

Your Name

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AICE English Literature 2

00 Month 2020

Annotated Bibliography

Bonica, Charlotte. "Nature and Paganism in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*." *ELH*, vol. 49,

no. 4, 1982, pp. 849–862., doi:10.2307/2872901. Dr. Charlotte Bonica was an English

professor at Columbia University. Dr. Bonica opens this critique by looking into Hardy's

use of natural imagery and paganism to reflect various characters' wants and desires

throughout the novel. She cites Angel Clare's departure from the traditional church (and

his family) as evidence that Hardy believed "Paganism is...an appropriate way of

comprehending existence" (Bonica 851). However, due to humanity's expansion over time,

Paganism has become useless and is treated as something to be nostalgic about. It shows

the simplicity of life in a rural landscape versus the urban hustle, and the tone used is

almost patronizing. Bonica notes that Angel's relationship with paganism changes when he

falls in love with Tess, repeatedly describing her as a "goddess", and effusively recounting

her impossible beauty: "...Tess seemed to Clare to exhibit a dignified largeness both of

disposition and physique, an almost regnant power..." (Hardy 160). Dr. Bonica goes on to

describe how Hardy uses nature to reflect the emotions of the characters. She argues that

the sun represents a deity of some kind, and the mist is symbolic of "moral or intellectual

confusion" (852). While her logic cannot be argued, she overlooks the fact that Hardy

explicitly compares Talbothays to the Garden of Eden multiple times, refuting the theme of

paganism, and encouraging the idea of Christian innocence, before the first sin. "...she

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regarded him as Eve at her second waking might have regarded Adam” (Hardy 208).

However, there is no doubt that there is truth in the statement, “Although at times nature seems to reinforce human joy, it can also intensify human sorrow” (Bonica 852).

Describing the weather to reflect the emotions of a character is not a modern development.

It is used in novels, poetry, and even screenplay to foster a deeper empathy within the

audience for the characters. This device is used frequently throughout *Tess of the*

d’Urbervilles: “her hopes mingled with the sunshine in an ideal photosphere which

surrounded her as she bounded along against the soft south wind” (Hardy 129). However,

Dr. Bonica asserts that the weather is not a reflection of Tess’s emotions, but is instead the

reflection of some god or nature itself *witnessing* Tess’s story: “...the natural world seems

at times to be animated with a consciousness antipathetic to Tess’s situation” (853). This

brings up an interesting point, as the use of nature as a character in the novel could be a

reference to a Christian or a pagan god, or an entirely different deity altogether, which then

leads Bonica to introduce the idea that none of it matters anyway as “nature is neither

innocent nor guilty, [only] animated by the pagan impulse to perceive meaning in it. In

itself, nature is devoid of moral significance” (Bonica 854). If we were to take gods and

men entirely out of the equation, many would find nature “innocent”. This is incorrect,

because nature has killed, and according to most moral codes in most cultures: killing

removes one’s innocence. So is nature guilty? Guilt implies a conscience and an intent, and

as nature has neither, it cannot be guilty. Thus, Bonica comes to the conclusion that in

Hardy’s opinion, “nature is clearly indifferent to human notions of worldly distinction”

(854) Hardy shows this repeatedly throughout the novel via his use of imagery. At one

point, the action occurring in the story contrasts immensely with the surrounding nature.

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“Above them rose the primeval yews and oaks of The Chase, in which were poised gentle roosting birds in their last nap; and about them stole the hopping rabbits and hares” (91). This soothing imagery is described during Tess’s rape, a period of time that no doubt would have caused immense fear and panic. The disparity evokes the feeling that nature does not care what happens to Tess, and by proxy, God may not either. However, Dr. Bonica points out that nature does reliably reflect the action in the novel in one particular situation: when the dairymaids are discovering their sexuality. That does not mean that nature (or God) cares about humanity any more than it did during Tess’s rape. Bonica even goes so far as to say that nature (or natural impulses) can be wicked, stating that “. . .the natural world, particularly through its inexorable sexual force, displays cruelty and injustice” (861). Hardy spends a significant amount of time in his novel describing the woes of the other dairymaids once they realize that Angel will never love them as he loves Tess. He describes their “feverish” tossing and turning in the night, so upset are they by his neglect (Hardy 178). Bonica finishes her article by explaining that although the theme of modernism is prevalent in many of his novels, it is not particularly important in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*: “Yet however nostalgic Hardy feels about the death of country life, he does not suggest that its central, though unconscious, attitudes towards nature – its paganism – can realistically provide a balm for the ‘ache of modernism’” (861). An indisputable point.

Works Cited

Bonica, Charlotte. "Nature and Paganism in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*." *ELH*, vol. 49, no. 4, 1982, pp. 849–862., doi:10.2307/2872901.

Hardy, Thomas. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Barnes & Noble Classics, 2005.

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