



Sexing Hardy: Thomas Hardy and Feminism (Thomas Hardy Studies)

Margaret Elvy

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SEXING HARDY: THOMAS HARDY AND FEMINISM There are surprisingly few feminist analyses of the work of British novelist Thomas Hardy, and most do not get beyond vague notions of sexism and misogyny, in the Kate Millett and second wave feminist manner. Margaret Elvy's book, however, uses up-to-date research in the fields of cultural studies, feminist poetics, gay, lesbian and queer theory. This new, postmodern and incisive exploration of Thomas Hardy offers an exciting and radical reappraisal of the discourses of gender, desire, class, economy, socialization, identity and patriarchy in his fiction and poetry. This new edition of Sexing Hardy includes a new introduction and a new bibliography. EXTRACT FROM CHAPTER ONE: "THOMAS HARDY AND FEMINISM" Is Thomas Hardy a feminist? Are Thomas Hardy's works feminist? How much do his works reflect and bolster the patriarchal attitudes and behaviour of his era, and how much do they question them? What is the relation between Hardy and the feminists of his time? And what is the link between Hardy's works and the feminism of the early 21st century? Thomas Hardy's theme is what you might call 'Wessexuality', 'Wes-sex-mania', Wessexual politics. Hardy's works are sexist, patriarchal and masculinist, and yet they question notions of sexism, gender, identity, patriarchy and masculinism. A text such as Tess of the d'Urbervilles is 'traditional', and follows patriarchal codes and morals. Yet it also questions them, and offers a number of feminist critiques of late 19th century society. In his letters, Thomas Hardy proposed feminist views; he wrote to feminists such as the suffragette leader Millicent Fawcett that a child was the mother's own business, not the father's (Collected Letters, 3, 238). One can see these feminist sentiments in, for example, Hardy's treatment of Tess in her motherhood: she works in the fields just a few weeks after the birth, even though she is melancholy (she seems to be suffering a mild form of post-natal depression). Tess further subverts patriarchy by taking her child's baptism into her own hands. She goes against her father, the vicar, and the whole church with her self-made baptism. [...] Thomas Hardy's novels were not always received favourably by women critics and readers. Hardy's own views, expressed outside of the novels, did not always square with those of feminists of the 1880s and 1890s. The ideological gap between Hardy and the women critics and feminists of the late 19th century is illustrated by Hardy's remark to Edmund Yates (in 1891): 'many of my novels have suffered so much from misrepresentation as being attacks on womankind' (Collected Letters, I, 250). Hardy hoped that works such as Tess of the d'Urbervilles would redress the balance. Illustrated. Bibliography and notes. ISBN 9781861710659. 194 pages. www.crmoon.com



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