

Tess's Commodification and Liberation in the Unconscious of Patriarchy

Roya Nikandam

PhD candidate, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, University of Malaysia

Abstract. This study will trace Lacanian psychoanalytic principles narrowed down to the symbolic order and its processes. It examines the unconscious of Victorian cultural traditions in the construction of Tess's identity as commodity in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'urbervilles*, in light of Julia Kristeva's maternity, thereby exploring the female capability to threaten the unconscious of Tess's identity in the Victorian symbolic era. . By investigating these theoretical observations, I hope to highlight the continuing issue of commodifying the value and dignity of women which can be observed in the patriarchal system of the Victorian era. A patriarchy can choose to terminate women's existence through exclusion, in order to ensure the stability of the symbolic order. Yet psychoanalytic feminists allow for a paradoxical triumph and show the awareness of women's struggles in the world of patriarchy. In Hardy's novel, it shows the reader that it is not the inferiority of women which leads to their oppression, but instead the attempts of subduing them, in light of tension they can cause to the patriarchy. They could overcome this inferiority and recover it through assigning the capabilities of their potential body, as the feminist psychoanalysts suggest they unconsciously do.

Keywords: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Thomas Hardy, Victorian age, Women, Maternity

1. Introduction

The focus on Lacan began in 1955 when he called for a new emphasis on the unconscious as the seed of a human being. According to him, language is central to investigating the unconscious because they both complex structures and because the analyst, in investigating the unconscious, is always using and examining language (Payne 1993:43). He divided three models of human psyche: Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic. Lacan contends that in the symbolic order, we learn to differentiate between male and female (Bressler 1994: 154). For Lacan, the symbolic is "the logical and syntactic functioning of language and everything which, in translinguistic practices is assimilable to the system of language proper" (Grosz 1990: 152). Lacan believes that the symbolic corresponds to the Oedipal and post-oedipal periods during which the child comes to individuals itself from others and to recognize itself as an I-he or I-she. Therefore, this identificatory change requires the child to renounce its desire to fuse with its mother. Psychic castration, then, is the awareness of this separation. According to Lacan, "the Oedipal crisis occurs during the process of language when the child learns its society's sexual rules" (Fraser and Bartky 1992: 123). In other words, to become a speaking subject, the infant has to be subjected to the laws and rules of language. Lacan designates the idea of structure of language as specifically paternal. He calls the rules of language the Law of the Father in order to link the entry into the symbolic, the structure of the language, to Freud's notions of Oedipal and castration complexes. Therefore the Name of the Father and the No of the Father is a metaphor for the paternal function. The symbolic paternal function in the Oedipus crisis is "the effective third that mediates symbolic castration, the law against incest, the release from the dual mode of relating, and thus accession to the symbolic order" (Smith 1991: 96). Lacan writes that the Name-of-the-Father operates "in the place first symbolized by the operation of the absence of the mother" (qtd.in Zakin 1997:81). These phrases imply that how father's emergence between the child and the mother forces the child to recognize alienation and separation and to use language to differentiate between itself and Others. Then the child experiences a system of linguistic and

therefore accepts language's predetermined position in such binary oppositions as male/female, father/son and so on. Consequently linguistic expressions transform the child from the unity of being to split social being. Lacan's symbolic order, which is loosely related to Freud's reality principle, "is the realm of law, language, society, and cultural beliefs. Entrance into the symbolic order determines subjectivity according to a primary law of referentiality that male sign (phallus) is as its ordering principle" (qtd. in Montashery 2006:12). Thus, the phallus is part of the symbolic order into which the child is born: "It is not something he creates, but something he encounters" (Wilden 1968:187). In *Seminar VII, the Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan describes the phallus as a lack which is brought into being:

"The phallus represents the intrusion of vital trusting or growth as such, as what cannot enter the domain of signifier without being *barred* from it, that is to say covered over by castration [...] It is at the level of the order, in the place where castration manifests itself in the order; it is in the mother-for both girls and boys-that what is called the castration complex is instituted. It is the desire of the other which is marked by the bar" (1992:15).

Lacan calls this Other Phallus. It is the transcendental ideal that every living being attempts to grasp. Every being is incomplete, but for a baby it takes time to recognize his/her insufficiencies. Phallus or Other or Center is the desired object, which is able to release a person from the disturbing sense of loss and incompleteness (Payne 1993:86). Lacan believed that masculine and feminine positions are functions, and not only a biological fact. For him, "The phallus as the signifier clarifies the structure that will govern the relationship between the sexes; the two sexes are positioned as such a mode of *being* (for the feminine), and *having* (for the masculine), the phallus" (Grosz 1990:131) In French as in English, the verb is modified by its conjugation with either being (*être*) or having (*avoir*) (Grosz 1990: 131). Based on Lacan's definition of the phallus, each sex is positioned as a speaking being, and it is only through the phallus that reality, containing cultural meaning and values, is given to the anatomical sex (qtd. in Hoshyar Rashti 2006: 20). Lacan believes that it is in the symbolic stage that a child becomes aware of its separation from its mother, and through absence or lack reflects the desire for another or for the mother. As the result, the awareness of separation is castration (Donovan 1992: 112). In other words, the separation from the mother brings the castration complex for both sexes in which: The man is 'castrated' by not being total, just as the woman is 'castrated' by not being a man. The man's lack of wholeness is projected onto woman's lack of phallus, lack of maleness. Woman is then the figuration of phallic 'lack': she is a hole (qtd. in Hoshyar Rashti 2006:53). Therefore the big difference between the sexes which causes the protest of many feminists is clarified here: "men try to deny their separation or alienation through their affirmation of phallic means of mastery" (Donovan 1992:112). In addition, Lacan's assumption was that the girl castration complex functions to ensure that she accepts her castrated condition as a *fait accompli*:

She 'resolves' her oedipal entanglements by accepting that she does not have the phallus. However, as a recompense for her turning from the mother to the father as her primary love-object, she acquires a number of reactive strategies and devices for gaining pleasure even if she has had to relinquish the active pre-oedipal position. (Grosz 1990:132)

For Lacan, the girl should use techniques which include: "Seductive, coquettish behaviour, narcissism, vanity, jealousy, and a weaker sense of justice-are a consequence of her acceptance of her lack (of the phallus)" (Grosz 1990:132). They are strategies developed to ensure that, even if she may become the phallus, the object of desire for another (Grosz 1990: 132).

2. Tess's Annihilation in the Symbolic Law

I choose Lacan's psychoanalytic theory as a way to understand the psyche or the unconscious of the Victorian construction of women. It will help explain the construction of Tess as commodity within the Victorian cultural tradition in order to obtain a better understanding of the unconscious of the Victorian cultural norms, which relates to making women passive and muted. Moreover, Lacanian psychoanalytic theories will aid to clarify my argument that Hardy, overwhelmed with his unconscious bias as a male writer, shapes his female characters accordingly. Hardy not only portrays his female characters as commodities, but also stands as a symbol of a deeply patriarchal Victorian society, since it is through his portrayal that these

values are reinforced. It can be seen in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* that the first bearer of the Name of the Father, whose authority and power exhibits itself through language, is Alec, who suppresses Tess. Alec's patriarchal language is manifested in his conversation with Tess in their first meeting in the fruit-garden at Trantridge. The reader notices the way Alec gazes at Tess—as the possessor of the phallus that desires Tess' phallic body. Based on Lacan's assumption, Alec is positioned as a speaking being and his subjectivity is affirmed by the phallic as a sign of mastery. It is here that Tess doesn't have the phallus, so she becomes the object of desire for Alec.

He stood up and held strawberries by the stem to Tess' 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 (Hardy 1958: 64).

Tess has entered the world of language, authority, and symbolic laws. Alec displays the law of the father here. Alec's function is masculine and he is positioned as having the phallus. It is only through the having the phallus that cultural value and dignity is given to him. It is here that we notice the power and patriarchal language that he uses to suppress Tess. As Kristeva mentions, "the sociosymbolic contract has been a sacrificial contract" (Donovan 1992: 113). Tess is sacrificed by the symbolic Victorian law. She obeys Alec's patriarchal request; and her reaction to this scarification should be observed as well: "Tess eating in a half-pleased, half-reluctant state whatever d'Urberville offered her" (Hardy 1958: 64). The second meeting between Alec and Tess takes place in his gig. Alec represents Lacanian phallogocentrism in this scene: he has the phallus, the signifier in the symbolic universe, which is the source in the symbolic, itself and the root of all meaning in the language (Hekman 1990:84). All he is thinking about is seduction and an illicit relationship. While the phallus provides all meaning, Alec manifests its power to Tess. Tess presents her role as lack in the symbolic Victorian society: "'now damn it—I'll break both our necks!'" (Hardy 1958:79) swore her capriciously passionate companion. "So you can go from your word like that, you young witch, can you?" (Hardy 1958:79). Tess views the patriarchal symbolic order, in which her identity has been denied and destroyed. She seems to exist outside the social system, her subjectivity under the control of rules and traditions. With Alec's authority, Tess is observed as a sexual object. "[Alec] knelt and bent lower, till her breath warmed his face, and in a moment his cheek was in contact with hers. She was sleeping soundly, and upon her eyelashes there lingered tears" (Hardy 1958: 101). The second bearer of the Name of the Father in Tess' life is Angel. Angel grows up in "the symbolic order [...] which is governed by the paternal metaphor and the imposition of the paternal law" (Homer 2005: 57). He is acting as the symbolic father of the society, which is defined in the Lacanian phase "whereas the boy becomes dominant, particularly in the discourse of language order, the girl is socialized into using a subordinated language" (Bressler 1994: 179). Angel chooses Tess for marriage based on the rules of a patriarchal culture and the symbolic law that defines her as a pure and saintly woman. However, when Angel finds out that Tess has had sexual relationship outside the marriage (even though it was against her will) it leads him to look upon her as a guilty woman. The superiority and power of law in Angel's blood is so full of strength that Tess' plea for forgiveness is rejected and Angel said that "O Tess, forgiveness does not apply to the case! You were one person; now you are another. My God-how can forgiveness meet such a grotesque-prestidigitation as that!" (Hardy 1958: 264). Tess was excluded from the symbolic conception of Angel and was repudiated because of her past deeds. According to Joseph Mahan, "in the nineteenth century, it is the woman who incurs the social stigma for behavior for which men may be chiefly to blame" (qtd. in Ahmad 2003: 45). Tess's realization of her fate reflects Lacan's statement that "the symbolic order which, as andro- or phallogocentric, is governed by the father's law" (Fraser and Bartky 1992:123). Tess is suffering under the patriarchal norms which lead to the shattering of her subjectivity, and since the symbolic order is ruled by the parental signifier, or what Lacan calls the Name-of-the-Father, and the law of the Phallus, Alec and Angel assume Tess to be only a sexual object to satisfy their desire and she is expected to become a commodity, the one who served them best. Therefore, Lacan's postulation on the symbolic order and its processes clarify the identity constructed for Tess as commodity in the patriarchal world.

3. Tess's Overcoming her Annihilation in the Symbolic Law

This section will discuss how psychoanalytic feminist perspectives aid in liberating Tess from her status as commodity. Kristeva asserts that women's procreative ability is controlled and subordinated in the Symbolic world since it has always been considered a threat and insecurity. She tries to explain the symbolic world's attempt to diminish women's power to reproduce by associating pregnancy with women's experience of negativity, which is the process of liquefying the rational attempt to define and stabilize thought and language (Walker 1998 54). For Kristeva, pregnancy is the impossible state of supporting and destruction of the symbolic order in which women take relish in having a split identity of plural which Cixous calls "not-me with me" and one. Moreover, Kristeva believes that motherhood "blurs the distinction between self and other" (Caputi 1993:34). Tess causes anxiety in her mother when she tells her about pregnancy:

"Then Tess went up to her mother, put her face upon Joan's neck and told 'and yet th'st not got him to marry 'ee! reiterated her mother. 'Any woman would have done it but you, after that!' perhaps any woman would except me.' 'It would have been something like 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 end like this! Why didn't ye think of doing some good for your family instead o' thinking about of yourself?" (Hardy 1958: 110).

For Joan, who here represents the symbolic world, Tess' pregnancy is a disruptive force since she creates tension and ambivalence in the symbolic world: "the site of motherhood gains its subversive potential as "the threshold of nature and culture,' the woman who is both *mother*, guarantor of the community and *other*, the polymorphic, orgasmic body, laughing and desiring" (Ainley 1990:58). Thus Tess, who now assumes the status of a reproductive entity, finds herself empowered by her condition; this is manifested somewhat in her treatment of the young girls of Marlott, her former school-fellows and acquaintances: "At moments, in spite of thought, she would reply to their inquires with a manner of superiority, as if recognizing that her experience in the field of courtship had, indeed, been slightly enviable. But so far was she from being, in the words of Robert South,'in love with her ruin' [...]" (Hardy 1958: 112). Tess's connection to maternal love gives her the strength to resist her exclusion from the society, and the strength for her to destabilize the authority of conventions. "If she could have been but just created, to discover herself as a spouseless mother, with no experience of life except as the parent of a nameless child, would the position have caused her to despair? No, she would have taken it calmly, and found pleasures therein" (Hardy 1958:121). The maternal love of Tess is significant, since it functions to break the dogmatic rules of the symbolic world. When Sorrow becomes very sick and has to be baptized her his life to be save, Tess's feelings of love toward him, and her ethics cause her to speak on two distinct levels: in the traditional speech of the patriarchy, as she symbolically uses words to save her baby's soul, and from the heart as she gathers up her strength to break the norms of society: "the baby's offence against society in coming into the world was forgotten by the girl-mother; her soul's desire was to continue that offence by preserving the life of the child" (Hardy 1958:122). As Kristeva states:

Now, if a contemporary ethics is no longer seen as being the same as morality; if ethics amounts to not avoiding the embarrassing and inevitable problematics of the law but giving it flesh, language, and jouissance—in that case its reformulation demands the contribution of women. Of women who harbor the desire to reproduce (to have stability). Of women who are available so that our speaking species, which knows it is mortal, might withstand death. Of mothers. For an heretical ethics separated from morality, an herethics, is perhaps no more than that which in life makes bonds, thoughts, and therefore the thought of death, bearable, herethics is undeath [amort], love. (1987:262-3)

Kristeva talks about ethics which is about love between mother and child .Kristeva's ethics opens a way for Tess to have subjectivity via law and the symbolic. A Tess-Sorrow relationship depicts a way to undoing social norms. She does right for her child not just out of law but out of affection (love) and " this love is not just for an other but for what was once in her and for the species, for the singular other and for the universal".(McAfee 86:2004). Tess makes a break with social norms and baptizes Sorrow herself. Showcasing that woman does indeed possess the ability to break social norms through maternity. When Tess initially meets the Vicar to arrange to give the child a Christian burial, she asks him to speak to her as a

person (“me myself”), not a man representing the views and expectations of patriarchal institutions, the “saint” to her “sinner.” She speaks to him through her maternity, a state that empowers her:

Undo the dualisms of mind/body, culture/nature, and word/flesh. The mother does right for her child not just out of duty (law) but out of love, a love that is not just for an other but for what was once in her and for the species, for the singular other and for the universal (McAfee 86:2004).

In this scene the symbolic language of men is threatened with the semiotic language of the unwed mother: Tess’ heart-felt language is, in a sense, more divine than the former. Later, when Tess asks if her “extemporized ordinance” was “doctrinally sufficient” to count as a real baptism, she is rewarded with an answer of “it will be just the same” (Hardy 1985:127). All this serves to show that when Tess speaks her maternal language, from the body, she becomes powerful. Her physical presence, informed by this experience of motherhood, destabilizes Tess’ symbolic position as she changes “from simple girl to complex woman”; her soul now “that of a woman whom the turbulent experiences of the last year or two had quite failed to demoralize” (Hardy 1956:129). It can be seen that Tess’ maternity is a threat that introduces insecurity in the symbolic world. It is through this maternity that they contest the symbolic patriarchal view of the Victorian era. It has been clarified that based on Jacques Lacan’s symbolic order and its processes, the identity of Tess is transformed to one that best serves the patriarchy. Her identity becomes bound up with the meanings and the values of the symbolic rules and the power that the metaphor and phallus give her. She is expected to have a lack of subjectivity in order to exist in the Victorian society. It also has been clarified that women have some ability to shatter the symbolic, patriarchal world. Julia Kristeva’s notion of maternity helps Hardy’s Tess to regain her ruined subjectivity within the Victorian tradition. Employing the theory of Kristeva allows to emerge the view that women do possess the ability to shake the stability of the patriarchy by relying on their attachment to maternity. They could overcome this inferiority and recover inferiority through assigning the capabilities of their potential body, as the feminist psychoanalysts suggest they unconsciously do. This study also would like to suggest that the Victorian values still persist in terms of women being considered as commodities even today. However, through this fixed norm point of view of women, this study attempts to shatter the incorrect historical, cultural, and social perspectives of women. This study also highlights the challenge for the supporters of women’s rights that women have many abilities, capabilities, and talented traits which are equal to men and even in some case, they can manifest their superiority over men as shown in the heroine in Hardy novel. I personally believe that women do not belong to anybody but themselves. They must step towards presenting their hidden, potential, and intellectual proficiency to break the building of women’s identities as commodities in the future.

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