



# HARDY

novelist and poet

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PAPERMAC

danger of falling to his death and in front of his eyes, in the rock, there is a fossil, a trilobite. It too had once had eyes which, 'dead and turned to stone, were even now regarding him'. In Hardy's writings one is constantly made aware of this confrontation of man with the immense geological perspectives of earth's history, showing us to be no more entitled to self-importance than the ants and weevils under our feet.

So Tess, about to be arrested and tried and hanged, comes to Stonehenge in a mood of total serenity—almost impersonal now, her spirit almost dissolving back into the great flow of life. Like Henchard she suffers defeat in the grand manner. But the Mayor of Casterbridge is the epitome of all that is male, a modern Macbeth, a bull in the arena, going down savagely and bitterly under repeated blows. Tess is the complete contrast, the totally feminine victim, caught in a web of tragedy by her meekness, her tenderness, her generosity. At the end she simply surrenders and withdraws herself into some inner fastness of the spirit where one may believe she at last finds peace. At any rate, in that famous and provocative comment of Hardy's, 'the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess'.

Hardy's skill in the portrayal of women is often praised as one of his particular achievements and there can be little doubt that Tess is in that sense his masterpiece. Like Henchard she is 'on-stage' for almost the entire action. She swiftly accumulates, or has inherent within her, the numinous power that radiates from a figure of impending tragedy. Like Shaw's St Joan or Ibsen's Hedda Gabler she lingers in our minds as one of the great feminine portraits in the modern idiom, as Hardy understood the word 'modern'. To quote his phrase, 'the ache of modernism' is in them.

In a comparison with Hardy's other principal heroines Tess stands apart as having a degree of voluptuousness—unawakened, no doubt, but not absent—which they lack. Bathsheba and Grace Melbury both owe more to Diana than to Venus; even more so does Sue Bridehead; if Eustacia Vye seems to be the exception it