First of all, let us look in detail at some different colours in Phase the First – The Maiden which consists of eleven chapters.

In the second chapter, Hardy alludes to a legend sketching Blackmoor Vale and the village of Marlott where Tess lives.

The Vale was known in former times as the Forest of White Hart, from a curious legend of King Henry III.’s reign, in which the killing by a certain Thomas de la Lynd of a beautiful white hart which the king had run down and spared, was made the occasion of a heavy fine.

From the beginning, Hardy seems to foreshadow Tess’s destiny with the legend by using the colour white. White, of course, symbolises purity and innocence or a forever pure maiden. Tess herself is a white hart who was brought to bay, hunted out and shot bloodily and in fact is hanged in the end.

Tess first appears in the May-Day dance. The girls and the women are all dressed in white gowns. ‘In addition to the distinction of a white frock, every woman and girl carried in her right hand a peeled willow wand, and in her left a bunch of white flowers.’ ‘This white shape (Tess) stood apart by the hedge alone.’ All of them are full of white. But Tess stands out. Because she was the only one who ‘wore a red ribbon in her hair, and was the only one of the white company who could boast of such a pronounced adornment.’ Thus

* Kyoko EZAWA 国際言語文化学科（Department of International Studies in Language and Culture)
Hardy suggests at the first stage that Tess is a beautiful, passionate and pure woman. The redness stands out very much against the pure white background. But it is more important that this red, once it has appeared, haunts her to the end. We may say that her destiny lies with the colour red. And the colour contrast of red and white is constantly visible in the background throughout the whole book.

Tess is forced to drive out in darkness to take the hives to the market on behalf of her drunken father. ‘They (Tess and her little brother) put a stock of candle-ends into the lantern.’ This is the first time for the colour black to appear in this book. This darkness which is connected with red and light foretells her tragic life. In fact, when she is asleep in the darkness, her cart collides with a mail-cart, which causes the death of Prince, her father’s horse. Her brother Abraham’s words are also ominous. He talks of ‘the various dark objects against the sky’ and of ‘this tree that looked like raging tiger springing from a lair.’

Thus, Hardy, without feeling, gives us the cold metaphor: ‘the stars, whose cold pulses were beating amid the black hollows above, in serene dissociation from these two wisps of human life.’

‘The pointed shaft of the cart had entered the breast of the unhappy Prince like a sword, and from the wound his life’s blood was spouting in a stream, and falling with a hiss into the road.’ A girl sleeping in the darkened road and brutally awakened by the collision with another cart symbolises the coming of a girl sleeping in the darkened wood and brutally awakened and raped by another man – Alec. And ‘the pointed shaft’ stands for ‘the carving knife’ with which Tess killed Alec in the end.

Tess tries to stop the blood. Does she do so to stop her family’s destitution which will come soon, or to stop her own blood’s spouting? Or in order to fight against darkness, creator of Tragedy? But all efforts are in vain, only resulting in getting drenched in its red powerful spurts. She keeps standing as long as she can. But, as Prince suddenly falls down in a heap, she too sinks down with all her innocent blood running out. Here, we can see her whole life compressed in this scene. As D. Kramer says, Prince’s death symbolises Tess herself who ‘will find pain and violent death on her own dark road of life.’

This patterning of red and white is found here also:

… while Tess stood and waited. The atmosphere turned pale, the birds shook themselves in the hedges, arose, and twittered; the lane showed all its white features, and Tess showed hers, still whiter. The huge pool of blood in front of her was already assuming the iridescence of coagulation; and when the sun rose a hundred prismatic hues were reflected from it. … Her face was dry and pale, as though she regarded herself in the light of a murderess.

The last sentence also suggests that she will become in reality a murderess at the end. She is forced to go begging to Alec’s family. She leaves her house from where she daily saw ‘towers, … faint white mansions.’

As she comes near, ‘the crimson brick lodge’ can be seen on Alec’s premises. And his house too was ‘of the same rich red colour that formed such a contrast with the evergreens of the lodge.’ Then her red ribbon stood out against ‘the subdued colours around,’ as it did at the May-Day dance. This red house, with the colour black, will soon be the place where she is deprived of her virginity, as if ‘a large red-brick building’(a prison),
with the same colour, would later take her life. Thus the two red buildings stand for sex and death.\(^2\)

Here, the colour red also plays an important part in her destiny. At the end of this chapter, it adumbrates paradoxically that her sexual passion – ‘the blood-red life,’ her sensual charm, will cause her tragedy:

... Tess Durbeyfield did not divine, as she innocently looked down at the roses in her bosom, that there behind the blue narcotic haze was potentially the ‘tragic mischief’ of her drama – one who stood fair to be the blood-red ray in the spectrum of her young life. She has an attribute which amounted to a disadvantage ....

And it was this that caused Alec’s eyes to rivet themselves upon her. When she leaves Alec’s place, he ladens her with roses. One of her fellow travellers says to her in the van, “Why, you be quite a posy.” \(^3\) ‘She blushed, ... and in looking downwards a thorn of the rose ... accidentally pricked her chin. ... she thought this an ill omen.’ And this does become unfortunate reality.

The scene in which Alec attracts Tess with strawberries and roses is originally derived from a myth in which Persephone is seduced by Hades.\(^4\) However, we must think over Hardy’s deliberate use of symbolism here. Red roses imply Tess’s passion. But at the same time we know that a rose used to be the symbol of death, especially in Greece and Italy.\(^5\) Naturally Hardy knew it. At this stage Tess is already destined to die, as Alec is destined to be killed by her. The fact that a thorn pricked her chin suggests that Alec will later pierce her, depriving her of her virginity. Therefore Hardy, to begin with, foretells us that redness is her sexual and murderous passion. And it is then when Tess’s miserable fate starts. Thus Hardy’s symbolism starts from the first and continues to the end through and through. As D. V. Ghent points out, ‘Hardy’s use of one of the commonest tools of novelists – symbolism – enforces a magical view of life.’ \(^6\)

Upon her departure for Alec’s place to work, her mother again tied her hair ‘with a broader pink ribbon than usual. Then she put upon her the white frock that Tess had worn at the club-walking,...’ On the way she meets Alec who drives a cart wearing ‘white neckcloth.’ He ‘nipped his cigar with the tips of his large white centre-teeth, and allowed his lips to smile slowly of themselves.’

Alec who at first gave us the impression of black as a youth of ‘a swarthy complexion’ gives us that of white here. Is this a prediction of the red spot on the white ceiling?

We can also see much red not only outside Tess but inside her. ‘She parted her lips and took the British Queen in.’ When she desolutely refuses Alec’s advances on the cart, Tess says “No, sir,” ‘revealing the red and ivory of her mouth’.

In any case, we can read Tess’s sexual passion in these sentences.

Let us have a look at the night of the rape.

He envelopes her in a dense fog, in a ‘mist’ like ‘illuminated smoke,’ that is, in a ‘blue narcotic haze.’ Hardy here also deliberately makes good use of smoke, fog, light, and so on. And the colour contrast, black and white, can be seen once again.

Nothing is seen. ‘Everything else was blackness alike.’ ‘Darkness and silence ruled everywhere around.’
Then Alec rapes ‘the white muslin figure’ who is sound asleep in the Chase.\(^7\) The colour white naturally stands for her virginity and purity while the colour black – darkness – means not Tess’s ‘guardian angel’ but the demon who bleeds her.

Hardy, on the one hand, sympathises with Tess, asking ‘where was Tess’s guardian angel?’ ‘Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; ….’

On the other hand he says without any sympathy:

Doubtless some of Tess d’Urbervilles’ mailed ancestors roll licking home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time.

As Tess’s own people down in those retreats are never tired of saying among each other in their fatalistic way: ‘It was to be.’

This patterning of sympathy and indifference is also one of Hardy’s characteristics.

After the rape the colour red even grows more impressive. On her way home from Alec’s place, a man who is carrying ‘a tin pot of red paint in his hand’ writes the words on the board, and ‘these staring vermilion words shone forth.’ She also reads ‘with a sudden flush’ on the white wall ‘Thou, Shalt, Not, Commit – ’ with the same colour which reminds us of the scarlet letter, “Adultery”, on Hester’s breast in Nathaniel Hawthorn’s _The Scarlett Letter_.

After this, when Tess is at home, the sun breaks ‘through chinks of cottage shutters, throwing stripes like red-hot pokers upon cupboards, chests of drawers, and other furniture within.’ The sun and sun light also dog her to the end and ominously reveal Tess’s past and foretell her future.

The above is a detailed discussion on the colours in the Phase the First.

In the following Phases Tess still constantly encounters to the end the red omens which grow more violent and clearer. We will later discuss some important scenes which have the images – white, red and black.

Colour, light and fire constantly play important roles in Hardy’s works. One of the reasons is that the background of his novel usually is based in nature. It is also effective for Hardy to use them in order to produce a mystical atmosphere. But it any case, it is natural that this imagery stems from his basic artistic viewpoint. Therefore the study of the role of these three is indispensable for us to understand Hardy and his literature.

Let us here introduce an anecdote from his childhood according to Mrs. Florence Emily Hardy.

One or two more characteristics of his personality at this childhood-time can be recounted. In those days the staircase at Bockhampton (later removed) had its walls coloured Venetian red by his father, and was so situated that the evening sun shone into it, adding to its colour a great intensity for a quarter of an hour or more. Tommy used to wait for this chromatic effect, and, sitting alone there, would recite to himself “And now another day is gone” from Dr. Watts’s Hymns, with great fervency,
though perhaps not for any religious reason, but from a sense that the scene suited the lines.\textsuperscript{8)

This shows us that Hardy had taken great interest in light and colour – red – from his childhood, and that his imaginative eye was remarkably developed from it. It is made more obvious by how he grew up to appreciate paintings and the fine arts.

Hardy once referred to Bonington’s\textsuperscript{9) paintings:

After looking at the landscape ascribed to Bonington in our drawing-room I feel that Nature is played out as a Beauty, but not as a Mystery. I don’t want to see landscapes, \textit{i.e.}, scenic paintings of them, because I don’t want to see the original realities – as optical effects, that is.\textsuperscript{10)}

Compared with his, Hardy says:

Turner’s\textsuperscript{11) water-colours: each is a landscape \textit{plus} a man’s soul …. What he paints chiefly is \textit{light as modified by objects}. He first recognizes the impossibility of really reproducing on canvas all that is in a landscape; then gives for that which cannot be reproduced a something else which shall have upon the spectator an approximative effect to that of the real. …. Art is the secret of how to produce by a false thing the effect of a true ….’\textsuperscript{12)}

In other words, ‘Nothing but the illusion of truth can permanently please, and when the old illusions begin to be penetrated, a more natural magic has to be supplied.\textsuperscript{13)}

And he also mentions of his preference.

I want to see the deeper reality underlying the scenic, the expression of what are sometimes called abstract imaginings.

The ‘simply natural’ is interesting no longer. The much decried, mad, late-Turner rendering is now
necessary to create my interest. The exact truth as to material fact ceases to be of importance in art – it is a student’s style – the style of a period when the mind is serene and unawakened to the tragical mysteries of life;  

As he himself confesses, ‘I am struck by the red glow of Romney’s backgrounds, and his red flesh shades.’ He was convinced that Romney’s paintings were also ‘landscape plus a man’s soul’.

Since he thinks that literature too should play such a role as do artistic works in form and colour, it is natural that he should put stress upon colour and light.

Moreover it is also essential for his study that colour and light are connected with his symbolism.

D. V. Ghent alludes to Hardy’s symbolism:

… symbolic depth is communicated by the physical surface of things with unhampered transparency while the homeliest conviction of fact is preserved … it is because of the actual motivational impact of the earth that Hardy is able to use setting and atmosphere for a symbolism …. Obvious as these symbolisms are, their deep stress is maintained by Hardy’s naturalistic premis.

This characteristic is marked in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. Because the ‘dramatic motivation provided by natural earth is central to every aspect of the book, it controls the style: page by page Tess has a wrought density of texture that is fairly unique in Hardy’.

I will discuss in the next essay how well and how impressively Hardy used colour and its symbolism.
Colours as Represented in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1)

‘Emma, Lady Hamilton’ by Romney
Notes

2) T. Tanner thinks that Tess’s life starts from this red house and ends with a ‘large red-brick building’. *(See The Critical Quarterly, p. 222.)* But her life, in fact, begins with red and black (Prince is bloodily killed in darkness, and Tess is drenched with his blood), and ends with red and black (Tess is executed in ‘a large red-brick building’ under ‘a black flag’). The colour black is an ill omen or a demonic emblem, and at the same time, it plays an important role through the book.

3) It is interesting to compare Tess here with Bathsheba in *The Return of the Native*. They both appear at the earliest stage. Both are beautiful and passionate. Both of them in red stand out against the surroundings; when one is in the van, the other is on the waggon. But Tess is with white withal. On the contrary, Bathsheba is in crimson only. Because Tess should have been described as a pure and innocent girl as in I. Disraeli’s lines:
   
   Her ‘white it says for ever’
   
   Her ‘red it never dies’

4) Persephone. Greek myth. Daughter of Zeus and Demeter, kidnapped by Pluto (or Hades) to be his wife and queen of the lower world, but allowed to return every year. *(Encyclopedic World Dictionary)* It is worthwhile discussing why Angel calls Tess “Demeter” in Chapter 20, and why Tess was thrown down from Talbothays to Flintcomb-Ash as if Eve was banished from the Paradise to the lower world.

5) Even nowadays such legends are spread throughout the world as one who is sick in bed will soon die if roses are given.


7) It may be a question whether Tess was raped or seduced. Some critics, one of whom is D. Kramer, think she was seduced. D. Lodge emphasises that ‘it is important to realize that she is seduced, not raped.’ *(The Twentieth Century Interpretations, p. 82.)* T. Tanner uses both words in his essay mentioned above.


9) Richard Parkes Bonington. 1801-1828. English landscape and genre painter. He was associated with Eugene Delacroix, leader of the romantic school in painting.

10) F. Hardy, p. 242 of the first book.

11) Joseph Mallord William Turner. 1775-1851. English landscape painter. About the turn of the century, Turner began using his landscapes as settings for Biblical of mythological subjects, thus giving full rein to his feelings for light and brilliant colour, simultaneously subordinating the solidity and structure of architectural and topographic forms to the achievement of a unified emotional effect. *(Americana)*

12) F. Hardy, pp. 283-4 of the first book.


14) F. Hardy, pp. 242-3 of the first book.

15) George Romney. 1734-1802. English painter. He, at nineteen, was apprenticed to a portrait painter at Kendal. It is only when we examine his portraits, and especially his female portraits, that we find that beauty of form and subtle charm of colour which place him among the greatest portrait painters of the eighteenth century. *(Americana)*

16) D. V. Ghent, p. 84.

Colours as Represented in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1)

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