

Tyranny of Conventions: A Comparative Study of Blake's *Visions* and Hardy's *Tess*

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ABSTRACT

William Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793) and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) have much in common. Both deal with female sexuality and question the society's sexual and religious mores by portraying a revolutionary woman who fights to gain her autonomy and self-assertion. However, as subjects/products of the dominant ideologies and conventions of their time, Blake and Hardy seem to empower the very conventions they try to reject in portraying heroines tyrannically destroyed by the long-held conventions that condemn an unmarried woman's sexual experience. These heroines' self-assertion/rebellion fails tragically. In this paper we argue that, comparatively, the ambivalent treatment of the notion of an independent woman is the most significant common feature in Blake's poem and Hardy's novel. On the one hand, both Blake and Hardy introduce a woman with a new sexual identity and, on the other hand, they deprive their heroines of voice and independence.

Keywords: William Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, tyranny, the New Woman, independence.

INTRODUCTION

Although separated by nearly one hundred years, William Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793) and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) have much in common. Both works are revolutionary in nature and anticipate the New Woman of the twentieth century, as both deal with the female sexuality and question the society's sexual and religious norms by depicting a heroine who is violated by a man and forsaken by another. As Linda Shires notes, Hardy's novel is the story of "a young girl's violation by one man and abandonment by another [that] leads to tragic consequences for all" (149). Tess, the young daughter of a rural working class family, is raped by the rapacious and possessive Alec d'Urberville, the son of her wealthy employer, and is abandoned by the obstinate Angel Clare, who claims to love her. Similarly, Oothoon, the self-assertive heroine of William Blake, is raped by "the arrogant slave owner and imperialist" Bromion (Munteanu, 2006, p. 65) who treats Oothoon as a property or object ("Thy soft American plains are mine, and mine thy north & south" (I. 20, 1372)) and is abandoned or rejected by the jealous Theotormon, whom she loves and "towards him her whole soul sighs" (Swearingen, 1992, p. 205).

Oothoon and Tess have been considered by critics as two rebellious heroines whose revolutionary nature

distinguishes them from their conservative counterparts or parents respectively. Reflecting on the relationship between Oothoon and Theotormon, Thomas Volger argues that Oothoon "as the speaker of a prophetic Truth [...] would transform the world, if only Theotormon would listen to her and act accordingly" (271), implying that Oothoon is suppressed tyrannically by a male-dominated society. Comparing Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* with Blake's *Visions*, Michael Farrell makes the point that while the former "insists on the virtue of female chastity" the latter, opposing this notion, defends Oothoon's "erotic energies" and assimilates them with "the revolutionary desire for freedom from patriarchal control" (8). In his *William Blake*, Harold Bloom makes a distinction between Thel (in Blake's *Book of Thel*) and Oothoon. According to him, Thel is half afraid to experience as she is "trembling on the threshold of experience," while Oothoon "is the soul in experience and not a particular woman suffering a particularly harrowing experience" as experience for her is the same as freedom (186). Likewise, in *Blake and the Assimilation of Chaos*, Christine Gallant distinguishes Oothoon from Thel. She makes the point that while Thel rejects the invitation "to move from her initial State of innocence to its contrary State of Experience," Oothoon follows it and, "eventually does become spiritually liberated" (45).

John Rodden in "Of Natar and God: a Look at Pagan Joan and Reverend James Clare" (2011) illustrates the parental relationship between Joan Durbeyfield and James Clare and their children, Tess and Angel. The protagonists in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, he argues, are far more complex than their paternal counterparts. According to him, there seems to be a generation gap between the parents and their children "that makes communication between the pairs difficult" (295). What widens the gulf between children and parents are the differences in their worldviews. First, it is Mrs. Durbeyfield's superstitious view that is in contrast to the educated Tess. Angel, also, remains largely unconcerned with either society or the salvation offered by the dogmatism of his father's church doctrines.

This gap, however, as noted by Hardy himself, is not a simple chasm between parents and their children, but a gap of two centuries:

Between the mother, with her fast-perishing lumber of superstitions, folk-lore, dialect, and orally transmitted ballads, and the daughter, with her trained National teachings and Standard knowledge under an infinitely Revised Code, there was a gap of two hundred years as ordinarily understood. When they were together the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed. (Hardy, 17-18)

Although Tess is a dutiful and obedient woman at the very outset of the novel and gains more autonomy and strength after being violated, Oothoon, from the very beginning, refuses to be obedient and fights for her freedom and self-assertion. However, both Oothoon and Tess, as embodiments of the revolutionary woman, turn out to be failures as they do not have the chance to liberate themselves completely from the male-dominated dogmatic society, implying that their freedom depends more on a man's approval than themselves. Hence, what Oothoon and Tess suffer from is not their violation—respectively, by Bromion and Alec—but their being abandoned, misunderstood and disapproved by their lovers, Theotormon and Angel.

In this regard, through comparing these works, it will be discussed that Blake and Hardy, under the influence of the dominant ideologies of their times, accept the very conservative conventions they intend to reject, and destroy their heroines according to the ideologically-established conventions that condemn and try to resist the sexual experience of an unmarried woman. In other words, both Blake and Hardy, as revolutionary writers who are against the conservatism of their eras, seem to be proponents of a rebellious heroine who is able to assert herself; nevertheless, these writers, as the subjects/products of

the eighteenth century imperialism and middle-class Victorian values, either consciously or unconsciously, represent in their heroines, what Nicola Lacey calls "the futility of female self-assertion or rebellion" (4). Therefore, Oothoon's and Tess's self-assertion is of little or no avail.

Blake's Disobedient Angel

As James E. Swearingen has suggested, in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, William Blake deals with "the question of sexual difference in a dramatic, even inflammatory way," since the poem uncovers "abuses perpetrated by a patriarchal moral code" (203). Blake, as a revolutionary writer, is critical of women's situation and in many of his works launches into a long diatribe against the treatment of women as properties. Notwithstanding, he does not surpass the dogmatic patriarchy of his time concerning the appropriate function of women as obedient mistresses, wives or mothers. In this regard, Anne Mellor makes the point that women at this period -- and in Blake's works as well -- are portrayed as "nurturing mothers, generous sensualists, compassionate lovers, all-welcoming and never-critical emotional supporters" (152), or what was later on called as "The Angel in the House" by the Victorians. In other words, the eighteenth century imperialism demanded women to be passive and obedient angels, and find sexual enjoyment in marriage as the socially proper institution. However, Blake, in *Visions*, portrays a female character who defies this cultural pattern of the eighteenth century and seeks erotic enjoyment out of marital boundaries, as she is "the soul of sweet delight [that] can never pass away" (l. 9-10, 1371). Oothoon, the only woman in Blake's repository "who is both active and good" (Fox, 1977, p. 518), violates this pattern and, through experiencing, tries to achieve what Blake calls higher innocence. She, according to Heffernan, "is probably the most remarkable woman Blake ever conceived" (3). She is a passionate woman who antagonizes and rebels against the exploitation of women by such social bonds as marriage that bind one to another's will. As an embodiment of female rebelliousness, Oothoon is open to changes and experiences, which puts her life at a high risk of destruction including the risk of violation by Bromion. She is

a virgin fill'd with virgin fancies
Open to joy and to delight where ever beauty appears
If in the morning sun I find it: there my eyes are fix'd
In happy copulation; if in evening mild, wearied with work;
Sit on a bank and draw the pleasures of this free born joy.
(VI-VII. 21-23 & 1-2, 1376)

According to Harold Bloom, Oothoon is Thel in evolution. While Thel is "trembling on the threshold of experience," Oothoon "crosses the threshold" (Bloom, 2008, p. 182). Unlike Thel, Oothoon seeks her self-assertion and autonomy and, to this end, is engaged in an adventurous quest that leads to her loss of virginity when she is raped by Bromion. However, for her, this sexual experience – even if it is a rape initiated by Bromion – is a "free surrender to sensual enjoyment" (Swearingen, 213) and, hence, the confirmation of her independence and liberation as she calls it "happy copulation" or "free born joy." Indeed she, as "an emblem of sexual manumission" (Farrell, 19), seems to be after her own rape since being raped for her is in fact challenging the orthodoxy and tyranny of such social boundaries as marriage and patriarchy. This experience she gains in her journey is a blessing to her that furnishes her with more freedom and makes her free from the laws of "religious caves" (II. 9, 1372).

In her quest for freedom, Oothoon requires to involve herself in some decisions and adventures. Beginning the quest, she has to respond to her inner temptation with regard to plucking "the bright Marygold of Leutha's vale" (I. 5, 1371) and, accordingly, is hesitant about what the flower is and whether or not to pluck it: "Art thou a flower! Art thou a nymph! I see thee now a flower; / Now a nymph! I dare not pluck thee from thy dewy bed!" (I. 6-7, 1371). She finally surrenders to the temptation, plucks the flower and puts it "to glow between my breasts/And thus I turn my face to where my whole soul seeks" (I. 12-13, 1371); and thus she comes to know that:

Responding to the temptation is a necessary moment in the initiation journey she envisions, one that simultaneously reiterates the Fall from an imaginative/visionary perspective, and, in so doing, re-opens the dialogue on *sinfulness and freedom* [author's emphasis] and redefines the relationship between *Law/Duty and liberty* [author's emphasis]. (Munteanu, 69)

As the above quotation suggests, gaining her liberation, Oothoon should violate law and ignore her duty as a colonized sensualist. But the point is that ignoring the law by Oothoon, as a rebellious woman seeking her liberty, is reminiscent of the great fall, as her freedom is associated with sinfulness. Moreover, implied here is that the violation of law will have a tragic consequence for Oothoon like the one endowed to Eve after eating the forbidden fruit. In other words, Blake condemns her heroine to destruction by assimilating her violation of the law with Eve's disobedience. In this regard, Oothoon seeks and acquires a kind of "creative autonomy" that, according to Bloom, Theotormon misunderstands and

Bromion "understands but rejects out of normal fear" (Bloom & Trilling, 1973, p. 45). This means that Bromion, as the embodiment of law and order in society, cannot tolerate such an autonomy of women and their making love outside the boundaries of marriage, since it may confirm women's "creative erotic imagination" (Munteanu, 74). This is why he tries to stigmatize her as a "harlot" lying "on Bromion's bed" (I. 19, 1372), while her lamentations and woes are overlooked.

Nelson Hilton compares Blake's *Visions* to a Greek tragedy "whose three characters deliver set speeches more or less unheard and at cross-purposes with each other" (205). However, the most impressive and paradoxically the most unheard voice in the poem is Oothoon's. After being raped, Oothoon has no feeling of guilt or shame and instead, the experience reaffirms both her liberation and her "eruption into coherent and complex use of language." In other words, she seeks more freedom; violating the law and social order provides her with a powerful language that is described as "the most sublime poetry" (Munteanu, 74) and gives her the opportunity to speak for herself. The second half of the poem is dominated by Oothoon where she "courageously utters despite Theotormon's limitations, Bromion's brutality and the Daughter's apathy" (ibid, 65). Although at the second half of the poem she gains vision and creates the most powerful and rhetorical kind of poetry that has impressed the audiences – not excluding the male ones – through the centuries, to use Hilton's words, it can unequivocally be observed that "in a no-win situation the achievement of vision tragically destroys her" (206), since Bromion and Theotormon are not touched by her words. Throughout the poem, Oothoon remains a "fascinating outsider" (Heffernan, 18) whose voice, which is the most essential part of her identity as an independent woman, is unheard by the male characters of the poem who either are not able or refuse to hear her voice. Therefore, while she gains the strength to assert herself, her self-assertion is futile as if she is persuading in vain: "Why does my Theotormon sit weeping upon the threshold; / And Oothoon hovers by his side, persuading him in vain?" (II. 21-22, 1372).

It is worth noting here that Blake, on the one hand, rejecting the conservative conventions of his time and condemning the exploitation of women as properties, portrays his heroine as a revolutionary woman who has her own voice and hence the ability to assert herself through the subject "I"; on the other hand, as the product of the ideology of eighteenth century imperialism, he destroys Oothoon tyrannically, not allowing her voice to be heard by the male characters of the poem. In general, Oothoon stands against the

dogmatism of the patriarchal society and tries "to develop a counter-theory to the one that has enslaved the Daughters of Albion" (Swearingen, 208). Nevertheless, the point is that Blake does not seem to advocate such a view and thus Oothoon's rebellious attempts at being independent is condemned to failure.

Tess: Hardy's Woman in White

According to Raymond Williams, "everybody seems to treat Tess as simply the passionate peasant girl, seduced from outside" (343). However, considering that Tess has "passed the Sixth Standards in the National School" and speaks two different languages, "the dialect at home, more or less; ordinary English abroad and to persons of quality" (Hardy, 2000, p. 15), she is more mobile and dynamic than an ordinary passive girl the Victorian rural society admired. In other words, from the very first chapters, Hardy seems to introduce his heroine as a modern educated girl he is interested in. At the end of the nineteenth century, women's education and autonomy were controversially important and reflected in not only Hardy's novels but also in the work of many of his contemporaries. Similar to Blake, Hardy, as a revolutionary writer, has been also critical of the female situation and a proponent of women's sexual freedom and autonomy. Notwithstanding, as the product of the Victorian ideology, Hardy also cannot wholly surpass the era's conservatism and thus identifies Tess with taciturnity throughout his novel. He represents in Tess what Lacey has called "an image of powerlessness and of the futility of female self-assertion" (4), and has Tess's self-assertion and autonomy lead to annihilation since her voice—that is the basis of her identity as an autonomous new woman—is not vocalized or remains unheard by the male-centered Victorian society. To be more precise, Hardy seems to destroy his heroine by the same modernity he attributes to her.

Borrowed from Coventry Patmore, the domestic concept of the "Angel in the House" in the Victorian period described the "ideals of middle-class, wifely, maternal, domestic femininity" (Dever, 2005, p. 164). Associated with spirituality, domesticity and "feminine moral virtue," this concept was used frequently to refer to an ideal mother or wife who was submissive to her husband and devoted selflessly to her children. Accordingly, in the Victorian novel whenever "representations of female sexuality" (*ibid*) appear, they challenge such ideals. This implies that a sexually represented woman was no longer an angel in the house, but rather a modern or new woman with a new sexual identity. In this regard, through

representing Tess as a sexually passionate woman, Hardy subverts the ideal of angel in the house and replaces it by the feminine ideal of New Woman who stands for self-assertion and independence as well as "self-development as contrasted to self-sacrifice or submergence in the family" (Cott, 1987, p. 39). Hardy throughout associates Tess with the sun and colors red and white—all of which stand for her animation, beauty and sexual passion—to single her out as an independent new woman. However, the same factors which are essential to her sexual identity are also related to Tess's death or ruin at the end of the novel. In fact, anything related to her identity as a sexual new woman is, in one way or another, related to her ruin, implying that Hardy's ambivalence towards the feminine ideal of New Woman challenges the very idea since he is frequently invoked by "the feminine domestic ideal" (Dever, 164) from which he aspires to depart.

From her first appearance with other girls in the May Day Dance to the final scene when she is hanged, Hardy associates Tess with the sun as both the cause of her vitality and mortal/earthly features. In this festive occasion, Hardy depicts Tess and other girls as if bathing in sunshine that animates them and makes their beauties apparent:

The young girls formed, indeed, the majority of the band, and their heads of luxuriant hair reflected in the sunshine every tone of gold, and black, and brown. Some had beautiful eyes, others a beautiful nose, others a beautiful mouth and figure: few, if any, had all [...]. And as each and all of them were warmed without by the sun, so each had a private little sun for her soul to bask in; some dream, some affection, some hobby, at least some remote and distant hope which, though perhaps starving to nothing, still lived on, as hopes will. Thus they were all cheerful, and many of them merry. (Hardy, 9)

Similarly, at the dairy, where Tess and Angel work, they wake up early in the morning when the sun is not yet risen. In such a misty and foggy dawn, Tess, enveloped in mist and grayness, seems to Angel as an angel in the house, or rather a prelapsarian Eve, who he adores and would like to marry, as she looks "unsexed, sexless, [and] the sort of non-physical spiritualized essence" (Tanner, 1968, p. 227). However, the halo-like spirituality of Tess vanishes when the sun rises; impacted by the rays of the sunrise, "her features would become simply feminine," as they are transferred "from those of a divinity who could confer bliss to those of a being who craved it." In such circumstances she loses "her strange and ethereal beauty" and is again "the dazzlingly fair dairymaid

only, who had to hold her own against the other women of the world" (Hardy, 115-116). In other words, distorting the image of Tess as a divine, moral and spiritual woman, Hardy challenges the ideals of the angel in the house and represents Tess as a harbinger of modernity with a new sexual identity. However, the point is that Hardy, as a subject shaped by the long-held middle-class Victorian ideologies and conventions, has an ambivalent attitude towards the concept of new woman and associates Tess's death with the same sunshine that made her look sexual. According to the Victorian ideologies, sexuality would be pestilential and, therefore, anything related to sexuality was either evaded or led to destruction. Hence, at the end of the novel, policemen come to capture Tess when the sun rises and she is hanged up in "the brightness and warmth of a July morning" when "the sun's rays smiled on pitilessly" (Hardy, 348-49).

Similarly, the color red—sometimes paired with white—is the color of both sex and death. Red, as the color of both passionate love and blood (death), is associated with Tess in two ways. It is first related, to use William Blake's words, with Tess's "crimson joy," and last, with her committing a murder that leads to her own death and tragic destruction. In this regard, in her first appearance during the May Day Dance, where the younger girls of Marlott walk in white gowns, Hardy distinguishes Tess by "a red ribbon in her hair" while she is "the only one of the white company who could boast of such a pronounced adornment" (Hardy, 10). From this very beginning she is singled out to be an autonomous individual and a challenge to the domestically feminine moral virtue. At this very beginning, Hardy draws the readers' attention to the red ribbon that discriminates its owner in her white dress, and as Tanner notes, "foreshadows the red blood stain on the white ceiling" (237) when she kills Alec. Actually, being singled out as an autonomous modern woman foretells Tess's tragic death at the end of the novel and thereby the non-fulfilment of her autonomy and sexual identity and the idea of the New Woman as well.

The way Hardy differentiates his heroine is interesting. He singles Tess out either by the red color, including her red ribbon, or her purely white dress that, for example, at the obscurity of the rape night dazzles the sight: "the obscurity was now so great that [Alec] could see absolutely nothing but a pale nebulousness at his feet, which represented the white muslin figure he had left upon the dead leaves" (Hardy, 64). At this foggy and dark night, Tess is clad in bridal white that may remind the reader of the white-dressed woman in Wilkie Collins's Novel *The*

Woman in White who is "an angel paradoxically wandering in the dark" (Dever, 164) when encountered by Walter Hartright, the protagonist of the novel. Wandering in darkness, as Dever suggests, she offers "a fusion of the iconographies of whore and virgin" (134). Likewise, Tess, depicted as an angel, is paradoxically wandering or left in the darkness of *The Chase* as a public woman, in contrast to a private lady, who is sexually available.

Reflecting on the color white, Michael Ferber refers to Rabelais's *Gargantua* and argues that "white stands for joy, solace, and gladness [...] because white dazzles the sight as exceeding joy dazzles the heart" (233). Ferber also states that white is the color of sunlight making Tess seem animated and sexual. Regarding Tess, here it is suggested that her white dress that highlights her in darkness is the color of sexuality as it is the cause of Tess's sensual beauty that dazzles Alec's sight and heart as well. Moreover, regarding this color, it is worth emphasizing that in Tess it is either spotless, like her white dress, or paired with red that, to use Ferber's words, is "the color of faces when they show embarrassment, anger, or the flush of health or passion" (169). According to Ferber, in literature "red and white are often paired as the colors of beauty and love" (169). Shakespeare's Adonis is described by Venus as "more white and red than doves or roses are" (qtd. in Ferber, 1999, p. 169). Thus, these colors – either separately or in pair – single out Tess as a beautiful and sexually attractive woman. In her early encounter with Alec, and when Tess tries to resist against his desires, she addresses Alec while "revealing the red and ivory of her mouth as her eye lit in defiant triumph" (Hardy, 47). Similarly, when her mother dispatches Tess to d'Urbervilles' home, she ties Tess's hair with "a broader pink ribbon than usual" that stands out when paired with her white frock, as Tess herself stands out when wears such an adornment (ibid, 41). Mrs. Durbeyfield, as Felicia Bonaparte offers, dispatching Tess in this way, explicitly hopes that "[Tess's] sensual beauty will act as a sexual bait for [Alec] and so entice him to marry her" (424). Hardy insists on marking Tess off by the red color that is the color of vitality, ruddiness, love and passion. It is also the color of transgression and sin reflected in the succulent strawberry that Alec puts into Tess's mouth against her will: "he stood up and held [the strawberry] by the stem to her mouth. [...] he insisted, and in a slight distress she parted her lips and took it in" (Hardy, 34). Thus, Tess's scarlet adornment together with the strawberry—a sexual symbol that appears in Shakespeare's *Othello* as another instance—singles Tess out in the same way the adulterers were singled out in Puritan communities by wearing a scarlet letter. In other words,

Tess's representation as an independent new woman with a sexual identity is bound to fail, and she, as Alec's temptress, is supposed to be punished by the orthodox ideologies of the hypocritical Victorian society.

After all, Tess is the product/subject and victim of the Victorian middle-class ideologies or what Tanner calls "man-made laws which are as arbitrary as they are cruel" (236). Tess has been dictated that subverting the law and being an antithesis to the Victorian female ideal will lead to one's destruction. On the way to become a new woman she is plagued by the tyrannies of male-dominated society and the Victorian conventions (unlike Daisy Miller, Henry James's American heroine who asserts "I've never allowed a gentleman to dictate to me or to interfere with anything I do" (James, 1995, p. 36)). In accord with Victorian mentality, Tess seeks an ominous sign when she marries Angel and departs from the dairy-house. Before they move off a cock crows: "the white one with the rose comb," and when one murmurs "that's bad," Tess says to her husband: "I don't like to hear him! Tell the man to drive on. Good-bye, good-bye!" (Hardy, 189-190). Cock's crow is a bad omen for Tess and foretells the futility of her self-assertion and her disastrous fate and, interestingly, the cock is white with a red comb, that is, the same colors that made Tess seem more sexual. That is Tess cannot escape the 'tyranny' of signs; she cannot go beyond the discursive/ideological make-up of her society.

Hardy himself is also the product of the same Victorian society. "The Victorians," as Andrew Miller and James Eli Adams explain, "were notorious as the great enemies of sexuality; [...] sexuality seems to be whatever it was that the middle-class Victorian mind attempted to hide, evade, repress, deny" (1-2). Although Hardy intends to portray Tess as a new woman and endow her with a sexual identity, he demonstrates great ambivalence towards the idea and envelops Tess's sexual encounters in "illuminated smoke" (Hardy, 54). Regarding Tess's sexual experience at the rape night, Hardy, as Shires notes, "indicates that something pivotal occurred, but clouds it in obscurity" (151). He makes the rape take place in an obscure night and in a dense fog, while "on account of fog The Chase [is] wrapped in thick darkness" with Tess in a deep sleep (Hardy, 64). By covering in obscurity the female sexual freedom he would like to speak about overtly, and by leaving Tess's voice and lamentations unheard Hardy shows the power of conventions that considered sexuality immoral. Such female characters as Tess and Oothoon seem to be the victims of a patriarchal society that hails people as subjects, shapes and

betrays desires—becoming an independent woman—and pushes non-submissive characters to the margin. Hence, male writers as Blake and Hardy who try to write back their heroines to the male center cannot promise much success, for one should not forget that writers and their writings are products of the dominant ideologies and conventions of their time.

CONCLUSION: THE NEW WOMAN

The New Woman was a feminist ideal that emerged in the late nineteenth century and had a profound influence upon the writers at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. The term "New Woman" was coined and popularized by Sarah Grand to describe, in Stubbs words, "women who had either won or were fighting for, a degree of equality and personal freedom" (54). The term always "referred to women who exercised control over their own lives, be it personal, social, or economic" (Bordin, 1). The idea of New Woman generally emphasizes professional and economic independence of women; however, voice and independence from male control provide a new woman's core of identity overlooked in many representations of the New Women.

Although the concept of the New Women was coined and used at the end of the nineteenth century, Oothoon, William Blake's heroine, who is said to be "a mouthpiece for self-revelation and liberation through sexual experience" (Farrell, 2007, p. 8), is a paradigm of the New Women that anticipates the late nineteenth-century New Women. *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, explores Blake's anxiety over female sexual freedom by depicting a woman (Oothoon) who is violated by a man and is abandoned by another. Many scholars have argued that Oothoon cannot be simply placed in a defined category; however, she could be seen as an early representation of independent woman – later on the New Women – whose self-assertion and self-revelation remain unfulfilled as she is unable to "completely [liberate] herself from male domination" (Munteanu, 62). By assimilating Oothoon's erotic energies with the revolutionary desires to freedom and by providing her with a powerful and rhetorical language, Blake projects a new sexual, revolutionary and self-assertive identity onto his heroine. But, he destroys his heroine by leaving her voice unheard as if she has been silent "all the day, and all the night" (IV. 25, 1374). He concludes the poem by leaving Oothoon in isolation while she wails "every morning" and "Theotormon sits/Upon the margind ocean conversing with shadows dire" (VIII. 11-12, 1377), and thereby reasserting/empowering the eighteenth century

imperialist ideology "that demanded women to find erotic enjoyment in being colonized" (Munteanu, 74). Hardy's heroine, Tess, also has a similar situation. She is represented as a new woman fighting for her autonomy and self-assertion. Hardy gives an earthly and sexual identity to Tess and depicts her as a modern figure. Unlike her voice and lamentations which are never vocalized all along the novel, Tess's sensual beauty, as Annie Ramel states, "catches the eye with irresistible power" (114). Nevertheless, on the one hand by covering in obscurity the sexual encounters of his heroine, and by killing her at the end of the novel on the other, Hardy proves his sexual prudery and implies that sexuality can be morally harmful and lead to one's destruction. In other words, the writer exhibits an ambivalent attitude towards the feminist ideal of the New Woman and corrupts Tess by the same modernism that is attributed to her. Hardy shows himself as a "middle-class Victorian mind" to which sexuality should be either repressed or evaded. It can be concluded that both Blake and Hardy, as the products of their era's ideologies, cannot surpass the conventions of their time concerning the appropriate function of women, although resistance to certain dominant discursive practices is not hard to find in their writings. Therefore, the New Woman they represent is a failure since both Oothoon and Tess lack voice and independence from male domination and hegemony as two essential features of a new woman, a notion based on the ideologically-formed illusion of female autonomy and originality.

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