

TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES:
A PURE WOMAN, FAITHFULLY DEFENDED

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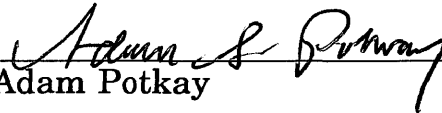
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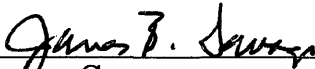
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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this essay is to confront and defend Thomas Hardy's sub-title of Tess of the D'Urbervilles, "A Pure Woman, Faithfully Presented." To support Hardy's defensive view of Tess, I am interpreting Tess's behavior as that of a pure woman in a hopeless situation. Tess's purity is most easily demonstrated by showing her to be pure in motive and a victim of outside forces.

Tess's motives are pure. She is merely trying to live up to the gender ideals of her culture. Tess desperately tries to be a dutiful daughter, a virginal bride, an obedient wife, and a submissive and morally irreproachable female. Although I will argue that it is society which prevents Tess from achieving these ideals, it is Tess, acting as her own judge, who attempts to atone for not being the perfect female. Tess sentences herself to martyrdom, thus becoming another Victorian feminine ideal--the self-sacrificing and long-suffering woman.

After defining Tess's actions as both this attempt to be an ideal female and a search for martyrdom, it then becomes necessary to explore the psychological motivations behind Tess's behavior: it is precisely because Tess is a woman and a peasant, and therefore lacking authority in a patriarchal system, that she feels inadequate, and it is her feelings of inadequacy and guilt, which lead Tess to make her sacrifices. It is also helpful to explore the social forces which engender in Tess her feelings of guilt, duty, and responsibility.

Of course, to find Tess free from blame necessitates the naming of other culprits--in this case, society and its representatives Alec d'Urberville and Angel Clare. Society as a force in Tess encompasses a variety of forms. As a concrete product of history, politics and economics, society not only provides the setting and the background but even determines the forces which shape Tess's life. The conventions or the moral views of society motivate Tess's actions as well as provide guidelines by which other characters evaluate Tess and by which she judges herself. Lastly, society in a grander sense as civilization is juxtaposed with nature throughout the novel. Tess is a victim of each of these differing faces of society. Alec d'Urberville and Angel Clare victimize Tess because of her gender and because of her class.

Hardy's motivations in creating the tragedy of Tess and endowing it with his controversial sub-title are the last aspects we need to explore, adding provenance to our study. Hardy's life, notebooks, and sources--both literary and personal--provide insight into the development of Tess.

It is not so unusual today to support Hardy's view of Tess as an innocent victim, whether of Fate, circumstance, or society; however, I believe that combining this view with a label of Tess as a martyr is a novel approach to examining Tess of the D'Urbervilles. This approach defines Tess's behavior as well as satisfies the inconsistencies in her personality, namely her love of life coupled with her self-sacrifice.

**TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES:
A PURE WOMAN, FAITHFULLY DEFENDED**

In the 1912 preface to the Wessex edition of Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Thomas Hardy defends his novel: "Respecting the sub-title [A Pure Woman, Faithfully Presented] . . . I may add that it was appended at the last moment, after reading the final proofs, as being the estimate left in a candid mind of the heroine's character--an estimate that nobody would be likely to dispute." Of course, that is an issue which most everyone who reads this book does question. At first glance, it is difficult to understand how a young woman such as Tess may be considered pure--particularly beyond dispute. She has a bastard child when seduced by a young rake, marries, becomes the kept mistress of the same man when her husband leaves her, and then, in the end, kills her lover when the opportunity of rejoining her husband presents itself. Thus, it must be Tess's motives and not her actions which Hardy considers "pure."

It is Tess's purity of character which I will attempt to establish in this essay. To show this, I will first prove that Tess's motives are pure by redefining her behavior as an attempt to attain to the gender ideals of her culture and, more specifically, as a search for martyrdom accompanied by a genuine desire to perform penance. Tess is a sensual, loving, intelligent woman who is crushed by the gender and class constraints of her culture. She tries desperately to be a dutiful daughter, a good mother, a virginal bride, an obedient wife, and a model woman--submissive, meek, and compliant; when Tess fails to achieve these goals, she takes upon herself

suffering and sacrifice--which she sees as chiefly a woman's burden--in expiation for her guilt.

Tess generally endeavors to please or to benefit others, hardly ever thinking of herself. Poor Tess--even when she is trying to do good, something disastrous happens. First, she falls asleep while driving the family cart to market and destroys her family's single source of income--their horse Prince. Next, attempting to help her family after the loss of Prince by going to the d'Urbervilles, she returns a fallen woman. When she is honest with Angel and tells him the truth about her past, he flees from her to Brazil. Later, she visits her bastard child's grave, and her family is evicted from Marlott after she is seen committing this indiscretion.

A hitherto unacknowledged motive for Tess is her desire to be a penitent and a martyr. Numerous scholars identify Tess's attempts at martyrdom as acts of self-destruction, even suicide. They see her self-destructive acts coupled with her often-expressed desire to be dead, and, naturally, assume her to be suicidal. There exists the possible opinion that Tess viewed death as a luxurious retreat: "Her depression was then terrible, and she could have hidden herself in a tomb."¹ However, we should remember that Tess did not precipitate her death at her moment of greatest despondency. Her most obviously self-destructive act occurs when she kills her lover, knowing it can only bring her own death. She only

¹ Thomas Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, (NY: Signet Classic-Penguin, 1980), 99.

sacrifices herself when she may bring the chance of happiness to herself and to Angel.

It must be discussed why Tess felt she must kill Alec d'Urberville and not just leave him. Tess believed that she was morally married to Alec:

She was Mrs. Angel Clare, indeed, but had she any moral right to the name? Was she not more truly Mrs. Alexander d'Urberville? Could intensity of love justify what might be considered in upright souls as culpable reticence? She knew not what was expected of women in such cases, and she had no counsellor.²

To validate her union with Angel Clare, "the man who was legally, if not actually, her husband,"³ she feels obligated to free herself of Alec. She could not legally separate herself from him because they were not legally married; thus she must kill him. Dorothy Van Ghent believes that it is a "primitive act of retributive murder," an act of revenge and a demand for freedom, such as a ballad heroine might commit.⁴ Van Ghent believes that it is with this "spectacular but still anonymous" act that Tess reverts to her "instinctive and natural" self.⁵

Labeling Tess's behavior as suicidal, authorities point out psychological motives for her self-destructive actions. However, their theories evade the issue of why most of Tess's actions aim at self-

² Thomas Hardy, Tess, 232.

³ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 304.

⁴ Dorothy Van Ghent, "On Tess of the D'Urbervilles," in The English Novel: Form and Function, (NY: Rinehart, 1953), 427.

⁵ Van Ghent, 209.

debasement or self-deprivation and only ultimately result in self-destruction. The same theories also falter when challenged by the fact that, instead of being self-destructive, several of Tess's actions are even life affirming. Their only counter is that Tess must have inside her a desire for life warring with her wish for death. A closer-fitting label exists for Tess's behavior--the search for martyrdom.

Of course, to find Tess free from blame necessitates the naming of another culprit. In this case, I will show that Hardy's label reveals his vision of Tess as a victim of outside forces--both societal and individual--and completely blameless for her problems and her resulting actions. Tess is only guilty of, to use Angel Clare's phrase, being "more sinned against than sinning."⁶

It is indicative of readers' immediate affinity toward Tess and their belief in her purity that so many argue she is a victim. They are upset by her death and seek to attach blame for the loss of such a character. These critics accuse other characters (in particular Angel and Alec), Tess's society, Fate, and even the very earth itself of working toward her destruction. In fact, I believe it is her society which proves the greatest detriment. It is society which imposes its unnatural constraints upon Tess, forcing her to suffer and driving her to sacrifice herself.

Tess may be seen as less culpable and viewed with even more sympathy if we label her self-destructive actions as martyrdom, instead of suicidal tendencies. The difference between suicide and martyrdom is

⁶ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 249.

subtle, yet it is distinct. Suicide is an attempt, for whatever reason, to destroy one's own life. In martyrdom, one's sacrifice is generally for a cause.

Tess may have absorbed the tradition of sacrifice from her society's practice of Christianity. In the nineteenth century, religion provides one of very few possible paths to exaltation for women. This may occur, in part, because of a Victorian reverence for the Blessed Virgin Mary. Victorians praise the Virgin Mary for her Christian humility, her role of mother, and her selfless service. Victorian women who follow in the ideal of Mary--chaste, gentle and long-suffering--are esteemed by their society.⁷ Though Tess cannot live up to the ideal of the Virgin Mary, she emulates Christ in her attempts to be self-sacrificing. The suffering that was seen as traditionally a woman's lot was justified as a woman's crown of thorns or her cross to bear.

A religious emphasis could foster Tess's impulse toward martyrdom, but if Tess does have a religion after the church refuses burial to her unbaptized infant Sorrow, then it is the religion of Angel Clare. Of Angel's own immense worth, Tess has no doubt. He is even more than an angel; he is deified in Tess's eyes. She prays to him and not to God: "She tried to pray to God, but it was her husband who really had her

⁷ Elizabeth K. Helsinger, Robin Lauterbach Sheets and William Veeder, Social Issues: 1837-1883 (NY: Garland Publishing, 1983), Vol. II of The Woman Question: Social and Literary Issues in Britain and America: 1837-1883.

supplication. Her idolatry of this man was such that she herself almost feared it to be ill-omened."⁸

In his new book, Erotic Faith: Being in Love from Jane Austen to D. H. Lawrence, Robert Polhemus argues that "love, not marriage, success, piety, or God, is the source and requirement for faith."⁹ He defines "erotic faith" as an "emotional conviction, ultimately religious in nature, that meaning, value, hope, and even transcendence can be found through love." Although Polhemus did not discuss Tess Durbeyfield, I am sure that he would recognize her as one of the people in the "hold of erotic faith [who] feel that love can redeem personal life and offer a reason for being."¹⁰

Tess suffers much in Angel's name. Perhaps choosing Flintcomb-Ash to reflect and enhance her own inner suffering, Tess undergoes the unnecessary hardships of life there--pulling turnips in the freezing winter and feeding the demanding threshing machine--simply to avoid spending the money which "his touch had consecrated."¹¹ She elevates these coins to the status of religious "relics" and even calls them such.

Of course, class and gender roles might reasonably have a function in Tess's choice of Angel as an object of worship. Angel is male, well-

⁸ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 232.

⁹ Robert M. Polhemus, "Faith, Love, and the Art of the Novel: 'The Feather Plucked from Cupid's Wing,'" in Erotic Faith: Being in Love from Jane Austen to D. H. Lawrence (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990), 3.

¹⁰ Polhemus, 1.

¹¹ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 291.

educated, and from a superior social class. Perhaps it is natural that she looks up to, if not worships, Angel. Tess is an ambitious and intelligent girl, who is not content to repeat her mother's life. Tess has gone to school and done well, and might have become a teacher. For a girl who has been looking to escape the confines of her class (since she cannot escape the strictures of her gender), Angel represents an opportunity to broaden her horizons. It is not peculiar that she turns him into her god and looks to him for redemption.

Some critics, Jean Baker Miller in particular, find it constructive to explore Tess's actions and motives using some of the psychology of Hardy's contemporary Freud, who has pointed out that self-sacrifice generally stems from feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. In Tess's case, she lends insight into her own mind as she frequently speaks of her own value: "I feel I am so utterly worthless! So very greatly in the way!"¹² Miller theorizes that, "As soon as [a woman] can believe she is using herself *with* someone else and *for* someone else, her own self moves into action and seems satisfying and worthwhile."¹³ Since Tess believes her value resides less in herself than in her affiliation to others, she concentrates on her relationships: she tries to be a dutiful and supportive daughter to her parents; she wants to be a virginal bride and an obedient wife to Angel, and

¹² Thomas Hardy, Tess, 256.

¹³ Jean Baker Miller, "Ties to Others," in The Woman Question: Readings on the Subordination of Women, Ed. Mary Evans (Oxford: Fontana PB-Oxford UP, 1982), 101.

she attempts to be a good mother to her infant. Miller posits that the dominant male culture "fosters" self-enhancement, while women have a "more advanced . . . approach to living," an approach where affiliation is key.¹⁴ Whether this approach is an innate strength or a learned manner of survival, it does appear true that many women, and certainly Tess, recognize, and are recognized by, their value in association to others. Not only must Tess see herself *with* relation to others, but she must make sacrifices *for* them in an effort to feel worthwhile.

On the other hand, it is Tess's heightened sense of responsibility which leads her to believe that such sacrifices are necessary and that she must be the one to make them. It is her parents' feckless attitude which forces Tess into the role of parent to her parents. As the eldest child of imprudent parents, Tess learns early that she must be the responsible one. Tess picks her parents up from the tavern in the evenings; she drives the cart when they are unable to do so. Tess's strong feelings of responsibility prohibit her from properly managing her burden of guilt.

For Tess, the psychological root of her self-sacrifice for and worship of Angel is twofold: she greatly overestimates Angel Clare's worth, while, at the same time, significantly underestimating her own value. In comparing herself to Angel, Tess does herself a disservice--she must feel herself to be particularly worthless in comparison with her inflated opinion of Angel: "When I see what you know, what you have read and seen and

¹⁴ Jean Baker Miller, 95.

thought, I feel what a nothing I am!"¹⁵ Tess feels so inferior to Angel that she adopts his attitudes and beliefs rather than developing her own; she tells Angel, "I knew your mind all the same, and I thought as you thought--not from any reasons of my own, but because you thought so."¹⁶ Tess even has "a certain bearing of distinction, which she had caught from Clare."¹⁷ She "lived and breathed" not only for, but also through, Angel.¹⁸ Tess makes Angel into her god--praying to him, worshiping him, and sacrificing herself for him.

The sacrifices Tess makes are in a desire to please or to benefit Angel. Like a nun who strives to make herself unattractive or a monk who dons rough horse-hair clothing as a penance for his sins, she destroys her beauty and puts on rough peasant clothes so that no other man will find her attractive while Angel is gone. These actions, which serve as Tess's self-immolation, at the same time reinforce her own low opinion of herself. Tess justifies her thoughts of suicide as martyrdom when she attempts to sacrifice herself for Angel. She tells him: "It was thought of entirely on your account--to set you free without the scandal of the divorce. . . . I should

¹⁵ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 142.

¹⁶ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 416.

¹⁷ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 294.

¹⁸ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 217.

never have dreamt of doing it on mine."¹⁹ In killing Alec, Tess continues to follow Angel's wishes because once Angel mentioned, "If he [Alec] were dead it might be different."²⁰ In her devotion to Angel, Tess seems like a priestess in the worship of a demanding god:

The firmness of her devotion to him was indeed almost pitiful; quick-tempered as she naturally was, nothing that he could say made her unseemly; she sought not her own, was not provoked, thought no evil of his treatment of her. She might just now have been Apostolic Charity herself returned to a self-seeking modern world.²¹

Even after Angel cruelly rejects Tess, she continues to see him as her god, as "all that was perfection, personally and mentally. . . . her Antinoüs, her Apollo even."²² Yet, when Angel attempts to elevate her status to one of a goddess, Tess insists on seeing herself as she really is--just Tess:

She was no longer the milkmaid, but a visionary essence of woman--a whole sex condensed into one typical form. He called her Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names half teasingly, which she did not like because she did not understand them.

"Call me Tess," she would say askance.²³

Perhaps Tess recognizes the danger to real women in being enveloped in myth and deified. However, I believe that, as a fallen woman, Tess did not feel worthy of being placed upon a pedestal, from where she could fall even

¹⁹ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 256.

²⁰ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 260.

²¹ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 259.

²² Thomas Hardy, Tess, 407.

²³ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 147.

further in Angel's estimation when he learns the truth. However, Tess sells herself short. By undergoing hardships of poverty and hard work rather than claiming she is Angel's wife, Tess obstinately refuses to see herself as worthy of Angel. Only Tess believes that in comparison to Angel she is nothing. Angel sees Tess as an example of an everywoman if not a goddess. Readers recognize that Tess is the more faithful lover. Even Alec acknowledges at his first sight of Tess that she is "'worth [her] weight in gold.'"²⁴ (Unfortunately, Alec only sees Tess as a commodity to be purchased, which is further emphasized when he later "buys" Tess with money for her family.)

As well as being her god and mentor, Angel serves as her father confessor and even her judge; on their wedding night, Tess tells Angel of her past, letting him decide what is right without a word in her own defense. Then she looks to him to set her penance: "I agree . . . Angel, because you know best what my punishment ought to be; only--only--don't make it more than I can bear!"²⁵ However, Angel does make her punishment more than she can bear when he abandons her to go to Brazil.

Frequently, Tess's self-sacrifice is merely an eager approval of what fate has brought for her. Hardy writes, "Yet, like the majority of women,

²⁴ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 58.

²⁵ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 271.

she [Tess] accepted the momentary presentment as if it were the inevitable."²⁶ This fatalism seems to be part and parcel of the life of a country girl. When Tess tells her past to Angel, she does not try to excuse herself and even suggests first that she must leave.

In an attempt to avoid not living up to society's ideal of the virginal bride, Tess conscientiously tries to reject her chance of happiness with Angel Clare. Instead of eagerly accepting her opportunity to marry Angel, Tess evades his advances. She first refuses, then will not commit to a wedding date, later tries to confess in letter, and even offers to give up Angel if one of the other dairymaids wants him. These sacrifices occur because she is not a virgin, as she is supposed to be in this culture when she marries. Tess wants to be honest and true, but Angel Clare's determined efforts eventually erode Tess's defenses and she succumbs to what has been her wish all along. (It should be noted here that gender ideals only cause Tess, not Angel, to feel guilty.)

At times, Tess does try to avoid her overwhelming feelings of responsibility. Because Tess's life vacillates so sharply between ecstasy and sorrow, she finds it natural to efface herself in an effort to avoid life and its accompanying pain. Tess becomes a "puppet,"²⁷ who submits easily to the wills of others to avoid responsibility for her pleasures or sufferings: she agrees to go to the d'Urbervilles when her mother urges her, she is seduced

²⁶ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 261.

²⁷ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 92.

by Alec, and, when she kills Alec, she only follows Angel's words to the letter even after he has probably forgotten he has spoken them: "How can we live together while that man lives?"²⁸ When Tess turns to Alec's kiss upon leaving the d'Urbervilles, it is "in the same passive way, as one might turn at the request of a sketcher or hair-dresser." She gazed, "Vaguely . . . upon the remotest trees in the lane while the kiss was given, as though she were nearly unconscious of what he did."²⁹

Tess's effacing attitude is probably learned from her society, which praises the dutiful daughter, the obedient wife, the seen yet not heard child, and the meek woman. Acquiescence and submissiveness are traits valued in women. When Tess becomes a "puppet," she is again conforming to the ideals of her society.

When Tess is not actively seeking punishment, she waits for it to come to her; Hardy says, she "took everything as her deserts [*sic*] and hardly opened her mouth."³⁰ Frank Giordano has labeled these acts of acceptance of fate or submission to a stronger will, "strategic passivity,"³¹ because the goal (albeit a subconscious one) of self-destruction is achieved by acceptance of the inevitable. Roy Morrell defines this novel as a series of

²⁸ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 260.

²⁹ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 93.

³⁰ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 258.

³¹ Frank R. Giordano, Jr., "I'd Have My Life Unbe": Thomas Hardy's Self-Destructive Characters, (University, AL: 1984), xvii.

possibilities, crossroads and decisions for the characters, but he also notices that, at times, Tess is "most pathetically skilful [*sic*] at 'choosing not to choose.'"³² While Giordano views Tess as self-destructive and even actively suicidal, Morrell sees her as cowardly--lacking in courage and encouraging, even enjoying, being a victim of fate, society and circumstance. In recognizing this flaw, Morrell ignores, I feel, the very courage which Tess possesses. She does tell Angel her secret; she does baptize Sorrow and bury her child in a corner of consecrated ground against church belief; she does kill Alec, knowing or suspecting the ultimate outcome. It is not courage which Tess lacks. Tess only "chooses not to choose" when by not choosing she is passively working her way toward her own self-destruction. Morrell was correct when he noticed that she encouraged being a victim; she is punishing herself for her own shortcomings and sins--imagined and real, her fault or not.

Tess's eager acceptance of her fate might be, in part, behavior learned from her father. When she looks always on the dark side, she emulates her father, who bemoans what happens to Tess and threatens to put an end to himself merely because his daughter is pregnant. For John Durbeyfield, this behavior is all bluff and no substance; for Tess, it is all substance and no bluff. On the other hand, although Joan Durbeyfield is certainly not a model, it is a shame that Tess does not accept her fate more as her mother does: "irrespective of desert or folly; a chance, external

³² Roy Morrell, Thomas Hardy: The Will and the Way, (NY: U of Malaya P, 1965), 151.

impingement to be born with; not a lesson."³³ Of course, Tess is made of finer stuff than her mother and therein lies the tragedy. Tess is the one who tries to be honest and true and to confess her lack of physical purity to her husband; her mother recommends:

On no account do you say a word of your Bygone Trouble to him. J did not tell everything to your Father Many a woman--some of the Highest in the Land--have had a Trouble in their time; and why should you Trumpet yours when others don't Trumpet theirs? No girl would be such a Fool, specially as it is so long ago, and not your Fault at all.³⁴

A turning point for Tess comes at Flintcomb-Ash, where she attempts to take charge of her own destiny. It is there, most likely after Marian's revelation that Angel tried to take Izz Huett with him to Brazil, that Tess decides that she has been mistreated by Angel. Tess tries to take control of her life again, instead of waiting in limbo for Angel to return: "I have been very wrong and neglectful in leaving everything to be done by him!"³⁵ Tess realizes that being the dutiful wife and submissive woman should be secondary to being Tess Durbeyfield. For the first time, she attempts to sway Angel by writing a persuasive letter. Before she writes this letter, there is a great deal of repressed anger in Tess for Angel's treatment of her which she cannot voice without threatening her necessary relationship with Angel. This inexpressible anger is probably internalized as further self-doubt and inadequacy.

³³ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 275.

³⁴ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 208-9.

³⁵ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 312.

Hardy's narrating voice announces that Tess embodies the outlook of both her parents when "the inherent will to enjoy and the circumstantial will against enjoyment" war within her.³⁶ Upon closer examination of the above phrase of Hardy's, we notice that "inherent" describes her mother's "natural" attitude, while "circumstantial" reflects the outlook of her father, a male representative, albeit a fallen one, of culture. Angel also recognizes this dichotomy within his new wife when he notices the inconsistency of her "'present mood of self-sacrifice and [her] past mood of self-preservation."³⁷ However, in this instance, Angel Clare may be hypocritical, because he wishes to label her past actions as unprincipled and to minimize her present, courageous act in order to support and to justify his own condemnation of her while ignoring his own confession of adultery. Giordano observes that Tess' entire life is a struggle between her love of life and "oppressive and victimizing forces."³⁸

Many critics attempt to explain why Tess vacillates between life-affirming actions, such as her remembrances of Talbothays while at Flintcomb-Ash, and death-seeking movements, such as her thoughts of suicide or wishing she was dead. Is she merely confused? Is there a deeper motive? Or does this double attitude make sense during her time of desperate solitude?

³⁶ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 304.

³⁷ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 247.

³⁸ Giordano, 160.

Tess is not confused so much as she considers joy to be a sin. She guiltily desires to castigate herself while naturally yearning for happiness in her misery. It must be a difficult life when you are unhappy during the good times as well as the bad. Tess is particularly distressed during her brief moments of happiness. She fears that "this good fortune may be scourged out of me afterwards by a lot of ill. That's how Heaven mostly does."³⁹ Tess has discovered that in her unfortunate life, this maxim has been true.

Tess's view of herself as a martyr extends to a picture of herself as a penitent. Tess's masochistic deeds are merely penance which she requires herself to perform for the small bits of joy amidst her life's continuum of pain. However, unlike self-sacrifice, feelings of inadequacy alone do not encourage acts of penance. Tess, who "looked upon herself as a figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence,"⁴⁰ commits conscious or unconscious acts of penance and attrition to cleanse herself of a guilt fostered by inordinate and unnatural feelings of responsibility. Morgan notices: "In her sacramental cleansing of the infant Sorrow's guilt Tess enacts her own desire to liberate the innocent soul from damnation."⁴¹ The label of penitent explains the dual forces various critics see warring within

³⁹ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 223.

⁴⁰ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 101.

⁴¹ Rosemarie Morgan, "Passive Victim?: Tess of the Durbervilles," Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy (NY: Routledge, 1988), 103.

her. Tess is not a split personality with suicidal impulses battling her own natural love of life as other critics claim. Her desire for happiness confronts her desire to be "good," which is equated with sorrow in Tess's mind. (Tess's attitude is not so peculiar or unnatural considering the self-chastisement inherent in feminine ideals.)

In an attempt to compensate for her feelings of guilt, Tess Durbeyfield pays with her two most valuable possessions--her beauty and her life. On Tess's way to Flintcomb-Ash after Angel condemns her, she discards her beauty: she bandages her face as if she has a toothache, puts on rough peasant's dress, and cuts her eyebrows, all in an attempt to save her beauty for Angel. In a heartwrenching letter to Angel from Flintcomb-Ash, Tess begs him to come back. She tries to entice Angel with the good looks which she does not value--"I only like to have them because they belong to you, my dear, and that there may be at least one thing about me worth your having."⁴² When it appears that Angel no longer desires her beauty, she virtually gives it to Alec, letting him dress her in finery like a doll. Even Angel Clare, who never really saw Tess clearly, realizes that Tess does not consider her body her own: "Tess had spiritually ceased to recognize the body before him as hers--allowing it to drift, like a corpse upon the current, in a direction dissociated from its living will."⁴³

⁴² Thomas Hardy, Tess, 356.

⁴³ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 400.

Tess is just as inconsiderate of the life which she does not value as she is of her good looks. It may be argued that Tess's behavior--both unconsciously and consciously--is self-destructive. Several acts which Tess commits in her sleep may be seen as subliminal attempts to ruin her life, and it has often been charged that throughout the novel Tess is uncaring of her life, if not downright suicidal.

As many psychologists, including Freud, have pointed out, sleep provides an opportunity to release suppressed desires. Tess's reason may tell her that suicide is untenable and "wicked,"⁴⁴ but her unconscious still seeks to carry out her wishes and destroy her own life while she sleeps. After complaining about the blighted planet upon which she lives, Tess falls asleep while driving the family cart and destroys her family's horse, their single source of income. Hoping to raise money for her family and to atone for her last ill-fated action, Tess throws herself into the clutches of Alec d'Urberville--with disastrous consequences. Again, in her sleepiness, Tess does not notice that Alec is heading not towards The Slopes but towards The Chase, where later, Tess is asleep when Alec seduces her, and she loses her virginity. Sleep allows Tess not only to ignore the world and her own troubles but subconsciously to seek unthinkable solutions. Perhaps if Tess cannot be with Angel, then she longs to be permanently free from sorrow in the ultimate sleep, death. Similarly, when Angel Clare cries for Tess in dreams, Hardy notices that his "inclination had

⁴⁴ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 256.

compromised his dignity when reason slept."⁴⁵ As Hardy observes, "When sorrow ceases to be speculative, sleep sees her opportunity."⁴⁶

Rosemarie Morgan argues that Tess's falling asleep "is not symptomatic of an innate passivity. . . . If anything emerges from his treatment of this episode, it is not that Tess sleeps at an inappropriate moment but that she suffers from an appropriation of her sleep!"⁴⁷ If Tess is tired, Morgan believes it is the fault of her society, which forces a young woman like Tess to cope with so much and to work so hard. I believe this critique is true--to an extent. However, I feel that we should credit Hardy with more psychological understanding than is implied by simply accepting the argument that Tess sleeps because she is tired. Tess is tired, but it is a weariness of the soul and of the spirit as much as of the body. It is an exhaustion which may perhaps only be eased by a permanent sleep.

Tess attempts to dispose of her life--worthless to herself--in many ways. Throughout the novel, Tess begs for punishment. In a "penitential mood," she tortures herself by refusing to commit to a day for the wedding. Later, when she hits Alec in the face with her glove, she is masochistic and asking for punishment. She beseeches him: "Whip me, crush me; you need not mind those people under the rick! I shall not cry out. Once victim,

⁴⁵ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 268.

⁴⁶ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 251.

⁴⁷ Morgan, 90.

always victim--that's the law!"⁴⁸ Victim is what Tess has come to deem herself; accordingly, it is on the altar at Stonehenge where Tess feels "at home."⁴⁹

For Tess's greatest happiness--her love of Angel--she believes she must pay the steepest price. The love between Angel and Tess appears perfect, perhaps too perfect; it reaches mythic proportions, but like the summer in which it blossoms, she fears their love is destined to fade.

Her idolatry of this man was such that she herself almost feared it to be ill-omened. She was conscious of the notion expressed by Friar Laurence: "These violent delights have violent ends." It might be too desperate for human conditions--too rank, too wild, too deadly.⁵⁰

Tess fear's are justified. Once she marries Angel and knows the happiness of belonging to him, Tess unconsciously precipitates the split between herself and her new husband. She confesses her past to Angel, thinking, reasonably enough, that he will understand. She condemns herself with "no exculpatory phrase of any kind," ruining her newfound happiness (which she believes is undeserved) as well as that of Angel. When Angel returns to Tess and vows that he believes in her purity, Tess's happiness is complete. After Tess accomplishes her single desire, which is to unite with

⁴⁸ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 351.

⁴⁹ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 415.

⁵⁰ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 232.

Angel, she is content "if necessary, to die."⁵¹ It is then that she calmly surrenders to the men pursuing them, quietly saying, "I am ready."⁵²

With Tess now defined as a martyr, other critics' theories may be examined to further explore her behavior; it is arguable that society, and even the other characters, are responsible for or aggravate Tess's feelings of inferiority and duty, which lead to her desires both to be a martyr and to pay for any happiness.

A necessary consequence of Hardy's campaign to purify Tess is his condemnation of society. To prove his heroine's innocence, Hardy shows her to be a victim of her time, her poverty, her heredity, and her gender. Hardy denies creating Tess as a tool of social criticism: "The novel was intended to be neither didactic nor aggressive, but in the scenic parts to be representative simply, and in the contemplative to be oftener charged with impressions than with convictions."⁵³ We need not accept Hardy's disclaimer; while I would agree that Tess is truly a novel concentrated on a single character, it is also a polemic novel, rich with social commentary on Hardy's part. It is impossible to deny the role that society plays as an instigator of Tess's problems and it is helpful to explore society's part in the shaping of the novel's characters.

⁵¹ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 229.

⁵² Thomas Hardy, Tess, 417.

⁵³ Thomas Hardy, "1892 Preface," in Tess of the D'Urbervilles.

Society as a force in Tess encompasses a variety of forms. As a concrete product of history, politics and economics, society not only provides the setting and the background but even determines the forces which shape Tess's life. The conventions or the moral views of society play another role in Tess. These conventions psychologically motivate Tess's actions as well as provide guidelines by which other characters evaluate Tess and by which she judges herself. Society in a grander sense as civilization is juxtaposed with nature throughout the novel. Tess, a victim of each of these differing faces of society, is a "subaltern character," which is, by definition, anyone outside patriarchal society.

As a product of history, Tess is just a merger of the fallen aristocracy of her father and the dying rural countryside of her mother--nothing more. Tess's family lies at the end of a long decline, not only socially, but, as Angel criticizes, they have lost their energy and vigor as well.⁵⁴ It is perhaps her awareness of her hopeless position which engenders Tess's fatalistic view of the world, even before the death of Prince or before her seduction--when she is almost just another village maiden, more ambitious and with Sixth Standard training:

⁵⁴ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 249-250.

"Did you say the stars were worlds, Tess?"

"Yes."

"All like ours?"

"I don't know, but I think so. They sometimes seem to be like the apples on our stubborn-tree. Most of them splendid and sound--a few blighted."

"Which do we live on--a splendid one or a blighted one?"

"A blighted one."

"'Tis very unlucky that we didn't pitch on a sound one, when there were so many more of 'em!"

"Yes."⁵⁵

The once-powerful d'Urberville family, now Durbeyfield, is represented by Tess's father, who is uneducated, stupid, drunk, and lazy. Her mother, a simple woman of the countryside, is drunk, overburdened, and distant from the land which could give her strength. The Durbeyfields depend upon Tess as their salvation. In calling upon their "cousins," the Stoke-d'Urbervilles, they are placing their hopes in the very aristocratic system which failed them. Tess too believes in the continuation of the aristocratic hierarchy; this conviction drives her to place things in the grand scale, some people higher and some lower--Angel (and Alec) prominent and herself near the bottom.

Tess recognizes that as a peasant and as a woman she is in the lowest possible spot of this hierarchy and possesses no power. It is precisely because Tess is a female and a rustic, and is therefore without authority in a patriarchal world, that she feels inadequate, and I argue that it is her feelings of inadequacy and guilt, which lead Tess to make her sacrifices.

⁵⁵ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 42.

Hardy scholar Anne Z. Mickelson notes that there are two crippling strikes against Tess--she is a peasant and a woman. Mickelson legitimately observes that it is because Tess fills these inferior positions that she sees herself as inferior in every aspect,⁵⁶ but Mickelson ignores the fact that Tess is an outsider in every situation. Even when dancing with the other girls of her village, among whom she is just "a young member of the band . . . not handsomer than some other," Hardy singles out Tess in three disparate ways: she is educated, she alone wears a red ribbon (expressive of her passionate nature) when the others are dressed in all white, and only she is not asked to dance by Angel Clare.

Mickelson also notices that society teaches Tess an inordinate amount of responsibility and a strong sense of familial duty--both qualities associated with the subordinate role. As the eldest child, Tess learns her strong sense of responsibility by having to act as parent to her irresponsible and undependable parents. It is her strong feelings of duty which lead Tess to go to her "cousins" in the first place, and it is her sense of responsibility to her family which later forces Tess to return to Alec.

As a seduced and later kept woman and finally as a murderess, Tess woefully falls short of society's expectations of her. Susceptible to convention, Tess falls victim to the "fallen woman"/"woman as moral teacher" dichotomy. Feminist critic Ann Douglas propounds that in the Victorian era, women gained status by becoming the moral keepers of their

⁵⁶ Anne Z. Mickelson, "Tess: Poor and a Woman," in Thomas Hardy's Women and Men, (Metuchen, NY: Scarecrow Press, 1976), 106.

generation.⁵⁷ Thus, women at least had a stronghold of power within their own household and gained some influence outside it. For Tess, at the bottom rung of society as a peasant woman, being morally superior and a moral teacher is the only base of power left to her. Unfortunately, Tess is a fallen woman. In this position, Tess desperately attempts to atone for her sins and to regain her pre-fall status through her acts of penance. At the same time, she tries to uphold the moral rectitude that as a woman she has been taught to champion. It is Tess, more than anyone else (indeed more than Angel), who judges herself the most harshly and even decides upon her own punishment.

Hardy's narrator recognizes that it is Tess, encouraged by her society, who places unattainable and unnatural demands of perfection upon herself:

But this encompassment of her own characterization, based on shreds of convention, peopled by phantoms and voices antipathetic to her, was a sorry and mistaken creation of Tess's fancy--a cloud of moral hobgoblins by which she was terrified without reason. It was they that were out of harmony with the actual [natural?] world, not she.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (NY: Knopf, 1977). Douglas argues that this is the manner in which nineteenth-century females gain power in America. In a related work, Helsinger, Sheets, and Veeder argue that in England women were also becoming champions of morality and gaining power through involvement in the church.

⁵⁸ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 101.

She was ashamed of herself for her gloom of the night, based on nothing more tangible than a sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society which had no foundation in nature.⁵⁹

In these two passages, we see a mode or manner of conduct imposed upon our poor heroine by her society, which runs counter to the natural world. It is within the rules of the natural world that Hardy sees Tess as pure. In his preface, Hardy chastises those critics who question Tess's purity and therefore "reveal an inability to associate the idea of the sub-title adjective with any but the artificial and derivative meaning which has resulted to it from the ordinances of civilization." These critics "ignore the meaning of the word in nature."⁶⁰

In this passage, Freud philosophizes upon the attempts of humanity to conform to the demands of civilization, a common theme in Hardy's writing:

"Experience teaches us that for most people there is a limit beyond which their constitution cannot comply with the demands of civilisation. All who wish to be more noble-minded than their constitution allows fall victim to neurosis; they would have been more healthy if it could have been possible for them to have been less good."⁶¹

⁵⁹ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 297.

⁶⁰ Thomas Hardy, "1892 Preface," in Tess.

⁶¹ Rosemary Sumner, "Knight and Angel: the Psychological Problems of Modern Man and Woman," in Thomas Hardy: Psychological Novelist, (NY: St. Martin's, 1981), 142. (From Freud, "Civilized" Sexual Morality and the Neuroses, 1908.)

Here, Freud pinpoints what is also the crux of Tess's problem; she would have been more happy and healthy indeed if she did not try so desperately to be virtuous.

The above sentence may be said to be a critique of practiced Christianity. David J. DeLaura notices that throughout Tess, Hardy condemns Christianity, particularly as it is practiced in the late nineteenth century. Hardy attacks the dogma and the moral rectitude of the practitioners rather than the sincere practice of Christianity. In other words, he is attacking Angel Clare's morally rigid brothers more than he is attacking the compassionate Reverend Mr. Clare.

In her article "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture," Sherry Ortner propounds a related thesis regarding the connection between women and the earth. Ortner takes as her starting point female subordination and seeks to explain it in terms of universal factors intrinsic to all cultures and times. Ortner suggests that women are identified with nature in every culture. (Although women are not necessarily being equated with nature, they are nevertheless perceived as being "closer" to nature than men.) She claims that this basic culture/nature split, which involves a claim of superiority of culture over nature, is at the base of the male/female dualism.

Hardy describes Tess's insignificance in a poetic and memorable image: "Tess stood still upon the hemmed expanse of verdant flatness, like a fly on a billiard-table of indefinite length and of no more consequence to

the surroundings than that fly."⁶² In light of Ortner's view of the male as affiliated with culture and the female as associated with nature, it is perhaps not surprising to find that in this instance, Hardy compares Tess with something natural, the fly, while juxtaposing her with a symbol of the male bastion--a billiard table. It is indicative of Tess's hopeless situation that she is compared to a fly, which is insignificant even in the natural world.

Although Tess is undeniably the actual agent of her destruction, it is her society which provokes her actions. Perhaps because Tess is such an appealing character, warm and vividly drawn, Hardy critics commonly, blithely blame society's treatment of Tess while completely absolving Tess herself. While Frank Giordano admits that Tess's "unrealistic idolatry for Angel and her inability to manage her guilt" contribute to her destruction, he names chiefly outside forces as the cause of her ruin: "Tess, for example, who is often seen as Hardy's most abused victim, is destroyed by the circumstances of her heredity, her poverty, her husband's heartlessness and Alec's ruthlessness."⁶³ And he is correct. In addition, most of these critics, if they do not blame society in general, blame the dawn of the modern world for Tess's destruction.

Some Hardy critics cite the introduction of a world based on rational and scientific thought accompanied by the general spirit of *ennui* as the

⁶² Thomas Hardy, Tess, 121.

⁶³ Giordano, 49.

cause of a rise in suicides.⁶⁴ Lawrence J. Starzyk notices that these feelings of *ennui* stem from a confrontation of ideals and actuality. Modern man seeks finality, yet can only find that certainty in death, never in life. While this dilemma generally receives credit for playing a large role in Angel Clare's confusion, it is not exclusively modern. In the seventeenth century, Descartes wondered if he was the only one alive and how we could be certain that the outside world even existed. A more germane sub-theme in the same article is that society and industrialization alienate modern man from nature and from himself. At Flintcomb-Ash where Tess is the most unhappy, she is no longer a milkmaid in a field, the symbol of bucolic innocence; she has become literally part of the threshing machine, vibrating with it, working at its pace. Rosemarie Morgan argues that:

The labour/woman exploitative, machine-grinding world in Tess, its exhausting demands closely linked at salient points throughout the text to Tess's beleaguered states of being, is quite clearly a causal factor in her tragedy: the taxing demands upon her energy and resilience have immediate, palpably felt repercussions upon her faculties.⁶⁵

Similarly, Van Ghent argues that the very earth is working against Tess, "clogging action and defying conscious motive." Tess must physically trudge from place to place (note her long walk to the vicarage and back), and she is eventually worn down by the "soul-wearying fatigue" of her

⁶⁴ Lawrence J. Starzyk, "The Coming Universal Wish Not to Live in Hardy's Modern Novels" in Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 26.4 (March 1972), 419-435.

⁶⁵ Morgan, 90.

efforts.⁶⁶ However, it is not the earth which causes Tess to labor so very hard; the earth is merely an obstacle, while her society is the reason.

It is possible that we may add a piece of the picture through a new manner of viewing the world which arose from the materialism of the 1980s. A "commodified subjectivity" is a way of looking at a world strongly influenced by late-twentieth-century materialism, where "commodified" refers to the tendency of capitalism to transform everything into a salable commodity. However, it can be helpful to extrapolate this view back in time to the start of the industrial revolution, when society constantly searched for cheaper and more efficient ways of doing things. The burgeoning capitalism of the modern world and its emphasis on money and value forces Tess to measure her life in terms of merit and worth, even in monetary terms:

She had deserved worse--yet she was the chosen one. It was wicked of her to take all without paying. She would pay to the uttermost farthing.⁶⁷

"I feel I am so utterly worthless! So very greatly in the way!"⁶⁸

"[T]here may be at least one thing about me worth your having."⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Van Ghent, 201.

⁶⁷ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 241.

⁶⁸ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 256.

⁶⁹ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 356.

Hardy entitles one section of the novel, "Phase the Fifth: The Woman Pays." It is not likely that Hardy titled that chapter lightly. He could call it "Tess Pays," but instead he chooses to focus on the fact that she is a woman. It is chiefly because she is a woman that she must pay. As we see, Angel Clare suffers little for his, in my opinion, equal indiscretion.

The modern world's trust in rational and scientific thought replaces its belief in an All-Mighty and omniscient God. The Victorians are caught between unreconcilable convictions--they are replacing their belief in God and Providence with a trust in science and rationalism and Darwinism and Freudian psychology, but they are still products of the traditions and conventions of the previous generations. They gain the freedom of science while still remembering the security of old faiths.

One critic notices that, with the belief that God is dead, people attempt to elevate their lovers to the status of gods.⁷⁰ As noted before, Angel has become deified in Tess's eyes. If, as Hardy's narrating voice believes, "the decline of belief in a beneficent Power" is a factor in the "chronic melancholy which is taking hold of the civilized races,"⁷¹ then what effect does Tess's loss of belief in not one, but two, gods, have on her? She has become distant from the God who refuses baptism to her innocent infant, Sorrow, and she is separated from Angel, who, she believes, no longer loves her. Oddly enough, it is not at her moment of greatest

⁷⁰ Polhemus, 1.

⁷¹ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 135.

disappointment that Tess precipitates her death. It is only when her belief in Angel is restored and the possibility of returning to him is offered to her that she kills Alec and starts the chain of events which leads to her death.

If society is allied with the male sex, then it is useful to explore the role society's agents, Alec d'Urberville and Angel Clare, play in the novel. For Penny Boumelha, it appears inevitable that as "Tess is purified, so there is also a far-reaching and wholesale blackening of Alec and Angel that transforms them unequivocally into rake and hypocrite."⁷² Boumelha furthers, "For both of these male characters, Tess is representative of her sex. For Alec, she says what all women say, but does what all women do. . . . For Angel, on the other hand, she represents a spiritualised version of her sex."⁷³ Unfortunately, neither Alec nor Angel see past their idealized renderings of Tess.

It would be easy to blame Tess's seducer Alec for her problems. He seduces Tess in the beginning and then separates her from her true love Angel, which goads her into murdering him later. It is not difficult to guess whom Hardy superficially labels as the villain--Alec. He appears in a Dante-esque scene at Flintcomb-Ash, holding a pitchfork, wearing black. Nevertheless, Hardy should be credited with more complexity of thought than that. As Donald Hall points out, "Of course one cannot put all the

⁷² Penny Boumelha, "Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891)" in Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form, (NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1972), 129.

⁷³ Boumelha, 131.

blame for what happens to Tess on [Alec's] tweed shoulders; if one did, the novel would be a melodrama. It is even possible to pity him, for he seems in his diabolism nearly as hopeless and lost as Tess herself."⁷⁴ Alec, despite his faults, appears to sincerely--if unhealthfully--desire Tess, and he is single-minded in his pursuit of her.

On the other hand, Angel is not the blameless character his name would lead a reader to expect. In fact, it is even easier to blame Angel for Tess's destruction--he first inspires love in Tess and then cruelly rejects her, wounding her in his fastidiousness. Critics blame this parson's son for his hypocrisy and for his too idealized view of the world: "He can contemplate the idea that his idealised symbol of rustic innocence is dead, but not that his ideal could be replaced by a real, living woman."⁷⁵ Even Alec recognizes the unfairness of Angel's treatment of Tess and offers to care for her when she is "neglected by one who ought to cherish you."⁷⁶ In contrast to Alec, Angel's love for Tess must battle with his morality and overcome his pride before he can accept her, love her, and see her as she really is--neither a goddess nor a whore, but simply Tess Durbeyfield.

The character of Angel is not simply defined. He is named Angel and carries a harp, and yet he is unfeeling in his treatment of Tess. In

⁷⁴ Donald Hall, "Afterword," Tess, 423.

⁷⁵ Sumner, 134-135.

⁷⁶ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 350.

defense of Angel, one critic notes that he is a personification of his society and it is this society which should be blamed:

He is not to blame for the tragedy any more than Tess or Alec D'Urberville. He is simply a victim of Fate which has played so tragically with Tess. He has inherited his ideas from his parents, products of a conservative England. This view of morality, for such a normal man as he, was not to be avoided, but Hardy says society can outgrow it if she will.⁷⁷

This critic is too kind to Angel; it is an English male, although admittedly one who has lived for a long time outside of English culture, who convinces Angel that he is wrong. Angel styles himself a rebel and rejects the way of life mapped out for him by his parents and attempts to find happiness in a rural Eden. Contradictorily, he is embarrassed for his family to meet Tess, a product of the pastoral life he desires. It is perhaps more just to say that Angel is caught between two cultures--the strict Christian upbringing of his youth and the rural life he tries to adopt--and what he sees as their two different moral views: "Different societies, different manners."⁷⁸

Difficulties in attaching blame in Tess of the D'Urbervilles arise as Hardy strives for a psychological truth, a truth closer to the realities, the ardors, the frustrations and disappointments of life; which, when found, he rarely sacrifices to the dictates of his plot. Each of the many complex characters upon Hardy's pages must be rooted in the past, with his or her current actions justified. For Hardy, painting a realistic portrait of Tess

⁷⁷ A. P. Elliott, Fatalism in the Works of Thomas Hardy, diss., (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1935), 103.

⁷⁸ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 249.

proves a complicated and almost unwieldy job, but the seeming contradictions for which readers criticize the novel reflect only the haphazardness and coincidences found in life.

Only in the unsatisfactory, clumsy ending do we feel Hardy's attempt to manipulate the novel and bring a sense of closure. Victorians' moral outrage over a book celebrating a fallen woman was assuaged by Tess's death. Some modern readers revel in the hope that Angel Clare and Liza-Lu will have an opportunity to erase the mistakes Angel and Tess made. They see this promise as a vindication of Tess's life. However, the Victorian reader recognized that such a union was impossible because the Wife's Sisters Act allowing a widower to marry his sister-in-law was not passed until 1907. I feel that it would have been grossly unfair of Hardy to have society defeat Tess and then offer her missed chance of happiness to Liza-Lu, a colorless copy.

However we may view Tess of the D'Urbervilles--whether as a novel of social import or a tragic tale of self-destruction--we always return to the character of Tess during the analysis. It is this figure who draws our attention, intrigues us with her contradictions, entices us with her philosophy. To Hardy himself, she might appear alive: she is possibly based on the life of his cousin, Tryphena Sparks, to whom Hardy was once engaged. (There is some evidence to suggest that Hardy impregnated his cousin during their engagement. When the two discovered they might be uncle and niece instead of cousins, the engagement was broken. Like Tess,

Tryphena's subsequent shame prevented her from becoming a teacher.⁷⁹) When Hardy selected the quotation on the title page, ". . . Poor wounded name! My bosom as a bed/Shall lodge thee.," he might be dedicating this novel in defense of his "cousin." Hardy's affection for his character and perhaps his guilt over his cousin lead him to create a martyred character, who is, if not "a *pure woman*" in the conventional Christian sense of the term, is, nevertheless, "a *pure woman*," a natural, embodied female.

Frank Giordano's contention that Hardy sublimates his own feelings of unworthiness and self-destruction through the characters in his novels deserves serious attention. Hardy suffers from the same feelings of inadequacy as Tess. There is evidence from his notes that he feels just as worthless--at times he mockingly calls himself "Thomas the unworthy,"⁸⁰ and, at other times, he likes to pretend that he is a ghost, "not solid enough to influence [his] environment."⁸¹ Hardy feeling this way explains the particularly sympathetic light with which he views Tess--it is from the eye of a fellow sufferer. Evelyn Hardy believes that Hardy's "emphasis

⁷⁹ J. T. Laird, *The Shaping of Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 120.

⁸⁰ Giordano, 14.

⁸¹ Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy* (NY: 1962), 210.

throughout Tess on *suffering* [is] made with such persistence that it implies personal suffering during these years."⁸²

Hardy's purpose in creating a character such as Tess can only be guessed. Still, there is sufficient evidence to support a belief that he creates her as a lesson to his society. Critics during Hardy's lifetime criticize his management of Tess for three reasons: "He handled this theme [the betrayal of innocence] at length, he made Tess the heroine of his tale, and he dared to call her 'a pure woman.'"⁸³ Evelyn Hardy surmises that this was in an effort to effect change: "Convention must first be outraged before it may be altered."⁸⁴ Perhaps Thomas Hardy wants his reader to realize, as Angel does, that:

Who was the moral man? Still more pertinently, who was the moral woman? The beauty or ugliness of a character lay not only in its achievements, but in its aims and impulses; its true history lay not among things done, but among things willed."⁸⁵

When Hardy defends Tess in his controversial sub-title and specifies his definition of "purity," he criticizes those who have "an inability to associate the idea of the sub-title adjective with any but the artificial and derivative meaning which has resulted to it from the ordinances of civilization. They ignore the meaning of the word in nature, together with

⁸² Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography (London: Hogarth, 1955), 226.

⁸³ Evelyn Hardy, 227.

⁸⁴ Evelyn Hardy, 227.

⁸⁵ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 359.

all aesthetic claims upon it, not to mention the spiritual interpretation afforded by the finest side of their own Christianity."⁸⁶ For Hardy, purity was evidently a natural quality opposed to artifice, not bound by the strictures of society.

Hardy's compassion for his trapped characters and his desire to make his novel not the stuff of melodrama but a mirror of the truth of human experience, lead him to create a tragedy in Tess of the D'Urbervilles. It is a tragedy for the helpless character of Tess, who while desperately trying to atone for her sins--perceived and real--is forced by society into committing more. For Dorothy Van Ghent, the tragedy in Tess stems from an "imbalance between human motive and the effect of action."⁸⁷ Tess questions the fairness of her quandary: "'But,' said she tremulously, 'suppose your sin was not of your own seeking?'" The text painter answered, "'I cannot split hairs on that burning query,' 'I leave their [the Biblical texts'] application to the hearts of the people who read 'em.'"⁸⁸

To conclude, Hardy's heart considers Tess "pure" because she is a human who commits each of her actions with pure intentions: she is trying to live up to the expectations and gender ideals of her society. The tragedy appears as society works so urgently to foil the promise of her

⁸⁶ Thomas Hardy, "1892 Preface," in Tess of the D'Urbervilles.

⁸⁷ Van Ghent, 195.

⁸⁸ Thomas Hardy, Tess, 95.

potential. After all, Hardy in describing Tess's mouth believes, "It was the touch of the imperfect upon the would-be perfect that gave the sweetness, because it was that which gave the humanity."

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