

A Critic's Interpretation

Read through the following statements, all made by Kristen Brady, in her essay 'Tess and Alec: Rape or Seduction?'; discuss them with a partner, and decide which you agree with and which you disagree with. Pick one (or you may be assigned one by your teacher) to explore fully and present to the rest of the class; this means you must explore the full meaning of the statement as well as discussing it in relation to the novel and either agree or disagree with the statement in the closing sentences of your presentation. You will need to provide evidence from the novel and think through your ideas carefully.

1. *By giving increased prominence ... to the villainy of both Alec d'Urberville and Angel Clare ... Hardy was able half to suggest that Tess was more a passive victim of male aggression and idealization than an active participant in her own disastrous fate.*

3. *From the time of the book's publication, the question of whether Tess was raped or seduced has divided critics ...*

4. *Generally, the heroine of romance must choose in some way between good and evil. Tess's choices are never so clear cut.*

2. *What seems to some readers an unevenness or contradictoriness in the final version of the novel is in fact the ... result ... of its controversial subject matter: not simply seduction, but the sexual responses of a woman who became pregnant by a man she did not love and then recovered sufficiently to feel a strong attraction to another man.*

5. *She [Tess] is both the betrayed maid and the fallen woman, both the scapegoat and the tragic heroine complicitous in her own downfall.*

6. *The narrator's undeniably erotic fascination with her [Tess] takes the form of a visual preoccupation with her physical presence, and it has even been suggested that the narrator derives an almost sadistic pleasure from Tess's suffering, that he shares in part the distorted views of her held by both Alec and Angel, and that he in some sense does himself violate her with his male voice and male eye.*

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