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Cultural Criticisms Within Thomas Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles

Holly Rose Litwin
Cleveland State University

CULTURAL CRITICISMS WITHIN THOMAS HARDY'S *TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES*

HOLLY R. LITWIN

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Brandeis University

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We hereby approve this thesis for

Holly R. Litwin

Candidate for the Master of Arts in English degree for the

Department of English

and the CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Graduate Studies

_____

Thesis Chairperson, Dr. Rachel Carnell

_____

Department & Date

_____

Thesis Committee Member, Dr. Gary R. Dyer

_____

Department & Date

_____

Thesis Committee Member, Dr. James Marino

_____

Department & Date

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TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

HOLLY R. LITWIN

ABSTRACT

To understand fully Thomas Hardy's cultural criticisms within his 1891 novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles,* one must look simultaneously at the full range of these cultural criticisms. The novel is a scathing condemnation of capitalism, Victorian beliefs about women, church doctrine, the shortcomings of the educational and judicial systems, and the destructive forces that industrialization and mechanization bring to the natural world in rural agrarian England. Within the past twenty years, scholars have explicated this text in ever-more specific, detailed, and narrow areas of focus, often coming up with fascinating and meticulously researched individual topics. However, I believe that a much broader and more expansive literary explication of *Tess* is required in order to understand the vast array of cultural criticisms contained within the novel. To comprehend the multifaceted and complex alienated condition of modernity that *Tess* depicts and deplores, a more expansive reading of the novel is necessary.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) contains complex and detailed interrogations of many Victorian values and of the capitalist culture of his time. This novel is a fierce condemnation of the social, ethical, moral, religious, and political values held by the majority of Hardy's cultural elite contemporaries in England. The most obvious example of Hardy's cultural criticism is his assertion in the novel's subtitle that Tess is "A Pure Woman." By traditional Victorian standards, Tess is a fallen woman and as such is considered damaged goods suitable for the lowest bidder. Hardy is radically departing from these values by proclaiming Tess's purity and virtue even though she has had sexual relations outside of marriage. It is, therefore, not surprising that initial reaction to the novel was highly negative. "[A]s everyone knows, this novel stirred up a furious controversy" Keith (83). As a result of the hostility the novel met because of its attack on widely held societal beliefs about chastity and feminine purity, Hardy vowed to give up novel writing. "Well if this sort of thing continues," Hardy proclaimed, "no more novel-writing for me. A man must be a fool to deliberately stand up to be shot at" (Zietlow 6).

Hardy considered *Tess* to be one of his greatest literary accomplishments, which is why in his general preface to the 1912 Wessex edition of *Tess* he placed the novel among his "Novels of Character and Environment." While early critics were scornful of the novel's questionable morality, it was well received by the reading public.

Early twentieth-century critics of *Tess* were correct in noting that Hardy is arguing against the double standard that allows men to have sexual relations outside of marriage but condemns women for doing so no matter what the circumstances. Tess did not consent to a sexual relationship. She was raped by Alec, yet she was condemned by society for having a child out of wedlock as a result of the rape. This cultural criticism is one of Hardy's many challenges to the social conventions and values of his time found within this text. Tess's struggle with Alec is both a gender and a class conflict. The text uses Tess's relationship with Alec to expose the similarities and interconnections between a man's physical and emotional oppression of a woman, on the one hand, and a more powerful social class's economic oppression and destruction of a weaker class, on the other. Hardy's *Tess* laments the destruction of the independent rural artisan class and blames nouveaux riche capitalist society for this degradation. Hardy goes on to condemn the industrialization of agricultural work because of what he views as the extremely destructive impact of technology and mechanization upon the quality of the rural workers' lives. Hardy is also extremely critical of organized Christianity in several places throughout the novel, including the scene in which Sorrow is actually denied a Christian burial. Hardy also raises questions about the injustice and inequality of a legal system, which finds Alec innocent of any wrongdoing but sentences Tess to death.

Studying the history of the literary and critical reception of *Tess* reveals the breadth and depth of Hardy's cultural criticisms. In 1998 John Paul Riquelme published a detailed study of the past one hundred years of literary analysis and critical history of this novel. He writes that for all those years, "*Tess* has been a significant stimulus to thinking about cultural values, both moral and aesthetic" (389). Riquelme gathers a vast amount of Marxist, materialist, and feminist literary analysis of Tess from the 1950s through to the 1990s. He describes how "intense energy has gone into feminist interpretations of Hardy, including centrally *Tess*. It is unlikely that any other male author writing in English has attracted more attention from feminist critics, a great deal of it thoughtful and positive" (400).

Peter Widdowson's "Hardy and Critical Theory" published in the 1999 *Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy* also explores in detail the evolution of critical approaches to the analysis of Thomas Hardy's literature and poetry over the past century. Widdowson writes that Hardy was:

> a widely read intellectual closely familiar with the literary debates of the second half of the nineteenth century. For the purposes of the present essay, we may deduce one – albeit crucial – feature of Hardy's involvement in these: one which casts him as ineluctably "transitional" between "Victorian" and "Modern" and which suggests the affinity between his work and late-twentieth-century critical approaches. If we read between the lines of the three fiction essays – verified by jottings in his notebooks and by memoranda quoted in *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* – it is apparent that Hardy is actually participating in the pan-European debate about Realism, and that he was opposed to a "photographic" naturalism, favoring instead a kind of "analytic" writing which "makes strange" common-sense reality and brings into view other realities obscured precisely by the naturalized version (74).

He describes how Hardy was opposed to the idea that literature should be a photographic, naturalistic representation of human experiences. Widdowson draws attention to Hardy's own assertion in *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* that:

> Art is disproportioning – (i.e., distorting, throwing out of proportion) – of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities, which, if merely copied or reported inventorially, might possibly be observed, but would more probably be overlooked. Hence 'realism' is not Art (74).

Widdowson describes how Hardy's fiction, including *Tess,* has been analyzed by "socialist-feminist, materialist-poststructuralist, or feminist-poststructuralist approaches" (80). Widdowson explains, "What they all have in common, however, is a cultural politics which seeks to subvert the orthodox "Hardy" and to (re)mobilize the "disproportioning" dimension of his work" (80).

By the mid 1990s, feminist literary critics wrote extensively about gender issues and the status of women within *Tess* while Marxist literary critics explored the role that class conflict plays within the novel. Penny Boumelha's groundbreaking book, *Thomas Hardy and Women Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form,* which was published in 1982, devotes an entire chapter to *Tess*. This chapter simultaneously examines the novel from both a Marxist and a feminist perspective. Boumelha writes about "the components of Tess's complex class-position (decayed aristocratic lineage, economic membership of the newly-forming rural proletariat, modified by an education that provides her with a degree of access to the culture of the bourgeoisie" (117). She emphasizes that within *Tess,* Hardy is depicting "the fact that sexual and marital relationships are presented in such direct relation to economic pressures and to work" (119).

Since the start of the twenty-first century, literary critics writing about *Tess* have focused in ever-greater detail on very specific aspects of the novel. Zena Meadowsong's 2009 "Thomas Hardy and the Machine: The Mechanical Deformation of Narrative Realism in Tess of the d'Urbervilles" is an excellent example of this specificity. Meadowsong focuses extensively on mechanization within the novel and how the scenes describing machines themselves have a mechanical syntax. She states:

> I wish to argue that the 'defects' of the novel are in a literal sense the work of mechanization. The machine enters *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* not only as the diabolical agent of modernization but – driving the action of the novel and producing its effects – as the primary determinant of novelistic form (231).

Deanna K. Kreisel's 2012 book *Economic Woman* devotes ten pages of her chapter on *Tess* to a highly detailed analysis of late Victorian milk production, distribution, safety and health concerns as well as late Victorian attitudes towards nursing mothers. This fascinating and meticulously researched social history about the role of milk in late Victorian society in the chapter *Self-Sacrifice, Skillentons, and Mother's Milk* seems a bit removed from the novel itself and only distantly connected to the scenes at Talbothay's Dairy described within *Tess*.

I wish to argue that only by simultaneously considering all of Hardy's social commentary and value judgments within the novel can one fully understand the complex and detailed cultural criticisms that Hardy raises about the bourgeois capitalist Victorian society in which he lived. Hardy constructed the novel so that in telling Tess's life story, the legitimacy of the Church, the legal system, capitalism, mechanization and the status of women were challenged. When explored as a whole, the novel's cultural criticisms harshly condemn the status quo of nearly every major societal institution. Rather than

focusing on an individual element, I believe that a broad and expansive literary explication of *Tess* is required in order to comprehend the depth and breadth of cultural criticisms contained within the novel.

I am in agreement with modern scholar and literary critic Linda Shires who writes in "The Radical Aesthetic of Tess of the d'Urbervilles":

> Texts in this tradition were expected to participate in ideological critique and transform the consciousness of readers. I would claim such effects for Hardy's text, just as I would claim the general intellectual influence of this tradition on him, whether indirect or direct. Texts in this tradition both reproduce the myths through which the nineteenth century operated and imagined itself (how it sees the past, how it views fallen women, how it defines love, how it rationalizes industrialism) and critique them at the same time. This is, I believe, the substance of Hardy's literary project not only in *Tess* but in all his novels, to greater or lesser degrees. (161)

The richness of the text lies in the fact that Hardy was able to critique a broad range of cultural and ideological conventions within *Tess* without the novel losing its passionate recounting of Tess's life or slipping into an overtly didactic tone. Most importantly, the key to unlocking this vast amount of social criticism and ideological convention is to shift away from the recent tendency of micro focus back to more of a macro focus when analyzing the complex and interconnected cultural criticisms within Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

CHAPTER II

ECONOMIC AND GENDER INEQUALITY

It is best to begin the simultaneous exploration of Thomas Hardy's cultural criticisms within *Tess* by focusing on the economic and gender inequality found within the novel. This complex subject matter is vital to the novel's plot. Tess's struggle with Alec plays a central role in the novel and this struggle is both a gender and a class conflict. Early twentieth-century critics originally focused in isolation on either the class or gender elements of the conflict. Either a Marxist or a feminist critique of the novel was used in isolation to explicate the text. However, later critics realized the importance of simultaneously examining the novel from both a Marxist and a feminist perspective. Hardy depicts Tess's struggle with Alec as both a gender and class conflict. The text uses Tess's relationship with Alec to expose the similarities and interconnections between a man's physical and emotional oppression of a woman, on the one hand, and a more powerful social class's economic oppression and destruction of weaker class, on the other.

In 1954, Marxist critic Arnold Kettle argued that although "the subject of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is stated clearly by Hardy to be the fate of a 'pure woman'; in fact it is the destruction of the English peasantry" (49). Likewise in 1990, Marxist critics have

upheld the validity and importance of a Marxist interpretation of the novel. John Goode writes, "I think it can be argued that . . . *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* permits and demands a Marxist reading" (33). However, the nature of the Marxist criticism has changed, becoming less reductive. No longer are the subject of Tess's purity and the status of women considered in opposition to the subject of the destruction of the peasantry and class conflict. Goode argues, "The two sources of power in the novel are gender and class. Tess is finally made into a woman by violation and into a field woman by economic oppression" (33). Goode correctly acknowledges that Alec's rape of Tess is the physical violation of a woman by a man, which Hardy uses to symbolize the destruction of the independent rural artisan class by the nouveaux riche.

Alec's exploitation of Tess and all of the misery she suffers in her short life remain an emotionally charged personal tragedy. Many passages throughout the text urge readers to see the exploitation of Tess and its aftermath as symbolic of the overall injustice and inequality of Victorian England's status quo. In order to achieve this goal, Hardy clearly establishes both Alec and Tess's socioeconomic backgrounds. Tess's father is a "haggler" (43) of eggs, dairy produce, and beehives. The Durbeyfield family's "rickety little wagon" (68) and their "horse Prince, only a degree less rickety than the vehicle," (68) are crucial to their economic survival. Because Tess feels responsible for the collision, which results in Prince's death, she reluctantly agrees to visit and attempts to claim kin with the wealthy d'Urberville family. However, after initially visiting the d'Urberville estate, Tess is horrified. She does not acquiesce in Alec's desire that she be employed on his family's estate but instead looks for agricultural employment within her

own village. Only after Tess is unable to find work elsewhere does financial necessity drive her to accept Alec's offer of employment.

Hardy clearly defines Tess as a member of the independent rural artisan class, a group whose way of life as a whole he asserts is at risk of extinction and whose quality of life is in decline due to capitalist economic forces and the industrialization of agricultural labor. He writes:

> The village had formerly contained, side by side with the agricultural labourers, an interesting and better-informed class, ranking distinctly above the former - the class to which Tess's father and mother had belonged - and including the carpenter, the smith, the shoemaker, the huckster, together with nondescript workers other than farm-labourers; a set of people who owed a certain stability of aim and conduct to the fact of their being life-holders like Tess's father, or copyholders, or, occasionally, small free-holders. But as the long holdings fell in they were seldom again let to similar tenants, and were mostly pulled down. (435)

Hardy's description of Alec's family embodies all that Hardy maintains is wrong with capitalist nouveaux riche society: there, money and status are more valuable and significant than people. Hardy's depiction of the d'Urberville estate and of Alec's behavior during Tess's initial visit leaves no doubt that money is most important to the d'Urbervilles. The d'Urberville estate, The Slopes, was "a country-house built for enjoyment pure and simple, with not an acre of troublesome land attached to it beyond what was required for residential purposes" (77). The d'Urbervilles view land as troublesome and therefore choose not to farm. Their estate is right next to "one of the few remaining woodlands in England of undoubted primaeval date" (77) and in complete contrast to it. The brand new mansion house and crimson brick lodge glaringly contrast with the ancient forest next to which they were constructed. The d'Urbervilles use money and technology to dominate nature. Their estate contains conservatories and greenhouses,

which alter the seasons in which produce can be grown. It is not surprising that Alec later repeatedly tries to use money and power to get Tess to comply with his own will.

The most striking and significant aspect of the d'Urberville estate is that everything "looked like money - like the last coin issued from the mint" (77). Alec's father, Mr. Stoke, is a capitalist who uses his wealth to purchase a new identity for his family. After having made his fortune as a merchant in the North of England, he settled his family in the South, as far away from his business district as possible, and altered the family name. By paying for the title of d'Urberville, once an upper class family in Wessex but now extinct, Mr. Stoke literally buys social status. Hardy disapproves of Mr. Stoke's attempt to purchase a new, more prestigious identity for his family. Throughout the text Alec is called a "sham d'Urberville" (437). The narrator refers to Alec's family as "spurious [and] compounded of money" (183). As Ian Gregor has observed, "Alec's world, the world of the Stoke-D'Urbervilles, is inseparable from nineteenth-century laissez-faire capitalism, it is the triumph of the individual bourgeois ethic, what is wanted can be bought" (192).

Alec's mother, who is no better than his father, maintains a small fowl farm as a hobby. She dotes excessively upon her birds, yet shows utter disrespect for humanity and especially for village families below her own status. Hardy depicts Mrs. Stoke-d'Urberville as follows:

> The descendants of these bygone owners felt it almost as a slight to their family when the house which had so much of their affection, had cost so much of their forefathers' money, had been in their possession for several generations before the d'Urbervilles came and built here, was indifferently turned into a fowlhouse by Mrs. Stoke-d'Urberville as soon as the property fell into hand according to law. (99)

Merryn Williams notes that this passage "is an early reference to the squeezing out of the intermediate class" (120) in rural England at the turn of the century. Throughout the novel, Hardy's narrator documents and laments the increasing prevalence of this squeezing out of the independent rural artisan class long before the reader learns that Tess's family suffer the same fate.

Alec's parents value possessions more than they respect human beings. They have taught Alec that money buys status and that might makes right. The d'Urbervilles' obsession with money, power, and status has perverted their priorities. They have destroyed their own humanity by defining themselves by their wealth and using it to literally reinvent their family's identity. Hardy's description of the d'Urbervilles is a scathing condemnation of capitalist culture because it shows the validity of Karl Marx's belief that "[w]ith the increasing value of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the devaluation of the world of men" (71).

The facets of Alec's relationship with Tess illustrate the destructive and harmful ramifications of class oppression and male domination of women. Because Alec is obsessed with Tess physically, he refuses to take her will into account and uses his financial status to take advantage of her. He thinks that his superior social standing entitles him to whatever he wants, including a sexual relationship with her. For Alec, Tess is no longer a person whose desires need to be respected but an inferior whose companionship and sexuality can be bought.

As he transports her from Marlott to his estate, Alec repeatedly demands that Tess kiss and touch him, even though he knows that she abhors doing so. She protests and

declares, “Never!” After each kiss that he forces upon her, Alec declares, “I’ll stop - on my honour I will!” (96). However, immediately afterwards he breaks his promise and again tries to kiss her. During his second attempt, Tess “dodge[s] aside” (96) in order to protect herself. Instead of deterring Alec, her resistance only infuriates Alec and makes him more determined than ever to have his way with her. He threatens her, “You shall be made sorry . . . unless you agree willingly to let me do it again” (97). In other words, Alec is fully aware that up until this point Tess has not willingly allowed him to have sexual contact with her. Even his initial kiss is described as “the kiss of mastery” (96). This clearly shows that Alec is trying to dominate Tess and force his desires upon her. He lusts after her and sees no reason why her feelings and wishes should be taken into account since they are the opposite of his. He believes that her will should be subservient to his and that he should be the one who controls what happens to her physically. Because Tess fights back by refusing his advances and insisting upon walking alone the rest of the way to the estate, Alec “cursed and swore at her” (98). Tess vehemently cries out to Alec, “I hate and detest you!” (98), yet even this does not stop Alec. He responds, “Well I like you all the better” (98). Nothing Tess does or says can diminish Alec’s desire for sexual contact because he views her as a sexual object to be conquered and not as an equal whose requests need to be respected.

Alec’s sexual harassment and exploitation of Tess culminates in the rape. One of the reasons Alec is capable of raping Tess is that he views her as a mere “cottage girl” who is overly “sensitive” (97). Alec is convinced that his gender and his superior wealth and social standing give him the right to have his way with her. In fact, he informs Tess that he has bought her father a new horse just hours before he rapes her. The gift of the

horse to the family is not charity but Alec's way of using his financial hold over Tess to enslave her. Tess understands this and so although she desperately wants to replace her father's horse, when Alec tells her he has done so, she responds, "I almost wish you had not" (117). Alec is convinced that because Tess is a mere rural girl, her will does not count and he can do what he likes to her. Their disparate economic and social status gives Alec the power to do so.

The rape itself is described as "the coarse appropriat[ing] the finer" (119). The economic term of appropriation is used to describe the disfiguring of natural relations among people. Alec has appropriated Tess's virginity. As Rosemarie Morgan points out, the rape is

> an act of theft, a dishonest appropriation of another's property with the intent to deprive her of it permanently. The term suffices to denote the moral nature of the act, which passes beyond sexual assault to take account of violation of rightful ownership. It is a fitting emphasis in a novel that stresses a sexual ethic that denies woman the right to control not only her own mode of existence but also her own body. (94)

Likewise, Mary Jacobus describes the rape as a scene in which "sexual and economic oppression are closely identified" (83). Hardy's narrator makes it clear that Alec's raping of Tess is meant to be understood within the overall historical context of the continued domination and victimization of women by men in positions of superior power, including Tess's forebears. In describing the rape Hardy writes, "Doubtless some of Tess d'Urberville's mailed ancestors rollicking home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time" (119).

Within *Tess*, Hardy criticizes Victorian England's moral standards for continuing to validate and legitimize this specific type of abuse and all other forms of male

domination and gender inequality. He has his heroine defy the prevailing societal views about the value of women and female purity by asking, "Was once lost always lost really true of chastity? . . . She might prove it false" (150). Tess's relationship with her husband Angel Clare, whom she loves deeply, is destroyed by Angel's inability to break from the conventional societally sanctioned ideas about women. When Angel sees Tess as "a visionary essence of woman - a whole sex condensed into one typical form" (187), she has to insist upon being treated as an individual and not as a female stereotype. "He called her Artemis, Demeter and other fanciful names half teasingly . . .. Call me Tess, she would say askance; and he did" (187). Because Angel idealizes Tess as the perfect woman and puts her up on a pedestal to worship, Hardy explains that "Clare's love was doubtless ethereal to a fault, imaginative to impracticability" (315). He criticizes Angel for falling in love with his own inflated image of what Tess represented and not with Tess herself, Tess the actual woman.

Angel's unwillingness to forgive Tess for not being a virgin coupled with his belief that Tess should forgive him for having had premarital sex ruin their marriage and cause Tess severe emotional and physical suffering. Hardy writes that Angel's "conventional standard of judgment" (378) causes Tess such misery. Tess ultimately acknowledges the cruelty and hypocrisy of Angel's value system and his treatment of her. She writes to him:

> 0 why have you treated me so monstrously, Angel! I do not deserve it. I have thought it all over carefully, and I can never, never forgive you! You know that I did not intend to wrong you - why have you so wronged me? You are cruel, cruel indeed! ... It is all injustice I have received at your hands! (455)

The cultural criticisms of late Victorian male domination and gender inequality found within the novel are an excellent example of Hardy's text asking his readers to question their values and judgments. Linda Shires describes this important phenomenon in detail in her seminal essay "The Radical Aesthetic of Tess of the d'Urbervilles." She writes:

> Hardy's text asks his readers to understand the relativity of their values and judgments. Does this mean that he is a relativist or that he is confused about rape and consensual sex? No. It means that he sees stereotypical values and judgments (whether against the woman: "blame the victim," against the man: the seducer is a cad," or against the event: "oh dear, this is the end of her life") as being socially constructed, historically shaped, and often irrelevant to a particular situation or, more subtly, irrelevant to a discriminating readership. Self-satisfied members of Hardy's audience, the text repeatedly suggests, might wake up to some honest doubt and faith, instead of relying on untested opinions and clichés. (154)

Living in South America enables Angel to understand that he was wrong to abandon Tess and refuse to forgive her. Only after he has physically removed himself from civilization in England by residing in the wilds of Brazil, is Angel capable of determining for him what his real moral and ethical beliefs are. In Brazil, he finally frees himself from mere blind acceptance of his own culture's moral code. For the first time in his life, Angel is truly uninhibited and capable of questioning the validity of his own culture's ethical doctrines and views about women. Hardy tells us that Angel "now began to discredit the old appraisements of morality. He thought they wanted readjusting" (421). Angel asks himself "who was the moral woman?" and concludes that "[t]he 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" (421). Since Tess obviously never wished to be raped, Angel finally realizes her innocence and purity and is gripped with remorse over his harsh treatment of her.

Hardy uses Angel's Brazilian encounter with the "large-minded stranger" (422) to demonstrate the relativity of all religious codes and cultural value systems. In so doing, the supreme authority and correctness of any one society's beliefs is undermined. After telling this stranger about what Tess had done and how he had responded to her confession, Angel became ashamed by "[h]is own parochialism" (422), especially when the stranger expressed his belief that Tess was innocent of any wrongdoing and that Angel was wrong to have left her. Hardy writes:

> The stranger had sojourned in many more lands and among many more peoples than Angel; to his cosmopolitan mind such deviations from the social norm, so immense to domesticity, were no more than are the irregularities of vale and mountain-chain to the whole terrestrial curve. (422)

Although Angel's change of heart comes too late for it to be very useful to either him or Tess, the section of the text leading up to it is of extreme importance in the overall framework of the novel. These passages deal with the core of Hardy's message that all people, including Tess, should be judged not by their deeds alone but also by their will and intentions. It also reinforces the novel's central belief that Victorian England's social, ethical, religious and cultural values are imperfect. Hardy approves of Tess and Angel ultimately questioning and criticizing parts of their own culture's values, which are discriminatory and oppressive, and often questions and criticizes himself through the authorial voice of the narrator and, especially, by calling Tess a pure woman in the subtitle.

Tess's response to Alec after the rape and during his ongoing harassment of her is directly contrary to what would have been considered a proper and conventional response during that era. After Alec's sexual assault, Tess leaves Alec and her job on the estate in

an attempt to break free from him both emotionally and financially. Tess believes that she can only have physical freedom from further victimization by Alec if she is economically independent of him and self-sufficient. Leaving is an extremely bold act on her part. Tess's family is shocked that Tess does not stay at The Slopes and beg Alec to marry her or support her and her child. After the rape, Tess continues to repel Alec's sexual advances and offers of financial assistance.

When Alec reappears asking her to be his mistress, Tess is living in poverty and suffering under deplorable working conditions; however, she still resists Alec and physically defends herself against him by "passionately" swinging "the glove by the gauntlet directly in his face. It was heavy and thick as a warrior's, and it struck him flat on the mouth" (411). After Alec harasses Tess by accusing her of being a temptress, Tess lashes out against him for blaming her, the victim, for the rape. She says, "You and those like you, take your fill of pleasure on earth by making the life of such as me bitter and black with sorrow" (387). Tess has come to view her victimization at the hands of Alec as part of a broader class and gender conflict.

Hardy is careful to show us how Alec destroys his own humanity in the process of victimizing Tess. As a member of the possessing class, Alec suffers from what Karl Marx calls "human self-alienation" (133). Alec "feels satisfied and affirmed in this self-alienation, experiences the alienation as a sign of its own power, and possesses in it the appearance of a human existence" (133). This is why Alec – who raped Tess while his family employed her – tells Tess that she is "ill-used on the farm" (402) and rebukes her boss, Farmer Groby, for verbally assaulting her. Alec's self-alienation prevents him from seeing the hypocrisy of his assertions. Alec never gives up trying to possess and control

Tess. He warns her, "I was your master once! I will be your master again" (412). Alec follows the Durbeyfield family to Kingsbere after Tess turns down his offers of financial assistance yet again.

Only after her father's death and her family's total destitution and homelessness does Tess succumb to Alec. In exchange for her family's survival, she gives in to Alec and becomes his mistress. Hardy deplores the fact that Victorian society has given Tess no viable alternative and forced her into this position. As Douglas Brown observes, "It is this homeless despair of a family which has lost its rights and independence in the village community, that gives Tess finally into the invader's power" (97-98). Like Friedrich Engels, Hardy longs for what Engels describes as the era in which "a new generation has grown up: a generation of men who never in all their lives have had occasion to purchase a woman's surrender either with money or with any other means of social power" (751). Within *Tess*, Hardy criticizes his own generation for falling short of this goal and illustrates the dire ramifications that result from this failure.

Knowing that Tess despised him and feared "towns, large houses, people of means, and social sophistication and manners other than rural" (348), Alec took her for a mistress and brought her to Sandbourne, "a fashionable watering-place" a "pleasure city" composed of "numerous fanciful residences" and "detached mansions" (463). This "Mediterranean lounging-place on the English Channel" full of "wealth and fashion" had suddenly "sprung up" within a mile of some of the most "prehistoric" and "undisturbed" rural areas in England (463). This gaudy city of the rich and famous threatens the continued survival of the rural areas around it. Hardy is using the novel's setting to show how class, capital and technology are dominating and disfiguring nature.

Naturally Alec feels most at home in Sandbourne. He pushes his way of life on Tess by forcing her to reside with him as a mistress in "a stylish lodging-house" and wear "the walking costume of a well-to-do young lady" (464). Tess is sickened by the role she must play and cries out, "I hate him. . . . These clothes are what he's put on me" (466). Because Tess is an impoverished rural woman, Alec will never accept "No" as an answer from her. After giving in to Alec to save her family, Tess tries to survive at Sandbourne by becoming emotionally dead, disassociating herself from her existence by allowing her body to "drift like a corpse upon the current" (467). When she realizes that this strategy is not working and that Alec is relentlessly destroying her, she decides to break free by stopping Alec before he totally destroys her. Murdering him is the only way that she can be certain that his torment will end.

Although killing Alec costs Tess her life, remaining his mistress would have meant sacrificing her quality of life anyway. Alec and Tess are the antitheses of each other culturally, ethically, intellectually and aesthetically. He is animalism – lust, greed, power, and new money – while she is rural virtue – innocence, simplicity and integrity. Tess and Alec and the ways of life that they each represent simply cannot co-exist. Through the detailed depictions of these two central characters Hardy shows his readers that the survival of either the independent rural artisan class or the nouveaux riche class can only be ensured by the destruction of the other.

James Hazen "calls attention to the freedom and courage of her actions" and argues "the murder of Alec is an act of defiance and protest" (779). Tess pays with her life for her freedom. Hardy depicts a world in which women are blamed by society for being raped, and they have a high risk of becoming rape victims because of their gender,

low social status and desperate economic conditions. Tess must resort to mutilating her own body by shaving off her eyebrows, wearing ugly clothes and covering her hair in order to ward off unwanted male sexual contact. Edmund Blunden points out that as early as 1893 Miss Clementina Black observed, "The book's essence lies in the perception that a woman's moral worth is measurable not only by one deed, but by the whole aim and tendency of her life and nature" (82). Modern critic Anne M. Mickelson elaborates:

> The values that Hardy builds into this novel and represents as Tess's values are his indictment of woman as sexual object, of deceit as a necessary basis for marriage, and the concept that a woman who is not a virgin is damaged goods to be offered to the lowest bidder. (116)

Economic and gender inequality play a central role in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and therefore it is necessary and important to study both of these subjects together in a careful and close reading of the text. A deep understanding of Hardy's cultural criticisms needs to start with the novel's primary focus on late Victorian society's treatment of women and how the treatment of women interconnects with that society's class conflicts. However if we stop here, as many Marxist and feminist literary critics do, we fall short of fully understanding the breadth and depth of Thomas Hardy's other important cultural criticisms of late Victorian English social institutions and the societal values and beliefs that each specific institution represents. *Tess* contains a fierce condemnation of the social, ethical, moral, religious and political values of Victorian England. A broad and expansive literary explication of *Tess* is required in order to thoroughly comprehend the depth and breadth of the cultural criticisms contained within the novel.

CHAPTER III

CRITIQUING VICTORIAN INSTITUTIONS AND VALUES

Hardy's complexity lies in the fact that he was able to write a novel that is both a fierce condemnation of the social, ethical, moral, religious and political values of Victorian England and a moving narrative of the plight of a unique and memorable heroine. In telling Tess's personal story, Hardy is able to weave in his challenges to the legitimacy of the church, the legal system, the university, capitalism, mechanization and the status of women without detracting from the compelling story line of Tess's personal struggle or causing the novel to take on an overtly pedantic or preachy tone. Literary critic Linda Shires describes how:

> *Tess* enacts the confusions and divisions of modern consciousness, the "ache of modernism" (T, XIX, p. 129), by reproducing its illogic and its divorce between experience and value. The novel assaults the reader with materials both shocking and subversive. (161)

Only when explored as a whole can the novel's multiple cultural criticisms and harsh condemnations of the status quo in major Victorian societal institutions be fully understood and appreciated. To explore properly these cultural criticisms as a whole,

each one must first be carefully and individually studied. They are each an important and needed puzzle piece to then place together in order to build the incredibly powerful and complex picture of how all-encompassing Thomas Hardy's cultural criticisms within the novel really are.

Hardy's cultural criticisms within *Tess* are broader than his condemnation of Victorian attitudes to women and his dismay at the destruction of the independent rural artisan class by the nouveaux riche capitalists and their relentless drive towards industrialization. While major characters such as Tess and Alec depict those struggles and Hardy's attitudes about them, it is Hardy's minor characters in *Tess* that shed light on Hardy's cultural criticisms of Victorian educational and religious institutions and their failings. Hardy clearly uses the sections of the novel devoted to Angel Clare's family and upbringing in order to build more of his own values and cultural criticisms into the text. Hardy's description of Angel's brothers Felix and Cuthbert is a very humorous yet searing condemnation of all that is wrong with upper class life. Angel's brothers blindly accept the fashionable status quo popular at the time without ever truly thinking for themselves. They have received an excellent education but are unable to think for themselves and are conformists to whatever is in vogue within their own upper class social circles. In describing Felix and Cuthbert, Hardy writes that they are:

> well-educated, hall-marked young men, correct to their remotest fibre; such unimpeachable models as are turned out yearly by the lathe of a systematic tuition. They were both somewhat short-sighted, and when it was the custom to wear a single eyeglass and string they wore a single eyeglass and string; when it was the custom to wear a double glass they wore a double glass; when it was the custom to wear spectacles they wore spectacles straightway, all without reference to the particular variety of defect in their own vision. When Wordsworth was enthroned they carried pocket copies; when Shelley was belittled they allowed him to grow dusty

> on their shelves. When Correggio's Holy families were admired, they admired Correggio's Holy Families; when he was decried in favour of Velasquez, they sedulously followed suit without any personal objection. (219)

Implicit within Hardy's bitingly sarcastic description of Felix and Cuthbert, there is an overall criticism of the church and the university system for producing such unthinking and excessively conventional men. Felix is "all Church" and "Cuthbert all College" (219). Along with most of their elite and educated male peers, "[e]ach brother candidly recognized that there were a few unimportant scores of millions of outsiders in civilized society, persons who were neither University men nor churchmen; but they were to be tolerated rather than reckoned with and respected" (219-20).

Hardy believes that higher education and clerical training are failures because they have produced such conceited and uncomprehending men. He criticizes his generation of church officials and university graduates for their lack of understanding of the overall world and of their limited role within it. Of Angel's brothers, Hardy tells us:

> Neither had an adequate conception of the complicated forces at work outside the smooth and gentle current in which they and their associates floated. Neither saw the difference between local truth and universal truth; that what the inner world said in their clerical and academic hearing was quite a different thing from what the outer world was thinking. (219-20)

It is clear from this passage that Hardy viewed Cambridge, Oxford and the priesthood as institutionalized ivory towers where students were insulated and protected from the real world and as a result were incapable of understanding that world, the world in which Tess along with the rest of the "unimportant scores of millions" (219) were forced to live and silently suffer.

Throughout the novel, there are additional indications of Hardy's disapproval of organized religion. It is, after all, Parson Tringham, a clergyman, whose lack of restraint and poor judgment cause him to tell Jack Durbeyfield of the Durbeyfield family's noble lineage, which sets in motion the terrible events that ultimately lead to Alec's assault on Tess and to both of their deaths. Parson Tringham's desire to humor himself at Jack's expense is obvious. He mockingly tells Jack, "[t]hrow up your chin a moment, so that I may catch the profile of your face better. Yes, that's the d'Urberville nose and chin - a little debased" (44). The parson admits that his telling Jack about the family's history is a classic example of when "our impulses are too strong for our judgment" (44-45). Although the clergyman regrets his lack of discretion and thinks it was a mistake to inform Jack of such useless information, it is too late; the damage has already been done. By telling Jack things that could only harm him and his family, Parson Tringham exhibits a great deal of insensitivity towards the wellbeing of his parishioners.

This same insensitivity is displayed by the religious sign painter who works "for the glory of God" (127). Hardy describes the frightening religious warnings that he paints in large glaring red letters on every wall, gate and stile throughout the countryside as a "hideous defacement - the last grotesque phase of a creed which had served mankind well in its time" (128). After seeing the religious sign painter paint "THY, DAMNATION, SLUMBERETH, NOT" (128), Tess tells him that his signs "are horrible . . . Crushing! killing!" (128). The painter responds, "That's what they are meant to be!" (128). Hardy criticizes the oppressive nature of religious doctrine through his descriptions of the religious sign painter, who views all of mankind as dangerous potential sinners who must be frightened into submission to God's will. His signs are destroying the beauty of the

landscape and are defiling the lush scenery and rural environment that surround them. Hardy writes that the wood upon which these signs are painted becomes distressed and wishes to rebel from having to carry messages that crush the human spirit. For Hardy, religious fundamentalism and intolerance is a destructive force in the late Victorian era that shares much in common with capitalism and industrialization in that all of these cultural constructs deface the natural landscape and endanger the rural agrarian way of life which has more humane and compassionate values.

It is Angel's father, Vicar Clare, who inspired the sign painter to undertake his mission and who attempted to convince Alec to accept Christ and abandon his life of debauchery. Hardy describes Mr. Clare as a complex man who is both deeply devout and full of compassion and love for mankind. However, he makes it clear that Vicar Clare exhibits kindness and mercy in spite of his narrow dogma and evangelical beliefs and not because of them. Yet Clare's religious convictions are responsible for some of his other good traits, such as selflessness, humility, devotion to missionary work and his indifference to both his reputation and material possessions. Clare's refusal to send Angel to Cambridge after he learns of his son's agnosticism is the best example of the Vicar's internal conflict between his compassionate love of others and his desire to uphold church doctrine and values. Hardy writes of how Clare, full of regret, lay awake at nights grieving over his decision not to let Angel attend Cambridge. He states:

> But the uncompromising Evangelical did not even now hold that he would have been justified in giving his son, an unbeliever, the same academic advantages that he had given the two others, when it was possible, if not probable, that those very advantages might have been used to decry the doctrines which he had made it his life's mission and desire to propagate, and the mission of his ordained sons likewise. To put with one hand a pedestal under the feet of the two faithful ones, and with the other to

> exhault the unfaithful by the same artificial means, he deemed to be alike inconsistent with his convictions, his position, and his hopes. Nevertheless, he loved his misnamed Angel, and in secret mourned over his treatment of him. (419-20)

Hardy's description of Clare's personal struggle between his love for his son and his desire to fulfill his own religious obligations is a powerful example of the painful dichotomy created by an organized religion that is at times at odds with the best humanist tendencies. In this section of the novel Hardy is showing his readers the limitations and flaws within Victorian religious dogma. Tolerance, compassion and love conflict with religious teachings and theological values.

The scene in which Angel tells his father of his loss of faith for the first time is an equally tragic expression of the tension created when personal integrity and religious dogma conflict. Hardy writes, "His father grieved so deeply that it made Angel quite ill to see him" (171). Angel's revelation about his agnosticism tears his family apart; however, it also serves to illustrate Angel's honesty and integrity. Angel's candid admission that his conscience will not allow him to become ordained as the minister of an institution whose tenets he does not believe in and fully agree with is commendable. James Hazen believes that "[i]n his refusal to serve the Church without believing in it--despite the great material and social advantages of doing so--he shows an integrity comparable to Tess's" (789). It is clear that Hardy views Angel's renunciation of official church doctrine favorably because it shows not only honesty but courage and the ability to think for one's self as well. When Vicar Clare asks what use a university education is if it is not used "for the honour and glory of God" Angel replies, "Why that it may be used for the honour and glory of man" (171). Hardy was himself an agnostic and shared Angel's humanist

values and independence of thought on matters of theology. He therefore praises Angel's response to the church within this novel.

The rest of the "religious" figures found in the text fall short of the level of compassion and mercy that Angel displays at the very end of the novel when he returns from Brazil and abandons conventional values. Angel, who has lost his faith in Christianity, ultimately shows more compassion towards Tess than anyone else. For Hardy, the freethinker and the non-believer turn out to be the better human beings. Miss Mercy Chant dedicates her life to the church, yet she does not fulfill the ideals her Christian name represents. We encounter her "by the church, from whose walls she seemed to be a sort of emanation" (339). She is "prudish" (376) and intolerant of opinions and religious beliefs that differ from her own. When Angel suggests that life in a cloister might be preferable to life in Brazil, Mercy responds severely, "Why, you wicked man, a cloister implies a monk, and a monk Roman Catholicism. And Roman Catholicism sin, and sin damnation. Thou art in a parlous state, Angel Clare. I glory in my Protestantism!" (339). According to Hardy, Mercy Chant is the human manifestation of the Church of England. As such she displays the divisive nature of organized religion, which pits sect against sect and has each call all others false and sinful.

The section of the novel devoted to the birth and death of Sorrow contains some of Hardy's most candid criticisms of official church doctrine. Tess, who is a mixture of both pagan and Christian tendencies and who bears a child out of wedlock, is able to achieve a level of spirituality while baptizing her son that no clerical figure throughout the novel ever approaches. The very act of baptizing her son by herself is wrong in the eyes of the church, but because it is done out of intense and genuine love for her child

and the desire to ensure his spiritual wellbeing, Tess is transformed by the experience into "a divine personage" (146). Hardy writes, "The ecstasy of faith almost apotheosized her" (145). Tess's intense love for her child compels her to act. Hardy contrasts the love of others that motivates Tess with the church's use of fear of punishment as a way to prevent sin and ensure righteousness. He disapproves of the many "details of torment sometimes taught the young in this Christian country" (143), such as the gruesome description of Satan torturing sinners in "the nethermost corner of hell" (143).

When Tess asks her parson if Sorrow's baptism is valid and if he can have a Christian burial, the vicar ultimately says "Yes," although in order to do so he must directly go against church doctrine. Hardy explains that "[t]he man and the ecclesiastic fought within him, and the victory fell to the man" (147). This sentence is a searing condemnation of organized religion for its diametric opposition to the very values that it purports to represent such as Christian charity, forgiveness and brotherly love. The fact that the parson must transgress church tenets in order to do the humane and merciful thing shows the rigidity and inhumanity of the church.

Within *Tess*, Hardy does not spare the legal system of late Victorian England from the same scrutiny that he gave the church and the educational system. Immediately after Tess's execution, Hardy writes, "'Justice' was done" (489). These three words carry incredible force. They show that injustice and inequality are at the very core of a legal system that could execute Tess and consider Alec innocent of any wrongdoing. Hardy shares Karl Marx's belief that bourgeois "jurisprudence is but the will of [the bourgeois] . . . class made into law for all" (487). Hardy critiques the legal system for being a tool that the owning classes use to enforce their disfiguring will and domination of nature itself,

human nature, gender relations and social interactions. By having the police capture Tess, as she lies prostrate on the altar at Stonehenge, Hardy emphasizes how Tess becomes a scapegoat who is literally sacrificed in order to preserve the status quo of unjust social laws.

That Hardy believes in Tess's innocence and essential goodness even after she has killed Alec is clear. Throughout the novel, Hardy repeatedly reminds us that Tess "had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment" (135) because nature "respects not the social law" (146) of Victorian society. Tess is in harmony with nature and has only transgressed the flawed value system which society has imposed upon her. Hardy criticized Angel for not accepting Tess after he finds out she is not a virgin. He now praises Angel for ultimately being able to forgive and love Tess although she has killed a man. Hardy believes that Angel's promise never to desert or detest Tess but to protect and love her always regardless of her having killed Alec is just and merciful. Hardy approvingly writes, "Tenderness was absolutely dominant in Clare at last" (475). Hardy uses this contrast to show his readers that this same tenderness, compassion and understanding of humanity is missing from the Victorian legal system, which convicts Tess of murder and punishes her for this crime by executing her.

Within *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Hardy uses Tess's different experiences at various agricultural jobs to continue his cultural criticisms by commenting on the way in which he feels the rural agrarian way of life is being destroyed by capitalism and industrialization. Hardy is highly critical of the dehumanizing and destructive effects that mechanization brings to the lives of late Victorian rural agricultural laborers. Douglas

Brown has argued that Hardy's five great novels all depict the "clash between agricultural and urban modes of life" (30). He notes that during the two years that Hardy was at work on Tess, he "roamed the Dorset countryside, dismayed by the evidence of appalling disaster, buildings crumbled, fences collapsed, roads decayed, and farmhouses were abandoned" (35). Brown concludes that Tess "treats in imaginative form . . . the defeat of our peasantry and the collapse of our agriculture" (36). Talbothays dairy represents the type of agricultural life that is regrettably being destroyed. "Dairyman Crick's household of maids and men lived on comfortably, placidly, even merrily" (185), in large part because the maids and men are treated as equals by their employer. The Cricks provide food and shelter for their out-of-town employees in their house; they eat communally with the workers who share their home and dairyman Mr. Crick often milks cows alongside his employees. Since there is not a trace of machinery on the dairy, the milking, cheesemaking and butter production are all done by hand. For Hardy Talbothays dairy is the ideal agrarian workplace because there is no mechanization, the workers and owners respect each other and they are all in harmony with nature and appreciative of their rural landscape and environment.

The Cricks are the antitheses of the d'Urbervilles. Alec's abuse occurs and remains undetected because Mrs. d'Urberville lives in her mansion, entirely apart from Tess, and has no social interaction with her. Hardy says of Talbothays, "[b]reakfasts were breakfasts here" (175) and this is not a coincidence. Because the Cricks eat alongside their employees and eat exactly the same food that they give their workers, they would suffer with their dairy workers if they denied them decent food or accommodations. By contrast, the more inhumanely and deplorably Mr. Stoke-d'Urberville, the merchant,

treated his employees; the less he paid them, the greater his profits and the larger his fortune. The only direct reference the text makes to Alec and his parents while Tess is at Talbothays is the narrator's contrasting Tess's moral character with theirs: Tess "was no spurious d'Urberville, compounded of money and ambition like those at Tantridge" (183).

The quality of life Tess encounters at Talbothays is sharply contrasted with her treatment at Flintcomb-Ash. Because dairy work is seasonal, she has to look for employment elsewhere after the season ends at Talbothays. Marian and Izz, her fellow dairymaids at Talbothays, also end up at Flintcomb-Ash demonstrating that more than just personal forces are at work. Hardy is showing us that what happens to Tess, Izz and Marian is part of an overall societal trend. All three milkmaids must settle for field labor at "a starve-acre place" (358) because they can find nothing better. Douglas Brown notes, "Flintcomb Ash directly reflects the new farming, contrasting in every essential with Talbothays" (94). Brown goes on to argue that Flintcomb-Ash "emphasizes the less human quality of the life that has replaced that older life, an older life embodied earlier at Talbothays" (95).

Hardy's description of the quality of life of the workers at Flintcomb-Ash is very similar to Karl Marx's assertion that "[w]ith the increasing value of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the devaluation of the world of men" (71). Flintcomb-Ash is "a starve-acre place," (360) "almost sublime in its dreariness," (358) at which Tess and the other field laborers work outdoors during pouring rain and freezing snow because "if they did not work they would not be paid" (361). Tess's boss, Farmer Groby is described as "a master [and a] man of stone, who would have cuffed her if he had dared" (397).

Marian becomes an alcoholic in order to dull the pain of her wretched existence, according to Hardy. She describes liquor as "the only comfort I've got now" (358). Hardy believes that the wage laborer under a profit- oriented system becomes a virtual slave, working excessively long hours each day. He describes how "Tess slaved in the morning frosts and in the afternoon rains" (362).

Merryn Williams points out that "Tess ... only does humanly meaningful work at Talbothays, whereas at Flintcomb-Ash she is degraded to a mere wage-slave" (177). In addition, George Wotton notes the similarities between Karl Marx and Thomas Hardy's criticisms of the decline of the quality of rural life in late Victorian England. Both men believe capitalistic expansion and industrialization of agricultural work are to blame. Comparing Hardy's *Tess* with Marx's writings reveals a striking similarity between Marx and Hardy's ideas about the overall effect of capitalism upon the moral well-being of society. Wotton describes how like Hardy, Marx talked specifically about the "transformation of the rural worker into a propertyless wage laborer" (17) within England during the second half of the nineteenth century. Marx stated, "Nowhere does the antagonistic character of capitalist production and accumulation assert itself more brutally than in the progress of English agriculture" (17). Within *Tess*, Hardy renders in fictional form this brutal transformation of the independent rural artisan class and the peasantry into property-less wage laborers who are exploited under capitalism.

The threshing scene at Flintcomb-Ash is the most dramatic example of this exploitation and enslavement. T. B. Tomlinson points out that "[ildeologically, to . . . Hardy, machinery is bad" (36). The dehumanizing and destructive nature of machinery is emphasized in Hardy's depiction of the threshing machine at Flintcomb- Ash. This is not

the only example of Hardy's highly negative descriptions of machinery found within the text, but it is his most powerful condemnation of mechanization. All of the other references to machinery within the text are also highly negative. For example, Hardy paints unflattering pictures of the mailcart (71), the reaping machine (136), the train (251) and the turnip-slicing machine (392) at different points in the novel.

As soon as Tess starts working with machinery at Flintcomb-Ash, Hardy states that all her "movements showed a mechanical regularity" (360-61). We are told that Tess realizes that "[i]t was the ceaselessness of the work which tried her so severely" (406). The threshing machine at Flintcomb-Ash controls the workers feeding it. The farm laborers are forced to comply with its will; their motions become subservient to the pattern of movement that the machine demands from them. Hardy shows how the presence of the threshing machine causes excessively long workdays. Tess and her fellow agricultural laborers begin threshing the wheat at the crack of dawn and are forced to eat "a hasty lunch" while standing because they are forbidden from "leaving their positions" next to the machine (406).

The threshing machine is "the red tyrant that the women had come to serve" (404). It is a "buzzing red glutton" (413), described in terms of its "inexorable wheels continuing to spin, and the penetrating hum of the thresher to thrill to the very marrow all who were near the revolving wirecage" (406). We are told that "the threshing-machine . . . whilst it was going, kept up a despotic demand upon the endurance of [the workers] muscles and nerves" (404). Tess is described as one of "the perspiring ones at the machine" (406). The machine is an alienating force in opposition to the humanity and well being of the workers. As the machine continues to run, the older male fieldhands

fondly remember the days when all the threshing was done by hand. The machine has literally enslaved Tess since, "the drum never stopped, the man who fed it could not stop, and she, who had to supply the man with untied sheaves, could not stop either" (406). Hardy is concerned with the detrimental health effects caused by the thresher's deafening noise. Tess practically loses her mind when the "hum of the thresher, which prevented speech, increased to a raving" (406).

The machine utterly dehumanizes anyone who has to work with it. The workers exposed to it have lost their ability to speak and cannot "turn their heads" (406) away from the thresher. Even "the freshest among them began to grow cadaverous and saucer-eyed" (414). By the time Tess is finally able to stop feeding the threshing machine, "[H]er knees [are] trembling so wretchedly with the shaking of the machine that she could scarcely walk" (407). The machine has nearly crippled her.

Like Alec's father, the engineer who travels from farm to farm with the machine is an invader from the north of England and feels no respect for or attachment to rural life. "He spoke a strange Northern accent; his thoughts being turned inwards upon himself, his eye on his iron charge, hardly perceiving the scenes around him, and caring for them not at all" (405). However unlike the d'Urbervilles the engineer is also a victim. Unlike Tess and the other field workers, he has daily contact with the thresher, and as a result is the most severely scarred. He has become an automaton in all aspects of his life. He is described as "a dark motionless being, a sooty and grimy embodiment of tallness, in a sort of trance" (404), who "looked what he felt" (405). The farm laborers at Flintcomb-Ash think that he looks like a creature from another world, because his human qualities have become mechanical. Hardy's engineer has nothing in common with the

agricultural world around him. The novel describes how the engineer "was in the agricultural world, but not of it" (405). The threshing machine is the center of his existence and has destroyed his humanity. In all aspects of life he "serve[s] fire and smoke" (405); the machine has become his God.

Hardy believes that technology is creating a moral decline within nineteenth-century British society. He writes of how stonily capitalistic Farmer Groby of Flintcomb-Ash subjects his employees, including Tess, to physical violence. Groby discriminates against Tess and all of his other female workers because of their gender, hiring them because he knows that the "cheapness" of "female field-labour" makes "it profitable [to hire women] for tasks which women could perform as readily as men" (359). Not only are the women paid less than their male co-workers for doing the same job, but also they are verbally abused. Hardy also blames technology and capitalism for the increased self-alienation of the bourgeois. Even when writing about a very minor character like Mrs. Brooks, the owner of The Herons hotel in Sandbourne, Hardy takes the time to explain how the effects of capitalism are destroying her humanity. He writes of how "[s]he was too deeply materialized, poor woman, by her long and enforced bondage to that arithmetical demon Profit-and-Loss, to retain much curiosity for its own sake" (468). Within *Tess,* Hardy also mentions Londoners who drink milk but have "never seen a cow" and "[w]ho don't know anything of ... where it comes from" (251). Because of technological advances in agriculture, wealthy Londoners have lost all ties to nature and consequently no longer have even the most basic understanding of where their food comes from and how it is produced.

In the same way that Alec physically raped Tess, Hardy believes that capitalist expansion and mechanization are ravaging the economy of rural England and destroying the lives of its inhabitants. The Durbeyfield family's loss of their home is depicted as part of this overall social upheaval facing the rural artisans and agricultural laborers. When Tess's father dies, the family's lease on their cottage expires. They are not allowed to stay on as weekly tenants because "liviers were disapproved of in villages almost as much as little freeholders, because of their independence of manner, and when a lease determined it was never renewed" (434). In other words, the Durbeyfields' status as members of the independent rural artisan class decides their fate in regards to their home. The Durbeyfields' personal migration occurs on Old Lady Day, placing it within the context of the annual migrations from farm to farm that take place in the rural agricultural world. Hardy is therefore able to use the narrative voice to present social commentary about the destruction of the independent rural artisan class by the nouveaux riche, which he blames for causing the demise of village life. The narrator views the increased annual migrations from farm to farm as detrimental.

In 1883, eight years before *Tess* was published Hardy wrote a nonfictional essay entitled, "The Dorsetshire Labourer," published in the popular magazine *Longman's*. There he first asserted many of the same social and cultural criticisms expressed again by his narrator in Tess. In fact, several passages of his nonfictional essay are placed word for word in *Tess*. This is Hardy's intentional way of showing his readership that the values and criticisms expressed within the novel are really his own. In both the essay and the novel, Hardy calls for social change. The entire section of the novel describing Tess's ordeal while working with the threshing machine at Flintcomb-Ash is reprinted word for

word from "The Dorsetshire Labourer" as a description of how inhumane the working conditions in late Victorian English agriculture really are. Hardy's condemnation of machinery is unequivocal within "The Dorsetshire Labourer." Both in the novel and in the essay, Hardy uses the same passages to decry the Hodge stereotype of rural farm workers. In both texts, Hardy argues that the stereotype makes it easier for wealthy bosses to treat their rural workers inhumanely because the landowners no longer respect the humanity and unique worth of each worker.

Hardy laments the depopulation of the countryside and blames mechanization for the forced migrations of the rural population to the cities. Both within *Tess* and the essay in *Longman's* he states:

> A depopulation was going on . . . . Cottagers who were not directly employed on the land were looked upon with disfavour, and the banishment of some starved the trade of others, who were thus obliged to follow. These families, who had formed the backbone of the village life in the past, who were the depositaries of the village traditions, had to seek refuge in the large centres; the process, humorously designated by statisticians as 'the tendency of the rural population towards the large towns', being really the tendency of water to flow uphill when forced by machinery. (*Tess* 435-36; *Longman's* 268-69)

After describing the increased migrations and breakdown of village life in "The Dorsetshire Labourer," Hardy concludes, "The system is much to be deplored" (269).

Many of Hardy's criticisms of Victorian England's social order and cultural values are very similar to Karl Marx's. Speaking about rural England in the 1870s, Marx notes, "the rural population has diminished, not relatively, but absolutely" (415). Marx explains that this is occurring because "[c]apitalist production" within rural England "is causing an ever increasing preponderance of town population" by "collecting the population in great centres" (416). Not only are Hardy's and Marx's ideas consistent, but

even their language is similar. Marx believes that "[i]n agriculture" capitalism is the "means of enslaving, exploiting, and impoverishing the laborer" and that the implementation of capitalism within agriculture results in the destruction of "the workman's individual vitality, freedom, and independence" (416). Hardy's *Tess* depicts this destruction in fictional form. Hardy's vision is so close to Marx's that when Marx writes, "In the sphere of agriculture, modern industry . . . annihilates the peasant, that bulkward of the old society, and replaces him by the wage-laborer," (416) he could have been describing the plot of Hardy's novel and the story of Tess's life.

Hardy succeeds in using the narrative voice to convince his readers of the validity of his social criticisms and cultural critiques in part because he is so good at disguising how large a role his own worldview and ideology played in shaping the novel. However, upon close examination of the text, it becomes clear that Hardy's *Tess* is a strong condemnation of the status quo and a challenge to the social conventions of his own late Victorian era. It is both a revolutionary work and a remarkably compelling narrative that succeeds in avoiding an overly pedantic or preachy tone. Linda Shires elaborates on this important point by stating, "*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, however, takes the Victorian novel to its limits without turning it into a didactic diatribe, a satiric parody, or a series of lyric moments. This is its achievement and its power." (161) The true extent of the vast and diverse cultural criticisms contained within *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* can only be understood and appreciated through an expansive literary explication of the text.

CHAPTER IV

THE COMPLEXITY AND POWER CONTAINED WITHIN *TESS OF THE D'UBERVILLES*

Since the start of the twenty-first century, literary critics writing about *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* have focused in ever-greater detail on very specific aspects of the novel. This specificity has yielded some very interesting insights such as scholar Zena Meadowsong's discovery that the scenes within the novel that describe machinery and the process of mechanization are themselves written in a mechanical syntax. I wish to argue that the time has come to greatly broaden our literary explication of this text. I believe that Thomas Hardy's *Tess* is like one of Claude Monet's Impressionistic paintings in the sense that if you look too closely at any one specific element of the art work you will be unable to appreciate the grandeur and depth of the subject matter. Stand too closely and Monet's landscapes are a blur of color, with the main image out of focus and unobservable. Focus exclusively on one interesting but very narrow aspect of *Tess*, and you will miss the novel's complexity and power. You will be unable to see the plethora of cultural criticism in the novel.

Only by simultaneously exploring all of Hardy's value judgments and social commentary within *Tess* can a reader fully understand the varied range of cultural

criticisms that Hardy raises about the late Victorian capitalist society in which he lived. When explored as a whole, the novel's cultural criticisms harshly condemn the status quo of nearly every major societal institution. Hardy constructed the novel so that in telling Tess's life story, he challenged the legitimacy of the Church, the legal system, capitalism, mechanization, and the status of women. In "The Radical Aesthetic of Tess of the d'Urbervilles" Linda Shires writes, "*Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is not only the richest novel that Hardy ever wrote, it is also the culmination of a long series of Victorian texts which identify, enact, and condemn the alienated condition of modernity" Shires (159). The richness of the text is revealed by the fact that Hardy successfully included multifaceted and complex critiques of a broad range of cultural and ideological conventions within *Tess* without the novel losing its passionate recounting of Tess's life. The time has come to shift from the recent scholarly tendency of micro focus to a holistic macro focus, so that we can recognize the trenchant social commentary in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

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