

Originalni naučni rad
Primljen: 31. januara 2024.
Prihvaćen: 14. februara 2024.
UDK 821.111.09-31 Tennant E.
10.46630/phm.16.2024.76

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EMMA TENNANT'S *TESS*: HARDY'S CANONICAL NOVEL FROM A FEMALE REVISIONIST PERSPECTIVE²

Depending on the perspective, Emma Tennant's *Tess* (1993) can be interpreted as a neo-Victorian, postmodernist, and revisionist novel. This paper is aimed at analyzing *Tess* from the aspect of revisionism. By offering a familiar story from a female perspective and combining it with an imaginative biography of Hardy's life and a polemic account of the history of women's oppression, the narrator intends to challenge the well-known past and rewrite it. The Victorian era is represented as "the last great age of punishment for women", but such representation is extended to Thomas Hardy. By presenting unknown facts that portray the writer in a negative context, the narrator intends to "shake" our understanding of the allegedly well-known past and break into history. The novel implies that the Victorian age was even bleaker than it is usually thought of, but this vision is extended to the present, which is arguably represented in an even grimmer light. By pointing to the patterns visible both in the past and the present, the narrator's purpose is to highlight the timeless, universal topics that permeate all the literary and historical periods, such as the oppression of women. As suggested by the novel, the only way to end the tradition of women's subordination and punishment is to allow women to tell their own stories.

Keywords: Emma Tennant, *Tess*, Thomas Hardy, revisionist, female

Introduction

Depending on the perspective, Emma Tennant's *Tess* (1993) can be interpreted as a neo-Victorian, postmodernist, and revisionist novel. It can be classified as neo-Victorian since it critically engages with "the Victoria" (HEILMAN & LLEWELLYN 2010: 4). Moreover, it is arguably postmodern since it is self-conscious, intertextual, and it is permeated with the mingling of genres and styles. Finally, it is also a revisionist historical novel since it uses Thomas Hardy's canonical *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) as its source-text. According to Peter Widdowson, the term "re-visionary fiction" refers to those novels which retell canonical texts from the past. In doing so, these novels challenge conven-

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2 This paper is published as part of conference proceedings of the Language, Literature, Process Conference 2023, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš.

tional readings of the well-known novels which have been viewed as some of the key influences on the formation of modern identity (WIDDOWSON 2006: 491). However, this critic underlines the fact that calling into question the authority of a canonical text does not mean that this “source-novel” is seen as absurd (2006: 501). The importance of the source-novel is emphasized with the very act of rewriting it from a contemporary perspective. The stories that revisionist fiction endeavours to rewrite are seen as universal and important in terms of the great influence they exert on shaping modern values. Still, revisionist novels stem from the need of the contemporary writer to retell a familiar story from a different angle, to delve into the origin of the story in order to unearth “those previously rendered voiceless by their oppressors” (2006: 493). For example, Emma Tennant, who made a name for herself writing revisionist novels, had an intention to speak for those who “live and suffer invisibly” such as single mothers, children, orphans and women in general (DUNN 2006: 5). Bringing to the fore an alternative version of the past, the version of the marginalized and the “losers”, is a common feature of postmodernism, neo-Victorian and revisionary fiction. Literary works belonging to these movements offer a dialogue with master narratives from the past, with the intention of exploiting their subversive potential. All these works deal with history and the past, but in a non-traditional and critical manner, examining the importance of the past for understanding the present, and the interweaving of the past and the present.

One of the leading theorists of postmodernism, Frederic Jameson, claims that history is in its essence unnarratable (1981: 82) and no longer relevant. Nancy K. Miller, a prominent feminist critic, asserts that loss of history may offer women the possibility to write their own history without the interference of male authors (1988: 106). Still, the proliferation of revisionist historical novels, particularly after World War II, testifies to the statement that history and historical consciousness are in fact major topics in postmodernist literature. In contrast with modernism, which was ahistoric movement, postmodernism is permeated with heated debates on the subjects of history and historical consciousness. Still, postmodern fiction does not deal with important historical events or stories of winners, but brings to the fore the experiences of ordinary (wo)men and marginalized people whose voice once could not be heard. Moreover, though postmodernist theorists such as Hutcheon acknowledge the existence of the past (1991: 67), they also advocate the position that the past, although not lost, is unstable and multidimensional, a sort of a “restless and permanently unsettled conceptual nomad” (KAPLAN 2007: 3). However, even though contemporary literature reflects the notion that there is no universal and one-dimensional past and truth, it still seeks for a more thorough and comprehensive perception of the past; therefore, it offers stories that add at least one layer that is missing to the existing representation of the past.

One of the distinctive features of postmodern literature is the blurring of boundaries between different styles and genres. Contemporary theorists discern that literature and history often employ similar narrative devices and techniques. Hence, the line between fiction and history has become vague and thin, and on this line stands the revisionist novel. The revisionist historical novel often combines facts and fictional stories. For example, Tennant’s *Tess* (1993) may be interpreted as a combination of a modern fictional version of “the Tess-story”, “an imaginative biography reconstruction of a late phase in

Hardy's life" (DUTTA 2018: 68), and a polemic account of the history of women's oppression. In mingling the factual and fictional, the narrator intends to question the official, proper history with a challenging and noticeably different view of the past. Having told a familiar story from a different point of view, that is, from the perspective of females who could not speak for themselves in the majority of novels from the past, the representation of history in the modern version of *Tess* is not reduced to its reflection or reproduction. In fact, the implication of revisionist novels is that by discovering hitherto unknown testimonies about known events history is made and re-made (CONNOR 2001: 1). In "juxtaposing what we think we know about the past with an alternate representation" (HUTCHEON 1991: 71), the novel strives to break into history and shake our conception of the past. Novels such as Tennant's *Tess* should contribute to the project of writing out the women's past since such a past is currently practically non-existent. Therefore, the aim of the writer goes in line with the famous statement of Adrienne Rich, a feminist theorist, that revision for female writers is "more than a chapter in our cultural history: it is an act of survival" (1972: 18).

An imaginative biography of Thomas Hardy and a polemical account of the history of women's oppression

Despite Tennant's reluctance to identify herself as a feminist, it may be argued that the novelist's starting point in *Tess* is to demonstrate that women are as oppressed by men now as they were in the past. She writes a modern version of the story of *Tess*, a narrative which, according to her, is universal and can be traced back to the very distant past, to the time of the Roman invasion of the British Isles. The implication of the novel is that the only way to end the tradition of women's subordination and punishment is to allow women to tell their own stories. In other words, only "the speaking and writing of women themselves can break the cycle of literary and historical abuse" (KING 2006: 28). Moreover, Tennant's *Tess* offers a harsh critique of the author of canonical *Tess*. Although Hardy's *Tess* was supposedly intended to offer a reflection of women's subordination and oppression in the nineteenth century, the narrator argues that a story written and controlled by a male author cannot adequately express the female side of the story. These claims are supported with Patricia Ingham's critique of Hardy. In Ingham's view, women are not represented in Hardy's literary oeuvre in their fullness and complexity – rather, they are reduced to types, representatives of certain features (1989: 73). This, however, is not a new tendency in male writing. As suggested in the novel, such tradition can be traced back to the brothers Grimm. The reason is quite obvious – male authors cannot understand female experience. Hence, "The girls were relegated to virtues – Patient Griselda; or sheer physical beauty – Sleeping Beauty; Beauty and the Beast" (1994: 48). According to the author, *Tess* is not only silenced and understood through the prism of gender and class stereotypes by the male characters; she is also controlled by the writer himself. Tennant's biggest complaint against the source-text for her novel is that it has been misinterpreted as evidence of Hardy's compassion for women. The novel implies that although Hardy claimed to fight against the victimization and idealization of women, his female characters were also victims of generalization. This implication is supported by

the fact that Hardy's heroines do not speak for themselves – the author speaks for them.

Even though some neo-Victorian novels express nostalgia for the bygone era, such longing is practically non-existent in the postmodernist version of *Tess*. The Victorian era is represented as “the last great age of punishment for women” (TENNANT 1994: 83), but such representation is extended to Thomas Hardy, who became famous as a writer who sympathizes with the plight of women in the patriarchal Victorian Britain. In order to offer a different view of Hardy, Tennant writes about his late life and presents hitherto unknown facts that portray him in a not at all favorable light. Hardy is represented as an egoistic man who was in love with his own image “in the mirror” (1994: 128). As Tennant presents the case, once he married a woman, he would begin to lose interest in her, to the point of completely neglecting her even in moments of utter weakness and helplessness. Such a fate befell both his wives, Emma Gifford and Florence Dugdale. The climax of the critique of the author is the narrator's assertion that Hardy's wives became interesting to him again only after they had died. According to her, Hardy, who did not have compassion for ill Emma not even in the last days of her life, changed his attitude towards her overnight after her death. Thomas Hardy is delineated as a morbid person inspired by the deaths of his wives to write some of his best poems. To Hardy, as the novel suggests, women were only possessions to be owned and controlled. What is more, it is indicated that the perception of women by men is no better in the contemporary period, and it may even be worse. The narrator proposes that there is an ancestral link between Hardy and John Hewitt, and supports such a claim with the fact that John was born in the Victorian era. John Hewitt is a representative of the Victorian age with all its negative connotations. She recognizes in him the urge to control, to possess females, which is also inherent in Hardy. John, similarly to Hardy, shuns and fears female independence. He always keeps women (his wife and daughters), like the swans he cares for, in a subordinate position, and is most excited by the thought that he is the complete master who determines the course of their destiny.

Tennant's novel is aimed at challenging Hardy's authority in order to replace his text with its corrected version, the version which offers the real original story, the story written and told by a woman. By offering a “herstory” and combining it with a history of women's oppression, the author attempts to fulfill two objectives: “to liberate both real-life women from the margins of history and to rewrite the canon” (TURNER 2010: 124). According to Turner, it is precisely this polemical aspect of her fiction that is one of the crucial reasons why Tennant failed to be called canonical. Although Tennant's literary oeuvre is arguably innovative and experimental, “meaning is often too clear, to the point of didacticism” and “the fiction can be too political” (TURNER 2010: 130). Still, as Kohlke and Gutleben assert, “‘doing’ history is always political” (2010: 8). They argue that the very act of selection of facts and events that are or are not to be incorporated in novels dealing with the past symbolizes an implicit ideological judgment. Tennant does not focus so much on the critique of the original *Tess* story as she concentrates on the conditions that preceded the creation of the story. By presenting Thomas Hardy as an egoistic and morbid person who was in love with dead women, the author intends to “dismantle his narrative authority” (ZABUS 2001: 191) so as to correct and subvert the past. In doing so, she succeeds in offering a view of the past that will serve her desires for changing the

future. The past is, according to Tennant, extremely important. Therefore, it must not be put aside. Quite the contrary, since her novels imply that the stories from the past repeat and haunt us, it is perceived as necessary to “Try and see the past, and you will be able to conquer the present and the future, too” (1994: 61).

The scars of the past still persist in the present

As Linda Hutcheon proposes in her influential study *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), the tendency of turning back to the past is not a legacy of the twentieth century (xi). What is new is the simultaneous dealing of the novelists with the past and the present in an effort to explain one by the other. Emma Tennant’s *Tess* is intended to provide such a dialogue. Since it refers to both the Victorian era and the 1960s, it adopts the position of a historical novel. As Raymond Williams explains, most of the novels that are labeled historical are in fact period novels (1987: 3). These novels, unfortunately, use the historical conditions of the period as a background and “remain enclosed within that period” (WIDDOWSON 2006: 495). On the other hand, revisionist novels intend to highlight certain patterns that are as visible in the present as in the past, if not more so. In combining two historical settings, Tennant intends to underline universal issues present in literally every epoch, most notably the subordination and oppression of women. In doing so, she challenges the notion of historical evolution as progressive concept. Quite the contrary, her fiction suggests that universal concerns and anxieties are as present now as they were once, if not more so: “I use existing texts as departure points for my novels – yes, but that’s not what seems to happen because I don’t feel I’m departing at all really. I’m coming full circle. I seem to have a strong urge to show the unchangingness of many things” (qtd. in INDIANA 1992).

The relationship between the past and the present in *Tess* reflects Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism, of the dialogic nature of the novel. In the view of Bakhtin, the novelist is able to bridge the gap between the past and the present. Since the reader does not read about the generalized experience, but of history as experienced by the ordinary (wo)man, the past is represented in a particular way “never thought of before” (TRYNIECKA 2015: 258). Such an innovative representation of the past gets into contact with the present. Therefore, as suggested by Bakhtin, the past is not interpreted by the present, it gets into new shape, it is “further developed, applied to new material, new conditions” (1981: 345).

At first sight, Tennant’s retelling of *Tess* goes in line with Hardy’s version. As Shanta Dutta notices, the pattern visible in those novels was quite common in the nineteenth-century fiction. The protagonist of the story is usually an orphan girl or a girl neglected by her parents (DUTTA 2018: 70). Furthermore, the young and naïve Tess Hewitt recalls Tess Durbeyfield who does not take men seriously and does not perceive potential danger in them. She is seduced by the young Alec Field, who is not ready to commit and runs away a few months after learning that Tess is pregnant. However, as suggested by Dutta, there are also important differences between the two stories. First of all, although the seducer-figure returns in both novels at some point, his comeback serves to achieve different effects. In Hardy’s story, Alec returns at the worst possible moment with the effect of hindering the later reunion of Tess and Angel. In Tennant’s story, Alec

returns to seek the custody of Mary. Whereas in Hardy's original narrative seduction occurs "outside the sanctity of home" (2018: 70), while Tess is trying to find employment and get in touch with her family's wealthy "cousins", the rape of Tess Hewitt is much more horrible since it takes place inside "the supposed sanctity of her home" (2018: 75) and is performed by her father. However, no one knows the dark secret of the Hewitts for years and everyone thinks that Tess is pregnant with Alec. After a short unsuccessful attempt to start a life with Alec, Tess returns home and her family grudgingly accepts her return. In fact, her mother, who had previously left her father and the family, comes back home and accepts to take part in the upbringing of her granddaughter Mary. On the other hand, Tess's father, John Hewitt, a typical Victorian hypocrite, cannot cope with his daughter's "sin". As a consequence, he permanently leaves the house. Tennant explains his attitude by the fact that he was a Victorian, born in the Victorian era, but nonetheless adds that such an attitude is still present today, much more than we would expect. A few years after Mary is born Tess meets her Angel Clare, a rock singer Gabriel Bell. The narrator ironically describes Tess's futile hopes that Gabriel, an open man with advanced ideas, will accept her as she is. In fact, as it turns out, Gabriel is not willing to commit to anyone, least of all to a single mother.

Up to this point, the story is quite reminiscent of the old one from the end of the last century. Tennant's *Tess* proves to be a historical novel since it establishes a link between the past and the present, very similar to historical discourse. As Hutcheon notices, it is essential "to sort out the past in order to understand the present" (1991: 71). By retelling a familiar tale from a female point of view and combining it with a reconstruction of Hardy's biography, Tennant intends to achieve two important goals. Firstly, she aims at demonstrating that the Victorian past is even bleaker than we used to think. Secondly, she also intends to prove that "the scars of the past persist into the present" (WIDDOWSON 2006: 492). Although published in 1993, Tennant's *Tess* is set in the fifties and sixties, the years that became known as the age of liberation. However, the narrator warns female readers not to be deceived by appearances: "Just because people live longer now, don't think that everything is solved, for us and maybe even our mothers. It isn't . . . we have to fight to make the earth whole for all of us together" (TENNANT 1994: 101).

Actually, Tennant's version of *Tess* is even bleaker than Hardy's. Tennant attempts to find the root cause from the past, a true reason that will explain the unfortunate ending of the "Tess story". In order to do so, Tennant expands the story so as to include the relationship between Tess's mother Mary and father John. Mary's story is intended to demonstrate that for the majority of men women are still nothing but possessions they like to control and quickly get bored with. In the opening pages of the novel the narrator even proposes that the very moment when a man takes control over a woman occurs when a woman settles down, that is, when she chooses to "stay in one place" (1994: 36) for good. On the surface, the Hewitts are a nice and conventional family. John has an interesting and extraordinary job, and his wife takes care of the daughters, Tess and Liza Lu. However, Tennant again warns readers to look under the surface, not to be deceived by the superficial decency of the family. Liza Lu, the narrator and eye-witness of the "Tess story", understands only too late what the silence of her mother and Tess was supposed to mean. Silence is a consequence of the realization that women have been in a subordinate

position in relation to men since ancient times. Liza Lu perceives that her mother is a spinster, although married, since she is excluded from her husband's life. She realizes with regret that embroidery, tapestry, and patchwork in their house were made by her mother while she was waiting for her husband to return home. Her mother, as Liza Lu suggests, is not an exceptional case. She is a representative of a huge number of women abandoned, although officially married: "Did I see that her exclusion from my father's life only mirrored the situation of a million wives, living on the periphery of their husband's lives, jobs, 'hobbies'" (1994: 50)?

As it may be, it is precisely Tennant's lack of conviction that passage of time has brought any significant changes regarding the relationship between the sexes which symbolizes the main cause of her reluctance to officially embrace feminism. Indeed, *Tess* offers a vision that is highly ambivalent, that rests on the narrow balance between Tennant's perception that women are determined to suffer at the hands of men and her belief that such tradition has to be changed. For example, she perceives many cases of Tess-figure who were drawn into the "story of love, betrayal, and revenge" and who seemed to be pre-destined to suffer for the mere reason of being the daughters of Eve, the first sinner, the temptress of Adam. What is more, the condition of Tennant's female characters is further complicated by the fact that they are "too implicated in the values they choose to challenge" (HUTCHEON 1988: 223). For example, in *Tess* no female character can be found innocent. The narrator, Tess's sister Liza Lu, confesses that she was enforced to watch Tess's raping by her father since Tess was seven years old. Furthermore, she indicates that Mary, their mother, must have known what was happening and the way her husband punished their daughter. Liza Lu and Mary symbolize women who enable the unhindered continuation of the oppression of women by their inaction. Similarly to Hardy's story, passivity comes to an end when the reality becomes too horrible to be endured any longer, that is, at the moment when Mary disappears from the house.

In the case of Tennant's *Tess*, it seems that despite her efforts to correct and subvert the original narrative of Thomas Hardy, it still haunts her. Her novel abounds in dark overshadowing and omens which suggest an inevitable and predestined tragedy. Moreover, whereas Tennant criticizes Hardy for reducing female characters to stereotypes, she may be "charged" on the same grounds. Namely, although the narrator notices that the female protagonist of Hardy and other male stories is too often reduced to a sheer beauty, we can notice the same feature as the most prominent one in delineating Tess Hewitt. Tennant herself may be stereotypical when she chooses to portray the elder sister and the protagonist of her story as a beauty and her sister Liza Lu as the plain one, as the helper of Tess, as someone who is always in the shadow of her charming sister: "For all the darkness of her looks, and the dazzling fairness of most of the young women. . . . Tess was immediately and wordlessly recognized as the giver of orders, the decider of the action of the party, as I was seen a waitress, a temporary hired helper" (1994: 109).

Another similarity to Hardy's narrative is the recurring motive of death. As suggested by the narrator, Thomas Hardy was only in love with dead women. Furthermore, the novel implies that Hardy's female characters were symbolically dead, as they were not allowed to speak for themselves, but were continually silenced through various means of misinterpretation and control employed by the male characters and the author himself.

What Tennant attempts is to allow those characters to speak for themselves, to breathe life into them. In other words, the zombies, the silenced female characters, have “not only to be raised from the dead but to be made to survive” (ZABUS 2001: 202).

Indeed, we agree with Jennifer Dunn that “Tennant’s characters oscillate between moments of exhaustion and revival, capitulation and subversion, entrapment and transcendence” (2006: 6). For instance, the narrator implies that female biology can be both the reason why women are subordinated and that it may offer them a chance for renewal. Mary Hewitt, at least at the beginning of the novel, gives the impression of a woman who has given up the fight for survival, most strongly supported by her lack of concern for the members of her family. Despite the fact that her act of leaving home and settling near a river, where she earns a living by cleaning fish, is interpreted by the narrator as a positive and self-assertive act, it also bears much resemblance to a form of surrender. Still, Mary’s revival is signaled by her decision to return home and help her daughter with her illegitimate child. Mary evokes the Celtic women, of whom the narrator writes with admiration, not so much when she cleans fish with a knife as when that knife becomes a weapon that will break the tradition of female abuse, at least in her family.

Although the Tess story as offered by Tennant is meant to subvert Hardy’s text and correct history, this paper does not argue that it purports to arrive at the total truth. Such endeavor would be doomed to failure in an age which recognized the plurality of perspectives and truths. As Tryniecka states, the novel is aimed at “the conscious recognizing of the world” (2015: 258), offering no “dominant force or truth” (BAKHTIN 1981: 20). Hence, the argument of this paper goes in line with Connor’s claim that the purpose of post-war British historical novels is not to learn about the past in order to avoid repeating its mistakes. Such an interpretation would be too optimistic, and it would be in direct opposition with Tennant’s noticeable ambivalence and uneasiness about the progressive nature of the contemporary movements and tendencies, including feminism. Her vision is closer to the assertion of Steven Connor that “the past will not teach us how to behave”, but that it is still better to know the past, no matter how horrible it was, than to remain in ignorance (2001: 134).

Conclusion

Starting from the observation that Emma Tennant’s version of *Tess* is an exemplary revisionist neo-Victorian postmodernist literary work, this paper offers evidence that Tennant’s novel simultaneously strives to rewrite the canon and liberate real-life women. There is an evident interweaving of styles and genres in the novel, and it represents a unique combination of the reconstruction of Thomas Hardy’s biography, a polemical review of the history of women’s oppression, and a twentieth-century version of the “Tess-story“. The narrator’s focus is not so much on the story itself, which is acknowledged as universal and ubiquitous, but on its origin, on the conditions that preceded its creation. By presenting Hardy as a villain, Tennant intends to challenge his authority and our understanding of the supposedly well-known past. By offering a familiar story from a different perspective, from a woman’s point of view, the novel implies that the first step in breaking the tradition of subordination and oppression of women is allowing them to tell their own stories.

The past is presented as grim and bleak, but the anxieties and concerns from the past are as present now as they used to be once, if not even more. The past and the present are not viewed as separate and independent, but as overlapping and influencing each other. The novel adopts a critical attitude towards both the nineteenth and the twentieth century, and such approach leads to a more comprehensive understanding of issues present in virtually all epochs. The novel suggests that facing the truth, no matter how painful it may be, is always better than living in lies and ignorance.

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ТЕС ЕМЕ ТЕНАНТ: ХАРДИЈЕВ КАНОНСКИ РОМАН ИЗ ЖЕНСКЕ РЕВИЗИОНИСТИЧКЕ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЕ

Резиме

Овај рад представља покушај да се анализира роман *Теса* (1993) Еме Тенант из женске ревизионистичке перспективе. Рад се фокусира на специфичан однос који дела постмодернистичке, неовикторијанске и ревизионистичке фикције успостављају према прошлости и историји. Историја је у овим делима важна, али је однос према њој нетрадиционалан, критички, што се манифестује кроз отворени дијалог које савремено дело успоставља са мастер наративом из прошлости. Ти мастер наративи се поимају као врло значајни због утицаја на формирање вредности и идентитета модерног човека, и ревизионистички романи попут *Тесе* им се враћају у покушају да познате приче испричају из другачијег угла и тако доведу у питање наше познавање и разумевање наводно добро познате прошлости.

У роману *Теса* Еме Тенант приметно је преплитање жанрова и стилова, те ово дело представља комбинацију савремене верзије приче о Теси, фиктивне реконструкције Хардијеве биографије и полемичког осврта на историју угњетавања жена. *Теса од рода Д'Урбервила: чиста жена* (1891) је одабрана за извор због универзалности и свеprisутности теме коју обрађује: потчињавање и угњетавање жена. Тенант узорке родне неправедности не тражи у викторијанском добу – роман сугерише да за праузроцима треба трагати у далекој прошлости, још у времену настанка хришћанства и ставовима да је жена слабији пол, али истовремено заводница и она која наводи на грех. Иако се роман враћа у прошлост, у време настанка Хардијевог канонског дела, циљ није критика саме радње романа, већ је фокус на дестабилизацији Хардијевог ауторитета. Оно што се највише замера Хардијевој верзији приче о Теси је чињеница да причу казује мушкарац, који не може да адекватно разуме и прикаже женско искуство. У *Теси* Еме Тенант износи се непознате чињенице о Хардију, чињенице која га приказују у крајње неповољном светлу. Харди је представљен као морбидна и себична особа која је на жене гледала као на поседе. Оваква репрезентација Хардија има за циљ да пољуља генерално поимање овог писца као неког ко је саосећао са женама и писао о њиховој подређености. Реконструкција његове биографије у комбинацији са приказом историје угњетавања жена има два главна циља: да Хардијву причу потисне правом, оригиналном причом коју казује жена; и да охрабри жене да не дозволе да буду стално потискиване на маргину. Нудећи алтернативну верзију прошлости, роман настоји да уздрма темеље на којима почивају наши ставови, што представља основу за промене које ће уследити у будућности.

Радња романа се односи на два историјска периода: викторијанско доба и период који је уследио након Другог светског рата. Циљ није да се било која епоха прикаже као супериорна/инфериорна – напротив, импликација је да је тлачење жена универзални проблем који се провлачи кроз све историјске и књижевне епохе. Роман изражава сумњу према

наводном напретку који карактерише историјску еволуцију, што је један од разлога одбијања Тенантове да се декларише као феминисткиња. *Теса* имплицира да ране из прошлости боле баш као и некада, ако не и у већој мери. Иако тон романа није превише оптимистичан у погледу евентуалног бољитка, први корак у тражењу алтернативе је свакако допуштање женама да саме причају своје приче. Стицањем увида у познате наративе из непознатих перспектива наша перцепција прошлости ће бити шира и свеобухватнија. Суочавање са истином, ма како болна она била, је, на крају крајева, далеко боље од живота у лажи и незнању.

Кључне речи: Ема Тенант, Тес, Томас Харди, ревизионистички, женски

