue means that shame still remains associated with the more sensitive, passive and therefore ‘feminine’ character.

### **3. Typecast Women Characters**

#### **a. Sexual Modesty, Shyness and Blushing**

Male-centred control in Hardy is secured further by the Victorian sexual double standard. This takes men as the initiators of sexual advance and women as its receptors, thus typecasting women into non-assertive, inactive roles and encouraging sexual modesty. Having begun a romantic attachment with, but not yet having married Thomasin, Wildeve’s position in *The Return*, for example, is infinitely less compromising than hers. And although, because of this, Thomasin is eager to tie the knot, such is the powerlessness of her position that she cannot force the issue but must wait until Wildeve decides to. It is precisely this subordination and difficulty of Thomasin’s position as a woman that Mrs. Yeobright bitterly points out to her son when he reprimands her for letting Thomasin risk attempting to marry Wildeve a second time. Her allegation, “You don’t know what a mortification anything of that sort is to a woman” (*The Return*, 218-9), is not only testimony to a system that supports and encourages male sexual freedom to the detriment of women, but also a plea for understanding. As Clym’s remarks to his mother show – “Was it right to let her go?”; “You should have looked more into it” – whilst men can afford to take time and be choosy in such situations, women enjoy no such luxury. In order to end what can only be a humiliating and shameful situation for Thomasin she must marry Wildeve. It is “the only thing that can be done to set that trouble straight” (*The Return*, 219).

The characters, Tess and Grace, meanwhile, implicitly support this sexual double standard. As already shown, although Hardy criticizes this patriarchal system in *Tess* through his poignant portrayal of Tess’ suffering at its hands, he also ensures that his

heroine remains suitably sexually modest,<sup>1</sup> as is also the case with Grace. On both occasions that Grace experiences the fervour of Fitzpier's passion for her before they are married, she neither indulges in nor enjoys the physical contact, but resists blushing to the last. On Midsummer's Eve the doctor catches and holds Grace a moment in his arms before she escapes, "the moon whitening her hot blush away" (*Woodlanders*, 149); the next time when he actually kisses her, Grace breaks from him "trembling, blushed, and turned aside" (*Woodlanders*, 164). The heroine thus shows the required degree of reluctance expected of a well-bred woman being pursued by an ardent lover, the notion that women could be anything other than sexually passive being, as the unsympathetic handling of Arabella shows, unthinkable.

Altogether, then, shame's connection to the blush opens up a whole range of other related associations such as passivity, modesty and shyness which deepen the gulf between male and female. "Women blush much more than men," writes Darwin, naming shyness and modesty in the softer sex as possible additional causes,<sup>2</sup> whilst Ellis also calls the blush "the sanction of modesty" and links it chiefly to women.<sup>3</sup> This notion that women should have a predisposition towards blushing, and that it is positively inconceivable that men should redden, is explicitly presented in *Madding Crowd* through the figure of Joseph Poorgrass. Joseph's propensity to blush is so odd that it is discussed by the other characters more than once, not only making him an object of curiosity to his Weatherby friends and neighbours, but also, as his surname implies, one of pity. Describing his encounter with his employer Bathsheba, Joseph recalls,

"And when I seed her, 'twas nothing but blushes with me!"

"Poor feller," said Mr. Clark

"'Tis a curious nature for a man," said Jan Coggan.

"Yes," continued Joseph Poorgrass [...] "'Twere blush, blush, blush with me every minute of the time, when she was speaking to me."

"I believe ye, Joseph Poorgrass, for all we know ye to be a very bashful man."

"'Tis a' awkward gift for a man, poor soul." (*Madding Crowd*, 106-7)

Blushing, be it out of shyness or modesty, belongs to a woman's domain; when found in

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<sup>1</sup> See pp. 141-144.

<sup>2</sup> Darwin, pp. 310 and 325. The greater part of Darwin's subjects are women.

<sup>3</sup> Ellis, p. 72f.

a man it is “curious” and “awkward,” and evokes sympathetic condolence, “Poor feller,” “poor soul.” As Joseph relates the history behind his blushing, telling how blushes “hev been in the family for generations,”<sup>1</sup> and how all attempts to cure himself have failed, Jacob Smallbury sums up explicitly, “’tis a very bad affliction [...] though ’tis well for a woman, dang it all, ’tis awkward for a man like him..,” which is echoed by Gabriel, “Yes, very awkward for the man!” The message is clear: whilst it is a positive, even admirable quality in a woman, it is embarrassing in a man.

With the exception of *Jude*, further passages in other novels confirm this point. The dying embers of Eustacia’s bonfire are said to shed “a fitful glow which came and went like the blush of a girl” (*The Return*, 107), not of a boy. The single male character to blush with bashful modesty in this novel is Charley on feeling Eustacia’s physical attraction, “the power of this girl’s face and form” (*The Return*, 180-1), a mean sum compared with the frequency that Thomasin and Eustacia redden for similar reasons.<sup>2</sup> In *Woodlanders* Grace’s face repeatedly reddens from modesty and self-consciousness;<sup>3</sup> Fitzpiers never does. And whilst Tess blushes for the same reason a total of twelve times,<sup>4</sup> when Angel reddens on one other occasion other than from shame, it is purely out of “distress.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus in an age that places a high value on the ‘feminine’ qualities of modesty, timidity and coyness in women, the blush allows Hardy to present precisely this admixture of sensitive moral virtue with understated physical charm in his female characters. Even in *Tess*, the most obvious choice for claiming Hardy’s allegiance to the women’s cause – “the greatest plea for women that was ever written”<sup>6</sup> – the entire crux of sympathy for the heroine is built upon her possessing the classic Victorian qualities every woman should nurture: modesty, sensitivity, sexual passivity and beauty. The pattern is even modified where unconventional, less ‘feminine’ characters, such as Eustacia and Sue, are concerned. Just as Bathsheba is “not given to reddening as a rule” (*Madding Crowd*, 68), Eustacia is not prone to blushing like Thomasin or Tess, for

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<sup>1</sup> It is possible that Hardy is drawing on Darwin here, who cites with great interest two cases where patients have appeared to inherit the tendency to blush, Darwin, p. 311.

<sup>2</sup> For Thomasin, see *The Return*, pp. 90, 213, 271, 458 and 461; for Eustacia see *ibid.*, pp. 174, 184, 241, 242, 321 and 344.

<sup>3</sup> *Woodlanders*, pp. 60, 66, 75, 131, 149, 182 and 280.

<sup>4</sup> *Tess*, pp. 80, 140, 176, 178, 179, 201, 203, 209, 239, 262, 267 and 388.

<sup>5</sup> This happens when his father tells him how he was abused by heretic scoundrels, *ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>6</sup> T. P. O’Connor, Monograph 54 in *Thomas Hardy: More Materials for a Study of His Life, Times and Works*, ed. J. Stevens Cox, Vol. II, St. Peter Port, Guernsey, 1971, p. 234.

unlike them, she is sooner independent and strong-willed than shy or modest. Nor is blushing Sue's speciality. Possessing a "curious unconsciousness of gender," her general failure to recognize and accept her own sexuality together with looks that are sooner elegant than "handsome or beautiful" make her an unlikely candidate for blushing. The fact that she reddens from self-consciousness and modesty significantly less than the female protagonists of the other five novels testifies this.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, on one of the three occasions Sue does blush – on becoming aware of the sexual implications of wearing Jude's clothes and letting him see her underwear – she immediately attempts to rationalize and criticize her reaction.<sup>2</sup> Her few blushes also lack the intensity of Bathsheba, Thomasin, Eustacia, Grace or Tess'; never turning crimson, they remain within the paler shades of "flush," "blush," or "roseate." Altogether, the reason why shame and the blush do not figure in *Jude* so highly as in the other novels examined is because, as already established, its female protagonist is not typically female in the Victorian understanding of the term.

### **b. Beauty and the Blush**

She reddened so intensely as to pass the mild blush that suffices to heighten beauty.

(*Woodlanders*, 14)

Further proof of Hardy's gender stereotyping is provided by the linkage of blushing to female attractiveness and the state of beauty. Though the degree of Marty's embarrassment in the above quote decreases rather than enhances her charm, the message is clear: blushing is beautiful. The narrator also assumes that this is a universally-known fact. Marty is so embarrassed that her blush surpasses "*the* mild blush that suffices to heighten beauty," a description based on a general rule which the reader is expected to know. Nor must this have been difficult in the nineteenth century. "All good colour is gradated. A blush rose (or, better still, a blush itself) is the type of rightness in arrangement of pure hue," writes Ruskin defining good and bad colour, just

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<sup>1</sup> These few times are found on *Jude*, p 198, 244 and 344. The remaining three times that Sue's cheeks redden, *ibid.*, pp. 195, 199 and 264, are out of excitement, increased body temperature and exertion respectively.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198, as discussed on p. 183.

as Burgess, Darwin and Ellis all praise the blush's attractive quality.<sup>1</sup> The blush is taken as a pleasing and comely sign in the female sex, and, as Joseph Poorgrass demonstrates, as a ridiculous one in the male.

Proof of this is abundant in Hardy's fiction, a typical example being the description of the moment Eustacia meets Clym's gaze in the well scene:

With the glance the calm fixidity of her features sublimed itself to an expression of refinement and warmth: it was like garish noon rising to the dignity of sunset in a couple of seconds. (*The Return*, 242)

Eustacia's blush heightens her beauty, purifying the features of her face into something more distant and refined as "garish noon" changes into "the dignity of sunset." A further blush underlines this beauty through its connection with her long eyelashes, a standard sign of attractiveness in women, "blushing, and lifting her long-lashed eyelids as if to lift them were a work requiring consideration" (*The Return*, 242). Similarly, much of Tess' charm is based upon her constant blushing. Examples include the scene of Tess' welcome home to Marlott where, moved to forget her sorrow by her friends' high spirits, we learn how "The marble hardness left her face, she moved with something of her old bounding step, and flushed in all her young beauty" (*Tess*, 133). Equally, in the scene at The Slopes where Tess tries to recover her whistling skills, blushing increases her attractiveness making Alec declare her "such temptation that never before fell to mortal man" (*Tess*, 103).<sup>2</sup> This aesthetic quality of the blush also works in reverse: in fitting with Sue, who is more spiritual and intellectual than beautiful, the rare times she blushes carry little connotation of charm, just as Arabella and Marian's lack of blushing accords with their general unattractiveness. Nor does the blush signify any kind of attractiveness, but only strictly modest beauty which clearly disqualifies Arabella, given her flagrant sex appeal.

Again then, the patriarchal system within the novels is maintained upon two bases. By reading his heroines' faces as an expression of charm and their blushes as a sign of beauty in the eyes of the opposite sex, Hardy stereotypes women into being the objects of pleasurable observation by men. Not only this, but by the blush being an essentially awkward and uncomfortable moment, men expressly obtain aesthetic pleasure from an

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<sup>1</sup> John Ruskin, *The Two Paths*, London, 1901, p. 269; Burgess, pp. 55 and 57; Darwin, p. 337; Ellis, p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> See also *Tess*, p. 178 where Tess blushes on realizing that Angel has deliberately ordered the cows to suit her milking preference which leads to a description of the charm of her smile.



experience which brings women pain.<sup>1</sup> The words describing Mrs. Charmond's blush on meeting Fitzpiers eyes and recalling their earlier romantic encounter in *Woodlanders* brings this point home. "[H]e observed a blush creep slowly over her decidedly handsome cheeks" (*Woodlanders*, 187) is clearly a pleasing view to the doctor and an awkward one for her. Whilst the blush highlights Felice's "decidedly handsome cheeks," typically it also denies her the right to continue to look, her eyes being, on blushing, "hastily withdrawn."

#### **4. Shame-based Sympathy and Distance: Socially Acceptable and Praiseworthy Heroines**

The wider associations of shame in the nineteenth century with sensitivity, decorum, modesty, blushfulness, and even charm, turn the propensity for a woman to experience this emotion into a virtue to be striven for. When Hardy's women characters demonstrate this tendency, they are guaranteed being considered an admirable 'heroine' in a Victorian reader's eyes. This positive aspect of shame is underlined by the way in which, as Darwin and Solovyof argue, the ability to be ashamed distinguishes man from the animal kingdom.<sup>2</sup> In the nineteenth century this aspect of shame played an essential part in fuelling and fighting racial discrimination. It was the means by which white settlers could justify their ascendancy over black tribes who, being dark-skinned and thus unable to show shame as distinctly as their masters, were therefore closer to animals and could be treated accordingly. "And how can those be trusted who know not how to blush? says the European, in his inveterate hatred to the Negro and the Indian" writes Burgess, quoting and fiercely refuting Humboldt.<sup>3</sup> Establishing the fact that dark-skinned races blush is an issue that both Burgess and Darwin do zealously for it was a

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, of the nineteenth-century examiners of the blush, it is only Ellis that makes this point explicitly, writing that "To evoke a blush, even by producing embarrassment, is very commonly a cause of masculine gratification," Ellis, p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> In contrast to Darwin and Solovyof, Burgess, p. 74, does not limit the sense of shame to human beings, arguing that "If a dog be chastised for his offence, he evinces *shame* in his *own peculiar manner*" (his italics). He supports this with an account of Sir Walter Scott's "*shame-faced terrier*" taken from "The Life of Sir Walter Scott."

<sup>3</sup> Burgess, p. 30. Darwin also takes up this issue, on Darwin, p. 318.

matter of establishing their full humanity.<sup>1</sup> In spite of this, Burgess still makes a distinction between those civilized races such as the Turks, Greeks and Europeans who, through having greater and more refined powers of reason, are more prone to the blush of shame than other more savage, instinct-driven races where the faculty to blush lies dormant and undeveloped.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the blush of shame is a sign of moral and social refinement which distinguishes civilized man from primitive races.

Shame's function of elevating (wo)man from the lower rungs of the evolutionary scale and denoting human refinement and moral supremacy is crucial to the presentation of Hardy's female characters. A hierarchy of sympathy is built among these characters whose lowest value is shamelessness, signifying a lack of decency and modesty, diminished reasoning powers and moral weakness, and indifference and coarseness. Women figures are ranked accordingly on a sympathy scale which is dependent on their propensity to feel shame. The bottom end of the scale is, as our study of *Jude* has shown, represented by Arabella. Indicative of her total disregard for convention and moral code, and her course and insensitive nature, Arabella's shamelessness is underlined by her backwardness in blushing. Apart from alcohol and physical exertion,<sup>3</sup> there is little that can bring a flush to her cheeks. Even having to admit that her pregnancy is mistaken leaves her cold; while her husband is struck dumb, Arabella is simply struck with "a little uneasiness." Another time, being void of the feelings but recognizing their conventional necessity, she feigns modesty and shyness through her alcoholic redness. Explaining to Tinker Taylor her and Jude's intentions to remarry, she is described trying to make "her spirituous crimson look as much as like a maiden blush as possible" (*Jude*, 460), a facial faking reminiscent of her dimple-making.

Another figure equally lacking in shame and modest sensibility is *Tess*' Marian. Of the three milkmaids at Talbothays, Marian is singled out as a somewhat brusque and unattractive character. The eldest of the three, she is plump and snores, and does not stand a chance of winning Angel's affections: when he carries her across the puddle on the way to Mellstock church, she is unflatteringly described as "a sack of meal, a dead

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<sup>1</sup> After a wide survey of the human race, Burgess concludes that "the *dark* races have the power of exhibiting their feelings by blushing as well as the *white*," Burgess, pp. 27-47, Darwin that "blushing [...] is common to most, probably to all, of the races of man," Darwin, pp. 315-320.

<sup>2</sup> Burgess, pp. 41-44.

<sup>3</sup> *Jude*, pp. 96, 240, 453 and 460.

weight of plumpness under which he had literally staggered” (*Tess*, 202).<sup>1</sup> Although equally as infatuated with Angel as her friends, typically it is Marian who scornfully chides Izz Huett into admitting it. But, critically, in response to Izz’s retaliation, “if I be in love wi’en, so is Retty, too; and so be you, Marian, come to that” (*Tess*, 193), Marian, unlike Izzy, does not blush. In accordance with her character and constitution, we are told explicitly that, “Marian’s full face could not blush past its chronic pinkness,” and that she speaks, “with the dry frankness of complete indifference to opinion.” These two points underline Marian’s general disagreeableness; not only is her face, like Arabella’s, normally so red due to her high alcohol consumption that any trace of a blush is indistinguishable<sup>2</sup> – but it is also highly unlikely that she would blush anyway, such is her indifference to external opinion.<sup>3</sup> Lacking in modesty, hardened and thick-skinned, Marian makes an unsuitable candidate for Angel’s wife and an unattractive female figure. As Darwin writes, “[I]diots rarely blush”: upon closer inspection we cannot help noticing that neither Marian nor Arabella have highly developed mental powers.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, in *Woodlanders*, Grace’s moral integrity and modesty are maintained through her blushes of shame,<sup>5</sup> which gives her a distinct advantage over her rival Mrs. Charmond. Indeed the intrinsic flaw of Mrs. Charmond is that her standing and reputation as a woman is not spotless. Said to flaunt her sexuality beyond the bounds of what is acceptable, she is in danger of being given precisely the opposite epithet as Grace, that of shamelessness. By describing how she would “sit down to her dinner with a frock hardly higher than her elbows” and how his brother-in-law calls her a “wicked woman” (*Woodlanders*, 26) in one of the first passages where Mrs. Charmond is spoken of, Robert Creedle casts her reputation as a virtuous woman into serious doubt. Again this fits with our overall judgement of her as a character as careless, insensitive and irresponsible.

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<sup>1</sup> As if aware of this, Tess fails to include Marian among the milkmaids she considers as potential wives for Angel, see *Tess*, p. 197.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed the closest Marian gets to blushing is depicted through the notion of ‘heating up,’ being described, “colour[ing] up so hot,” *ibid.*, p. 200, and “with heat added to her redness,” *ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>4</sup> Darwin, p. 310. This point is also made by Burgess, pp. 70-73.

<sup>5</sup> *Woodlanders*, pp. 108, 177, 221 and 290.

Finally, although shame is extremely scarce in regard to male figures, we can even find remnants of this same hierarchy of sympathy among them. The pitiable Giles and Jude, for example, are more closely connected to shame than their rival counterparts, Fitzpiers and Phillotson.<sup>1</sup> If we were to apply this value system to the men characters in *Tess*, we would be forced to conclude, as many critics do, that Alec is the better man.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For Fitzpiers see *Woodlanders*, p. 188, compared with *ibid.*, pp. 176 and 293 for Winterborne. Similarly Phillotson feels explicitly ashamed all of once, *Jude*, p. 295, compared with the countless times Jude does as discussed on p. 242f.

<sup>2</sup> For the occasions of Alec and Angels' shame, see p. 238, n. 2 and 3.

**E. Conclusion:**  
**Redressing the Balance – Shame as the defining Aspect of Guilt in**  
**Thomas Hardy**

The claim was made at the beginning of this study that Thomas Hardy has an earnest and exceptional interest in the experience of shame. This interest not only affects the understanding of guilt in Hardy's fiction, but also calls for the re-evaluation of his three novels, *The Return of the Native*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*.

Hardy's treatment of shame is exceptional because it shows the author's intense involvement in an area which has not only received little critical attention from other academic disciplines up till today, but which has also been neglected within the legacy of literary criticism that Hardy left. It is exceptional because its diversity, depth and subtlety exceeds the achievement of contemporaries who specialized upon the subject in Hardy's time, such as those of the biologists Charles Darwin and Havelock Ellis. Together with guilt, its handling contains elements of psychological and cultural theory developed in the twentieth century; the treatment of both of these concepts even goes beyond conventional assumptions which are still made about them today. Their presentation is altogether progressive and cannot be anchored within any particular period.

This is not to say, however, that we can do away with the context in which Hardy was writing when evaluating his presentation of guilt and shame. Associations and traditions depicted in the novels examined can clearly be traced back to specific values and attitudes of the nineteenth century. Shame's public appearance in *The Return*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Woodlanders* and *Tess* in the form of a social sanction to secure socially and morally correct behaviour is inseparable from the rigid Mrs. Grundyism of Victorian England, just as its association with the female body, sexual modesty and passivity in the same reflects the patriarchal structure of society at this time. Here it was men, not women, who were given the power to shame and to partake in the aesthetically pleasing occupation of observing their female counterparts blush. Guilt's rendering is also equally 'Victorian' at times. Appearing in *The Return* and *Jude* in an exaggerated form, connected with neo-puritan doctrine, all things spiritual, and especially with sin, it, too, appears to imitate the renewed Evangelical fervour of the nineteenth century. But even in these respects where Hardy's rendering seems to do no more than to mirror the *Zeitgeist* of his age, the task he sets himself is not just a descriptive one. By using the blush as a visual sign of shame and modesty in his female characters, the author is not

only able to present typically feminine and therefore orthodox characters, but also to show visually, rather than tell of verbally, potentially shameful situations in which these characters find themselves. Replacing explicit words with the implicit sign of the blush, he hereby creates a literary freedom based upon visual imagery. This freedom thus enables him to depict morally-threatening scenes otherwise unsuitable for print, a rare achievement for a nineteenth-century novelist. Nor is Hardy's portrayal of his characters' shame and guilt experiences without his vigorous challenging of the moral and social rules and systems which are made partly responsible for causing them. One of the messages that endures is that these characters are in fact 'shameless' and 'guiltless,' being simply made to feel otherwise by an inherently flawed moral system that uses falsely interpreted Church doctrine as its justification.

Further, just as we cannot confine the period in which Hardy wrote to a discussion of Victorian ethics and society, nor can we confine Hardy's shame and guilt to being moral emotions concerned with socially acceptable behaviour, and Hardy's novel writing to an exercise in social criticism. As shown, Eustacia Vye and Mrs. Yeobright's shame for the degradation they experience has no moral bearing, Angel Clare's shaming of Tess Durbeyfield is far more than an attack on Victorian prudery, and Sue Bridehead's guilt for the children's deaths has little to do with the censure of neo-puritan practice. Indeed it is precisely when guilt and shame are freed from their conventional moral mould that their function in the three novels becomes most interesting. More far-reaching than the above applications is Hardy's presentation of shame and guilt as a psychological and physiological experience. This experience not only involves the immediate mental and physical moment of feeling ashamed or guilty, and the language and narrative technique used to describe this moment, but also its wider, more serious effect upon the individual's view of himself, his situation and his environment. It is these aspects of guilt and shame in Hardy that beg a re-reading of the literary construction of *The Return*, *Tess* and *Jude*, and of their individual and related messages.

Hardy's expression of shame and guilt is characterized by his attempt to transfer the mental and physical hallmarks of these emotions to a literary setting in an authentic and natural way. His reconstruction is based upon the private, inward and verbal type of expression that guilt takes as opposed to shame's predominately outward and visual manifestation. A mental process involving the character's shift in consciousness, the shameful moment in Hardy – in accordance with modern psychological theory – is shown to involve a detached and altered view of the self which often (though not

always) is connected to an audience of some kind. Depicted by the sign of the blush, shame is communicated through a realistic body language. The reddening of characters' cheeks or other parts of the body, and their rise in body temperature fuel many a description of shame in the novels, as do the typical desire to avoid eye contact and to hide in order to avoid being seen by some 'other.' Involving the painful exposure of the self to the self and to others, and the subsequent recognition of one's own shortcomings, shame also creates new characterization opportunities. Its experience is used by the author to reveal by default the sexual, social, moral and intellectual identities of his characters: by showing what these characters feel sexually, socially, morally and intellectually ashamed about we can draw clear conclusions about their aspired standing in relation to all these different areas. The blush being a physiological symptom which cannot be faked, shame also exposes truths about characters, a function which is often used when their identity is in danger of being misunderstood. In *Tess*, for example, the shame Angel feels before his brothers for using Talbothay slang re-establishes the conservative conformism that rules his character at precisely the point when the reader imagines him to have broken free from such "splints and bandages." Guilt also has a unique form of expression in Hardy which is conditioned by its intrinsic nature. Associated in *Jude* with the niggling voice of the conscience, it is communicated in the form of a live, spoken debate which takes place internally in the title character's mind. Lacking the conventional grammatical structure and narratorial intrusion of nineteenth-century third-person narration, and presented in the form of thoughts as they occur to the character, this live debate of the conscience foreshadows the narrative technique of stream of consciousness characteristic of modern fiction. Sue's guilt, meanwhile, takes a different form. Denied access to her thoughts, it is expressed through the written letters she addresses to Jude. Depicting her continual flux between guilty, penitent and innocent states, these letters bear witness to the essential temporariness and absolvable nature of guilt as opposed to shame's permanency. Connected, furthermore, to specific wrongful action the culprit has deliberately taken, guilt is shown to be without self-reference and concerned sooner with action and plot rather than with character.

The above characteristics of guilt and shame manifested in their individual narrative expression are also connected to specific social landscapes in the novels. Changes in these landscapes produce the varying guilt and shame text-worlds (or 'cultures') in Hardy's writing; *Tess*' focus upon shame and *Jude*'s upon guilt can be mapped to the public and communal structure of society in the former as opposed to the private, isolated plight of the individual in the latter. The shift from shame to guilt over the span

of *The Return*, *Tess* and *Jude* is thus linked to a wider pattern of social change, a change which also took place in Hardy's lifetime. Together the three novels present the increasing urbanization, rootlessness and isolation of the individual against the background of a crumbling, agricultural community. Here, individual, private opinion takes precedence over the opinion of the majority, as opposed to a community environment where the individual is intrinsically bound and subject to the values of a closely-knit group or audience. This change in social structure that the Victorian era witnessed as people moved from close, rural communities to the anonymity of the sprawling cities impairs the conditions for shame, given its public, vicarious nature. Instead it encourages private, silently considered guilt, where, in the absence of others, the individual experiences a forced introversion centred about the conflicts of his conscience.

Chief structural principles of *The Return*, *Tess* and *Jude*, then, shame and guilt go on to alter the purport of each work. Again, they do this in ways that have nothing to do with their moral aspect. Rather, their power to change and reveal the individual's view of himself in relation to his environment is essential here, with shame's threat to self-image and identity playing the decisive part. Although in different ways, each of the three novels presents a protagonist in search of his or her proper purpose and position in life based upon his or her understanding of the world. Having abandoned his career as diamond merchant and dedicated himself to enriching the minds of the poor, Clym Yeobright believes to have found just this; his choice of vocation is determined by his new view of life as "a thing to be put up with" and his subsequent belief that the spiritually elevating occupation of teaching will help mankind accept their grim situation. Having dedicated herself to Angel's cause by agreeing to be his wife, Tess also imagines to have found the right purpose in life which she has been seeking; her belief is based upon the assumption that devoting herself to this man is the highest good she can achieve. And having broken free from their unfortunate marriages to live together, setting the pursuit of happiness as their single focus by making a "virtue of joy," Sue and Jude imagine they have found the hidden secret ruling all creation. And yet in spite of each character's certainty in having found the 'true' meaning of life, and therefore of their own existence, all four are proved horribly wrong. Clym, Sue and Jude's senseless loss of their families, Tess' loss of Angel, show that the trust they placed in life, in loved ones, in God and Nature was utterly misplaced; in reality there is no higher force guiding life on earth, conferring it with meaning; no guarantee that



things happen for a reason. Instead, in accordance with Hardy's own view, there is only the "ache of modernism"; life is chaotic and meaningless, and man's striving futile.

It is this sudden and shameful exposure of misplaced trust that forms the connection between the three novels. Robbed of their beliefs, aspirations and identities, the shame experience, representing the individual's interaction with and understanding of the outside world, severely destabilizes these characters; they recourse to guilt as the single rationalizing force available in an irrational and unpredictable world. Tess accepts Angel's conviction of her because she cannot face his failure as a person and thus the failure of the world they have mentally built together; Clym and Sue make themselves responsible for deaths they did not cause since this is easier than accepting that these deaths did not have to happen. Altogether, then, guilt is simply a crutch in a world devoid of meaning, its delusion necessary to be spared the truth about life that all three tragedies proclaim. *Tess* is, in this respect, the most negative of the three novels. In comparison with Clym and Sue, Tess' shaming by Angel is infinitely more personal; this, together with the fact that she finally rejects her guilt, makes her recovery impossible, and the novel's close a loss in every sense. The endings of *The Return* and *Jude*, meanwhile, are gains. Thanks to their lasting guilt, Clym and Sue take on new identities, occupations and directions; whilst Tess is shamed into losing belief in the world altogether, Clym and Sue are left believing something, however false this may be. The final point which remains to be made is that the new way in which Clym and Sue see the world fails to give them an insight into the truth about life as we might expect from tragic suffering. The Sophoclean maxim that it is through suffering that we learn is hereby reversed, with Hardyan guilt bringing self-delusion instead of self-knowledge, deception instead of realism.

In addition to re-affirming the full tragic implication of *Tess*, the above re-evaluation of Hardy's three 'modern' works provides a new way of looking at *The Return* and *Jude*. This works on the premise that the presence of guilt in these two novels originates from a similar experience. Another point this re-evaluation raises is that, in keeping with the intrinsic affinity between the two emotions, guilt and shame appear side by side in the three novels. Thus, contrary to previous critical practice, guilt cannot be fully appreciated in Hardy without the corresponding consideration of shame. Here, the comparison of both concepts even suggests that shame is more central. Reason for this is the joint focus upon shame in *The Return* and *Tess*, together with the fact that it is more crucial to the plots of *The Mayor* and *Woodlanders* than guilt; even the traditionally guilt-racked work, *Jude*, is not without its unique interest in shame. This

latter observation goes far beyond the study of Thomas Hardy and English literature; it ensures that some progress is made towards compensating for the widespread neglect of shame in other areas of academia.

Hardy is not only morally intelligent about shame and guilt, but psychologically, physiologically, visually and literarily informed about them. And yet despite the wider symbolism and application these concepts have, they remain human emotions intrinsic to the tragic human predicament as Hardy understood it. This predicament is caused by the cruel realization that, contrary to what his characters would believe, there is no higher force guiding events on earth with the appropriate care and justice; the realization that “the First Cause worked automatically like a somnambulist, and not reflectively like a sage.” For the characters of *The Return*, *Tess* and *Jude*, shame in terms of broken trust and betrayal accompanies this painful realization, whilst personal guilt allows them to pretend that this same realization never took place:

Human beings [...] have always hesitated to conceive a dominant power of lower moral quality than their own; and [...] invent excuses for the oppression which prompts their tears. (*The Return*, 448-9)

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