

Travel and journeys

In his essay, 'Colour and Movement in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*' (1968) Tony Tanner writes,

'*Tess of the d'Urbervilles* opens with a man staggering on rickety legs down a road, and it is his daughter we shall see walking throughout the book. ... Always Tess has to move, usually to harsher and more punishing territories, and always Hardy makes sure we see her.' (p.204-205)

'... all the confusions that make up his [Hardy's] plots are the result of people who perceptibly give up their fixity. ... All plants and all animals move, but much more within rhythms ordained by their native terrain than humans – who build things like the Titanic and go plunging off into the night sea, or who set out in a horse and cart in the middle of the night to reach a distant market, in both cases meeting with disastrous accidents. Only what moves can crash.' (p.207)

'Life is movement, and movement leads to confusion. Tess's instinct is for placidity, she recoils from rapid movements. Yet at crucial times she finds herself in men's carriages or men's machines. She has to drive her father's cart to market and Prince is killed. Alec forces her into his dog-cart which he drives recklessly at great speed. ... Angel, by contrast, takes Tess to the wedding in a carriage which manages to suggest something brutal, punitive, and funereal all at once ... All these man-made conveyances, together with the ominous train, and that 'tyrant' the threshing machine, seem to threaten Tess. And yet she is bound to be involved in travelling, and dangerous motion, because she has no home. (p.209)

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1. Firstly, discuss the quotations above and explore their meaning. What does Tanner mean, for example, when he writes that, 'Hardy makes sure we see her'?
2. Do you agree that the plot of *Tess* revolves around people who, 'give up their fixity'? Explain your ideas fully.
3. Go through the novel and make a note of all journeys and conversations about journeys, travel or homes that you can find. Look carefully at all the characters rather than just Tess. Consider whether they move purposefully, are forced and how they travel (walk, on horseback etc).

Tess of the d'Urbervilles

4. For example, compare the portrayal of Angel's parents (always seen in their house) with Angel and his brothers (participate in long walks). Consider the way Tess is sometimes described as being in a dream-like state when she moves and Angel sleep walks with Tess in his arms. Explore how Alec pursues Tess: he sometimes appears on foot and at others on horseback; when Angel finds Tess again she is in a boarding house with Alec: she has no permanent home even though Alec has promised to take care of her. Look at the description of Tess and her mother and children leaving the family home and setting up house in a churchyard. Find the description of Tess and Angel's last journey together and note the way in which Angel sees Tess running to him from a distance.

5. Analyse carefully each of the examples you find and explore *why* Hardy has depicted the characters in this way. For example, what does Hardy's description of Tess's father as walking, 'with a bias in his gait which inclined him somewhat to the left of a straight line,' tell us about his character? He seems to be walking with little purpose, he is perhaps unreliable, there is no urgency to his journey: this is what leads to his family's problems, that he takes little responsibility for what happens to him, he makes no plans, does not think through the consequences of what he does, and allows others (Tess in particular) to take on his role of provider and protector of his family. When he asks the Parson where the d'Urbervilles now live the Parson replies, 'You don't live anywhere. You are extinct – as a county family.' This hints at the homelessness and lack of shelter that Tess is to encounter throughout the novel. Furthermore, we may be reminded of this in Tess's first meeting with Alec: he is an imposter, a pretender and his description gives weight to the suggestion that he is a melodramatic representation of a villain. Whenever Tess encounters him they are on the move or about to make a journey – he has no 'real' home any more than she does.