

Intertextuality and the context of reception: *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* - chapter 5 by Thomas Hardy

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Lesson plan

Resources

- ❖ **Resource A** – Optical illusions pictures
- ❖ **Resource B** – Extract from chapter 5
- ❖ **Resource C** – Film clip
- ❖ **Resource D** – Extract from chapter 5 with Bible passages
- ❖ **Resource E** – Group work questions

Learning objectives

- ❖ To consider how a text might be interpreted on different levels
- ❖ To consider the context of production and reception
- ❖ To consider the significance of the beginning of Tess's relationship with Alec.

Starter activity – introducing different interpretations

- ❖ Look at optical illusions [**Resource A**] and discuss – what image do students see? (vase/faces, lion/hand, duck/rabbit, baby/scene, old/young lady, seal/donkey, good/evil).
 - Some pictures can be interpreted in more than one way, and so can literature. Contribute examples in literature where something can be interpreted in more than one way, depending on how / by whom / when it is viewed (e.g. something which is shocking/controversial to an original reader can be considered normal or commonplace by a modern day reader).

Main activity 1 – first interpretations

- ❖ Read extract from chapter 5 [**Resource B**]
 - First of all establish what is actually, physically taking place (i.e. Alec and Tess take a walk, eat some fruit, pick some flowers, sit down to eat, then

Alec smokes. You may wish to quickly track this through using images, storyboarding, drama or just talking and note-making.)

- Then consider at a deeper level what is going on between Alec and Tess
 - Find examples of where he is trying to impress / dominate / seduce her
 - Find examples of the warning voice of Hardy telling the reader the relationship is dangerous.

Main activity 2 – biblical interpretations and group work

- ❖ Hardy's original readers may have interpreted/accessed this episode in another way – they may have been aware of the biblical story which parallels this episode of seduction and danger. Can any student guess which biblical story this passage links to?
 - Watch the film clip [**Resource C**] and handout the parallel text [**Resource D**]
 - Divide students into groups to discuss and make notes in response to the question sheets [**Resource E**]
 - Feed back ideas
 - Groups then choose a key quotation which could be interpreted on different levels and write a point-example-explain paragraph analysing it, considering how different readers could respond in various ways
 - Hear some examples.

Plenary

- ❖ What has this process taught us about:
 - Hardy's presentation of the relationship between Alec and Tess?
 - Hardy's use of the Bible?
 - How texts can be interpreted on different levels?
- ❖ Make predictions about the development of the relationship between Alec and Tess
 - How do we know it won't end happily?

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Resources

Resource B - *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* Chapter 5 by Thomas Hardy

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?'

'I suppose I have,' faltered Tess, looking uncomfortable again.

... Supposing we walk round the grounds to pass the time, my pretty Coz?'

Tess wished to abridge her visit as much as possible; but the young man was pressing, and she consented to accompany him. He conducted her about the lawns, and flower-beds, and conservatories; and thence to the fruit-garden and greenhouses, where he asked her if she liked strawberries.

'Yes, () when they come.'

'They are already here.' D'Urberville began gathering specimens of the fruit for her, handing them back to her as he stooped; and, presently, selecting a specially fine product of the 'British Queen' variety, he stood up and held it by the stem to her mouth.

'No--no!' she said quickly, putting her fingers between his hand and her lips. 'I would rather take it in my own hand.'

'Nonsense!' he insisted; and in a slight distress she parted her lips and took it in. They had spent some time wandering ... thus, Tess eating in a half-pleased, half-reluctant state whatever d'Urberville offered her. When she could consume no more of the strawberries he filled her little basket with them; and then the two passed round to the rose-trees, whence he gathered blossoms and gave her to put in her bosom. She obeyed like one in a dream, and when she could affix no more he himself tucked a bud or two into her hat, and heaped her basket with others

... Stoke d'Urberville took her back to the lawn and into the tent, where he left her, soon reappearing with a basket of light luncheon, which he put before her himself ...

'Do you mind my smoking?' ()

'Oh, not at all, sir.'

He watched her pretty and unconscious munching through the skeins of smoke that pervaded the tent, and Tess Durbeyfield did not divine, as she innocently looked down at the roses in her bosom, that there behind the blue narcotic haze was potentially the 'tragic mischief' of her drama--one who stood fair to be the blood-red ray in the spectrum of her young life.

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Resource C - <http://www.crossref-it.info/articles/491/Tess-of-the-d%27Urbervilles-~-ch-56>

Resource D - *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* Chapter 5 by Thomas Hardy

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?'

'I suppose I have,' faltered Tess, looking uncomfortable again.

... Supposing we walk round the grounds to pass the time, my pretty Coz?'

Genesis 3:1 ¹**Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made.**

Tess wished to abridge her visit as much as possible; but the young man was pressing, and she consented to accompany him. He conducted her about the lawns, and flower-beds, and conservatories; and thence to the fruit-garden and greenhouses, where he asked her if she liked strawberries.

Genesis 3:1-3 **And [the serpent] said unto the woman, 'Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'**

²**And the woman said unto the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: ³But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye di.e.'**

'Yes, () when they come.'

'They are already here.' D'Urberville began gathering specimens of the fruit for her, handing them back to her as he stooped; and, presently, selecting a specially fine product of the 'British Queen' variety, he stood up and held it by the stem to her mouth.

'No--no!' she said quickly, putting her fingers between his hand and her lips. 'I would rather take it in my own hand.'

'Nonsense!' he insisted; and in a slight distress she parted her lips and took it in.

Genesis 3:4,6 ⁴**And the serpent said unto the woman, 'Ye shall not surely die:'**

⁶**And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat...**

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They had spent some time wandering ... thus, Tess eating in a half-pleased, half-reluctant state whatever d'Urberville offered her. When she could consume no more of the strawberries he filled her little basket with them; and then the two passed round to the rose-trees, whence he gathered blossoms and gave her to put in her bosom. She obeyed like one in a dream,

Romans 11:8 ⁸God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear...

and when she could affix no more he himself tucked a bud or two into her hat, and heaped her basket with others

... Stoke d'Urberville took her back to the lawn and into the tent, where he left her, soon reappearing with a basket of light luncheon, which he put before her himself ...

Romans 11:9 ⁹And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock...:

'Do you mind my smoking?' ()

James 3:6 ⁶ ... the tongue is a fire ... it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

'Oh, not at all, sir.'

He watched her pretty and unconscious munching through the skeins of smoke that pervaded the tent, and Tess Durbeyfield did not divine, as she innocently looked down at the roses in her bosom, that there behind the blue narcotic haze was potentially the 'tragic mischief' of her drama--one who stood fair to be the blood-red ray in the spectrum of her young life.

Genesis 3:13-16 ¹³And the LORD God said unto the woman, 'What is this that thou hast done?'

And the woman said, 'The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.'

¹⁴And the LORD God said unto the serpent, 'Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed ... ¹⁵And I will put enmity between thee and the woman ...'

¹⁶Unto the woman he said, 'I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.'

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Resource E

Discuss the following questions and make notes:

- 1) Who does Tess represent?
 - a) What does this suggest about her role and characterisation?
 - b) For example, do we find her more vulnerable, or more evil because of this link?
 - c) Why has Hardy done this?

- 2) Why does Tess eat the fruit, and why is it wrong for her to do this?

- 3) What could Tess's dream-like state represent?

- 4) What are the consequences of Tess giving in to the temptation Alec represents?
 - a) How does Hardy communicate the danger of this to the reader?

- 5) Who does Alec represent?
 - a) What does this suggest about his role and characterisation?
 - b) How is the reader meant to respond to him?

- 6) Which aspects of Alec's words and behaviour are crafty / deceitful like the snake?
 - a) Where does he manipulate and dominate Tess?

- 7) What could Alec's smoking represent?
 - a) Overall, how does Hardy represent the relationship between Alec and Tess?

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Resource A - Optical illusions – say what you see

