

# Narrative Acts and the Formation of the Self in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

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## 1. Introduction

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Tess repeatedly fails to tell her life story, or her story makes an unintended impression on her interlocutors. In fact, the course of her life is formulated through these failures. However, whereas her narrative acts fail, her life is often talked about by others, as her past attracts the interest of people in the community. These narrative acts by others also torment Tess, imposing a meaning on her experience regardless of her wishes; through the narratives based on Victorian moral systems, her social self is constructed as an impure woman. Entrapped by narratives adverse to her, Tess's last resort is silence: she wishes her life history would be completely effaced. What is paradoxical, however, is that the novel, as its subtitle claims, "faithfully" records and presents the life history of Tess, who desires to be forgotten. Therefore, throughout the novel, Tess's life is entangled with narrative on various levels. In this paper, I will investigate narrative acts of the protagonist and the narrator in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, employing some ideas from studies on the relationship between narrative and the self.

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The reason why I resort to these ideas is that in the novel narrative plays a crucial role in understanding a person and constructing of the self of the protagonist. In this paper, therefore, among various aspects of narrative, I will focus on aspects of narrative as a cognitive instrument (that affects human understanding of experiences) and as a social interaction through which the self is evolved. Narrative is essential for human beings as “homo narrans”, and as is often argued, the self is constructed by narrative (Fisher, 6).<sup>1</sup> Narrative gives amorphous experiences a structure and turns them into a meaningful and coherent story. As Bruner (1991) says, “we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on” (4). Yet once an experience is storied, the story goes into the public discourse, where the story is judged as to whether it should be accepted, modified, or dismissed ; as narrative is a part of social interaction, the story needs to be approved by interlocutors or members of the community. Therefore, the narrative act is personal and interpersonal at the same time : as Ochs and Capps say, “People apprehend their lives through the filter of narrative and build communities through the co-authoring of narrative” (24).

These roles of narrative can be detected in Hardy’s novel, and they are strongly related to the development of Tess’s life. Focusing on these roles of narrative, I will first illustrate the narrative formation of Tess’s identity as an impure woman ; through her failures in narrative acts and hostile narratives by others, she comes to be regarded as a type, the fallen woman, rather than as a unique being.<sup>2</sup> Then I will investigate why Thomas Hardy faithfully presents the life of Tess, who wants to be forgotten. Throughout the investigation, I will argue that while showing the risk of conventional narrative which stereotypes

experiences, Hardy is still relying on the power of narrative to modify society's sense of what is typical,

## 2. Failed Narratives

One important feature of Tess's life is that she cannot articulate her past in the form of a narrative. During the courtship period by Angel, the novel focuses on her anguish caused by her dilemma: whereas she thinks it necessary to tell him her past with Alec, she is too afraid to perform it. As a result, she repeatedly hesitates to tell her story, saying she wants to tell it: "But my history. I want you to know it – you must let me tell you – you will not like me so well!" (188) The dilemma creates through untold narrative an effect of emotional suspense to which the reader is attracted.

What is interesting in Tess's untold story is that her suffering is revealed also through the tale of another woman. Confronting the difficulty of confessing her past, she sympathizes with the suffering of a widow who remarried without telling the new husband about the previous marriage. Talking about the story of the widow in a group at Talbothays, she feels sorry for the woman because she knows the difficulty of telling a life story.

Yes, there was the pain of it. This question of a woman telling her story – the heaviest of crosses to herself – seemed but amusement to others. It was as if people should laugh at martyrdom. (180)

Importantly, Tess is depressed by the fact that the tale is received as a light entertainment by others. In other words, Tess is scared by the power of narrative to determine the meaning of experiences; through the narrative, the widow's sad experience is structured as a sort of comedy. It is this function of narrative that she confronts when she finally confesses her past, which point I

will argue later in detail.

Moreover, even when she makes up her mind to confess her past, fortune fails her. Finding it difficult to confess her past in person, she writes a letter and slips it under Angel's door as an alternative means of confession. Unfortunately, however, her letter turns out to have slipped under the carpet, and as a result, it does not reach Angel. Not knowing that Angel has not read the letter until too late, she ends up marrying him without telling him her past, which was the last thing she wanted to do.

This kind of miscommunication plays a very important role in the fate of Tess. Or rather, it moulds the course of her life. In a miserable state after the breakup of her marriage with Angel, she tries and fails to tell her misery to Angel's parents and win their sympathy. When about a year has passed since the breakup, she decides to visit Angel's parents to ask for help. She knows well that what she has to do is to tell her story; as the narrator puts it, "there is no doubt that her dream at starting was to win the heart of her mother-in-law, tell her whole history to that lady, enlist her on her side, and so gain back the truant" (296–297). The point of her plan is to tell her "whole history" and establish the social self of an unhappy wife who is unduly forsaken by her husband. However, after eavesdropping on a conversation between Angel's brothers, she loses her courage and misses her chance to appeal to the parents-in-law. In this way, Tess's life course is formulated through narrative failures.

### **3. Narrative Construction of the Self**

Another important aspect of Tess's failure is that her narrative does not work as she intends, the most outstanding example of which is the confession of her past to Angel. It is true that Tess knows that the confession would pro-

duce a disastrous result, but once she hears Angel's confession, she feels encouraged to tell her own story ; on the night of their wedding, Angel tells her about the affair he had in London. Since Angel is as guilty as Tess and she forgives him, she cannot help thinking that her past should be forgiven as well. Unlike Angel's confession, however, her relationship with Alec is not forgiven, and her story brings her a catastrophe.

The main cause of the failure is her ignorance of the importance of gender. When she confesses, she thinks she is telling almost the same story as Angel's. However, what she overlooks is the Victorian sexual double standard ; as widely known, Victorian society was much less tolerant to women than men with regard to sexuality.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, although their stories are similar in terms of plot, her female gender means that Tess's confession does not work in the same way as Angel's does. Whereas Tess willingly forgives him, Angel loses romantic enthusiasm toward her and comes to see her as impure. Highlighting the role of gender in narrative, the novel can be said to be highly conscious of the interpersonal and social aspects of narrative.

In fact, it is at this interpersonal level that Tess fails in narrative. As mentioned above, a person gives a meaning to one's experience in the form of narrative. Then, once the story is told, it is judged by an interlocutor to be authorized or not. As Bruner (2002) says, "To tell a story was to issue an invitation not to be as the story is but to see the world as embodied in the story" (25). In short, narrative is an interpersonal activity, complemented by a response of an interlocutor. In Tess's case, by making the confession, she invites Angel to see her as a person whose sin is similar to his. Tess's narrative invitation, however, is turned down ; refusing to authorize her story, Angel regards her instead "as a species of impostor ; a guilty woman in the guise of an innocent

one” (229).

The result of Tess’s failure in the narrative invitation is the transformation of her social self. The narrator describes the effect of Tess’s confession as follows: “And yet nothing had changed since the moments when he had been kissing her ; or rather, nothing in the substance of things. But the essence of things had changed” (227). The “essence of things” that the confession has changed must be Tess’s social identity, as Angel says to her, “You were one person ; now you are another” (228). The words of Angel demonstrate the power of narrative which constructs and transforms reality. Even though Tess is the same person, the narrative changes the way Angel sees her ; when Angel takes her confession as the story of a fallen woman, her social self is reconstructed according to his interpretation of the story.

In contrast, Tess, who expected that the narrative would result in forgiveness, is shocked by the narrative transformation. Although she knew that the confession might ruin her relationship with Angel, Tess seems to have an essentialist approach to the self. When told by Angel that the confession made her another person, she contends she is the same person that Angel loved so much. She argues as follows :

“I thought, Angel, that you loved me – me, my very self! If it is I you do love, O how can it be that you look and speak so? It frightens me! Having begun to love ’ee, I love ’ee for ever – in all changes, in all disgraces, because you are yourself.” (228)

Tess’s claim shows that she regards the self as intrinsic and immune from external influences. As the phrase “my very self” shows, Tess believes in autonomy of the self. That is why Tess promises that she will always love Angel no matter what changes will happen in his life or in their circumstances. There-

fore, Angel's refusal of her plea can be regarded as his dismissal of Tess's essentialist approach.

It is noteworthy that Hardy's novel was written in the age when the idea of social identity originated. In 1890 William James's *The Principles of Psychology* was published, in which James focused on and argued for the "social self". As Holstein and Gubrium argue, in the tradition of Western thought after the European Enlightenment, the self was conceived as transcendent in the sense that the self was "viewed as an idealized, abstract platform from which concepts and judgments emanated" (4). Challenging this tradition, James developed the idea of the social self in his empirical research on human psychology (Holstein and Gubrium, 17–24). In James's idea, the self does not transcend society but is constructed in social interaction, as his often-quoted words show: "a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their minds" (294). In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* we can find a similar approach to the self; the fact that Tess becomes another person in Angel's eyes suggests that the self is regarded not as transcendent but as the product of interpersonal interaction.

Moreover, besides the narrative transformation of Tess, there are some cases where the selves of characters are reconstructed through narrative interactions. Returning to the beginning of the novel, we find John Durbeyfield, who believes he becomes a changed man after a local parson informs him that he is a descendant of the d'Urberville family. The casual interaction with the parson produces the magical transformation of John Durbeyfield, an ordinary farmer, into "Sir John d'Urberville":

'Sir John D'Urberville – that's who I am,' continued the prostrate man.

'That is if knights were baronets – which they be. 'Tis recorded in history

all about me. Dost know of such a place, lad, as Kingsbere-sub-Greenhill?’ (10)

Discovering his forgotten origin, John reviews and reconstructs his life and social identity. He re-conceives himself as “Sir John”, and by telling the narrative of his origin, he invites people in the community to see him as an aristocrat. “Sir John”, however, is no more than a joke in the community, since it does not authorize the story of his new social self. Still, the behavior of “Sir John” saddens Tess and brings misfortune to the family, and it is this narrative transformation of John from which the tragedy of Tess originates.

As is shown above, this novel focuses on narrative reconstruction of social identity, describing the transformations of the characters through narrative. By telling a story, one provides one’s experiences with a certain structure and attempts to persuade an interlocutor or people in the community to authorize the version of reality embodied in the story. Yet, as we see with Tess, this attempt does not always succeed. Tess’s confession was meant to suggest that Angel and Tess are similar in that they both committed moral sins in the past, but Angel does not approve of Tess’s version of her story. Similarly, even though John Durbeyfield tries to reconstruct his social identity by the story of aristocratic ancestors, the story of “Sir John” is dismissed by the community. In this way, the novel highlights the interpersonal or social construction of reality through narrative, and its failure.

#### **4. Silence**

So far, we have examined Tess’s failures in narrative acts. Her decision to tell her stories fails her, and even when she manages to, her story does not function as she intends it to. The consequence of these multiple failures is her

silence.<sup>4</sup> The tendency for silence is a significant characteristic of Tess. After the series of narrative failures, Tess would rather remain silent than try to justify herself through narrative.

After Tess has learned that narrative is not in favor of her, the strategy she takes is *not* to tell a story. Instead of reconstructing her past with a story, Tess tries to negate her past by refusing to talk about it. Following the murder of Alec, Tess and Angel are reunited and run away together. At this stage, even though Angel regrets having forsaken her, Tess does not ask him to revise her life history so that she can be regarded as pure. Instead, Tess simply requires him not to talk about the past.

“Don’t think of what’s past!” said she. “I am not going to think outside of now. Why should we! Who knows what to-morrow has in store?” [. . .] By tacit consent they hardly once spoke of any incident of the past subsequent to their wedding-day. The gloomy intervening time seemed to sink into chaos, over which the present and prior times closed as if it never had been. (389–390)

By avoiding talking about their past, Tess controls her past in her own way; the sorrowful period after their marriage seems to “sink into chaos”. As argued above, one major function of narrative is to provide raw amorphous experiences with a certain form, which in turn determines or conditions the way others interpret the experiences. What Tess aims at by means of silence is not to give this form to her past and to let the past lose its shape and disappear. After the series of failed narratives, her last resort is silence by which she virtually nullifies the past and produces the impression of “as if it never had been”.

Of course, the murder of Alec is in itself a part of nullification of the past. According to Tess, the murder was done in order to reunite Angel and her by

clearing Alec from their way, as Tess says, “[h]e has come between us and ruined us” (384). Interestingly, in her delirium after the murder, Tess thinks the murder results in the nullification of her past sin itself: “Angel, will you forgive me my sin against you, now that I have killed him?” (385) In Tess’s idea, the death of Alec results somehow in the effacement of her past with him; when Alec ceases to exist, her sin with him also dies away. To put it differently, by silencing Alec, she lets her past disappear in the silence.

The emphasis on silence can be seen also in “Tess’s Lament” (1901), a poem which plays a supplementary role for the novel. This well-known poem shows her desperation for silence. Entangling herself in hostile narratives which determine the course of her life, Tess wishes to nullify her life story.

I cannot bear my fate as writ,  
I’d have my life unbe ;  
Would turn my memory to a blot,  
Make every relic of me rot,  
My doings be as they were not,  
And leave no trace of me! (43-48)

As the phrase “my fate as writ” shows, her life is regarded as narrative, and what Tess longs for is the erasure of her life history. Just as she tried to efface her past with Alec by murdering him, she is desperate to “unbe” her existence and undo what she has done; in other words, she wants to nullify her storied self and storied life, as her wish is to “leave no trace” of her. Negating the past and the future prescribed in her fate as a story, she longs desperately for silence. In this way, instead of producing her story to justify herself, Tess denies the story itself.

In this regard, the ending of the novel seems to be appropriate for Tess,

as silence is emphasized in the ending. Sometime after the arrest of Tess, Angel and 'Liza-Lou visit the city where the execution of Tess is to take place. Throughout the scene, they remain silent without speaking any word. The ending of the novel reads as follows :

From the middle of the building an ugly flat-topped octagonal tower ascended against the east horizon, and viewed from this spot, on its shady side and against the light, it seemed the one blot on the city's beauty. Yet it was with this blot, and not with the beauty, that the *two gazers* were concerned.

Upon the cornice of the tower a tall staff was fixed. Their eyes were riveted on it. A few minutes after the hour had struck something moved slowly up the staff, and extended itself upon the breeze. It was a black flag.

'Justice' was done, and the President of the Immortals (in Aeschylean phrase) had ended his sport with Tess. And the D'Urberville knights slept on in their tombs unknowing. *The two speechless gazers* bent themselves down to the earth, as if in prayer, and remained thus a long time, absolutely motionless : *the flag continued to wave silently*. As soon as they had strength they arose, joined hands again, and went on. (My Italics, 397–398)

What is emphasized in this ending is silence, for Angel and 'Liza-Lou are described as “speechless gazers” whose eyes are riveted on the cornice of the tower, without any conversation between them. Also, the figure of Tess is neither seen nor described, and the death of Tess is announced non-verbally ; only a black flag, which “continued to wave silently”, tells that the execution was done. The existence and death of Tess is reduced to the black flag on the

tower. In this way, the end of the life of Tess d'Urberville, who longed for silence, is appropriately described with the physical and verbal absence of herself, and nobody comments on her death, *except the narrator*.

The biggest irony in the scene above, however, is that the end of Tess's life is narrated, despite its emphasis on silence. Like "Tess's Lament", which is paradoxical in that the poem gives a voice to the woman who wants to be completely forgotten, it is curious that Tess's life and its end is recorded in the form of novel by the narrator. Moreover, her death is described with allusions to other stories: the narrator employs an Aeschylean phrase and alludes to Adam and Eva who leave paradise hand in hand. Through the reference to the classical and biblical narratives, Tess, who turns her back on stories to embrace silence, is entrapped in narrative again.

So far, we have examined the aspect of Tess as a subject to tell stories. However, as the paradoxical ending of the novel highlights, Tess is also an object to be talked about. In the next section, I will investigate the latter aspect of Tess.

## 5. Narrative and the Typical

Apart from her own failures in narrative, Tess is tormented by being an object of narrative. Returning to her home village after the rape or seduction, Tess becomes a target of gossips in the village. The sense of being talked about tortures her so much that Tess comes to hear accusing voices in her own mind. Working in the field with nobody around her, she feels as follows:

At times her whimsical fancy would intensify natural processes around her till they seemed a part of her own story. Rather they became a part of it; for the world is only a psychological phenomenon, and what they seemed

they were. The midnight airs and gusts, moaning amongst the tightly-wrapped buds and bark of the winter twigs, were formulae of bitter reproach. [. . .] But this encompassment of her own characterization, based on shreds of convention, peopled by phantoms and voices antipathetic to her, was a sorry and mistaken creation of Tess's fancy – a cloud of moral hobgoblins by which she was terrified without reason. (85)

This passage shows the process in which nature around her is storied or the way nature is understood with a framework of story, as nature becomes “a part of her own story”. Moreover, the storied nature comes into Tess's mind. Natural processes are personified and appear as reproachful voices in her mind, even though the voices are the “mistaken creation of Tess's fancy”. Tess is so distressed by being gossiped about that she weaves a theatrical fantasy wherein she is surrounded by antipathetic characters.

In addition, when local people do talk about Tess's past, they project an existing story onto her experience. As her past is too sensitive to talk about publicly, people in the community avoid straightforwardly mentioning it. In fact, Tess is not criticized to her face ; rather, local people appear to be sympathetic to her. Still, they refer to her past indirectly. Her life in the local village is described as follows :

Tess's female companions sang songs, and showed themselves very sympathetic and glad at her reappearance out of doors, though they could not refrain from mischievously throwing in a few verses of the ballad about the maid who went to the merry green wood and came back a changed person. There are counterpoises and compensations in life ; and the event which had made of her a social warning had also for the moment made her the most interesting personage in the village to many. (92)

Although local women are interested in her past, they dare not talk about it openly. And instead of clearly mentioning it, they sing a ballad about a generic maid who had a similar experience to Tess's. In this way, Tess's past is alluded to and becomes an object of narrative. What is important here is that a ballad, a genre of oral narrative, is projected onto Tess's story. Being a counterpart of the maid in the ballad, Tess comes to be understood with the framework of the ballad.<sup>5</sup> When she is framed in a traditional oral narrative, she becomes a "social warning" to prevent young girls from falling, which function is an integral part of the ballad. In other words, being a social warning, Tess loses her individual uniqueness, for she becomes an emblem, or a type of "the maid who went to the merry green wood and came back a changed person".

It is an important characteristic of narrative to transform an individual experience into a type. When a story is to circulate in a community, it needs to be understood by members of that community. Then, in order for the story to acquire a certain degree of universality, it needs to be presented as a type that is applicable to other similar cases; as Bruner (2002) says, "it is the conventionalization of narrative that converts individual experience into collective coin which can be circulated, as it were, on a base wider than a merely interpersonal one" (16). When Tess's story is blended with the ballad as a collective narrative, Tess is transformed into a type of person whose function is to warn girls of male temptation. Therefore, it can be said that the passage above demonstrates the process of her being absorbed into the public sphere of narrative where it is not individuality but type that matters.

This function of typification by narrative can be found elsewhere. Returning home after becoming "impure", Tess finds herself in the community as follows: "she looked upon herself as a figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of

Innocence” (85–6). It is true that there is nobody talking about her in this passage, and it is Tess herself who projects an allegorical story onto her life, thus making herself an object of the story. The result of being framed in the allegory is that she becomes a personification of an abstract idea, as she is a “figure of Guilt”. This passage shows not only that her situation is provided with a meaning through the narrative, but also that the narrative turns her into a type.

In addition, the novel is remarkable in its frequent use of folk narrative.<sup>6</sup> Apart from ballad, superstitions and legends are featured in the novel, such as the superstition of the crowing of a hen, the history of “Cross-in Hand”, and the legend of the d'Urberville Coach. The important point of these folk narratives is that they are concerned with types rather than individuals; they are *common* wisdom which has been transmitted orally for generations and is therefore applicable for various persons in different ages. In other words, the folk narrative in the novel is a place for repetition where Tess's role has been and will be played by many other people.

This aspect of narrative is clearly shown in Tess's conception of history. As Miller's argument has made famous, Tess shows a dislike to learn history. Tess declares that history depresses her because it tells her that her life is just a repetition of those of many other people :

‘Because what's the use of learning that I am one of a long row only – finding out that there is set down in some old book somebody just like me, and to know that I shall only act her part ; making me sad, that's all. The best is not to remember that your nature and your past doings have been just like thousands' and thousands', and that your coming life and doings 'll be like thousands' and thousands.’ (126)

According to Tess, although history records stories of many people, it empha-

sizes the repetition of similar lives, rather than respects individual differences. Therefore, in Tess's conception, history is a genre of narrative wherein an individual is reduced to a type. As her remark on history shows, the novel features narrative's aspect of molding the typical.

This typifying function of narrative is a central theme of the novel, as it focuses on the label of impurity attached to Tess. As shown above, besides Tess who regards herself as "a figure of Guilt" in her allegorical story, the novel represents her transformation into a fallen woman through the confession of her past with Alec. Tess's narrative transformation might be understood as a transfer of Tess in Angel's cognitive categories; Tess falls off from the category of a "beloved" down to a "species of impostor" (229). This transfer is triggered when Angel takes Tess's confession as a version of the generic story of the fallen woman. In other words, by presenting her past in the form of narrative, Tess turns herself into the narrative coin of the fallen woman. It is this categorization that torments Tess most; as she pleads with Angel to love her "very self", she wants him to see her as an individual rather than a type, yet it takes time for Angel to overcome the conventional view of Tess, and when he finally does, it is too late.

Still, the novel relates Angel's eventual emancipation from Victorian convention which emphasizes type. Although having regarded Tess as an impure woman, Angel overcomes the narrow-mindedness by recognizing the importance of individual uniqueness. Going through a hard experience in Brazil, Angel acquires a cosmopolitan or relativist view of the world. As a result, Angel is now able to appreciate the value of Tess again. Coming back to Tess, he says to her, "I did not think rightly of you – I did not see you as you were!" (378) This change is triggered by his realization that he was too concerned

with the general; he recognizes that his cruel attitude toward Tess was “arisen from his allowing himself to be influenced by general principles to the disregard of the particular instance.” (341) In the general principles, Tess was categorized as impure, but judged “constructively rather than biographically” (370), Tess remains pure. In this manner, the novel relates a kind of redemption of Angel, who was trapped in convention but comes back with a deeper insight, although the redemption is too late, and therefore futile as usual in Hardy's novels (*Casagrande*, 2). Nevertheless, Angel redefines Tess as a unique being, discarding convention as a master narrative which emphasizes the general or the typical.

What is important here is that Angel's re-evaluation of Tess involves a revision of her life history. In order to reappraise Tess, Angel needs to come up with a new version of her life history which gives a new meaning to her past. Reviewing Tess's life in a new light, Angel thinks as follows: “The beauty or ugliness of a character lay not only in its achievements, but in its aims and impulses; its true history lay, not among things done, but among things willed” (340). Focusing on “things willed” rather than “things done”, Angel creates a new version of her life history, which he thinks is the “true history”. Thus, narrated from a different perspective, the “true history” of Tess represents her as pure and unique, unlike the former version.

In order to investigate the issue of categorization in the novel, it is important to remember that the subtitle reads, “A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented”. The subtitle shows that the novel is significantly concerned with the categories of “pure” and “impure”. By calling Tess “a pure woman”, Hardy provoked a controversy in the Victorian society.<sup>7</sup> Yet, a novel about a fallen woman was not uncommon when Hardy wrote *Tess*; rather, the figure of the

fallen woman was conventional in Victorian literature (Reed, 70–72). In other words, *Tess* is “an over-writing of the traditional fallen-woman-atones stories” (Ingham, 85). Besides its opposition to the sentimentalized figure of the fallen woman, what makes *Tess* different from other fallen woman novels is its argumentative mode and Hardy’s passionate identification with *Tess* (Boumelha, 46–47). The subtitle highlights the conventional idea of purity and then challenges it. In this way, *Tess* is a narrative challenge to the Victorian conception of purity, showing unusual sympathy toward the protagonist. Yet, this sympathy to *Tess* brings back the question I mentioned above : why does Hardy faithfully present the life history of *Tess*, who wants to efface it?

As I have thus far examined the storied life of *Tess* on various levels, I would finally focus on *Tess*’s life as told by Thomas Hardy. As mentioned above, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* is paradoxical : the novel records the life of *Tess*, while Hardy is sympathetic to *Tess*’s desire not to be recorded, as Claridge detects “Hardy’s intense identification with his heroine” (63). As is manifest in her dislike of history, *Tess* is reluctant to be an object of narrative and wishes to avoid being reduced to a type through narrative. Instead of being talked about and becoming a narrative coin in the public sphere of narrative, *Tess* prefers to be completely forgotten without any records of her life. Despite her wishes, however, the narrator relates her life history ; or even worse, her life is “faithfully presented” according to the subtitle. This apparent paradox derives from the fact that Hardy exploits another function of narrative when he writes the life history of *Tess*.

Apart from the typifying function, a narrative can affect what is called common sense. Although I have focused so far on narrative’s function to turn an individual experience into a type, the relationship between narrative and the

type is dialectic ; while narrative is concerned with the typical, it also modifies community's sense of what is typical. As Bruner (1991) argues, in order for a narrative to be understandable, it must be relevant to a cultural script, or "a prescription for canonical behavior in a culturally defined situation", but at the same time, in order for the narrative to be worth telling, it must be about "how an implicit canonical script has been breached, violated, or deviated from" (11). It is this breach of the canonical that might lead to the reformation of the canonical. A story of an anomalous event highlights the instability of the canonical code and provides the community with an opportunity to reconsider conventional category systems, which otherwise do not attract attention. Introducing Shore's argument on the typical in narrative, Herman says, "the narrative representation of anomalous or atypical events can in turn reshape a culture's or community's sense of what is normal or typical, and thereby help build new models for understanding of the world" (179). In other words, a narrative which relates a breach of a social norm can be subversive, since by showing the existence of what cannot be fit into the existing categories, it invites the community to review and reconstruct the categorical framework which is at the basis of the current version of common sense.

This is the very function of narrative Hardy expects the novel to have. Within the world inside the novel, Tess's life story is reduced to a type, as it transforms her into an impure woman. However, in the form of the novel which defines her as a "pure woman" in the subtitle, she is presented as an atypical being, in that she does not fit into any one ready-made category. Being a figure of Guilt and a pure woman simultaneously, Tess does not fit in either category. In the Victorian society, it was unusual for a woman to be both pure and impure at the same time, as the Victorian idea of sexual purity

was based mainly on virginity ; therefore, these categories were mutually exclusive. What the novel suggests by presenting an atypical woman is that there is a flaw in the traditional categories which cannot accommodate Tess. In this way, Hardy tries to modify “community’s sense of what is normal or typical”. To put it differently, the novel is concerned with the reconstruction of society’s cognitive framework ; the reader is invited to re-examine what is called common sense, as Angel finally comes to recognize the necessity to re-adjust Victorian morality, asking himself “Who was the moral man? [. . .] who was the moral woman?” (340) Thus, relating the life history of Tess as an atypical woman and describing her aversion to being transformed into the typical, Hardy encourages the reader to review his or her sense of what is typical. As Bruner (2002) says, “great narrative is an invitation to problem finding, not a lesson in problem solving” (20). In *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, by faithfully presenting the life story of Tess, Hardy highlights the problem of the Victorian society through the power of narrative.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined narratives by and about Tess in relation to the formation of the self. What characterizes the life of Tess is her failure in narrative acts ; she repeatedly fails to tell her past to Angel, and even when she does confess, her narrative works in an unintended way. As narrative plays an important role in the formation of the self, her failures in narrative result in those which negatively establish the self. For example, despite her intention, her confession transforms her into a type of fallen woman in Angel’s mind. As a result of the series of failures, she comes to long for silence rather than to try to justify her past by creating and presenting her life story. Yet, even if she

remains silent, she can be an object of narrative ; people in the community talk about her and impose a certain meaning on her life through narrative, especially folkloric narrative such as a well-known ballad. When Tess is incorporated into the public sphere of narrative, her experience loses its own uniqueness and turns into a type, or a narrative coin to circulate in the community. In this way, her narrative failures and the narratives by others construct her social identity as an impure woman.

However, while Tess fails in her narrative acts, the narrator presents her life history for her sake. The novel's paradox is that it records and presents the life of Tess, who does not like her life to be recorded, although the narrator seems to be sympathetic to her desire. This apparent paradox derives from Hardy's awareness of the risk and power of narrative. On the one hand, through the description of Tess's narrative transformation into an impure woman, Hardy exposes the risk of narrative which turns an individual experience into a type. It is because of this risk that Tess longs for silence, trying to stay away from narrative. On the other hand, Hardy relies on the power of narrative when he faithfully presents Tess as a pure woman in the form of the novel. Narrative may modify the community's canonical codes by introducing the atypical. Presenting Tess as an atypical woman who is regarded as impure in the community but called "pure" in the subtitle, Hardy invites people to re-view their sense of what is typical, which is at the root of Victorian moral systems. In this way, when Hardy describes Tess's aversion to narrative, he believes in the power of narrative to reshape the canonical codes of Victorian society. And it is Tess as "narrative" that stirred intense debate in Victorian society.

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<sup>1</sup> The relationship between the self and story is often argued especially in sociology-based or psychology-based studies of narrative, such as Bruner (1991, 2003), Linde, Holstein and Gubrium, Gergen and Gergen, and Ochs and Lisa Capps. See also *Identity and Story* edited by McAdams et al, a collection of psychology essays on the issue.

<sup>2</sup> The idea of Tess's identity as an artifact is not uncommon. For example, Widdowson asserts "Tess has no character at all: she is only what others (most especially the author) construct her as" (133), and some critics have analyzed how Hardy constructs Tess's identity through biblical and mythological allusions (Thomson, Ingham: 82-84). These arguments, however, are mostly concerned with Tess as an object to be constructed textually; in contrast, my analysis emphasizes interactional or social dimension of narrative acts in the novel and covers narrative acts of Tess as a subject to tell a story, thus leading to understanding the construction of Tess in relation to dynamism of narrative acts in society.

<sup>3</sup> There are a lot of studies on the issue of sexuality in the Victorian age, yet for comprehensive introduction to the issue, see Marcus and Mason.

<sup>4</sup> As for the issue of silence, William Morgan's inspiring essay investigates the changing function of silence in Hardy's works throughout his career as a novelist and poet, although his viewpoint is different from mine.

<sup>5</sup> For the fuller argument on the process of projection of one story onto another, see Turner, who argues that parabolic understanding is the foundational mechanism for human cognition.

<sup>6</sup> Parker points out the persistent appearance of ballad and other folk narrative in the novel and detects the tension between Hardy's attempt to purify Tess and the moral judgment that the folk narrative embodies.

<sup>7</sup> "Purity" of Tess has been often discussed by many critics from various perspectives, such as arguments by Davis, Paris, Claridge, and Bernstein. Among them, representative studies include Liard and Jacob, who analyze textual revision and its effect on purity of Tess, respectively, and feminist readings by Boumelha, Ingham, Rosemarie Morgan, and Higonnet.

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