

Tess of the d'Urbervilles and George Turberville

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Abstract

Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* may get her name through his interest in the Renaissance writer (and translator of Boccaccio) George Turberville, the last names being originally variants. Numerous references to Renaissance literature throughout the novel support this proposal—as well as Rebekah Owen's own explicit familiarity with Turberville's work.

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Because the noted Hardy scholar Carl J. Weber has observed that Rebekah Owen related her reading of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* not only to the Dorset town of Bere Regis but also to her discovery of “a 1570 edition of the *Poems of George Turberville*,”¹ it is worthwhile to consider whether any connection between the names can be documented. As a starter, we should note that this same edition of Turberville's poems is cited in the *Dictionary of National Biography* as being in the British Museum (the only copy there) and that Hardy had the *DNB* in his personal library (Cox 194). It seems reasonable that he would have looked up “Turberville, George,” in the *DNB*, particularly because he knew of the mansion of the Turbervilles, demolished in 1832 (Kay-Robinson 82, 96-97). The last acknowledged members of that family had died in the previous century. Because the Turberville name is unusual enough, might he not have thought back a century even earlier in order to “echo” some traits of the noted Renaissance student of Boccaccio when he wrote *Tess*? If such a supposition appears on the surface to be a bit pedantic, it is not without a few points of interest, as we shall see, and because linguistic boundaries are crossed, the comparatist should be interested.

To begin, in Chapters XXXIV and LII, Hardy by implication treats the name *d'Urberville* as if it were originally a variant of *Turberville* (191, 324), or vice versa, which it was (Kay-Robinson 82, 96-97). Further, *Tess* harks back to the Renaissance in several respects, Roger Ascham being cited in Chapter XV (86), for example. George Turberville (?1540-

?1610) wrote on sport, as did Ascham. (Turberville composed two books on hunting; Ascham wrote one on archery.) For what it may be worth, *Tess* is replete with both hunting and bird imagery, probably the dominant metaphors of the novel.² This association at least provides some circumstantial linkage, which would corroborate Hardy's comment that "the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed" (*Tess* 16). He was doubtless aware of the wordplay involved in the *Noble Art of Venerie* (the sport of Venus), the title of one of Turberville's treatises, and may have appropriated it in *Tess* subliminally.

Both Hardy and Turberville also took a strong interest in agrarian subjects and the use of dialect. At the same time they had frequent recourse to classical subjects. Hardy cites "Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names" (115) in Angel's reference to Tess, and Turberville models himself on Mantuan, Ovid, and Mancius. The most arresting phrase in the novel is probably at the very end, with its reference to "the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase," having "ended his sport with Tess" (354). Thematically, a Turbervillian phrase may even furnish a gloss for the novel: "A hatefull thing is Love (God wotte). . ." (Turberville sig. D1v). This adage, which comes from one of his pastoral translations, suggests the tension between love and hate so operative in Tess's story: it recalls oxymoronic treatment of these abstractions in *Romeo and Juliet*, also cited in the novel (189). The *DNB* makes the point that Turberville was found to be a "translator only of the passion of love," not of its spiritual side. Moreover, Turberville's use of the Faust tradition in his eclogues bears upon a thematic undercurrent in *Tess*: the theme of seduction in stark Mephistophelean terms. For example, when Tess first encounters Alec, he is smoking (30), suggesting hellfire. Shortly afterward, he says to himself, in a casual oath, "I'm damned" (34). When Tess is violated, the narrator asks flatly, "But, might some say, where was Tess's guardian angel?" (63) A leading irony of the novel, and further evidence of Hardy's intense onomastic interest, is that her angel—Angel Clare—turns out to be anything but angelic, again suggesting the dangers of the Faustian alter ego.

Floral imagery interconnects as well. Turberville wrote of the fading of flowers and women ("beauty's buds like fading flowers do fall"),³ recalling for us the despoliation of Hardy's heroine. In the same context, much is made of "the cowslip in the midst of May" even as the novel tells of May Day festivities, of flower imagery to the extent that Tess's own mouth is compared with a "mobile peony" (8). Yet her

darkening sun—a prime image—makes flowers wither. The tragedy of her story recollects Turberville's own interest in *Tragical Tales* (1587).

According to Michael Millgate, Hardy "gave much attention to the naming of his characters and was particularly happy in the combination of the Norman-sounding d'Urberville, which also manages to suggest the urban origins of the *nouveau riche* family by whom the name has been appropriated, with the uncompromisingly rural and plebeian Durbeyfield, which none the less sounds like an authentic 'corruption'" (294). True, but in telling how "the fictional d'Urbervilles had declined to Durbeyfields," Millgate also in the same breath cited "the historical Turbervilles" (294), albeit their own specific decline ("to Troublefields") is relevant only analogously. In any case, even as Tess's first name connotes her need to undergo a test or moral trial in maturing, so her appropriated last name harks back in part to that of George Turberville, whose own agrarian as well as amatory interests are reflected in the "-field" of her demoted maiden name.

In sum, Hardy's use of names bears looking into more, even as his Jude Fawley had the original, manuscript name of *Hopeson*, the ironic connection being that St. Jude is known as the patron saint of hopeless cases. Hardy even cited "Jude the saint" in correspondence about that novel (see Fleissner, "The Name *Jude*" 24-26). For what it is worth, the "T" and "e" of Tess's Christian name may derive from *Tryphena*, the double "s" from the beginning and end of *Sparks*. Awareness of Hardy's secret love for his cousin Tryphena Sparks is now a commonplace. The contrast of the religious and secular is not so surprising given his notable ironies. But there is also some room for a Renaissance Turberville, however incidentally. It fits his historical nature.⁴

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Notes

1. Weber 75, 79. Also, Robert Gittings reveals numerous instances of Hardy's debt to the Renaissance period, notably to Shakespeare, e.g., *Othello*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear*, (40, 60, 80, 84). Cox shows that, through the works of Shakespeare, the Renaissance is well represented in Hardy's library.

2. Notable animal imagery is found on 44, 46, 48, 106, 108, 244-47, 295, 351. For critical treatment on this subject, see Holloway 243. Hardy's animal imagery here probably owes something to Shakespeare as well. See Griesbach's study. See also Fleissner, "*Lear*" 3, 7.

3. Quoted by Craig 45.

4. This paper was originally presented, in somewhat different form, at a literature conference at Wright State University (1985).

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Length: 8-20 pages

Documentation Style: MLA

Deadline: December 15, 1989

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