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Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Victim of Time, Class, and Moral Judgement

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Abstract: ***This review is to examine the concept of Victorian morality and its influential portrayal through the thematic brilliance of Thomas Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles. During Queen Victoria's prosperous reign, English society adhered to a rigid moral code known as Victorian morality: an ideology marked by restraint, intolerance toward deviation from religious or social norms, and a deeply entrenched belief in male domination. This framework, devoid of equality, dictated a strict code of conduct that applied disproportionately to women, enforcing an idealized and often unattainable standard of womanhood. All through the novel, Hardy criticises this moral structure and the society that sustains it, exposing its hypocrisy and double standards. Tess, as a character, is initially perceived through the lens of this morality as impure or fallen. Yet Hardy, through his third person narrative voice and compassionate portrayal, repeatedly justifies her actions and reframes her as a victim of social conventions and male exploitation. This tension is encapsulated in the novel's subtitle: A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented. Tess is never truly immoral by any ethical standard; she is condemned not for her character, but for her circumstances.***

Keywords: morality, Victorian era, code of conduct, ideal woman, societal convictions, double standards

1. Introduction

Thomas Hardy presents a haunting portrait of a young woman who is caught in the ordeals of a male - dominated Victorian England. Tess Durbeyfield's journey is not merely one of personal tragedies, but a broader indictment of the social, moral, and sexual double standards of Victorian England. Through Tess, Hardy exposes the hypocrisy of a world that punishes innocence, glorifies dominance, and silences feminine suffering. This novel is not just the tale of a fallen woman; it is a powerful exploration of how systems of power break spirits, distort justice, and leave lasting scars on those who dare to live authentically in defiance of them. Moreover, the novel reflects Hardy's critique of the corrupt and unequal Victorian society of nineteenth - century England. Additionally, it highlights Thomas Hardy's masterful thematic treatment. The author defines Victorian morality and explores the context in which it emerged. He then examines the roles of men and women in Victorian society, emphasizing how any defiance of social norms was met with harsh disapproval. Finally, Hardy underlines that Tess remains a pure woman until the very end of her life. Victorian age viewed men as symbols of ambition, independence, action, reason, and aggression and women, in contrast, were seen as symbols of passivity, dependence, submission, weakness, and self - sacrifice.

The novel opens with a rich and vivid description of the landscape, setting the tone and context for the story that follows. The setting is Wessex, a rustic and historically significant region in south - western England, where agriculture forms the backbone of daily life. Thomas Hardy is renowned for his richly detailed descriptions, which serve a crucial function: by meticulously documenting the landscape and its realistic details, he brings Wessex to life, allowing readers to immerse themselves more fully in the story's world. In the very first chapter, Mr. Durbeyfield is seen walking toward his village when he encounters an old man, Parson Tringham, who introduces himself as a student of history. The parson tells Durbeyfield that he recently came across a record revealing his noble lineage with the d'Urbervilles. This false revelation greatly appeals to Durbeyfield, a man already inclined toward idleness, and only deepens his indolence. The scene brings to mind Shakespeare's Macbeth, where the three witches tempt Macbeth with the promise of kingship, a thought that ultimately corrupts his mind. Here, Mr. Durbeyfield has already become enthralled by a dream of rising from rags to riches, and he sends for a horse - drawn cart to take him home.

As the prophecy of the three witches sends Macbeth to his doom, Parson Tringham's words cast Tess's life into turmoil and ultimately leading her to the gallows in the country with unequal laws. Upon hearing the words, John, without verifying their truth, is overcome by a surge of superiority and rushes home to share the 'good news' with his family. The family has endured a hard life: John is a poor provider, and his wife struggles to keep their large household fed and clothed. They have seven children in total and Tess, or Theresa, is the eldest. Several themes emerge early in the novel, with fate playing a central role in the characters' lives. Hardy introduces the motif of a poor family discovering their noble lineage: a revelation that initially appears to be a blessing. However, as the story unfolds, this seemingly fortunate news sets off a chain of events that ultimately lead to tragedy. Parson Tringham dramatically remarks, 'How the mighty are fallen. ' (Gutenberg, 2024) In the novel, readers witness not only the downfall of the once - mighty but also how the poor, despite their struggles to rise, are inevitably crushed by forces beyond their control. Hardy critiques the rigid social hierarchy of Victorian England, where the wealthy are the masters of the fate of the less fortunate.

Hardy's depiction of the May Day celebration is deeply a symbol of the days gone by. It is where the readers first encounter the titular character, Tess, a young girl dressed in white: a colour representing purity, innocence, and joy. Amid the festivity, Tess joins her friends in a May Day dance in their village of Marlott, marking her introduction in a scene brimming with youthful vitality and tradition. Hardy also observes that while such traditions have faded in the cities, they still flourish in the countryside where Tess lives. This highlights her lack of sophistication and worldliness; a trait that renders her unprepared for the advances of a lustful rich young man as worldly and predatory as Alec d'Urbervilles. The May Day itself is an ancient celebration, dating back to pagan times when the Romans honoured the goddess Floralia, symbolizing spring flowers, and Maia, the goddess of May, associated with growth and renewal. Through this, Hardy bridges the pagan and Christian worlds, illustrating how a former pagan festival had evolved to incorporate Christian elements. In this setting, Hardy portrays Tess as a sixteen - year - old girl, full of emotion yet innocent about the ways of the world, embodying youthful beauty and vitality. During the festival, she catches sight of her future husband, Angel Clare, but does not notice her.

As John Durbeyfield drinks excessively, he becomes unable to drive the family's horse cart. Owing to this, Tess and her brother Abraham set out with their horse, Prince, to deliver beehives to a nearby farmer's market. Along the way, they speak about their parents' plan to send her to d'Urbervilles and they fall asleep in the wagon, leading to a tragic accident in which Prince is fatally struck by a passing mail cart. The death of the horse is a significant loss to the family's financial benefit, and Tess feels she is responsible for it. At this point, Joan Durbeyfield proposes that Tess seek employment with their wealthy d'Urbervilles relations. Though Tess initially resists the idea, the absence of their horse leaves her with little choice, and she ultimately agrees to go. Having finally resolved to follow this course, Tess grows restless and distracted, carrying out her tasks with a newfound sense of purpose. She takes comfort in the thought that her work might secure another horse for her father. Though she has once hoped to become a schoolteacher, fate has dictated otherwise.

Mr. Durbeyfield has an idea of sending Tess to the wealthy d'Urberville family. He takes advantage of Tess's innocence and persuades her to go. His deeper intention is to secure a marriage for Tess within the d'Urberville family, hoping it will elevate their social status. Mrs. Joan, in her blissful ignorance, justifies the plan by saying they must accept both the good and the bad, believing this is the perfect moment for their noble lineage to be recognized. Tess, however, wants no part in Durbeyfield's scheme and insists she would rather find work on her own. Yet, she is ultimately persuaded, both by her mother's insistence and by the guilt she feels over the death of their horse. Resigned to the plan, Tess agrees to go to work at d'Urbervilles. With this decision, her fate is sealed. Tess and her family do not realize is that the d'Urbervilles is not their lineage. It was Simon Stoke, a wealthy merchant from northern England, adopted the name d'Urberville to create the illusion of belonging to an old and distinguished aristocratic Norman family from the south. Slowly, the name Stoke became Simon d'Urberville. Money makes many things. In Shakespeare's King Lear, the king says 'Through tattered clothes great vices do appear; Robes and furred gowns hide all. ' (Shakespeare William, 2017)

Tess and her family never attempt to uncover this truth, partly due to their lack of education and partly because they blindly trust the pastor's account of their ancestry, in addition to these, they are poor. When Tess is summoned by Mrs. d'Urberville to The Slopes to tend to her poultry farm, her mother is overjoyed, but Tess feels uneasy and expresses a desire to stay with her parents. A week passes, and one day, Mr. Alec d'Urberville arrives on horseback, claiming his visit is merely casual. In fact, he comes there to determine whether Tess is willing to accept his mother's offer. Her mother is eager to send Tess with him, already envisioning her as his bride. Yet, something holds Tess back; an unexplainable sense of fear. Neither his handsomeness nor his wealth appeals to her. After much contemplation, she agrees to go. This message is conveyed to Mrs. d'Urberville, who responds with a welcoming note, stating that a cart will be sent for Tess on a particular day. Joan is overjoyed, but Tess can't shake the feeling that the handwriting in the letter appears distinctly masculine. At last, the day of Tess's journey arrives. Her mother dresses her in fine clothes, ensuring she looks her best. Once satisfied with her daughter's appearance, the mother bids her farewell and Tess takes leave of her father.

Accompanied by her mother and siblings, she walks to the place where the cart is expected on the day of departure. Just as she is about to step into it, Mr. Alec d'Urberville comes in his luxurious carriage and invites her to sit beside him. She hesitates for a moment but ultimately yields to the gentleman. Astonishingly, tears well up in the eyes of the children, including their mother. They all feel that Tess should not have left them. For Tess, this moment is fraught with uncertainty, and in many ways, her fate has already been decided by her parents. It brings the words of Portia, in Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, says, 'The will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father. ' (Shakespeare William, 2018) But here the will of a living daughter is changed by her living parents. John Durbeyfield feels that due to his simple - mindedness, his grand lineage is sold for a pittance. It means, his daughter is given away for almost nothing. Tess's parents believe that her beauty will secure a measure of happiness and stability for the entire family. Joan, in particular, hopes Tess will marry into a wealthy and prominent family; a prospect she believes hinges on Tess's connection to the d'Urbervilles.

The link between the mother's aspirations and Tess's fate foreshadows the tragic events to come. Sadly for Tess, the outcome will be even more disastrous than anyone could have imagined. The cart that carries Tess and Alec d'Urberville marks more than a physical journey; it symbolizes a departure from the innocence of the rural past into the moral uncertainties of the modern age. Alec, embodying the careless entitlement of a changing world, exploits the moment to kiss her, oblivious to the depth of Tess's purity and reserve. They come from irreconcilable worlds: she, rooted in the quiet dignity of tradition; he, in the

unchecked impulses of a modernity blind to virtue. His failure to comprehend her innocence foreshadows the tragic consequences of their encounter. What is a trivial indulgence for Alec, a mere kiss, is, for Tess, a deeply intimate act bound up with notions of chastity, dignity, and selfhood. In Hardy's hands, the kiss is no innocent gesture; it is an early exercise of mastery, foretelling the violation to come. Tess is rendered powerless in the moment, not through physical force but through Alec's confident intrusion upon her innocence, an intrusion sanctioned, in part, by a society that overlooks such transgressions when committed by men of status.

At d'Urbervilles, Tess's job is to take care of fowls and other birds. When Mrs. d'Urberville who is blind asks Tess to improve her whistling to the bullfinches, it serves as yet another subtle affirmation of Tess's innate harmony with the natural world. This moment marks the beginning of her association with bird imagery: delicate, instinctive, and tragically vulnerable. Tess's ability to connect with the birds underscores her role as a figure of nurturing nature, contrasted with the artificial and often destructive forces surrounding her. Later, when another maid mentions Alec's name, Mrs. d'Urberville's uneasy reaction suggests a silent disapproval of her son's behaviour, though she remains unable or unwilling to intervene. Her blindness takes on symbolic weight: not merely a physical condition, but a metaphor for moral impotence and detachment. Whether out of genuine helplessness or wilful ignorance, Mrs. d'Urberville's inability to confront Alec's actions contributes to Tess's inevitable downfall. Mr. Alec once again draws Tess's attention under the pretext of teaching her to whistle; an act that seems playful but, in Hardy's hands, becomes charged with tension and symbolic meaning. It subtly underscores the disparity of power between them.

When Mr. Alec refers to her as his 'cousin, ' the term masks his intentions in a false veil of respectability and familiarity. Tess, though deeply modest and morally earnest, is seen by Alec as a temptation, and he holds this imagined role against her, as if her mere presence is a provocation. This projection reflects the deeply ingrained hypocrisies of Victorian morality: a society that idolizes feminine purity while blaming women for the sins committed by men. Mary Jacobus in her Tess's Purity, writes: 'The ambiguity surrounding Alec's assault on Tess and how Victorian societal norms influenced Hardy's portrayal of Tess's purity and victimhood, ' (Jacobus Mary, 1976). Hardy exposes the injustice of this moral framework, where innocence becomes guilt, and victimhood is mistaken for complicity. The scene foreshadows the later violation that will be interpreted not as a crime against Tess, but as a stain upon her, a cruel indictment of a culture that punishes purity when it fails to protect itself. The societal forces; its rigid class structures, unequal distribution of wealth and impinged gender roles, all these converge to empower Alec at Tess's expense.

At d'Urbervilles, Tess experiences some momentary joy, untouched by manipulation or deceit of Alec. Deception has no place in her natural, truthful world, which stands in stark contrast to the calculating, morally ambiguous environment she has been thrust into. Tess's capacity to find beauty in small, sincere tasks becomes both a evidence to her character and a quiet resistance against the corrupt forces encircling her. Despite Alec's persistent pursuit, Tess remains undeterred in her work, resolutely rejecting his unwelcome advances. For several months, she has succeeded in maintaining this independence. She observes that people travel to the market town of Chaseborough to spend their Saturday evenings and rest on Sundays. For some time, she has refrained from joining them, but eventually, she begins going there for relaxation, drawn by the promise of good company and a sense of security. The drunken and troublesome women of Trantridge stand in sharp contrast to the innocent and superstitious women of Marlott. Nearly every element of this scene, including Tess's first mysterious encounter with Mr. Alec d'Urberville, serves as foreshadowing for the events to follow.

One Saturday, Tess arrives late to the market town and later discovers Alec's group engaged in a wild dance. Hardy portrays this as an expression of ancient paganism: something entirely separate from Tess's purity and innocence which leaves her feeling uneasy. As the dance becomes increasingly frenzied and primal, Alec's delight in it underscores his essentially beastly nature. The atmosphere grows heavy with foreboding, suggesting that something terrible is about to unfold. At last, the group begins its journey home with Tess who notices that many of them are staggering drunkenly. Among them, there is Car Darch, the 'Queen of Spades, ' who has recently been one of Alec's favourites. As they reach a gate, Car goes ahead, balancing a heavy basket on her head. Suddenly, the group notices a dark liquid trickling down her back. They soon realize it is treacle from a smashed jar in her basket. Laughter erupts as Car desperately trying to clean herself. Car Darch emerges here as a disruptive force for Tess, driven by jealousy and hostility toward Tess's modesty and innocence. Car turns on Tess in a fit of rage, intent to attack her. Stricken with fear, Tess runs back. Meanwhile, Mr. Alec arrives on horseback and offers a ride to Tess to go home. Feeling helpless, she accepts and climbs on behind him; someone remarks that she has gone from the frying pan into the fire.

Alec and Tess finally speak to each other while on horseback, it reveals to Alec the depth of Tess's genuine modesty and innocence. He begins to understand that his flirtations, which once succeeded so easily at home, have no effect on her. Tess's drifts into sleep recalls her earlier reverie before Prince's death, once again casting her in the role of the passive, sleeping victim of impending catastrophe. Tess doesn't understand the direction of the journey. Alec drives the horse into the nearby Chase forest. On getting down, Tess makes another attempt to assert her independence, but the circumstances have become inescapable, she is now forced to rely on Alec. He talks about the condition of her family, subtly reinforcing yet another form of control, knowing that Tess's sense of duty compels her to sacrifice herself for their welfare. The harsh reality of her predicament dawns on her with heartbreaking clarity. Tess is so sleepy that she can once again become the passive victim as Alec takes control of her. The primal forces of The Chase forest assert themselves under the cover of night, rendering Tess a symbol of tragic innocence and her chastity is robbed off.

Tess's social conditioning likely left her ill - equipped to comprehend the assault as something she had the right or power to resist. Tess is emotionally drained, confused, and traumatized. The cumulative weight of earlier tragedies, such as the death of her horse, her guilt over her family's poverty, and Alec's persistent manipulation has eroded her spirit. When the violation occurs, Tess may be too numb, disoriented, or overwhelmed to respond in any conventional sense. Hardy uses Tess's silence and the aftermath to indict a society that fails to protect vulnerable women. He presents her as a victim of injustice, but not as a fallen woman. Her silence is not consent; it is a symptom of her voicelessness in a patriarchal society. Shakespeare's words from the drama, Macbeth, come to mind here: 'What's done cannot be undone, ' (Shakespeare William, 2023). They aptly reflect Tess's situation in the novel. She cannot return to her days of chastity, nor can she choose to be with Alec d'Urberville as she doesn't love him. The only option left is to stay with her parents and seek some form of work for her livelihood.

At Trantridge, Alec's manner of speaking about the rape amplifies only its horror, as if his wealth and shallow apologies could erase it. He dismisses her suffering as meaningless. Tess couldn't live in Alec's presence any longer. At last, one day, Tess leaves the manor at dawn, carrying all her belongings and setting out on foot to Marlott. But Alec soon arrives with his cart, offering her a ride, she cannot refuse. Though she accepts the ride, she rejects any kind of assistance from him, as she does not love him. Here, Hardy's tragic critique of the sexual double standard and societal hypocrisy takes shape. Tess clings to a simpler, purer form of faith that is not rooted in dogma, but in an innocent, intuitive spirituality. When Tess returns home, her mother reproaches her for failing to get Alec d'Urberville married and ignores the immense sacrifices Tess has already made for the sake of her family. As the narrative deepens, it becomes evident to the reader that Tess already bears the physical consequence of her violation; she is pregnant, thus sealing her fate in the unforgiving eyes of society. The mother tries to rationalize or excuse the tragedy as something inevitable and even divinely sanctioned, it is nothing but fatalism.

Tess finds her greatest solace in the communal singing and chanting at the local church, activities that echo the rhythms and rituals of ancient pagan traditions. Yet this connection is soon disrupted, as she becomes acutely conscious of the people's whispering judgments about her. This moment serves as the first explicit instance of Tess being morally condemned for her rape; an event for which she bears no fault. The social stigma isolates her, compelling her to withdraw from human society and seek refuge in the natural world, which Hardy consistently portrays as a space of innocence and spiritual renewal. In doing so, Tess begins to dissociate from a society that punishes rather than understands, reinforcing her identification with the natural rather than the social order. Nature seems to reflect Tess's sadness now as it has reflected her purity before. This is the author's explicit critique of the unfairness of Victorian society is the modern world. Tess is still in accord with nature and morality; it is only the arbitrary rules of society that she is forced to break.

Hardy strategically places Tess beside the industrial harvesting machine, a symbol of modern progress and mechanized efficiency, to heighten the stark contrast between the natural and the artificial. This visual juxtaposition underscores Tess's increasing alienation from a world that no longer accommodates her values or her existence, reinforcing Hardy's broader critique of industrialization and its corrosive impact on rural life. Hardy reveals the birth of Tess's child with measured restraint, deliberately avoiding melodrama. Yet the quietness of the revelation only deepens its emotional impact, catching the reader off guard. While Alec's violation of Tess could never be undone emotionally, the child becomes a tangible, visible consequence, an inescapable marker of her trauma. In this, Hardy exposes the harsh moral hypocrisy of Victorian society, where a woman's worth is tethered to perceived chastity, and where compassion is often absent in the face of social disgrace. By this point in the novel, Tess's past is common knowledge in Marlott, and she finds herself unable to escape its shadow. Unwillingly thrust into the role of a mother, she is burdened not only by societal judgment but also by a profound inner conflict. Her interactions with the child are marked by moments of tenderness.

Tess's love for the innocent life born of violence is in constant tension with the anguish of what the child represents. Through this, Hardy paints a deeply human portrait of a woman navigating trauma, guilt and maternal instinct under the weight of an unforgiving world. Hardy reaffirms Tess's deep connection to the natural world, setting it in contrast to the rigid and arbitrary moral codes of society that continue to condemn her. It is not the act itself, but the relentless judgment of others that now becomes her greatest source of suffering. In portraying this, Hardy critiques a social order more concerned with appearances and chastity than with justice or compassion, exposing the psychological violence inflicted on those deemed to have transgressed its norms. The child, born of sorrow, seems doomed from the outset, a symbol of innocence overshadowed by circumstance. Despite the weight of society's scorn, Tess's maternal instincts emerge with quiet strength. When her child falls ill, she does not hesitate; she embraces her role as a mother with instinctive tenderness and care. In this moment, Hardy underscores the depth of Tess's compassion and resilience, revealing a love that transcends shame, guilt, and judgment. Her actions stand in silent defiance of the moral hypocrisy surrounding her, affirming her humanity in the face of inhuman condemnation.

Though Tess works as an agricultural labourer, she tries to save her ailing child; even as her own father, echoing society's condemnation, refuses to support her. Her decision to baptize the baby herself is both the desperate act of a heartbroken young girl and a profound moment of spiritual agency. In the quiet solemnity of this act, Tess begins to take on the role of a religious figure, appearing almost priestess - like as she performs her own improvised rite. Hardy elevates this moment beyond personal grief, imbuing it with sacred dignity, and positioning Tess as both sinner and saint in a world where official religion and social morality have failed her. Hardy subtly affirms that Tess requires no parson to sanctify the baptism; her act is validated by the purity of her

intent and the natural moral authority she embodies. Tess names the child Sorrow; a haunting choice that encapsulates both her grief and the circumstances of his birth. In Hardy's vision, Tess is already consecrated, not by church doctrine, but by her suffering, sincerity, and intimate connection with Nature. Through this, the author challenges the institutional monopoly on spiritual grace, suggesting that true sanctity can arise from personal conviction and emotional truth rather than formal religious structures.

But the short - lived child passes away at night. Tess is still filled with the calm dignity of assuming her religious role, and so she is able to make independent and potentially blasphemous decisions for herself. Yet, she meets the parson and tells him about her child. He is also affected by her state, and he goes against the technicalities of his religious position and acts as a sympathetic man to conduct the funeral rites. Hardy clearly values the spirit rather than the letter of the law. Tess discovers a quiet strength in the religious role she has assumed, drawing upon an inner faith shaped by sincerity rather than dogma. In burying her child with the help of a church officer, she completes her own version of a Christian rite, not as a formal priestess but as a grieving mother imbued with spiritual authority. In doing so, she defies the judgment of a society that has abandoned her, asserting her dignity and agency in the face of exclusion. Hardy presents this act not as blasphemy, but as a deeply human, sacred gesture, one that reclaims spiritual meaning from the rigid structures that seek to deny it. The author emerges as her sole advocate by standing against an indifferent fate, an unforgiving deity, and a needlessly judgmental society.

Meanwhile, Tess receives a letter stating that a milkmaid post is vacant at Talbothays, located at distant place from Marlott. She decides to leave her place and join the dairy. More than three years have passed since the bitter experience at The Chase, and Tess once again leaves her home to work as a milkmaid. In the open air, far from the moral rigidity of Marlott or the oppressive legacy of the d'Urbervilles, Tess begins to reclaim a sense of peace. Her spirit responds instinctively to the beauty and rhythm of the agricultural world around her. Surrounded by fields, animals, and the quiet pulse of rural life, she experiences a quiet joy that contrasts sharply with the darkness of her past. The landscape becomes both a refuge and a source of inner renewal, aligning her more closely with the natural order than with the corrupted values of society. Though Tess is nominally a Christian and adheres to the tenets of the faith she has been taught, her spiritual sensibilities are deeply rooted in something older and more elemental. Her instinctive affinity with the natural world, her reverence for the rhythms of the earth, and her quiet, unquestioning morality reflect a faith more in tune with the ancient pagan traditions of the land.

Hardy implicitly critiques the rigid and often hypocritical moral code of institutional Christianity, suggesting that Tess's 'pagan' innocence is in many ways more sacred than the formal piety of the society that judges her. She follows the life with cows and her movements attuned to the quiet pulse of pastoral life. The rich, lyrical language used to depict the animals and landscape evokes a sense of radiant natural abundance, casting Tess momentarily in harmony with the world around her. The master - dairyman, Richard Crick, receives Tess kindly and casually mentions the ancient d'Urberville lineage from the region. Tess, however, quickly changes the subject, unwilling to confront the burden of her ancestry. Despite the hopeful tone of her arrival and the freshness of her new surroundings, the past reasserts itself almost immediately. Hardy reminds us that for Tess, the past is never truly behind her; it lingers like a shadow, entwined not only with her history but with the course of her future. Her identity, shaped by forces beyond her control, becomes an inescapable thread woven through every chapter of her life.

Tess is more deeply in harmony with nature than even the seasoned dairy farmer. In contrast, Tess embodies a natural vitality and instinctive ease in her rural surroundings. She is, at last, where she truly belongs: outdoors, among the animals, her voice rising in song. This moment affirms her kinship with the natural world, where her presence feels organic, unforced, and unrecognized, offering a fleeting sense of peace and belonging that society has long denied her. Hardy carefully builds anticipation before introducing a new character, signalling his significance to the narrative. His subtle detachment and amused response to Dairyman Crick's rustic tale mark him as a man of a different class and education; someone not entirely at home amid rural superstitions and folk legends. This contrast sets him apart from his surroundings, foreshadowing the tension his presence may bring. He is Mr. Angel Clare. In the fertile, agricultural setting, surrounded by the simple rhythms of rural life, there remains a glimmer of hope that she might reclaim some part of that untainted self. It is a past untouched by shame, and the landscape seems to offer her a second chance, however fleeting, to return to a state of natural purity and quiet joy.

Mr. Angel Clare stands apart from the other workers in both manner and dress, subtly marked by the refinement of his higher social class. Though he seeks to immerse himself in the agricultural life, his presence carries the quiet air of an outsider. His idealistic desire to engage with rural labour is sincere, yet he remains both inexperienced and not wholly at ease within the world he wishes to join. Though Angel Clare is the son of a clergyman and comes from a respectable family, he chooses to pursue a life in farming, distancing himself from the religious vocation expected of him. Unbeknown to him, Tess has seen him before, at the village, Marlott, dance at the very beginning of the novel, a moment that now gains quiet significance as their paths cross again in this new setting. Angel Clare arrives at Talbothays as a six - month pupil, seeking practical farming experience to prepare for either managing a home - farm or migrating to the Colonies, depending on future opportunities. Angel is portrayed as a man striving for independence from both his family and society, a trait reflected in his rejection of his father's theological indoctrination.

The wrong delivery of The Imitation of Christ, a book, by Thomas à Kempis symbolizes the ideological divide between father and son. Angel's scepticism toward Christianity stems from intellectual reasoning, whereas Angel embodies a more grounded and practical outlook on

life. Reverend Clare cannot even fathom his son's disbelief, so profound is his own faith. Angel's movement from the city and intellectual avocations to the countryside and farming foretells his relationship with Tess. Yet, he remains an outsider in the rural world; unsettled and not fully integrated among the agricultural community. Angel's tendency to idealize and stereotype others foreshadows the emergence of his later flaws. In time, however, he learns to see the farm workers as distinct individuals. This development echoes Hardy's broader theme, the importance of recognizing Tess as a real, complex person rather than reducing her to a mere symbol or ideal. Through his experiences in the countryside dairy farm, Angel begins to discover some of the vitality and freedom in Nature that Hardy has long celebrated through Tess's character.

It is notable that Tess remembers their brief earlier encounter, while Angel Clare does not: a reflection of her emotional sensitivity and his distracted detachment. His intellectual preoccupations initially prevent him from noticing her. In contrast, Tess unwillingly reveals glimpses of her complex religious depth and troubled soul, which feel strikingly out of place amid the otherwise light - hearted table conversation. Here, Angel begins to consider Tess as a pure, mythical symbol of Nature. Though he senses they have met before, he cannot recall the details as vividly as Tess can; an early indication of how his fleeting impressions and soon - forgotten whims will come to shape, and ultimately harm, her life. Mr. Angel Clare first expresses his interest in Tess in a subtle and indirect manner, sharply contrasting with Alec's bold and overt flirtations. One evening, while Tess is in the garden enjoying the surroundings, she hears Angel playing the harp. Though his playing is not perfect, she is transfixed 'like a fascinated bird, ' as she likes music. Being bewitched, she slowly approaches him, keeping herself hidden behind a hedge. Friedrich Nietzsche says, 'I do not know how to make a distinction between tears and music. '
The other women embody Angel's ideal of purity even more than Tess does. Nature, once a source of solace, now offers her no comfort; it feels like just another extension of the harsh, modern world. Tess goes to bed before her roommates, only to wake when they return. Two of the maids, on the same night, gaze through the window, both infatuated with Angel Clare who is in the garden. At first, their feelings seem innocent and crude, even foolish, but by the end, their tears reveal the true depth of their longing. Their final admission that Angel belongs to a different world and that none of them stand a chance; and it makes their rural existence feel hopelessly small. Tess lies awake, troubled and restless. She knows that Angel Clare favours her and has even asked Mrs. Crick, hypothetically, about marrying a farm woman. Yet, burdened by her past, she feels unworthy of marriage to anyone. Guilt weighs on her for drawing his attention away from the other, purer girls of Talbothays. Her understanding of chastity is shaped by the male - dominated religious and cultural ideals that surround her.

The next morning, the Dairyman Crick is deeply troubled after receiving a complaint that the butter has an unpleasant taste. Upon tasting it himself, he concludes that the cows must have eaten a garlic plant from the meadow. In response, all the workers form a line and move slowly across the fields, searching for the offending shoots. Mr. Crick, Tess, and Angel Clare join the group, walking deliberately. As the search progresses, Tess and Angel find themselves side by side, though their conversation remains perfunctory. Meanwhile, Mr. Crick urges Tess to rest, as she has mentioned feeling unwell. This causes Tess and Angel Clare to separate from the group, and Tess, determined that Izz and Retty are more deserving of Angel than she, and subtly redirects his attention toward them. She praises their beauty, agricultural skills, and the way they blush under his gaze. Resolute in her decision, she begins to distance herself from Angel, consciously creating opportunities for her three friends to be near him. Tess observes that all the dairymaids are in love with him, he continues with his remarkable self - restraint. Once again, Tess reveals her self - sacrificing nature, depriving herself of happiness out of a deep - seated sense of unworthiness. In contrast, Angel's restraint in not exploiting the dairymaids' affections stands in stark opposition to Alec's unchecked pursuit of pleasure, highlighting the moral difference between the two men.

On a Sunday, the four girls decide to attend services at Mellstock Church. They put on their finest clothes, only to encounter an obstacle; a portion of the road has been flooded by heavy rains, hindering their journey. As they deliberate over their limited options, Angel Clare happens to ride by, stirring excitement among them. Unlike the girls, he is not heading to church but is instead surveying the damage caused by the storm. Finding the girls stranded, Angel kindly offers to carry them across. Each eagerly awaits her turn in his arms, but he saves Tess for last. As he lifts her, he remarks that he has waited a long time for this moment, though Tess modestly deflects his words. Savouring the brief intimacy, he walks slowly, prolonging the moment, yet refrains from pressing his affections any further that day. After Tess rejoins the others and Angel Clare departs, the girls lament that they stand no chance against her for Angel's affections. Their remarks wound Tess, as she has no desire to be the cause of their heartbreak, yet they accept the inevitability of the situation. Later that night, as they lie in bed, the conversation turns to Angel's supposed betrothal to Mercy Chant, a clergyman's daughter from Emminster. The revelation is new to Tess, but rather than stirring jealousy, it only deepens her resolve to avoid any romantic entanglement with Angel. She feels even less worthy of him than before.

Hardy depicts Angel as possessing wisdom and admirable insights, sharply contrasting Alec's careless, pleasure - seeking nature. Angel appears to share Hardy's view of an indifferent God or an inexorable fate. Though he briefly considers distancing himself from Tess, the idea repels him. Instead, he resolves to return home and seek the opinions of his family and acquaintances on whether a farmer marrying a farm - woman is truly unreasonable. One morning, all are at the breakfast table and then the four young women understand that Angel Clare has gone home. They struggle to mask their disappointment. The dairyman, amusingly oblivious to their emotions, remains unaware of their quiet distress. Angel, at home, grapples with the conflict between his deep, instinctive love for Tess and the rigid expectations of his family. Yet, in the intensity of his passion, he still

believes such reconciliation is within reach. Angel arrives home at breakfast time. Reverend Clare commands the greatest respect among the Christians Hardy depicts, yet it is his sincerity and conviction that are presented in a positive light rather than the particulars of his religious beliefs. His entire nature is inclined toward this path, and he remains steadfast in it, undeterred by the shifting trends of the church and society.

Angel acknowledges the pagan essence of his rural life, contrasting it with his father's rigid austerity. Though Reverend Clare holds strict religious beliefs, his kindness lends them a human touch. In contrast, Hardy criticizes Angel's older brothers for their lack of originality and conviction. While they adhere more closely to social decorum than Angel, Tess, or Reverend Clare, they have lost their sense of wonder and the ability to empathize with different perspectives. Here, Hardy's critique of society and religion is particularly sharp, portraying the conventional Clare brothers as lifeless embodiments of societal expectations. The brothers' worlds intersect, yet they exchange few words, they are absorbed in their own state of mind. Angel, accustomed to the hearty meals of a farmer, finds his family's austerity stifling. Hardy underscores the contrast between the meals at Talbothays and those in the Clare household: the farmers embrace their appetites and simple pleasures, while the Clares practice restraint and self - denial.

That night, after prayers, Angel finally speaks to his father about his desire to marry Tess. He shares his plan to establish a farm, either in England or the Colonies. Reverend Clare then reveals that he has been saving money for Angel's future land expenses and emphasizes that his wife should be a devout Christian, suggesting Mercy Chant. Angel describes his meeting with Tess as an act of divine providence and attempts to highlight her Christian virtues. However, the Reverend remains fixated on his specific expectations. Meanwhile, Mrs. Clare enters the room, and through her argument, she appears worldlier than her husband, showing concern for their social class. Angel recognizes the profound divide between his family's world and Tess's, aware that they may judge her based solely on external circumstances. Though love blinds him to rigid social conventions for now, he remains prudent enough to prepare his austere family for Tess. The next morning, as Angel sets off on his return journey, his father accompanies him to see him off. A mention of Alec d'Urberville in their conversation stirs memories of the past; serving as a reminder that Tess can never truly escape it.

As Angel Clare returns and unexpectedly, he encounters Tess, she is surprised to see him. He tells her that he has come back so soon from home just to see her. Her heart races with excitement, and together, though in a daze, they set about their daily task of skimming the milk. When they are finally alone, he asks her to marry him. However, the weight of her painful vow resurfaces, compelling her to refuse. Angel is stunned; she loves him indeed, yet she cannot accept his proposal. Angel Clare persists, telling Tess that he has already spoken to his parents and sharing details of his visit. He even mentions the young squire Alec d'Urberville that his father is striving to save him spiritually. However, instead of bringing them closer, the story only deepens Tess's hesitation. The mention of Alec d'Urberville rekindles memories of her past sorrows and deception, reinforcing her conviction that she can't marry Angel. Although Angel hopes for an enthusiastic and positive response, Tess's refusal does not discourage him. He believes she simply needs time to consider his proposal. Their growing intimacy, he feels, is a sure sign that she will eventually accept.

Meanwhile, Tess wrestles with the turmoil of her undying love for Angel and her solemn vow to remain alone for the rest of her life. By now, nearly everyone at the dairy is aware of their relationship. Even the other girls, though heartbroken, accept Tess as the rightful victor, without resentment. Finally, Angel can bear it no longer and demands an explanation for Tess's distant and guarded remarks. She consents to reveal everything to him on Sunday. As the days pass by, Tess is suffered from an agonizing dilemma, whether to honour her vow of solitude or surrender to love. In the end, her heart prevails. There is a striking similarity between Tess and Prince Hamlet in Shakespeare's Hamlet. Like Hamlet, who hesitates, torn between duty and doubt, morality and vengeance, Tess grapples with an internal struggle of profound ethical weight. Hamlet's contemplation of life and death reflects his torment over the consequences of his actions, just as Tess faces a moral crisis: whether to reveal her past to Angel or to remain silent. Both wrestle with choices that will shape their destinies, caught in the grip of forces beyond their control. (Shakespeare William, 1998)

At last, Tess resolves not to reveal her past to Angel Clare, believing that silence is the best course for them both. She has nothing left, yet her love for Angel remains pure, undiminished, and selflessly willing to sacrifice everything for his happiness. In him, she sees hope, redemption, and the fragile dream of happiness. That month, a red - letter day arrives, a rainy one, when Angel and Tess set out in a carriage to deliver milk barrels to the railway station. On the way back, Tess shares her father's revelation that they are descendants of the d'Urberville lineage. Angel Clare, unfazed by the news, treats it lightly and playfully suggests she can adopt the name Teresa d'Urberville, as if bestowing her with nobility might lend a touch of grandeur to their love. Seated close to him, Tess finds their emotions entwined with the misty, rain - swept landscape, leading to an unforeseen turn of events. What begins as a light - hearted exchange soon stirs deeper undercurrents of fate, identity, and the fragile illusions Tess clings to. In that silent, unspoken moment, she and Angel become one as she surrenders herself completely, choosing him to be her life partner. Tess writes a letter to her mother with Angel's permission, seeking guidance, reassurance, or perhaps a final confirmation of the choice she has made. Torn between love and truth, she reaches out, hoping for words that might ease the burden of her silence.

Her mother, Joan Durbeyfield, quickly writes back, congratulating Tess while cautioning her not to reveal her past intimacy with Alec d'Urberville. Tess's love for Angel is profound, and they become inseparable; to her, he is a guide, philosopher, and friend. Angel expresses his delight

at the prospect of their marriage, eager for his family to see proof that she is a true d'Urberville. He wishes to set a date for their wedding. One evening, during their conversation, Tess suddenly bursts into tears, declaring that she is unworthy of Angel. She wonders why he had not loved her when he first saw her at the dance, lamenting the years she spent without him. Angel affectionately calls her capricious in her moods and asks when they should set their wedding date. Unable to decide, Tess hesitates, saying she prefers things as they are. At that moment, the Cricks and two milkmaids happen upon them, causing Tess to spring up in embarrassment. Angel then announces that they will be marrying soon. Later that night, the girls stay up talking to Tess about Angel, expressing their disappointment that he is marrying her, though they do not resent her for her fortune. Tess insists that one of them would be a more suitable match for him and suddenly breaks down in tears. Realizing they have upset her, the girls fall silent, unwilling to distress her further. However, through her sobs, Tess resolves to confess her entire past to Angel, despite her mother's warnings, no longer able to endure the burden of deception.

This dilemma, to be or not to be, prevents Tess from setting a wedding date, but she soon realizes she can no longer delay. The year is coming to an end, and Angel's time at the farm completes. With Crick no longer requiring Tess's services, Angel considers it the ideal moment for their marriage. Though Tess remains hesitant, she ultimately agrees to marry him at the year's end so that they can leave the dairy together. Tess writes to her mother informing her the date of her wedding, but she receives no reply. Meanwhile, Angel decides to acquaint him with the workings of a flour mill, in case he chooses to incorporate corn cultivation into his future farm. He tells Tess that after their marriage, they will spend a brief period at the Wellbridge flour mills, excitedly sharing the little - known fact that their lodgings there were once used by the d'Urbervilles. Afterwards, they will tour several farms beyond London before visiting his parents. Tess worries that Angel has forgotten to announce their wedding date at church in due time, but he reassures her that they will be married by license instead. She is greatly relieved, knowing that without a public announcement, there will be no chance for anyone to object. Her spirits lift further when packages arrive containing items for a wedding dress. Despite these joys, Tess remains haunted by her past.

Angel Clare wants to spend a day alone with Tess before the wedding, so they go to a town on Christmas Eve. With Tess, radiant and beautiful, Angel draws the attention of many onlookers. At an inn, a man from Trantridge seems to recognize Tess and insults her slightly. Enraged by the insult, Angel strikes the man, who then retreats, offering an apology for his mistake. Angel, feeling remorseful, offers the man five shillings for treatment. Yet as the man walks away, murmuring to his fellow walker that he remains certain that he was not mistaken that Tess is indeed the woman with a profaned past. Troubled by the encounter, Tess pleads with Angel to delay the wedding, but her appeal is in vain. In a final effort to confess the truth, she writes a four - page letter and slips it under Angel's door. But Tess notices no change in Angel. On their wedding day, he treats her with the same tenderness as always, leaving her wondering whether he has read the letter and silently forgiven her. No one from either family attends the marriage. Still haunted by some uncertainty, Tess investigates the fate of the letter and is shocked to find it beneath the carpet, unread.

Tess, moves by the sight of her sorrowful friends, asks Angel to kiss each of them goodbye. As the couple prepares to leave, a cock suddenly crows, an unusual sound at that hour. A quiet unease settles over the group, for all sense it as a bad omen, though none admit it aloud. Mrs. Crick dismisses it lightly, calling it merely a sign of changing weather. Tess and Angel ride off in their carriage, leaving Talbothays in the distance. In essence, the cock crowing thrice at this moment is Hardy's subtle yet ominous signal that Tess's journey with Angel is already shadowed by moral failure, impending betrayal, and an inescapable fate. It serves as a quiet, chilling prelude to the suffering that lies ahead. Victorian readers would have recognized the cockcrow, especially when heard at an unusual hour or repeated thrice, as a bad omen rooted in folk superstition, often associated with misfortune or death. In this context, it functions as a subtle but foreboding warning of the tragic events to come. Hardy employs omens symbolically and evocatively throughout his works, particularly in Tess of the D'Urbervilles. These omens function as a deliberate literary technique, foreshadowing tragedy, and underscoring his themes of fate, moral complexity, and human helplessness in the face of larger forces.

After the marriage, Tess and Angel arrive at their lodgings and share their first meal together. As they sit in silence, Angel quietly reflects that Tess is now his wife; her fate bound to the rise or fall of his own fortunes. While they wait for their luggage to arrive, a different package is delivered, sent by Angel's father for Tess. There are old family jewels inside the box. Tess, astonished that they now belong to her, adorns herself with them. Angel, struck by her beauty, is momentarily spellbound. At last, their luggage arrives along with distressing news from Talbothays. After Tess and Angel's departure, Retty attempts to drown herself, throwing the entire household into turmoil. Marian has taken to heavy drinking, and even Izz is deeply saddened. Tess is profoundly disheartened to learn it. Angel tries to change the subject by reminding Tess that he had wished to confess something before their wedding. He speaks of a confused period in his life, during which he strayed and had an affair with a woman in London. He sincerely asks Tess for her forgiveness. She feels relief and happily forgives him and hopes for his in return. At his urging, she begins her confession. She tells him everything about her past with Alec. When she finishes, she looks at his face, it is completely transformed. There is an expression of betrayal, as though she has deceived him.

Angel rises and tells her that he has loved another woman in the guise of Tess all this time. Tess pleads for his forgiveness, vowing to do whatever he asks and to obey him like a slave. Angel, however, longs for a harmony between her present mood of self - sacrifice and her past instinct for self - preservation. His words reflect a troubling double standard: chastity, he implies, is essential for women but optional for men. At last, he leaves the house, while Tess

following him. Angel admits that she has indeed been more sinned against than sinning, and though he forgives her, he confesses he can no longer love her as he once did. He further discredits her d'Urberville lineage. Tess, heartbroken, offers to drown herself if it would ease his pain, but Angel simply tells her to return to the house and she obeys. Later that night, Angel returns and is relieved to find Tess asleep. He feels the night has robbed him of all his former happiness. The next morning Tess raises the idea of divorce, but Angel rejects it, claiming the situation does not justify such action. She confesses to having attempted suicide the night before, and Angel solemnly extracts a promise from her never to try again. Angel is extremely cold towards her, showing not even a fraction of affection for the woman he was so devoted to only a few nights ago. She resolves to go home, and Angel says that as soon as he is settled, he will write to her but she should not be proactive.

Shortly after one o'clock in the morning, Tess hears a sound and she sees Angel sleepwalking. He enters the room, lifts her in his arms, and carries her outside. As they cross the river, Tess fears they might fall in and die together. He brings her to a nearby graveyard and gently lowers her into an empty stone coffin. Concerned that the cold might make him ill, Tess rouses him just enough to guide him back to the house. The next morning, they finish packing and prepare to leave. On their way, they stop briefly to visit Mr. and Mrs. Crick, as Angel has some unfinished business with them. In front of the Cricks, they try to act normal, but Mrs. Crick feels something is wrong, Tess no longer looks like a proud young bride of a wealthy man. Angel tells Tess that he harbours no anger toward her, but she must not follow him. Having learned about her past with Alec, he feels torn between love and moral judgment. He insists that there can be no reunion while Alec still lives. She may write to him only if she falls ill or is in need of something. With that, he sends her away. Tess comes home burdened by dread at having to face her parents. Instead of comforting her, her mother scolds her for confessing the truth to Angel and thereby driving him away.

Tess's father suspects the very conduction of the marriage. Tess has received a brief letter from Angel after a few days, informing that he has gone to inspect a farm. To spare her parents further worry, she allows them to believe she is going to join him and gives them half of the £50 Angel had left for her lodging and other necessities during his absence. The response of Tess's parents clearly shows the lack of emotional and moral support she has at home. On her return, she finds not even a bed prepared for her, emphasizing her physical and emotional displacement. Hardy uses their indifference to deepen Tess's isolation, showing that even her own family fails to offer her solace in a time of profound despair. Three weeks after the wedding, Angel visits his parents and informs them of his intention to travel to Brazil. He explains that Tess is staying with her own family in light of this plan. When his mother inquires whether they have quarrelled, he acknowledges that they have had a disagreement. However, his unusual demeanour arouses her suspicion, prompting her to ask whether Tess is truly virtuous. Angel, though visibly troubled, passionately defends Tess, insisting that she is entirely blameless.

Angel arranges money to be sent to Tess through the bank and then returns to the Wellbridge mill, where he and Tess had spent three brief days after their wedding. Their short - lived union, marked by moments of tenderness, underlying tension, and eventual emotional rupture, now lingers as a painful memory. At the mill, Angel returns the keys and attends to final business matters. He unexpectedly meets Izz Huett, who has come to visit the couple. During their brief conversation, she reveals that she no longer works at the dairy and that Marian has turned to drink. Moved by her situation, Angel offers her a ride home. As they travel, he impulsively asks if she would accompany him to Brazil. Izz accepts Angel's proposal. In a moment of sincerity, she tells Angel that no one could ever love him more deeply than Tess does. This simple truth deeply affects Angel. He immediately withdraws his offer and parts from Izz, yet remains resolute in his decision to go to Brazil. Angel is not so much fickle as he is morally conflicted and emotionally immature. He struggles to reconcile the idealised image he had constructed of Tess with the reality of her past. His impulsive proposal to Izz can be seen as a desperate effort to escape, not only from Tess but also from his own guilt, confusion, and inability to fully grasp the strength and integrity of Tess's character. After five days, he takes leave of his people to go to Brazil

Eight months have passed since Tess and Angel parted ways. Tess has left Marlott and now finds herself alone and helpless. She had been employed at a dairy, but lost her position with the arrival of autumn and its relentless rains. Out of pride, she has concealed her circumstances from her family. So when Joan writes seeking assistance, Tess sends her the remaining £20. She contemplates reaching out to Angel's father for support, but ultimately refrains; again out of pride and the fear of being viewed with contempt, as though she were a mere beggar. Meanwhile, Angel is in Brazil, stricken with fever. The reality he faces bears little resemblance to the dream he once had of the country. Tess receives a letter of recommendation from Marian and sets out for a farm in search of work. Along the way, she encounters the man whom Angel once fought with and he was from Trantridge and is acquainted with Alec. Being terrified, she flees from him. In her flight, she stumbles upon a harrowing scene: wildfowl, dead or dying, left behind by hunters. Moved by their suffering, she mercifully ends the lives of several, while tears streaming down her face as she does so.

Driven by a desperate need for employment, she makes her way to Flintcomb - Ash, where her former co - worker Marian resides. Tess struggles to endure the hard labour, and the approach of winter looms, adding yet another burden to her heavy trials. Tess encounters Marian when she enters the village and both are surprised and sympathetic toward their plights. Due to Marian's recommendation, she secures a position. But the nature of the work starkly reflects her descent into a life far removed from her earlier hopes and aspirations. Tess writes to her parents informing them of her new address, but she doesn't mention her difficulties. This stage of Tess's journey, marked by endurance, disguise, and silent suffering, invites comparison with the journey of Oliver Twist: both characters caught in the grip of social injustice, clinging to fragments of dignity in an unkind

world. Tess is a poor rural girl and her story begins in relative innocence but is soon marred by fate and societal pressure while Oliver Twist, a workhouse orphan. His innocence is remarkably resilient despite cruel surroundings. Both the protagonists begin life with innocence and virtue. Hardy presents a naturalistic, fatalistic vision: Tess is a plaything of chance and fate in spite of being pure - hearted. Dickens offers a moral fairy tale: suffering is eventually rewarded if one remains pure - hearted. (Dickens Charles, 2013)

Tess and Marian toil under harsh conditions at the desolate Flintcomb - Ash farm, a setting that starkly mirrors the struggles faced by women in manual labour. Tess endures the labour for the love of Angel Clare. As they toil, their conversation drifts to memories of Talbothays Dairy; a time of relative happiness for them both. Marian invites Izz Huett to come there. Meanwhile, the frost and snow intensify the bleakness of winter, not only heightening their physical hardship but also foreshadowing the emotional trials yet to come for Tess. But along with Izz, another calamity arrives, the landlord himself. To Tess's shock, he is none other than the young man from Trantridge whom Angel Clare had once beaten. On seeing Tess, he smiles coldly, as though the bird has flown into his cage. Burning with vengeance, he demands an apology, but Tess, holding firm to her pride, refuses. In retaliation, he assigns her the hardest tasks and expects perfection. When Tess returns to work and Marian tells her the story that Angel invites Izz to go to Brazil with him. Though she struggles to believe it, she cannot dismiss the words of someone once loved by Angel. That night, she begins to write a letter to Clare, hoping to plead her case but overwhelmed by despair, she tears it up.

Tess decides to visit Mr. Clare's family and give them a letter seeking Angel's aid or guidance. But it turns out to be another ordeal for her. With the consent of Izz and Marian, she embarks on a significant journey; a lengthy, solitary walk driven by a deep longing to reconnect with Angel. Tess believes that Angel is the only person who can truly understand her plight and possibly offer help. After an arduous walk, she reaches the Vicarage, but at the last moment, she loses her resolve and turns back without meeting Mr. Clare's family. Tess overhears a conversation between Miss Mercy Chant and Clare's brothers which confirms her worst fears that Mr. Clare's family would likely never accept someone like her. The experience turns out to be an ordeal for her; one of many moments in which Hardy poignantly portrays Tess's tragic sensitivity and the cruel moral judgments imposed by society. The unequal social laws and the forces of fate conspire against Tess. Confronted by external judgment and her own internal struggles, her journey ends in tears and a shattered sense of identity as she realizes the Vicar's family hardly understands her plight.

On her return journey, Tess encounters Alec d'Urberville for the first time since she left him at Trantridge. He is dressed as a preacher; Alec is delivering a sermon in a barn. At the sight of him, Tess is seized by a deep sense of conflict and fear. She turns away and continues toward Flintcomb - Ash, but Alec follows and confronts her. In their conversation, Alec expresses a desire to save her from her burdens, but Tess responds with disdain, firmly insisting that his supposed conversion appears insincere and hollow. He recounts how he came to his newfound beliefs, crediting Mr. Clare from Emminster for inspiring his conversion. As Alec implores her to swear to not tempt him, she reluctantly complies. At last, they part ways, and Tess reaches her lodging, where she sees Izz speaking to a young man. For the reader, Alec d'Urberville's reappearance unmistakably signals a bad omen for Tess, foreshadowing further sorrow in her already burdened life. The owner of Flintcomb - Ash farm, Groby, proves to be another source of misery for Tess. The appearance of d'Urberville introduces yet another cruel turn in her fate.

Many days pass, and one day, while Tess is at work, Alec arrives with a marriage license in hand. He confesses that what he had done to her was the gravest sin of his life, and pleading for a chance to atone by marrying her. Tess, with scorn, reveals that she is already married. The revelation strikes Alec like a bolt from the blue. Undeterred, he presses the matter, insisting that she is a deserted wife. At that moment, the owner of the farm, Groby, appears, forcing Alec to depart abruptly. Some days later, Alec appears at her cottage while she is alone on a weekend. Their conversation turns to religion, and Tess, with quiet earnestness, repeats the ideas Angel once shared with her that the Bible should not be taken literally, and that true Christianity lies in following the spirit of Christ rather than rigid dogma. Though she admits she does not fully grasp all of it, she accepts his views with a simple faith. His desire for Tess and the religious notions she conveys, Alec swiftly abandons both his newly adopted faith and his role as a preacher and requests her for a hug. As she declines, in a moment of bitter weakness, he accuses Tess of being a temptress, blaming her for his inability to banish her from his thoughts. Tess pleads with him to leave her in peace, and he reluctantly, he obeys. Victorian morality harshly condemns women for premarital relationships while often turning a blind eye to the transgressions of men.

One day, Tess engages in threshing work, but Alec appears in fashionable clothes and watches her. When Tess sees him, she is upset because he won't go away. He tells her she is neglected by her husband. Though she throws her heavy gloves and they hut his lips, he reminds her he has offered to marry her. Angel held: Tess is Alec's wife because he took her virginity. For Alec, marriage is like a rape and it is a matter of possession. The work continues, and after some days Alec appears again and offers to take care of Tess's family too. She rejects it vehemently. At last, Tess writes a letter to Angel in a state of deep physical and emotional suffering. She tells him about the harsh, degrading farm work she is doing and how difficult her life has become. Despite everything, being the same woman, she still loves him deeply and remains faithful to him. She does not blame him for leaving but expresses a quiet, sorrowful longing for his forgiveness and return. She expresses, in a submissive tone, deep remorse and shame but insists on her emotional purity and her love for Angel. Dolores Rosenblum, in her essay 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles as Anti - Pastoral, ' writes: 'Tess's moral strength lies in her refusal is owned by Alec, by convention, or even by Angel's idealism. The novel critiques Victorian definitions of marriage as legal

possession, contrasting it with Tess's vision of emotional truth and fidelity. ' (Dolores Rosenblum, 1974)

The narrative shifts to the Clare household, where Angel's parents discuss Tess's letter. Despite its heartrending message, the letter is not forwarded to Angel. In Brazil, Angel suffers health troubles and encounters a worldly and realistic man who bluntly tells him that his treatment of Tess is unduly harsh and that her past is irrelevant. Though Angel thinks of Tess, it is in vain, as he makes no effort to contact her. Meanwhile, Tess is visited by her sister, Liza - Lu, who informs her that their mother is on her deathbed and their father has lost the will to work. Tess gives up her contract at the farm and returns home. Tess takes care of her family's farm, while her father's illness remains unchanged. As Joan begins to recover, Alec appears in disguise and assists Tess in the fields. He inquires whether she plans to rejoin her husband, and when Tess cries out that she has no husband, the depth of her heartbreak becomes evident. Alec expresses tender feelings for her and offers to take care of her, pointing out that if her mother dies, the younger children will need support, as her father is unreliable. On her refusal, Alec departs. Just then, Liza - Lu arrives with news that Jack Durbeyfield has died. Fortunately, Joan is recovering and no longer in danger.

As Mr. Durbeyfield dies, the family loses its right to their house, so, they are forced to leave Marlott. Tess is burdened with the responsibility of caring for her siblings and mother. Although they have made tentative plans to settle in Kingsbere, they remain uncertain about how they will earn a living. Upon arriving at Kingsbere, the Durbeyfields are devastated to learn that all available rooms have already been taken. With no other option, they are forced to seek shelter near the d'Urberville family tomb. Alec once again comes and offers to look after Joan and the children, Tess remains resolute in her refusal, yet Alec's seeming generosity begins to take on a darker tone, as his ulterior motives gradually come to light. In her despair, Tess cries out, 'Why am I on the wrong side of this door!' a powerful expression of her alienation, injustice, and social displacement. As feminist critic Elaine Showalter notes, 'Tess's tragedy lies in her attempt to live honestly in a world that punishes female desire and autonomy, ' (Showalter Elaine, 1977). This moment encapsulates the cruel irony of her fate: condemned by a moral code she never chose, Tess suffers punishment without crime.

Much like the rape and the birth of her child, Tess's acceptance of Alec's bargain to provide for her family in exchange for her submission is never shown directly on the page. These three pivotal and harrowing moments in Tess's life unfold between the lines or across narrative breaks. It is a testament to Hardy's narrative artistry that he shields the reader from the most traumatic details. Meanwhile, the weakened Angel returns to his parents' home and inquires about any letters. They hand him Tess's final message, which deepens his despair over their estrangement until he discovers the others. Meanwhile, Angel receives a letter from Izz and Marian, informing him of Tess's dire circumstances and her deeply miserable state of mind. He sets out at once in search of her and eventually encounters Joan, who is initially reluctant to disclose Tess's whereabouts. At last, she reveals that Tess is living in Sandbourne. When Angel finds her, she is transformed, richly dressed, strikingly beautiful, and no longer bearing the signs of hard labour. Tess greets him with a cold conduct and reiterates that it is too late. He pleads with her, saying he has come for her and that his parents will welcome her, but she remains unmoved. She explains that Alec convinced her Angel had abandoned her forever and won her back by supporting her family. Stunned by the revelation, Angel scarcely registers her departure. Finally, he leaves Sandbourne and his journey is aimless.

Meanwhile, Tess informs Alec of Angel's advent. His subsequent use of derogatory language ignites her emotions, leading her to seize a knife and fatally stab him. In Tess's mind, Alec represents the primary obstacle to her reunion with Angel. She firmly believes that only his demise can pave the way for their future together. Consequently, this act of murder is not an isolated incident but rather the culmination of the cumulative suffering and injustice Tess has endured at Alec's hands. In the immediate aftermath of murdering Alec d'Urberville, Tess finds herself reunited with Angel Clare. Their brief time together unfolds as a poignant, almost spectral honeymoon, spent wandering through the countryside and finding temporary refuge in a vacant dwelling. Forced to relocate by the house's caretaker, Angel devises a plan for their escape by ship. Their journey culminates at the ancient stones of Stonehenge under the cloak of night, where Tess sleeps. As dawn breaks, police arrive to arrest her. Offering no resistance, Tess accepts her fate with a quiet serenity, her final request to Angel being to marry her sister, Liza - Lu. The novel concludes with the poignant image of Angel and Liza - Lu, hand in hand, observing the black flag hoisted above the prison, a stark symbol of Tess's execution. Their departure together hints at a potential for emotional continuity in the face of overwhelming tragedy, yet one forever cast in its long shadow.

2. Conclusion

This paper examined Thomas Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles as a reflection of Victorian morality, exploring its key aspects, gender roles in Victorian society, and Hardy's thematic mastery. Hardy's significance in British literature, particularly as a bridge between Realism and Modernism, is evident in his work. He both engages with Victorian concerns about morality and double standards while also anticipating the Modernist pursuit of liberation. The novel illustrates that any defiance of social norms by the lower middle class, particularly its women, was met with severe disapproval. In addition to the above factors, it exposes the devastating consequences of Victorian hypocrisy, which ultimately leads to Tess's demise. The emphasis on form and rigid social conventions renders issues of guilt and fairness irrelevant. Tess dies alone and condemned, but she remains a pure woman. She was no longer a fallen woman but a victim of Victorian misdirected morality, a theme Hardy conveys with remarkable mastery, earning widespread acclaim. Thomas Hardy's work is universally acclaimed for its exploration of fate, social constraints, and mortality. His novels frequently portray tragic characters that grapple with their own weaknesses, the

rigid expectations of society, and the unpredictable forces of destiny. Here is the full title: 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles - A Pure Woman.'

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