Tess, Jude, and the Problem of Adapting Hardy

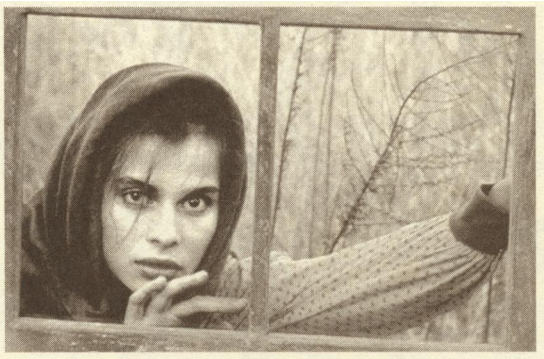
An adaptation is, among other things, a reading. While the resultant text may seek to alter or subvert elements of the original its point of origin is always the same: an encounter between the adapter, or adapters, and the book. How that book is read, how it is interpreted and understood, will normally influence, if not determine, the character of the new text. I contend that the last two novels of Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1894-95), are liable to a variety of different readings. In particular it appears that both novels have affiliations to a range of literary genres and modes, many of which are eschewed by their adaptations, *Tess* (Polanksi, 1979) and *Jude* (Winterbottom, 1997). An examination of the elisions, inclusions, and additions that are effected between page and screen reveals the readings that their filmmakers favor. In addition, the derived texts might even be seen as arguments about how the originals should be read or, more particularly, how they should be defined.

In her essay "*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form" Penny Boumelha describes Hardy's book thus: "structured primarily as a tragedy, the novel draws also on a number of other genres and modes of writing: on realism, certainly, but also on a melodrama that reaches into balladry, and, of course, on polemic" (in Widdowson, *Tess* 54). This mixture proved awkward to tolerate for many early readers and critics (an interpretive tendency stretching long into the twentieth century) who struggled to reconcile Hardy's detailed rendering of rural life with his enthusiasm for the heightened emotionality and reduced credibility of melodramatic style. Peter Widdowson charts the development of this species of Hardy criticism, culminating in the 1970s vogue for "humanist-realist" approaches to literature that assume both an externally-knowable real world and the capacity in language to apprehend that world accurately (Widdowson, *Tess* 4). "Hardy, against the grain of much of his writing, has, from the earliest reviews, been hauled into consonance with such a world-view and such an aesthetic" (Widdowson, *Tess* 4–5).

While celebrated for characters whose stories were seen to reveal fundamental truths about human nature as well as for descriptions of the countryside that chronicle a vanishing way of life, Hardy's work was also regarded as suffering from a variety of faults. Paramount among these shortcomings were his attraction to melodrama and his reliance on coincidence—itself a common feature of melodrama plots—as well as his pessimistic tone and sometimes awkward or uncomfortable style, particularly his rather clumsy references to art (*Tess* 5). These supposed inadequacies had in common a tendency to undermine realism, to threaten the verisimilitude that the "best" aspects of his writing fostered. Interestingly, more recent interpretations of Hardy have celebrated the variety, the mixture of voices, in his novels as evidence of his work anticipating postmodern devices. In "The Violence of Style in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*" Jean-Jacques Lecercle maintains that Hardy deliberately opts for a polyphonous approach:

> [T]o let violence erupt on the surface of the text, to follow the lines of flight it indicates, to let the minor voices engage in their babble/Babel, in other words not to erase the contradictions from the text. To describe this choice we can borrow Bakhtin's term, "polyphony" [...]. [Hardy] accepts the violence of an unstable language as an integral part of his style, he lets the different languages within him speak out and contradict one another. (in Widdowson, *Tess* 154)

While Lecercle's reading finds Hardy choosing boldly to adopt a polyphonous style, Merryn Williams discerns a writer so concerned with the quality of his prose that he began "studying Addison, Macauley, Newman, Gibbon, and leading articles in *The Times* in an effort to polish up his style" (Williams 26). This raises an important question: Was Hardy striving to create a seamless finish, to plane away the discrepancies, or are the different voices deliberately in conflict? Does a critical intention underpin the jarring polyphony?



With his adaptation of *Tess* Roman Polanksi excises most of those original scenes that have a pronounced flavor of melodrama as well as those elements that contribute to the novel's polemics. The latter is relatively straightforward to effect as the polemical aspect of the original resides principally in the authorial voice. For example, when Tess's infant child Sorrow is buried, Hardy describes an area of the churchyard as "that shabby corner of God's allotment where He lets the nettles grow, and where all unbaptized infants, notorious drunkards, suicides, and others of the conjecturally damned are laid" (*Tess* 148). The film does not repeat—through voice-over for example—these judgments and criticisms; viewers must form their opinions on the basis of what unfolds in the diegetic world, such as the refusal of the Vicar to give Sorrow an official burial because of the censure this would provoke from his parishioners. Most obviously, Polanski plays down the novel's social critique by not beginning with Hardy's provocative epigraph: "A pure woman faithfully presented." Michael Winterbottom's *Jude* likewise omits the original title page's opening salvo: "The letter killeth." With the first subtitle Hardy frames an argument that Tess is pure despite her possible compliance with her seducer, bearing an illegitimate child, becoming a "kept woman," and eventually a killer. With the second he expresses the view that the binding law of Christian marriage is stifling, even fatal.

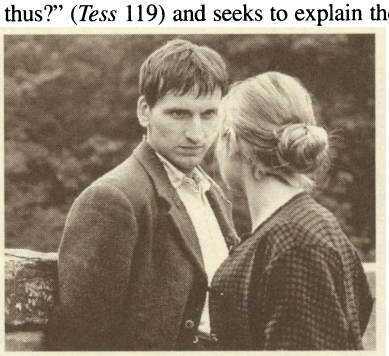
It is however in the approach of the adaptations to melodramatic material that the process of "straightening out" the multi-form, generic identity of Hardy's originals is most evident. This systematic practice of omission seems likely to arise from the filmmakers' desire not to compromise the tragic narratives and realism of the new texts with improbable material that might damage the credibility of characters, events, and causality. One suspects that a working assumption underpinned both adaptations—that the most plangent moments would (if faithfully included) severely alloy the intended tragic realism by posing an interpretive and emotional difficulty for audiences unaccustomed to reconciling such different elements in a single-screen text. Most criticism of Hardy has, until comparatively recently, maintained that this original mixture was not entirely successful in literary form, and it seems apparent that his adapters have sided with the early critics in preferring a clearer generic identity.

Perhaps the most plausibility-straining and emotionally heightened scene in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* occurs days after Tess has acquainted Angel of her past and he fails to forgive her. In the middle of the night she sees him, crossing a "stream of moonlight," and entering the bedroom. A false hope is raised, both for Tess and the reader—that Angel has forgiven her and decided to consummate the marriage. Unfortunately, his "eyes are fixed in an unnatural stare" and we realize

he is sleepwalking. Murmuring to himself, "Dead! dead! dead!" he picks up Tess and rolls "her in the sheet as in a shroud." Angel carries Tess to the landing where it seems for a moment that he might be intending to drop her, or both of them, to their death below before beginning an increasingly unlikely somnambulistic journey. Tess is carried, "the absence of clothes taking much from his burden," over a "voluminous and deep" river, the sleeping Angel managing to negotiate "the bare plank [...] lying a few inches above the speeding current." Their journey culminates in a suitably gothic location, "the ruined choir of the Abbey-church," where Angel places Tess in "the empty stone coffin of an abbot" and kisses her lips before falling into a deep immobile slumber. After several minutes Tess begins to shiver, "the sheet being but a poor protection," so she walks the still-sleeping Angel back to the house where she leaves him on the sofa bed. The next day he has no recollection of the night's events (*Tess* 317–20).

Polanski's adaptation does not include this scene, which is described here to convey how extravagantly Hardy merges melodramatic action and a high gothic setting. In *Conversations in Ebury Street* (first published in 1924), George Moore specifically criticized the sleepwalking scene (in Pettit 111) and it appears that Polanski was anxious to avoid such brickbats, even if the many omissions of this type ran the risk of his work being judged unfaithful. However, what is remarkable about the exclusionary approach taken by both directors is that it does not result in allegations of infidelity. Widdowson notes how positive reviews of *Tess* consistently praised the film's faithfulness (Widdowson, *Tess* 97), a critical tendency which suggests either that those reviewers were simply unfamiliar with the novel or—as seems more likely—they shared the view that such scenes are instances of Hardy writing aberrantly and that to elide them does not constitute infidelity. In essence, they believed some elements of his writing to be more "Hardy" than others and were prepared to forget sections that always failed to sit comfortably with preferred readings of the texts and their author.

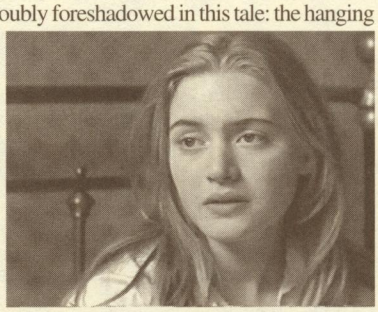
Both adaptations eliminate original material that relates to the supernatural. *Tess*, for example, contains no reference to the ghostly carriage—a device worthy of Poe or Hawthorne—which is understood to be of ill-omen to whoever hears it. In the novel, on the morning of her wedding Tess shudders inexplicably at the sight of the old carriage that will take her to the church, a phenomenon that Angel blithely explains as her having heard "the legend of the d'Urberville Coach—that well-known superstition of this county" (*Tess* 280). However, Tess denies any knowledge of the legend and the novel thereby allows the possibility that Tess, an authentic "blood" d'Urberville herself, may be subject to a slow-working Fate that punishes her family for the misdeeds of its forebears. Indeed, after Tess is raped by Alec, Hardy asks "why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus?" (*Tess* 119) and seeks to explain the event partly as a protracted retribution:



> Doubtless some of Tess d'Urberville's mailed ancestors rollicking home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time. But though to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children may be a morality good enough for divinities, it is scorned by average human nature; and it does not mend the matter. (*Tess* 119)

Similarly, *Jude* excises the story told by the churchwarden while Jude and Sue work at the re-lettering of two stone plaques of the Ten Commandments in an old church. Although the adaptation retains the scene to demonstrate how Jude and Sue's unmarried condition hinders their employment prospects, particularly in ecclesiastical work, it omits the rural ghost story of hard-drinking stone-masons working at exactly the same task in a nearby church a century earlier. The job goes on late and the men eventually fall

down drunk. They recover their senses in the middle of the night with "a terrible thunderstorm a-raging" and see the "dark figure" of the devil finishing their work. The next morning when the service begins it is observed that the Commandments have been painted with the "nots" left out. Another tale that the adaptation omits is Widow Edlin's macabre story, recounted to Jude, Sue, and Little Father Time, of the man whose wife left him to stay with friends, taking their child with her. The child dies and the wife refuses to allow him a burial alongside his family, prompting her husband to break into the house to steal the body. Being caught, he is tried, hung, and gibbeted for burglary. This story is told on the night before Jude and Sue intend to marry and it prompts the little boy to exclaim "If I were you, mother, I wouldn't marry father!" (*Jude* 349-50). *Jude the Obscure*'s most dreadful incident is doubly foreshadowed in this tale: the hanging anticipates the means by which Little Father Time will kill his siblings and himself, while the dead child in a coffin anticipates the triple funeral that follows. His presence as a listener suggests that the story provides a partial inspiration for his actions and his words point specifically to dreadful consequences arising from a union between Jude and Sue.



The concept of Fate is key to both novels. In conversation with her brother Tess likens their circumstances to that of a blighted apple surrounded by other, splendid fruits. Their own world or "star" is simply a bad one and this unfortunate fact determines the course of their lives (*Tess* 69-70). Likewise, Jude is placed at the end of a family history that merges unpleasant facts, folklore, and superstition. In chapter eleven, Jude asks his aunt Drusilla about his parents and discovers that his mother had drowned herself after a final argument with his father. Drusilla explains that: "The Fawleys were not made for wedlock: it never seemed to sit well upon us. There's sommat in our blood that won't take kindly to the notion of being bound to do what we do readily enough if not bound" (*Jude* 116).

The adaptations omit these and other references to those forces that determine the fate of their title characters. In doing so, the films make themselves less amenable to many of the interpretations that critics have brought to bear on the novels. For example, Holloway argues that Tess's decline is caused by an inner flaw, a consequence of her heredity (98). Tony Tanner posits a wider justification for Tess's suffering, arguing that Hardy is not so much condemning "specific social anomalies" as describing "a universe of radical opposition, working to destroy what it works to create, crushing to death what it coaxes into life" (in Widdowson, *Tess* 39). Boumelha suggests that Hardy may be offering so many potential or partial reasons for Tess's downfall in order to question whether events are explicable at all: "the multiplicity of 'explanations' offered for Tess's tragedy form part of the novel's onslaught on moral dogma and absolutism, and [. . .] they have as their primary effect to undermine the authority of the whole notion of explanation" (in Widdowson, *Tess* 57). Indeed, one might continue Boumelha's argument to claim that Hardy is seeking to undermine the authority of the novel itself as an explanatory form. The conclusions of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* so emphatically reject the Victorian/Christian conception of Providence that prevailed in many other contemporary novels as to suggest an increasingly bitter relationship with the medium that had made him famous. In his analysis of *Jude the Obscure*, Widdowson argues that satire and not tragedy is the appropriate term to describe Hardy's fiction and particularly his last novel. He describes the operation of this satire as dual: first a critical depiction of sexual relationships in a class society and second an undermining of realism as a fictional discourse. Approaching Hardy's work from this perspective enables the reader, Widdowson contends, better to explain the multiplicity of modes and elements in his fiction which so many critics have regarded as flaws and faults (Widdowson, *Late Essays* 174). If the principal goal of his novels is not the evocation of tragic realism but its deconstruction, then such anti-realist features as melodrama, a reliance on coincidence, and authorial interjection become instrumental rather than aberrant. Widdowson's argument is especially relevant to a study of Hardy adaptations for it is just such material that is omitted and it is precisely a tragic realist tone that is sought by such a scheme of omission.

Widdowson argues that Hardy's satire was directed at "readers who are seduced by the fictions constructed on behalf of a specious Christian/humanist society by its dominant cultural mode of

representation; tragic realism" (Widdowson, *Late Essays* 8). Of course, most readings, criticism, and adaptations of Hardy position him as a practitioner rather than a castigator of this mode. Focusing on Hardy's construction of tragic realist narratives but sweeping under the carpet the strategies he employs to debunk the assumptions that underpin such narratives results in an inaccurate estimation of the author and his texts. Although the oppositional relationship to Christian orthodoxy and contemporary sexual mores is discerned, the internal critique of realism and tragedy as authentic modes of representation is not. Interestingly, Widdowson senses (though he provides no evidence) that the "late-Victorian flak" which *Jude the Obscure* prompted was motivated not only by its "immoral" content, particularly its representation of marriage and marriage laws, but also by its "discomforting" textual strategies that assault the "cherished tenets of humanism" and "its handmaiden, realism" (Widdowson, *Late Essays* 177). Viewing the adaptation, he finds compelling proof of his reading of the original as satire: "Hardy's anti-humanist, anti-realist satirical fiction can only be granted the status of classic tragic realism precisely when all those elements of his text which make such a reading tenable are stripped out or suppressed" (Widdowson, *Late Essays* 195).

In their article "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism" Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni distinguish and categorize films according to their relationship to ideology. They describe a grouping of films "which attack their ideological assimilation on two fronts," first by taking a directly political subject and second (the act without which the first part is politically ineffective) through a "breaking down of the traditional ways of depicting reality" (in Mast, Cohen, and Braudy 686). Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* would seem to operate at this level, challenging not only the signified but also (and by means of) the signifier. Conversely, Winterbottom's *Jude* may be interpreted as belonging to that grouping of "films [...] which have an explicitly political content [...] but which do not effectively criticise the ideological system in which they are embedded because they unquestioningly adopt its language and its imagery" (in Mast, Cohen, and Braudy 687).

Two broadly "authorial" possibilities may be inferred from the fact of *Jude* taking the shape that it does. First, that Winterbottom—and his screenwriter, Amini—read *Jude the Obscure* as it is widely and popularly understood, namely as a tragic-realist novel, and regard the mixture of other conflicting elements as flaws. Excising these elements, they have striven to produce what they believe to be an otherwise faithful work, where the updating of dialogue and other modifications are fundamentally in tune with the tone, as they interpret it, of the original. Second, there is the possibility that Winterbottom and/or Amini have sensed that Hardy deliberately sought to undermine realism but have chosen not to follow that path. This may be because they prefer the interpretation of Jude as a tragic hero, despite what Widdowson convincingly identifies as Hardy's deconstructive intent. In either case it seems clear that to highlight the multiplicity of elements—the satire, the melodrama, the anti-realism—would not have been a wise commercial decision. A century of readings has not favored this approach, nor has most criticism, nor previous Hardy adaptations. It is doubtful that audiences would appreciate a *Jude* or *Tess* that sought fidelity to their originals by dismantling cinematic realism. Combining such an approach with Hardy's unhappy subject matter would certainly have resulted in uncomfortable (if not unpalatable) texts, since audiences would inevitably be figured as ideological dupes in the majority of their viewing. Alternatively, the satirical/deconstructive intent might go unrecognized—just like Hardy's—with the muddling of genres and modes and the undercutting of realism interpreted as failures of taste and judgment rather than purposeful devices.

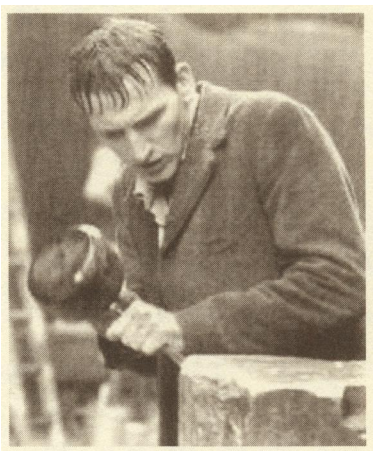
Since in both *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* causality is a murky mixture of social and supernatural forces, fate and authorial privilege, the trimming of these elements causes difficulties for both films in terms of creating a new causal register. Searching for an explanation of Tess's downward spiral and death, the film invites us to blame Alec, Angel, and (implicitly) Society. Alec rapes Tess (though there are attempts to mitigate this by describing the rape as a "violent seduction"), then makes her his mistress. Angel, despite his abstract intellectualizing, is still bound by conventional morality and fails to judge her as he wishes to be judged himself, thereby precipitating her return to Alec. We may also infer a degree of blame for a society that afforded men like Alec such power and that structured the moral codes that condemn Tess. However—and this is key to certain criticisms of the film—we are now far more inclined to debate Tess's own role in her fall, to question whether she might at various junctures have acted more forcefully or intelligently to determine her own future.

In an angry review Jane Marcus condemns Polanski for not showing us "Tess the powerful," arguing that Nastassja Kinski portrays a meek and submissive girl who repeatedly acquiesces to masculine dominance:

> He will not let Tess speak or act. She is passive throughout, and lying down for much of the film. Hardy's Tess is upright. She walks and talks and works and struggles and grows from child to woman under the loving hands of her creator who subtitles his novel "A Pure Woman," taking the part of a male sympathiser of heroic womanhood. Polanski is a voyeur of victimisation who infantilises our Tess. (in Widdowson, *Tess* 93)

However, much of what Marcus identifies as Polanski's unfaithful alterations to the novel can be seen to originate in Hardy's portrayal of Tess. Boumelha describes how she is already in a trance-like or sleepy state for much of the novel: "[P]articularly at moments of [...] erotic response, consciousness is all but edited out. Tess is asleep, or in reverie, at almost every crucial turn of the plot [...] Tess is most herself—and that is, most woman—at moments where she is dumb and semi-conscious" (in Widdowson, *Tess* 48-49).

The crucial difference, of course, is that where the original's mixture of tragedy, melodrama, balladry, and polemic so clouded the issue of causality as to distract the reader from a critical analysis of Tess's actions, the adaptation has no such smokescreen. In the novel we understand that Tess faces an array of insuperable adversaries, ranging from the "President of the Immortals" to her own inherited shortcomings. In the novel the very weight of opposition she must face affords her a heroic aspect and she is liable to interpretation in such terms. (Indeed, a year after its publication Hardy was asked to become Vice-President of the Women's Progressive Society, an offer he turned down "because he did not believe in their main aim, namely women's suffrage, as he explicitly told the lady who invited him" [Butler in Pettit 50].) As with *Jude the Obscure* the procession of unlikely (but seemingly predestined) encounters, successive miseries, and tantalizing but always stolen hopes feels so irresistibly plotted as to render any serious contemplation of the protagonist's determining power a virtual nonsense. But with those original elements dismantled we are, sadly, led to ask the same questions and reach the same conclusion as Tess's tormentor, Alec (played by Leigh Lawson), who asks: "What is this strange temptation misery holds for you? [...] There is a point beyond which obstinacy becomes stupidity. Are you in love with this drudgery?"



The problem is not merely that Tess and *Tess* have no answer—neither does the novel. Rather it is that Alec's question now has a pertinence that it previously lacked. With a new (broadly realist) conception of causality proffered it has become the audience's question too. For Polanski has not, as Marcus claims, altered Tess: he has altered the world through which she moves.

Jude is rather more successful in explaining the downward trajectory of its title character. As with *Tess*, genre is at the root of the problem; the realist intentions and concomitant streamlining of the multiply generic original might threaten to result in a void where Hardy had structured a tangled but nonetheless substantial causality. However, genre also provides the solution in that *Jude* is crafted to lend itself to comparison with certain British television programs and films, of a body of texts the temperament of which fills this aetiological gap. The generally depressing perception of life invited by the events of Jude's story maps quite well onto this genre. One key element is the casting of Christopher Ecclestone in the title role, which

provokes associations with the television dramas in which he has previously appeared—*Cracker*, *Hearts and Minds* and *Our Friends in the North*—as well as his film role in Danny Boyle's *Shallow Grave* (1994). These texts have in common a largely negative view of society and human nature. Characters are often cruel, or perform cruel acts, and the texts' realism is understood at least partly in terms of the representation of selfishness as a dominant tendency while altruism and idealism are either absent or impossible to implement. This world-view also informs *Trainspotting* (1996)—another Boyle-directed movie—which culminates in its "hero," Renton, choosing to abandon his erstwhile friends and disappear with their loot. Jude feels thematically and visually bound to their bleak creed. In a *Sunday Times* article, Brian Appleyard described this strongly nihilistic aesthetic thus:

> British Television has, for years, been in love with a very narrowly conceived idea of realism. Shows such as *Cracker* and *Prime Suspect* are based on the view that realism consists of a sort of bleak, gritty pessimism about human nature. Indeed, whenever a police-type show was praised by the industry and by critics, one could invariably predict its style—grainy, harsh—and its content—depressing [...] The underlying belief was that reality is intrinsically nasty and brutal, and that it was the broadcaster's job to expose this. (Appleyard 27)

It is precisely this conception of realism that informs *Jude* and marks it as different from other literary adaptations. Michael Atkinson's review in *Film Comment* stresses how the film differs from the genre of literary adaptations that have come to be known as heritage films: "As modern, sinewy, and seriously stuck in the bog of poverty as recent adaptations of Austen, Forster, James and Wharton have been nervelessly romantic and entranced with the leisure of wealth, Winterbottom's movie basks in the clean truth of catastrophe" (Atkinson 47).

In fact, the dual effort to make the adaptation reverse the heritage aesthetic and conform to the genre of modern British cynicism is so pronounced that it compromises both literary fidelity and the other "realism" of Hardy's locations. The television and film texts recognized as key constituents of this genre are almost without exception set in the North—either the North of England or Scotland—and *Jude* borrows from their scenic palette, using Northern locations and emphasizing dull colors in both urban and country scenes to convey the hardness of his life. The decision to film in such locations as Durham and Edinburgh, and particularly to render the city environment as generally depressing, is highly revealing and suggests that Winterbottom regarded the bleak aesthetic, which as a *Cracker* director he had helped establish, as a paramount consideration.

Hardy's Christminster is universally understood to represent Oxford. Indeed, his substitution of fictitious names for real place-names is so well documented that many editions of his novels contain a glossary for matching the two and a map of his "Wessex" with its surroundings. Yet *Jude* is so eager to evoke a version of realism constituted in "Northerness" and dejection that it does not employ Hardy's "real" setting for fear of contrary values being evoked. Television programs that have used Oxford as a backdrop, such as *Brideshead Revisited* and *Inspector Morse*, tend to lean heavily toward nostalgic/idyllic representations of the city and its dreaming spires. In these and other texts, images of College quadrangles, the Bridge of Sighs or the domed roof of the Bodlean library function as a visual shorthand for Oxford and are invariably intended to carry pleasant associations. In rejecting Oxford as a location (and one assumes that Edinburgh's Royal Mile was not a cheap alternative) the adaptation studiously avoids such meanings and manages to convey Jude's rejection by the college and its indifference to his dreams as part and parcel of the city's harsh aspect. Images of the parade where hard-faced Dons process along a cobbled thoroughfare certainly succeed in suggesting the meanness of the city—even in its ostensibly glorious moments—as recognized by the chastened Jude.

Jude also bears a considerable similarity to a number of films directed by Ken Loach—not least in their shared Northern texture. Like the child in Loach's *Kes* (1969) the young Jude is a thin and isolated figure, physically and emotionally bullied, who finds something (in his case the ideal of Christminster) in which he then takes an obsessive interest. Jude's beating at the hands of Farmer Troutham recalls the treatment of the child in *Kes* from his Games Master and his elder brother while the shot of a gibbet of dead crows—never mentioned in the novel—recalls the fate of his

kestrel. The remarkable opening of Loach's *Poor Cow* (1967) in which the female lead is filmed giving birth also seems a probable inspiration for the particularly graphic childbirth scene in *Jude*, another addition to the original.

In his article on *Trainspotting*, Bert Cardullo notes how it is related to Loach's films by their common rejection of the dominant cinematic mode of representing English society—a mode he describes variously as an "Oxbridge-Thatcherite view of the world," "the view through yuppie eyes," and the "British–Museum tradition of Alexander Korda" (Cardullo158). He cites *Sense and Sensibility* (Lee, 1996) and *Emma* (McGrath, 1996) as examples of this tendency and is clearly addressing and targeting the heritage genre and its antecedents. Although *Jude* may be grouped with such texts simply by virtue of having a celebrated literary original, it appears in all other respects to structure itself in an insistently oppositional relationship to the heritage film. Northern rather than Southern, not dissipating the central narrative focus either by emphasizing subsidiary performances or offering visual pleasures of architecture, landscape, and costume, *Jude* consistently reverses the heritage aesthetic and the reassuring view of Britain that heritage film perpetuates and exports. It thereby bridges the British traditions of literary adaptation and contemporary social-problem picture, borrowing from the latter to re-figure the past so often represented in the former. Made at the end of a long period of Conservative government in Britain, it shares and expresses the growing public sense of disillusionment with that administration and rejects its nostalgic view of the national past. By other standards however—especially those of Comolli and Narboni—*Jude* is not the critical/political text that it might be. It plays the realist tragedy too straight, sustaining the very idiom that Hardy sought to sabotage. One is minded to believe that Hardy's original, with its "problem" of competing genres, is still the more dangerous text.

The generic status of *Tess* is less clear. The film evidently does not share *Jude*'s affiliations to a cycle of gritty and pessimistic dramas, pre-dating those texts by several years and striving for an entirely different visual texture. The reviewer Andrew Rissik took particular exception to its use of light, describing the film as:

> A collation of second-hand picturesque effects [...] (of which) probably the most offensive [...] is the ubiquitous gold light that shimmers around and about almost everything on the screen, as if this were a Biblical movie and we were awaiting the Incarnation. (Rissik 353)

Rissik and others who heaped opprobrium on Polanski for the prettiness of *Tess* may be guilty of failing to recognize Hardy's tendency to situate his title character, especially in her happier moments, in terms of light. For example, in the contented period before her wedding Hardy describes her affection as a "photosphere" that "irradiated her into forgetfulness of her past sorrows." This was a time when "she walked in brightness" (*Tess* 260). Conversely, after her rejection by Angel she conceives of her predicament in terms of the absence of light; "she knew that he saw her without irradiation" (*Tess* 301). Yet it is striking how such barbs anticipate the tenor of many responses to films of the heritage cycle as it unfolded through the 1980s and 1990s. Adaptations would consistently be figured as tastefully landscaped but critically deficient—compromising or missing elements of their originals. Reviews and criticism would describe languidly photogenic characters negotiating passage through narratives of unctuous melancholy but also chart how the films were essentially memorable for their bewitching settings and overall pictorial sumptuousness, the appeal of which effectively diminishes the interpretive potentialities proper to the originals. *Tess* and *Jude* may then be understood as virtual book-ends to the heritage cycle and its relationship to the literature it molded and transformed; *Jude* denouncing that which *Tess* announced.

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Note

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