

ON AND OFF SCREEN

Polanski and Seymour on *Tess*

DVD

In this second extract we are going to see the director of *Tess*, **Roman Polanski**, talking about **why he decided to make this film** and listen to writer and researcher, **Claire Seymour**, speaking about the parallels between *Tess* and what was actually happening in **English agriculture at the time of the story**. She also speaks about the critical response to Hardy's novel.



Over to you

First extract

- 1** We have already seen an extract from another film directed by Polanski, *Macbeth* (see Vol. 1, p. 148), in which we spoke about Polanski's 'unconventional' way of representing the play and its characters. From the short scene you saw in the first extract would you say that his portrayal of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is traditional or unconventional?
- 2** Now watch and listen twice to Roman Polanski talking about *Tess* and answer the questions.
 1. Why is the film dedicated to Sharon?
 2. In what way might she have been connected to the film?
 3. What happened to her?
 4. Find out in what way she was connected to Roman Polanski from the Internet.

Second extract

- 1** Now watch and listen to Claire Seymour speaking about the parallels between film and novel.
- 2** There are some agricultural scenes shown in the film. Write the names of each activity, first in Italian and then in English, after referring to a dictionary.
- 3** Claire Seymour says that Hardy spent a lot of time (in his novels) focusing on 'the minutiae of agricultural traditions'. What does this mean?

- 4** She also speaks of Tess's 'passive decline in the face of certain pressures.' From what you know of the story, in what ways would you say Tess is a) passive or b) active in trying to change her circumstances?
- 5** Seymour also goes on to speak about the 'incomprehensible danger or threat in terms of a new, modern, urban way of life [...] mimicked in Tess's own tale.' While farms depended on labourers to survive, Tess and many others would always find work but this became gradually harder with the introduction of new technology. Look again at the scenes from the film. How would these activities be done today?

Third extract

- 1** Here Claire Seymour speaks about the critical response to the novel. Answer true or false.
 1. Critics liked the novel. T F
 2. It was Hardy's most successful novel. T F
 3. 'It was criticised for being sordid.' T F
- 2** Look 'sordid' up in the dictionary. Discuss in pairs what Victorian critics might have found sordid about the story of *Tess*.
- 3** How do you think reactions today would differ?