THE SHATTERED MIRROR:

A STUDY OF THOMAS HARDY'S TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

by

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THE SHATTERED MIRROR: A STUDY OF THOMAS HARDY'S

TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

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ABSTRACT

Although *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is generally recognized as one of Hardy's major novels, many critics have attempted to assimilate the novel's complexities into a critical system or have considered these complexities as flaws. The result has been a simplistic reading of the novel. My thesis attempts to locate and address the textual problems which have led to such responses and to arrive at a more comprehensive reading of *Tess* by positing a split between the novel and the narrator.

The critical orientation of the thesis involves two major assumptions: first, that the text itself and the experience of reading the novel are of primary importance; second, that a work of literature is both a product and an expression of its culture and reflects that culture, whatever the conscious intent of the writer. Given this orientation, I attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What are the social and economic conditions that form a background in the novel? How do these conditions affect Tess as a woman?
2. What are the emotional effects of alienated labour and social change?
3. How is the dominant cultural ideology expressed and transmitted through the male characters and reinforced by Hardy?
I conclude that, although he wants to defend Tess against Victorian oppression, Hardy finally cannot do so because he himself is afraid to become a radical critic of his culture. The resulting tension between narrator and novel illuminates the ideological biases arising from Victorian anxieties and becomes a crucial factor in understanding an approach to literature as culture.
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INTRODUCTION

_Tess of the d'Urbervilles_ is a novel that continues to be read almost ninety years after its first publication. Despite its popularity, however, critics have had a great deal of difficulty with the novel. One of the reasons _Tess_ becomes so problematic when we try to talk about it is that the narrator so often seems outside of and imposed on the novel itself. This gives the novel a degree of complexity, if not confusion, that tempts many to dismiss it as a badly written or flawed work. Hardy is not the traditional third-person narrator, "present, at the side of his work, like the lecturer whose exposition accompanies the lantern slides or the documentary film."¹ Rather, because his comments are often so emotion-laden and inconsistent, he seems to be experiencing and reacting to his own novel along with the reader and the characters. John Goode writes:

> Hardy mediates our relationship with Tess in many ways but it is not appropriate to see him in a simple ideological situation. He is not simply a dispassionate all-knowing sage. . . . Nor is he—as modern sentimental critics see him—a "stricken father" who "mourns" her. The authorial view ranges from erotic appropriation . . . to "naturalistic" description . . . to admiration . . . to identification. . . . What we are witnessing in fact is the objectification of Tess by the narrator which is acted out in the novel.²

To understand _Tess_ it is thus necessary to define a real split between the basic novel—plot, characters, setting, story—and the narrator who
makes predictions, suggests allusions, attributes motives and comments on the basic novel. Needless to say, such a split consciousness is difficult to maintain and ultimately misleading. Nevertheless, because Hardy's conscious purpose is confused, we must begin with a primary response to the novel itself. As long as the novel itself stands clearly in the foreground and becomes the primary focus of the reader's attention, the very real personal and social issues it explores are not necessarily negated or reduced by Hardy's treatment of them.

Yet a thorough reading of the novel cannot dismiss the strange role of the narrator. Although problems of narration are usually seen as purely formal, Hardy's narrative stance in *Tess* is integral to our response to the novel in more than a technical way. It reverberates throughout the novel and substantially defines Tess's world; conversely this world brings into being the anxiety of the narration itself.

Hardy always claimed to be more comfortable with poetry than with fiction and his narrative style reflects this preference. As if writing a poem, Hardy attempts to translate Tess's experience into some sort of philosophical meaning for himself. He seems unconscious of the fact that his is a two-level narrative, that after creating the characters, he attempts to redefine their experience. Just as a poet provides the consciousness through which a poem is filtered, Hardy is not just a narrator or commentator, but attempts to be the controlling central consciousness of his novel, a consciousness, moreover, that is constantly and often obtrusively present. Hardy attempts to validate both his creation and his experience of the novel by mythologizing, philosophizing and idealizing. For Hardy it is safer to talk about myth than reality.
Thus, although Hardy was brave enough to write about a farm woman as if she were important, and to deal specifically and consciously with her sexual and moral nature, his need to justify this focus to himself leads him to shy away from the real and retreat into the ideal; and the force of that retreating shows just how difficult are the problems the novel raises. A woman working in the field becomes Demeter. A woman worried about the judgment of her young husband becomes a sinister Norman adulteress. Tess Durbeyfield's motives become a genetic legacy of the d'Urbervilles. The reader can understand the everyday complexity of Tess's experience, but Hardy must see her as special and thus defuse the explosive proposition that any woman is sexual, conscious and complex. He must also define Tess as proper in male petit bourgeois terms: she is religious, natural, chaste, voluptuous, loving and beautiful as well as ladylike, proud, noble, naturally intelligent, philosophical, of ancient lineage and of mythic stature. These qualities, however contradictory, irrelevant or unrealistic, make her acceptable, important and victim enough to be worth writing about. Thus while Hardy wants Tess to be a conscious and feeling woman with an actual existence, his labelling of her does not in fact allow her to be so. Like Angel, when Hardy catches a glimmer of understanding of Tess, he separates himself in horror.

But if Tess's own consciousness becomes irrelevant to both Hardy and Angel, it is not so for the novel. And this is what makes it an important novel despite, or perhaps because of, the narrative evasiveness. The unconscious level of the narrator is both a help and a hindrance in dealing with the issues of the novel. Unlike Sue Bridehead, Tess is not totally limited by Hardy's conception of her; the novel communicates
that Tess's motives and actions need not be distilled into some acceptable formula in order to achieve high tragic status. A woman's life is important in itself, the novel tells us. Hardy's naivety in Tess allows the reader to experience the dilemmas of the Victorian age both in the novel itself and in the author's own reaction to it. The sometimes melodramatic, even banal levels of the novel are belied by Hardy's own sense of the complexity of the issues involved and his extreme anxiety in dealing with them.

Hardy continually re-defines Tess from multiple points of view, some of which are more true to our experience of the character than are others. Our understanding of the character, and therefore of the novel as a whole, occurs in the interaction between Hardy and the novel. The resulting dynamic has led critics to make such comments as "Tess is never continuous with her destiny, neither her sexual one, nor with the contrived events which lead her to the gallows. Hardy cannot hold her steadily either before himself or before us";\(^3\) or "Tess ... conveys the feeling that she is greater than destiny";\(^4\) and "Whatever Hardy's own ideological commitment, no frame will hold his novel in place."\(^5\) These rather unusual critical comments give evidence that we must either dismiss Tess or find a new approach to understanding the novel.

In the following chapters we will deal more specifically with Hardy's role in the novel and with the real and mythological levels of Wessex in order to arrive at an understanding of Tess herself and of the social and ideological constraints that become apparent in the novel. The intersection of these several aspects of Tess will perhaps allow us an understanding
of the novel which is based neither on reduction, sublimation nor projection. The different levels in Tess, in Hardy's narration, in the novel itself and in our response to it imply a life-like complexity that we would be wrong to simplify or deny.
CHAPTER I

A TERRIBLE SINCERITY

Thomas Hardy stopped writing novels in the mid-1890's, after Tess of the d'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure had been widely criticized and he had been forced to revise both novels in order to make them acceptable for serialization. Although it is clear that he took much of the criticism quite personally and seriously, it is not so clear that this was the only factor in his abandoning fiction. It is also true that Hardy reached a thematic end-point with Tess and Jude. These two novels explore very precisely and directly the emotional and social results of economic change and late Victorian ideology; in doing so the novels show why Wessex is no longer a relevant or even a possible subject.

As well, Hardy's last novels begin to raise questions that his concept of fiction cannot answer. In a cancelled paragraph of the manuscript of Tess, Hardy, probably anticipating adverse critical reaction, states clearly and simply his attitude toward the writing of fiction:

The humble delineator of human character and human contingencies, whether his narrative deal with the actual or with the typical only, must primarily and above all things be sincere, however terrible sincerity may be. Gladly sometimes would he lie, for dear civility's sake, if he dared, but for the haunting after-thought that "this thing was not done honestly and may do harm."
In typical history, with all its liberty, there are, as in real history, features that can never be distorted with impunity and issues which should never be falsified. And perhaps in glancing at the misfortunes of such people as have, or could have, lived, he may acquire some art in shielding from like misfortunes those who have yet to be born. If truth required justification, surely this is an ample one.2

As his fiction career draws to a close, however, Hardy's perception of the world's truth more and more seems reflected in a shattered mirror: it is "faithfully presented," but somehow askew, confused, fragmented. Thus his very conventional moral statement quoted above remains open-ended and seems to have little relation to Tess. It is certainly not clear from reading the novel how one is to avoid "like misfortunes" or even which misfortunes to avoid. His novel presents a real reflection of the contradictions of the Victorian world and is certainly more interesting for its complexity; yet it is rather at odds with Hardy's moral tone. Hardy is incapable of articulating what on the unconscious, creative level he understands. Thus in the anguish which Hardy both creates and experiences in his last two major novels, the viability of "typical history" as he defines it comes into question. In refusing to accept fully the shattered reality he has created, Hardy is ultimately unable to provide any analysis or direction either for the reader or for the characters. His own commentary, rescued from absurdity only by the dead seriousness of his intent, comes to seem merely another broken piece of the mirror.

Not only does Tess have a critical transitional position in Hardy's writing, it is an incipiently modern novel in its articulation of individual struggle, its exposition of social values and its exploration
of the connections between sexual and social repression. To the extent that **Tess** is a tragic novel, it involves a different sort of tragedy from that of Hardy's other novels. In **Tess** there is not the sense of ultimate rightness that underlies the tragic elements of **The Return of the Native** or even **The Woodlanders**, but neither is there the sense of despair and powerlessness that haunts **Jude**. Although the human condition is certainly problematic in **Tess**, there is a vitality about the novel that, for Hardy, is connected with its Wessex roots. Through the evocation of a partly-mythologized Wessex, Hardy attempts to carry what is good, vital and pure about the past and about nature (which are largely identified) into the modern world. Upon closer examination, however, we shall see that it is **Tess** herself who provides the novel with vitality, for reasons of which Hardy is only partly conscious. When Hardy's nostalgia ultimately fails, the reader is left with a novel of contradictions to which Hardy does not provide any consistently plausible answers. Although Hardy does not completely understand this complexity, it allows the novel to push beyond the stereotyped "theme of the innocent country girl pursued by the member of the upper classes" so common in the Victorian popular fiction where **Tess** had its roots.

The crucial nature of **Tess** is indicated by the critical response the novel has elicited since it was first written. Although seduction was certainly a common theme in Victorian literature, many contemporary critics were hostile to the novel on moral grounds. It would seem that they saw the novel's questioning of fundamental social and ideological assumptions to go beyond the standard "seduced and abandoned" theme. Before it was even completed, **Tess** was rejected by three magazine editors who had
wanted to publish Hardy's new novel but changed their minds after reading the work in progress. Edward Arnold of Murray's Magazine, rejecting the novel as suitable material for publication, wrote to Hardy on November 15, 1889:

When I had the pleasure of seeing you here some time ago, I told you my views about publishing stories where the plot involves frequent and detailed references to immoral situations; I know well enough that these tragedies are being played out every day in our midst, but I believe the less publicity they have the better, and that it is quite possible and very desirable for women to grow up & pass through life without the knowledge of them.4

This particular comment is a very telling one, for it advocates one of the attitudes that Hardy most explicitly criticizes in Tess. After her seduction Tess cries out to her mother (in what J. T. Laird calls a "somewhat novelettish"5 way):

"How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house four months ago. Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn't you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance of learning in that way, and you did not help me!"6

R. H. Hutton found Tess "... very difficult to read because in almost every page the mind rebels against the steady assumptions of the author and shrinks from the untrue picture of a universe so blank and godless ..."7 Nowbray Morris, in an April, 1892 review, called Tess a "clumsy sordid tale of boorish brutality and lust."8 Several contemporary reviewers, while focusing their criticism on Hardy's style or vocabulary, were at the same time clearly reacting to what they perceived as an attack on their society. Even when Hardy was approved of for his essentially ethical intent, he was criticized for his "painful 'moral,' the noble, though somewhat obtrusive 'purpose.'"9
Later critics have also had trouble with Hardy's purpose. As indicated earlier in the preface, a major problem lies in defining exactly what roles Hardy plays, consciously and unconsciously, in *Tess*. This problem has been at the root of much critical discussion that has seen Hardy as an intruder in his own novel. *Tess* includes many comments which seem to come directly from Hardy and which, according to many critics, break the continuity and consistency of the narrative. Dorothy Van Ghent, for instance, contrasts the "bits of philosophic adhesive tape, rather dampened and rumpled by time" with "the deeply animated vision of experience which . . . *Tess* holds."¹⁰ This rather grotesque metaphor expresses a reaction many readers of *Tess* have had. Van Ghent at least emphasizes the significance of the story; most critics prefer the "adhesive tape" and read the novel as a treatise on fate, society, heredity and/or nature.

F. R. Leavis is somewhat more condescending than Van Ghent. He agrees with Henry James's assessment that *Tess* is "chock-full of faults and falsity, and yet has a singular charm." Leavis's "great tradition," from which he excludes Hardy, equates greatness with control; Hardy's writing, he finds, "hasn't the rightness with which the great novelists show their profound sureness of their essential purpose." "It is . . . a little comic," he continues, "that Hardy should have been taken in the early nineteen-twenties . . . as pre-eminently the representative of the 'modern consciousness' or the modern 'sense of the human situation.'"¹¹

Other critics, basically agreeing with Leavis's definition of "great," have tried to find this "sureness" in *Tess* through coherent patterns of imagery or central themes that organize all of Hardy's work. Thus the thrust in most Hardy criticism is away from the story and toward the "moral"
or "purpose": Hardy is variously seen as a social realist, a determinist, a champion of sexuality, an early psychoanalyst or, as Lawrence says, "a metaphysician."\(^\text{12}\) Hardy may at various times be all of the above, but it is stretching a point to argue that he is any of them exclusively, consistently, or even consciously. Hardy's greatness and his flaws are related. Because he cannot consciously control the novel, the novel itself can explore far-reaching questions about the connections that exist in and among the forces of sexuality, rationality, history and individual isolation. But conversely this open-endedness becomes confusing, contradictory and frustrating to the reader because Hardy himself seems unable to deal with it. He raises questions, but he also shuts down discussion. Like his contemporary critics, he is rather uncomfortable with the subject matter and implications of the novel. Thus, according to Arthur Efron, "as Lawrence insisted, one must trust the tale, not the teller..."\(^\text{13}\)

Let us look closely at two examples of this problem of Hardy's purpose. Hardy clearly intends to raise questions about the nature, source and consequences of Victorian morality: both the early versions of the novel and the final addition of "A Pure Woman" to the title show the primacy of this intent. The inequality of sexual relationships and the double standard for sexual behaviour are definite problems in Victorian England, as the behaviour of the three major characters obviously emphasizes. But the fact that Hardy himself is not really equipped to solve such problems shows in the way he approaches them. Not only does the excess of sentimentality with which Hardy sometimes treats Tess call his approach into question, but the moral and social statement of Tess remains confusing
because the novel's defense of Tess comes from three different directions. Either she is pure because sex is natural and society repressive; or she is pure because her essential being provides a more important criterion than her virginity; or because she was Alec's unwilling victim and thereafter is caught in a chain of inevitable events. Hardy, inconsistently, argues each of these positions separately, as if it were the sole explanation, despite the fact that the three perspectives are contradictory. As Wayne Burns says, "... if Tess is pure because she acts in accordance with 'what is' by doing sexually what animals and birds in their natural state do, then she can hardly be pure because she does not do, or does unwillingly, what birds and animals in their natural state do."\(^{14}\) Hardy's defense of Tess is further complicated by the fact that the plot leads Tess inexorably to the gallows. Hardy, on the one hand, in what Burns calls "his role of commentator in the novel,"\(^{15}\) protests Tess's innocence; on the other hand, as story-writer, he bows to social convention with Tess's execution and the marriage of Angel and Liza-Lu. A corollary of this complicated problem is the ambivalence with which Hardy attempts to place blame for Tess's tragedy. The tone of the commentary throughout the novel, as well as the subtitle, suggests that Hardy wants Tess to be a moral tale, but the novel never states clearly and absolutely what the moral is. At various times Hardy suggests that Tess is ruined by her own wrong or naive inclinations, by her parents' stupidity and greed, by Alec, Angel, the gods, her ancestors, capitalism, nature and Victorian morality. The question of blame does not lend itself to a simple answer, and should perhaps not even be posed. Hardy, however, does lay blame, attempting to simplify the issue by choosing one
factor to the exclusion of others, and then changing his mind and placing the blame elsewhere. Answers are given only to be later negated; yet consciously Hardy does not seem to notice. The overall effect may be to indicate the multiplicity of factors that make up what is commonly called "fate," but Hardy himself just seems confused.

The source of this ambiguity lies in the distinction noted earlier in the preface between the novel and what we can call the narrator, observer or commentator. This is not a narrator in the strict sense of the word, for he does not consciously control the novel. Rather, many of the narrator's remarks seem to come directly from Hardy's emotional experience of his own novel as it unfolds. Sometimes the commentator seems almost passive, as if he is not responsible for what happens to the characters, but can only conjecture about aspects of the novel in a detached philosophical, ironical, cynical or analytical way, much as a first-time reader might do. For instance, the commentator wonders, "But, might some say, where was Tess's guardian angel? Where was the providence of her simple faith?" (p. 107). At other times Hardy purports to be omniscient and offers definitive answers which really seem to have little to do with the characters' experiences. For instance: "Tess Durbeyfield did not divine, as she innocently looked down at the roses in her bosom, that there behind the blue narcotic haze was potentially the 'tragic mischief' of her drama--one who stood fair to be the blood-red ray in the spectrum of her young life" (p. 71). Most often, however, the narrator appears to be intensely, even desperately, emotionally involved in the novel, describing from the inside what characters think or feel as if the events of the novel were happening to him.
Ambiguity arises from the contradiction between what we see happening in the novel and Hardy's redefinition of the event. For example, Hardy enters the novel directly, comparing people to historical or mythical figures, plants and animals, even paintings. Often such comparisons happen at crucial times in the novel when Hardy seems at a loss about what to say. For instance, after Tess's death he describes Angel and 'Liza-Lu: "They moved on hand in hand, and never spoke a word, the drooping of their heads being that of Giotto's 'Two Apostles'" (p. 448). Such references have a dual role. Hardy may consciously intend that they provide a rationalization for the aesthetic validity of a novel about quite ordinary people. While expanding the scope of the novel, however, they also allow both Hardy and the reader to avoid thinking further about uncomfortable situations. In this latter sense such allusions actually negate the experience of the novel.

Hardy's treatment of the country, particularly of Talbothays, provides a good example of this dual effect of validation and negation. Hardy consistently idealizes Talbothays and insists on introducing specifically pastoral elements. Thus "Dairyman Crick's household of maids and men lived on comfortably, placidly, even merrily. Their position was perhaps the happiest of all positions in the social scale, being above the line at which neediness ends, and below the line at which the convenances begin to cramp natural feeling, and the stress of threadbare modishness makes too little of enough" (p. 168). Hardy's attempt to see this part of the novel as a pastoral is strongly reinforced by his use of mythology. He explains why: "Women whose chief companions are the forms and forces of outdoor Nature retain in their souls far more of the Pagan fantasy of
their remote forefathers than of the systematized religion taught their race at later date" (p. 141). By collapsing his characters into a stereotype of country women in such comments, Hardy forbids us to look at the specific qualities and situations of Tess and the other milkmaids. (We will return to this point in Chapter 2).

Another technique Hardy uses for distancing himself from uncomfortable situations is to pull back from a specific scene to the broad perspective of a landscape painter. In some cases this technique lends a distinctively cinematic effect, as if a camera were zooming in and out:

"Thus they all worked on, encompassed by the vast flat mead which extended to either slope of the valley—a level landscape compounded of old landscapes long forgotten, and, no doubt, different in character very greatly from the landscape they composed now" (p. 146). The effect of this passage is not only to situate the scene spatially, but to place it in a temporal context as well. At the same time as it gives historical scope to the menial farm work, this perspective implies that the acts and thoughts of the characters are not nearly so important in the context of history as the characters or the unwarned reader might think them. Thus the events of the novel become at once more and less important. Yet it is this very outlook on life that Tess fears and rejects:

". . . what's the use of learning that I am one of a long row only—finding out that there is set down in some old book somebody just like me, and to know that I shall only act her part; making me sad, that's all. The best is not to remember that your nature and your past doings have been just like thousands' and thousands', and that your coming life and doings'll be like thousands' and thousands'." (p. 165)

Tess appears to be locked in a battle with Hardy's narrative consciousness as much as with any other aspect of her world.
What becomes clear is that, in Raymond Williams' words, Hardy is both "the educated observer and the passionate participant."\(^\text{16}\)

While Hardy sometimes specifically introduces a hypothetical outsider watching the characters--"an alien observer passing down the neighbouring lane might well have been excused for massing them as 'Hodge'" (p. 179)--more often he enters the novel directly. Clearly the anonymous voyeur in the following passage is Hardy himself:

> This morning the eye returns involuntarily to the girl in the pink cotton jacket, she being the most flexuous and finely-drawn figure of them all. But her bonnet is pulled so far over her brow that none of her face is disclosed while she binds, though her complexion may be guessed from a stray twine or two of dark brown hair which extends below the curtain of her bonnet. Perhaps one reason why she seduces casual attention is that she never courts it, though the other women often gaze around them. (p. 124)

Hardy also goes beyond description to interpret, generalize or comment on the characters or situation:

> The air of the sleeping chamber seemed to palpitate with the hopeless passion of the girls. They writhed feverishly under the oppressiveness of an emotion thrust on them by cruel Nature's law—an emotion which they had neither expected nor desired. The incident of the day had fanned the flame that was burning the inside of their hearts out, and the torture was almost more than they could endure. The differences which distinguished them as individuals were abstracted by this passion, and each was but portion of one organism called sex. There was so much frankness and so little jealousy because there was no hope... The full recognition of the futility of their infatuation, from a social point of view; its purposeless beginning; its self-founded outlook; its lack of everything to justify its existence in the eye of civilization (while lacking nothing in the eye of Nature); the one fact that it did exist, ecstasizing them to a killing joy; all this imparted to them a resignation, a dignity, which a practical and sordid expectation of winning him as a husband would have destroyed. (p. 187)
The use of "seemed" in the first sentence is key. To whom does the air seem to palpitate? Clearly not to the four women, and there is no one else present. Here Hardy himself is a direct presence in the world of the novel. Thus what initially appears as an ordinary descriptive passage is loaded with innuendo, pathos and self-justification that really has little to do with the characters. While attempting to validate the milkmaids' experience, Hardy succeeds in making the scene almost ridiculously melodramatic. He himself seems to be writhing feverishly. This passage expresses Hardy's own strange excitement in the presence of innocence more than it describes the women's frustration.

Hardy also begins to falsify the characters with his insistence on large philosophical problems that satisfy another idealistic reality outside the novel. The application of outside values to the novel begins to create further problems, oversimplifying situations which the novel itself makes complex. The following passage gives an example:

Why was it that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman the man, many thousand years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order. One may, indeed, admit the possibility of a retribution lurking in the present catastrophe. 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. But though to visit the sins of the father upon the children may be a morality good enough for divinities, it is scorned by average human nature; and it therefore does not mend the matter. (p. 108)

This passage is an important example of Hardy's technique in two ways. The first problem is, of course, its sentimentalized treatment of Tess. She is a person, not "tissue," and from what we know of her so far in the
novel, a robust country girl. Moreover, the rhapsodizing about Tess's purity, and the breast-beating about her loss of purity is not the reaction of anyone but Hardy. Indeed, the next paragraph admits that "Tess's own people down in those retreats are never tired of saying to each other in their fatalistic way: 'It was to be'" (p. 108). Although often read as an instance of Hardy's belief in fate, this reaction is surely not fatalistic in the sense that Tess's people believe in predestination; it is the reaction of people who for generations have had little power over their own lives and have no choice but to accept what happens.

There is also a problem in the above passage with the explanation of ancestral curse. If a character had made such a remark, the reader could treat it as representative of that character's view of the world. The fact that the commentator makes the remark (and others like it) lends credence to the perspective and obscures the passage's intent. While rejecting the explanation of heredity as having no ethical import in human affairs, Hardy obliquely gives it some validity. Such comments occur frequently enough to add a sense of fate or inevitability to the novel: Hardy's famous sense of fatality comes not so much from the novel itself as from the commentator's interpretation of the novel. 17 Hardy may tell us that Tess is like "a fly on a billiard table of indefinite length," (p. 142) but we do not feel it. Hardy, in fact, does not want to believe it. Yet this emphasis on fate keeps us from seeing the real causal factors in the novel.

To further complicate the problem, Hardy's commentary is not always set off as such; rather it often blends unobtrusively with Angel's or
Tess's thoughts. There are numerous minor instances of confusion between the commentator and a character. For instance: "It was true that [Angel] was at present out of his class. But she knew that was only because, like Peter the Great in a shipwright's yard, he was studying what he wanted to know" (p. 164). One might wonder whether Tess can be so well acquainted with Russian history.

But there are also major ambiguities. In the following passage, for instance, the reader's interpretation of the rape/seduction is confused by the narrative ambiguity:

Get Alec d'Urberville in the mind to marry her! He marry her! On matrimony he had never once said a word. And what if he had? How a convulsive snatching at social salvation might have impelled her to answer him she could not say. But her poor foolish mother little knew her present feeling towards this man. Perhaps it was unusual in the circumstances, unlucky, unaccountable; but there it was; and this, as she had said, was what made her detest herself. She had never wholly cared for him, she did not at all care for him now. She had dreaded him, winced before him, succumbed to adroit advantages he took of her helplessness; then temporarily blinded by his ardent manners, had been stirred to confused surrender awhile: had suddenly despised and disliked him, and had run away. That was all. (p. 117)

The tone and vocabulary here suggest that Hardy is justifying Tess's actions to himself rather than that Tess is thinking about herself. As Wayne Burns argues:

Perhaps the most striking thing about these "thoughts" is that they are not Tess's own: she would never have thought this way or at least never have used words in this way. When she tells Angel of her past, for example, she uses "no exculpatory phrase of any kind," whereas . . . the passage above include[s] phrase after exculpatory phrase. . . . those words represent Hardy's own confused surrender to the rhetoric of special pleading.18

Moreover, the rest of the novel does not clearly support the passage's interpretation of events. There is little evidence that Tess
"dreaded him, winced before him." Rather, although she is intimidated by Alec, Tess flirts with him, is flattered by his attention, feels smug about his preferring her to the other women. And surely she does not wince; Alec, in fact, accuses her of being proud and independent. At best this passage describes only part of her complex reaction to Alec, yet it has the air of an absolute authorial statement.

According to J. T. Laird, the section from "advantages" to "had run away" was added in the 1892 edition. Originally, however, "cruel" was used instead of "adroit" and "flash" instead of "ardent." In changing these two words, Hardy makes Tess's relationship to Alec more complex, the verdict of rape less clear. But he still does not admit this complexity. The contradiction between the suggestive "wholly" and the rest of the passage is not dealt with. At the same time as Hardy introduces questions he insists on the straightforward explanation: "How could I be expected to know?"

Yet it is largely through the ambiguities created by such confusions and ambivalences that the novel raises its most important questions. The discrepancies between Hardy and the novel are often so blatant that we must think through the issues ourselves. Hardy's commentary becomes merely another part of the novel; we can accept or reject his explanations just as we can do so with Angel's or Alec's or Tess's. In the vacuum that arises, we as readers become unwilling atheists without the help of an authority to interpret the world for us. Thus when the questions are asked, the issues raised, no answers or too many answers are given. The reader must be left disturbed or thoughtful. Moreover, from the conflict between the experience of the novel and the inappropriate commentary upon it arises
a sense of the inadequacy of theoretical models to explain human life.

This sense of inadequacy is a product of the type of world the novel as a genre describes. According to Georg Lukacs, the epic is the formal expression of a unified, coherent society. On the other hand, "the novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality."20 In his role as commentator, Hardy attempts to reintegrate the world of Tess, to give it epic pretensions by denying the subjective nature of his perceptions and the unconscious qualities of the novel itself. In Lukacs' terms, Hardy posits a totality or coherence to the experience of the reader, if not of the characters. He does so despite, or perhaps in reaction to, the fact that he is describing a changing world, a collapsing culture, and the violent reality of late-Victorian anxieties. The paucity of his solutions leads John Lucas to say: "Hardy sometimes sinks into banalities about nature's inexorable laws, which save him the trouble of doing much more than shrugging off as hopeless the problems that he himself has been exploring."21 Hardy, however, never shrugs; he remains passionately committed even in banality. Viewed in this way, what has been called Hardy's "gloss" can be seen as his reaction to his own experience of both art and life, an ongoing statement which is crucial to the point of the novel. Hardy does not succeed in giving his world philosophical coherence; unconsciously, however, he creates both an unconscious level and varying levels of consciousness in the characters, in the reader's response, and in the novel as a whole. At the same time as Hardy, the novelist, stands outside the novel, he also experiences the contradictions of his characters, sharing the hopeful individual's sense of possibilities and the desperate
individual's sense of fatality. As we deal with Tess in this paper, it will be necessary to bear in mind the nature of Hardy's vision and involvement with the novel. His narrative is flawed, and sometimes obscures real issues, but its faultiness does not ruin the novel. On the contrary, it provides on a formal level the best possible example of the processes the novel explores. Hardy is in fact reflecting "feelings which might almost have been called those of the age—the ache of modernism" (p. 163). If these feelings are expressed by characters in Tess, they also define the perspective of its author. Hardy's statement of sincerity seems so naive as to be laughable. Yet the "terrible sincerity" with which he approaches and experiences the novel, the sincerity of his unconscious response, if not his conscious intent, creates a dynamic counterpoint which is crucial to the "truth" of the novel.
CHAPTER II

HARDY'S WESSEX: MYTH AND ALIENATION

There is a sense in Hardy's novels that he would like to be a storyteller in Walter Benjamin's understanding of the word: a chronicler of history and culture, based in and contributing to the real experience of his own people.\textsuperscript{1} Thus, confronted by the complexities of Victorian England, he writes about Wessex, a half-mythologized geographical and cultural, if not political, entity. Hardy's choice of the archaic name for the area and his focus on the remains of dead cultures—ruins, tombs, language, customs, folklore—show his concern to establish viable links with the past, to posit some continuity in history. As well, in writing about that area of England that he felt he knew best and cared about most, Hardy attempts to extol the contemporary rural culture he sees becoming lost. Ultimately, however, the Wessex background in Tess has contradictory functions. At its worst, Hardy's treatment of Wessex diminishes a period of social struggle into a hazy, unexamined "golden age" and reduces the complexity of the novel. At its best, the detailed documentation of the contemporary and historical context of Tess and her people leads us to

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an understanding not only of historical and cultural change, but also of the relationship of change to the individual struggles explored in the novel.

Life in Wessex is superior because it is, for Hardy, more "natural." Hardy attempts to write a paean to the old Wessex virtues as well as a criticism of Victorian morality, as if the former could mitigate the latter. But the world is not so black and white and the novel knows it. Moreover, Hardy finds himself really incapable of dealing with the sexual issues the novel inevitably raises. Thus the conflict between myth and realism forms a continuous backdrop which is crucial to the novel. As a contemporary reviewer noted, the story of Tess is something that happens all the time. As the subject of many ballads, presumably based upon the frequency of actual occurrences, "the maid who went to the merry green wood and came back in a changed state" (p. 128) became part of a cultural tradition. As well, the young country girl seduced by a villainous but wealthy rogue was a staple of nineteenth-century popular fiction. Tess, then, has both truth and folklore at its roots and Hardy wants to keep it that way. Tess is a would-be ballad that becomes a novel largely because both Wessex and the character Tess are too complex to allow complete mythologizing. Hardy wants Tess to be a real woman but also a personification of traditional Wessex values; as the novel progresses, however, she becomes an individual in her own right, shaped by herself and by conflicting social forces. (It is this point that I will explore in Chapter 3.)

Tess bases itself in an exploration of the changes in social structure in nineteenth-century England. The experience of the novel progresses
from the secure existence of the freeholder to the harsh and barren insecurity of the hired labourer. Against this background Tess stands out in relief, not only because she is the heroine of the novel, but because, from Marlott to Sandbourne, she experiences herself as alienated from her environment. Throughout the novel, her questioning attempts at self-realization illuminate the problems inherent in her culture and in Hardy's attitude to it. While Hardy is not always conscious of the implications of his novel, in his desire to depict the emotional, social and economic reality of Wessex as experienced by Wessex people, and particularly because of his sense of Tess as a woman, his novel indicts the English culture as a whole.

The novel arises from Hardy's own experience of Dorsetshire life, some of it described in essay form in "The Dorsetshire Labourer." Michael Millgate notes evidence that particular details of <i>Tess</i> are based on true events. For instance, Hardy actually saw the prototype of Jack Durbeyfield singing, "I've got a great family vault." The death of Prince and the spreading bloodstain on the boarding house ceiling come from newspaper reports. Hardy, in his self-proclaimed role as champion of the rural people attempts to see these events as important because culturally typical. His feeling of intimate personal connection with Dorsetshire culture is the foundation of his writing, but the implicit or explicit nostalgia in his dedication to Wessex often gives his work an idealized, Arcadian tone.

Although <i>Tess</i> is by no means solely a pastoral novel, Hardy consciously plays with the idea of the pastoral through his idealization of rural life. If Hardy has frequently been seen as a pastoral novelist, evoking, in
Raymond Williams' definition of "pastoral," "an idealization of actual English country life and its social and economic relationships," it is because, in part at least, he wanted to be one. Thus, although his understanding of social and economic relationships at times seems more sophisticated than that of a traditional pastoral writer, many contemporary reviewers who were on the whole critical of Tess particularly like its rural aspects. R. H. Hutton in The Spectator of January 23, 1892, although he "cannot at all admire Mr. Hardy's motive in writing," commends "... the vivacity of the description of the cows themselves; the perfect insight into the conditions of rustic lives ..." Mowbray Morris, rejecting Tess for serialization in Macmillan's, comments, "The rural scenes seem to me particularly good--more so than the 'entirely modern bearings' &c." Hardy is, as Millgate and Raymond Williams both point out, in many ways an outsider to the world of Tess. He approaches Wessex from a distance, and his commentary reflects the perceptions of a jaded city-dweller looking at a pretty landscape and hoping to find truth there. From his perspective nature often looks like a benevolent deity: "One could feel that a saner religion had never prevailed under the sky. The luminary was a golden-haired, beaming, mild-eyed, God-like creature, gazing down in the vigour and intentness of youth upon an earth that was brimming with interest for him" (p. 122). In this context rural folk, particularly women, seem to have a privileged lot. Not only are they part of a distinct community, they are in a sacred union with all of nature. Losing their identity in some kind of natural whole, they do not suffer from the alienation of the city-dweller. For Hardy, the country woman is
"most interesting . . . by reason of the charm which is acquired . . .
when she becomes part and parcel of outdoor nature. . . . a field-woman
is a portion of the field; she has somehow lost her own margin, imbiber
the essence of her surrounding and assimilated herself with it" (p. 123).
Hardy also presents nature as a "cruel law" (p. 187) and notes that in
winter the sun has a "wrathful shine" (p. 380). Both benign and malevolent
views of nature, however, are highly romanticized. Hardy's presentation
reduces the humanity of the country people to a mere extension of an
abstract force. Moreover, because Hardy's rural people are not really
primitives, they do not really participate in his natural ideal. In trying
and failing to attribute a sense of wholeness to their view of nature,
Hardy sets up instead the very modern feeling of isolation in a world which
does not seem orderly or purposeful in itself, and is beyond human control.

In "Candour in English Fiction," Hardy says he "seeks to show Nature's
unconsciousness not of essential laws, but of those laws framed merely as
social expedients by humanity, without a basis in the heart of things. . . ."6
How one can recognize an "essential law" is questionable. This concept
defines nature as a truth existing beyond and apart from society, a truth
that human beings can only guess at. In Tess, on the other hand, the
emphasis is slightly different. Hardy ultimately sees nature as indifferent
to human experience altogether. His view is tinged with the bitterness of
a betrayed child--his own bitterness, not Tess's:

. . . the whole field was in colour a desolate drab; it
was a complexion without features, as if a face, from
chin to brow, should be only an expanse of skin. The
sky wore, in another colour, the same likeness; a white
vacuity of countenance with the lineaments gone. So
these two upper and nether visages confronted each
other all day long, the white face looking down on the
brown face, and the brown face looking up at the white face, without anything standing between them but the two girls crawling over the surface of the former like flies... They worked on hour after hour, unconscious of the forlorn aspect they bore in the landscape, not thinking of the justice or injustice of their lot. (pp. 331-2)

Later Hardy is more cynical: "Though they were young they walked with bowed heads, which gait of grief the sun's rays smiled on pitilessly" (p. 448).

But while Hardy tries to abstract nature as a force outside of human experience, the novel itself reveals perceptions of nature to be based on human experience and determined by human activity. At Talbothays Tess would have found the heat oppressive rather than sensual if she had been working in a factory. Conversely, if she could have stayed indoors, the white-rimed fields at Flintcomb-Ash might have looked starkly beautiful. In Alfred Schmidt's interpretation of Marx's concept of nature:

Although nature and its laws subsist independently of all human consciousness and will for the materialist Marx, it is only possible to formulate and apply statements about nature with the help of social categories. The concept of a law of nature is unthinkable without men's endeavours to master nature.7

If at any time the fates of Wessex residents depended solely on the weather and the soil, such a time is long past in Tess. The statement that "'Tis nater, after all, and what do please God!'" (p. 117) in the context of the novel ironically refers to sexual mores, financial need and social roles more than to the birds and the bees. Ultimately the novel shows that Hardy's Romantic concept of nature as god represents a human ideal that is socially determined: Hardy wants to believe in some kind of absolute meaning and in an increasingly agnostic world this view of
nature provides that meaning.

As Hardy's contemporary critics were so aware, the contradiction between nostalgia and realism becomes acute in *Tess*. As Raymond Williams notes, however, if we respond so naively to Hardy as merely a regional writer, we miss the centrality of change in *Tess*. In the course of his career as a novelist, the Wessex Hardy writes about does not remain static; in the context of *Tess*, the Wessex of Hardy's early novels would itself seem an anachronism. Despite Millgate's argument that Hardy's knowledge of Dorsetshire was at best vague, Hardy's primary focus on rural culture allows his novels to reveal vast economic and social changes and to document contemporary historical processes.

On a simple level this process of change is shown in the setting of *Tess*. The end of the novel takes place in a part of Wessex hitherto ignored in Hardy's work. Alec's death occurs in Sandbourne, part of Wessex which has become a fashionable watering-place catering to all of England: "An outlying eastern tract of the enormous Egdon Heath was close at hand, yet on the very verge of that tawny piece of antiquity such a glittering novelty as this pleasure city had chosen to spring up" (p. 426). Tess's execution takes place in Wintoncester, an ancient city which was once the capital of Wessex. The prison appears to be an intrusion in the old-fashioned town: "... it seemed the one blot on the city's beauty. Yet it was with this blot and not with the beauty, that the two gazers were concerned" (p. 449). The ancient political importance of Wintoncester has been subsumed to that of the Victorian penal system. The old civilization has become merely picturesque.

Hardy's characters' attitudes towards Wessex and the world beyond
also document social and cultural change. An important motif in many of
the novels is the contrast between the outsider and the Wessex native,
or the return of the native from the outside world. In his early novels
Hardy focuses on the disruptive effects of the dissatisfied individual's
looking away from the Wessex community. For the benefit of the community,
such attitudes are usually destroyed. In The Return of the Native, for
instance, Egdon Heath and its inhabitants return to the eternal round of
existence once the disruptive elements have been either assimilated or
destroyed. Eventually, however, in The Woodlanders, there comes to be
little value judgment on such dissatisfaction: Grace cannot help being
unable to love Giles, just as her father cannot help wanting to educate
her in accordance with his rising social status. The resulting emotional
confusion is seen as an inevitable symptom of social change; the Wessex
community is no longer a self-sufficient culture.

Clearly Hardy knew that the village culture was dying and loyalty
to old communities ending. Merryn Williams documents the social upheaval
involved in the eviction of the copyholders, the repeal of the Corn Laws,
and the subsequent exodus of tenant farmers and farm labourers from the
countryside in hopes of higher-paying industrial jobs. In Dorset, only
six years before Hardy's birth, "six labourers who became known to
history as the Tolpuddle Martyrs . . . were transported for trying to
form an agricultural trade union."9 Engels writes about cases of incendiary-
ism throughout the 1840's. "It is manifest, therefore," he says, "that
here, too, the system of industrial production has made its entrance, by
means of farming on a large scale, by the abolition of the patriarchal
relation . . . by the introduction of machinery, steam, and the labour of
women and children.  

Tess was written, then, with at least half a century of rural unrest behind it. Happy peasants, living in an Arcadian world, are not a part of late nineteenth-century Dorsetshire. Despite Hardy's eulogy of old Wessex, the sense of history in Tess is ultimately too complex for nostalgia to be any kind of solution.

Thus, Hardy's careful details of Dorsetshire life in Tess begin to seem a desperate protest against time. For Hardy, even contemporary Wessex becomes too complicated; throughout Tess he refers to Druid or Norman times when, he postulates, human nature was more "natural." Even his idealism about Wessex varies in tone. While he usually presents the pastoral levels of Tess quite seriously, at times he is blatantly ironic. A good example is the title "Saturday Night in Arcady," given to the expurgated chapter on the Trantridge dance published separately from the rest of the novel. The title calls explicit attention to the contrast between people's actual lives and the popular pastoral ideal.

If ultimately Tess cannot become an idyllic pastoral, it is largely because of its emphasis on how the destruction of a culture affects individuals. Arnold Kettle fails to take this emphasis into account. His attempt to deal with the social levels of the novel oversimplifies the process of social change described in Tess to the point where the novel seems to be a Marxist pastoral. His statement that "Tess emerges as a fine novel, a moral fable, the most moving expression in our literature . . . of the destruction of the peasant world" reduces the novel to a spurious historical tract. In fact, according to Raymond Williams, "Where Hardy lived and worked, as in most other parts of England, there were . . . virtually no peasants." Moreover, Williams continues,
the novel is not about simple country people destroyed by the vicious outside world: "The pressures to which Hardy's characters are subjected are . . . pressures from within a system of living, itself now thoroughly part of a wider system. There is no simple case of an internal ruralism and an external urbanism." Tess is partly about a sixteenth-century world catching up with the nineteenth century, but "the changing nature of country living [is] determined as much by its own pressures as by pressures from outside. . . ." The rural society is already a complex one, as the experience of the characters makes clear. The conflicts between social pressures and the traditional culture of Wessex come together in the individual who, increasingly cultureless, reflects social contradictions and participates in change.

Raymond Williams implies that Hardy is quite conscious of this emphasis on the individual:

It is not only that Hardy sees the realities of labouring work. . . . It is also that he sees the harshness of economic processes, in inheritance, capital, rent and trade, within the continuity of the natural processes and persistently cutting across them. The social process created in this interaction is one of class and separation, as well as of chronic insecurity, as this capitalist farming and dealing takes its course. The profound disturbances that Hardy records cannot then be seen in the sentimental terms of neo-pastoral: the contrast between country and town. The exposed and separated individuals, whom Hardy puts at the centre of his fiction, are only the most developed cases of a general exposure and separation. Yet they are never merely illustrations of this change in a way of life. Each has a dominant personal history, which in psychological terms bears a direct relation to the social character of the change. True enough, as an analysis of the novel. The problem, however, is that Hardy does not see this situation consistently. But the focus on the characters insures that the emotional, physical and economic realities of
life are seen and seen consistently by the reader who experiences them with the characters.

In Hardy's last novels, then, the Wessex natives themselves have become outsiders as their own culture disappears. Throughout Tess it is clear that a set of social assumptions is disappearing, and that drastic changes are occurring in the family and in the community. Tess is the first of Hardy's novels in which there is really no longer a rural community: the "nineteenth century" has encroached on Wessex itself. While most of the rural characters in Tess still appear to feel isolated from other areas of England, the novel as a whole indicates the end of isolation and the disappearance of the Wessex culture that the elder Durbeyfields take for granted. The boundaries between Wessex and the rest of England are dissolving as remote areas are affected by London through the improved communications system. Hardy tells us at the beginning of Tess that the railroad has placed the Vale of Blackmoor "within a four hours' journey from London" (p. 39). England is becoming more centralized and the dominant culture and economy are increasingly pervasive. In Tess more so than in Hardy's earlier novels, local customs are presented as quaint ritualized anachronisms, rather than vital parts of a culture. The club-walking, for instance, with all its connotations of a fertility rite, is basically extraneous to the important events of the novel. The community at Marlott is an old one, composed of families who presumably have lived for centuries in the same location and for generations have played the same economic and social role in the community. On the other hand, Tess's life at Trantridge, Talbothays and Flintcomb-Ash is based on labour. The fact that these latter communities are also
transient, their reason for existence controlled by the market, emphasizes the arbitrary and impersonal nature of social groupings in the cultural vacuum of rural England.

Work takes on a particular value in Wessex as the competition for survival becomes more serious. Country people are becoming directly identified as workers, and work is becoming a specific area of life, rather than an organic part of culture. As David Meakin and Merryn Williams have both pointed out, the importance of work continues throughout Tess and consistently undercuts the sentimental, pastoral aspects of the novel. In addition, Merryn Williams points out that "the great dividing line between Hardy's authentic and inauthentic characters is determined by their various approaches to work." Certainly, Tess's willingness to work hard appears in the novel as a positive characteristic, in contrast to Alec's bourgeois idleness and Angel's vague dilettantism.

On the level of plot as well work is important. The novel follows Tess to various workplaces which form a background for her development. It is through her position in the d'Urberville household that Tess meets Alec, and it is after marketing day that the seduction occurs. Later, it is through work that she meets Angel. Work rather than fate determines where Tess lives and whom she meets; in a sense it also becomes a substitute for family life, as it is in working relationships that Tess experiences her only sense of belonging to a community.

It is through work, then, that Tess participates in the world: the impulse toward self-esteem and away from isolation is closely identified with the desire to work in the novel. What is basically an economic necessity becomes internalized as the means to a sense of self: "A
resolution which had surprised herself had brought her into the fields this week for the first time during many months. After wearing and wasting her palpitating heart with every engine of regret that lonely inexperience could devise, common-sense had illumined her. She felt that she would do well to be useful again—to taste anew sweet independence at any price" (p. 126). Thus Talbothays is important to Tess as a means of leaving home, of forgetting the past and of supporting herself, but also as a way to become socially useful again. Later in the novel Tess chooses hard and degrading work before charity from the Clares. This emphasis on work as both a financial and social necessity and a means to personal fulfillment is a new concept in the nineteenth century.

As work, rather than tradition, provides the predominant system of values, the individual, rather than the community, becomes the basic social unit. One indicator of social change in the novel is the fact that Tess is basically on her own. With the disintegration of traditional culture, people have become atomized. In the nineteenth century, according to Raymond Williams, "increasingly the phrase 'an individual'—a single example of a group—was joined and overtaken by 'the individual': a fundamental order of being."\(^{17}\) In other words, the emphasis on the individual rather than on relationships among individuals reflects a changing society in which relationships have become less important. Not only are they less possible for individuals, they are less fundamental to the structure of society. From Phase One, where Tess is a focus within a larger group, she emerges as an isolated individual, having to survive on her own while at the same time searching for new connections.

Moreover, the communities of workers in the novel are made up largely
of women. On one level, this composition reflects an economic reality of the nineteenth century. According to Hardy in "The Dorsetshire Labourer," "Women's labour . . . is highly in request, for a woman who, like a boy, fills the place of a man at half the wages, can be better depended on for steadiness . . . . a woman is invaluable in work which, though somewhat lighter, demands thought." However, the novel's emphasis on single women also reinforces the sense of isolation in Tess; individuals rather than families make up the basic social unit. The minor role that working men play in the novel emphasizes the disintegration of traditional sex roles and suggests a link between economic and personal changes. Thus, contrary to what Kettle says, the novel is not primarily about economics. Ian Gregor says that Hardy has a "sense of a deep interrelationship between the individual, the social and the metaphysical," that "he was able to image the sexual and economic concerns of a society as part of a single process." While we may question whether Hardy really has this sense, the above description certainly fits the novel.

Let us look more closely and specifically at the Wessex that Tess experiences. The novel starts before social change has become evident; at the beginning of the novel we get a sense of the way Marlott has lived for centuries. The May-day dance, already an anachronism, lingers as the last of a multitude of festivals held in earlier times. The villagers seem to have little sense of relationship to Victorian England. Although she has had a London schoolmistress, Tess, at the start of the novel, has never been outside the Vale of Blackmoor; she and her peers would never have ventured on the walking tour that leads the more patrician Clares to
Marlott in Chapter 2. The several journeys Tess undertakes in the course of the novel are in themselves indicators of massive social change. The villagers' attitude to the world is an easy-going fatalism. Joan Durbeyfield, despite her very worldly plotting of how to advance her daughter, appears as "an unapprehending peasant woman" (p. 275), enjoying her drink and her children, consulting the Compleat Fortune-Teller and locking it outside at night. In general the Durbeyfields seem to share an illusion of security based on their traditional position as independent lifeholders, but completely unjustified by economic facts. Sustenance for this illusion is found at the local pub:

Life for the Durbeyfield family is hard, but in The Pure Drop and Rolliver's it can be made to acquire "a sort of halo, an occidental glow." It is there in the inn that dreams can be indulged, and the Durbeyfields can believe that they are the true descendants of the D'Urberville (sic) family. But around them press the economic realities, and when the horse dies, their livelihood is jeopardised.20

Tess's family is of an intermediate class, "an interesting and better-informed class . . . who formed the backbone of the village life."21 According to "The Dorsetshire Labourer," such people are being forced into towns by landlords who are consolidating their holdings and dispensing with non-farm workers in order to increase agricultural production. As Merryn Williams notes, the class to which the Durbeyfields belong is mobile socially in both directions. Its members might lose everything, through the constant fluctuations in rural society, and be reduced to the most menial forms of labour, but they could also hope to rise out of their class through marriage or education or indeed through sheer energy, as the Mayor of Casterbridge does. The society which Hardy presents in his novels is not feudal, not a rigid caste system which denies all mobility, but a developing capitalist society, in which it is possible for families and individuals
either to sink or to rise from their original status, and in which accident plays a large part.  

Thus within the first phase of the novel we see two opposing tendencies in the Durbeyfield family. Jack drinks rather too much, has little business and relies financially on a half-dead horse. While a generation or two ago none of this would have mattered, it is crucial now since the family lifehold ends with him. His pathetic excitement at the discovery of noble ancestors is a last-ditch attempt at face-saving. Joan, on the other hand, has always had grand hopes for her daughter, and the discovery of the d'Urberville link leads her to romantic fantasies based on very pragmatic interests. Tess, too, is rather ambitious; she once hoped to become a schoolteacher and has passed the Sixth Standard, learning to speak London English. The Durbeyfields, then, are destined either to rise or fall. Particularly after the death of Prince and later the eviction, Tess feels she ought to help determine their course. The competition among the farm girls for both Alec and Angel is not solely due to their masculine charms; both are eligible bachelors from non-labouring classes and represent a possible rise in status for a working woman. 

Despite the undercurrents of change, Phase the First defines Tess's only real experience of a community that has any roots. In her childhood Tess "had used to be seen about the village as one of three" (p. 65), not particularly striking in herself. The narrator also comments that "to almost everybody she was a fine and picturesque country girl, and no more" (p. 43), one of many. Starting in Marlott, a community of women forms a consistent background to the novel. The club-members are brought together by common tradition and a common home. The cultural continuity
is emphasized not only by the ancient ritual itself, but by the wide
span in ages among the group. The presence of both the old and the
young denotes a securely defined sense of both past and future. Just
as there is the knowledge that those "scourged by time's trouble" walked
in the group when their "life throbbed quick and warm" (p. 41), so there
is the assumption that the young girls will walk until gray-haired in
their turn.

The community at Trantridge is again partly an anachronism. There
are only hints within this section of changes in village life. For
instance, the good home-brew beer made by the local innkeeper in The
Mayor of Casterbridge has become "the curious compounds sold . . . as
beer by the monopolizers of the once independent inns" (p. 94). As well,
the Stoke-d'Urbervilles, landlords of the area, are not historically
rooted there: they are bourgeois Londoners trying to give the imprimatur
of land to their newly acquired wealth. Tess's naive surprise at the new-
ness of the d'Urberville estate is a masterful stroke of irony, as is the
juxtaposition of the manor with the ancient Chase: "All this sylvan
antiquity, however, though visible from The Slopes, was outside the
immediate boundaries of the estate. . . . Everything looked like money--
like the last coin issued from the Mint" (p. 67). In addition, Hardy
emphasizes that this is a pleasure-farm "with not an acre of troublesome
land attached to it beyond what was required for residential purposes, and
for a little fancy farm. . ." (p. 66).

If The Slopes has little to do with the farming which forms the
economic base and defines the culture of the community, the common people
still seem to live in a more or less traditional way. They are presented
as villagers, rather than transient workers. Although we later see Car and Nancy Darch working as farm-labourers at Flintoomb-Ash, and are told they "were only temporary sojourners [at Trantridge] as here ..." (p. 336), Car's gift of treacle to her grandmother leads us to assume at the time that they are still with their family at Trantridge. The dance in Trantridge seems a traditional mating ritual of the area. It differs, however, from the club-walking dance in its explicit sexuality. Hardy strangely etherealizes the event while at the same time situating it in a barn among the products and accoutrements of agriculture. The dancers become lesser deities of a very agricultural religion:

Through this floating,usty debris of peat and hay, mixed with the perspiration and warmth of the dancers, and forming together a sort of vege-to-human pollen, the muted fiddles feebly pushed their notes, in marked contrast to the spirit with which the measure was trodden out. They coughed as they danced, and laughed as they coughed. Of the rushing couples there could barely be discerned more than the high lights—the indistinctness shaping them to satyrs clasping nym- phs—a multiplicity of Pans whirling a multiplicity of Syrinxes; Lotis attempting to elude Priapus, and always failing. (p. 96)

In this rather overdone passage, the dance becomes more than traditional; it becomes archetypal. Moreover the tone of Arcadian indulgence here serves to avoid the explicit sexuality of the scene. While Hardy wants us to know what really goes on in the villages, he does not want to say so.

The dance is the only place in the short Trantridge section where men of Tess's class have any role. Tess seems to have little to do with the men, refusing arrogantly to dance with at least one prospective partner: "She did not abhor dancing, but she was not going to dance here" (p. 97). Although there are clearly men in the homeward-bound
group, they remain completely unimportant; none are mentioned by name
and the leadership seems to rest with the women. It appears as if Alec
is the only male in Trantridge. His economic and sexual power pervades
and structures the relationships and activities of the group of women.
According to the narrator: "The levity of some of the younger women in
and about Trantridge was marked, and was perhaps symptomatic of the choice
spirit who ruled The Slopes in that vicinity" (p. 94). Certainly to Tess
he is the only man in town. Despite her embarrassment at her mother's
matchmaking, she remains aloof from men of her own class. While she does
not speak of an attraction to Alec, she is perhaps not so different in
her response to him from those she considers "a whorage" (p. 100).

Nevertheless, from Phase the First there has been a process of
singling Tess out: Angel looks back and sees her standing apart at the
dance; she is also the only dancer to wear a red ribbon. Chosen by Hardy
and noticed belatedly by Angel, she is never again merely "a young member
of the band" (p. 41). Her values, as well, set her apart. Just as she
disapproves of her parents' nocturnal visits to the public house, she
looks down on the popular morality of Trantridge. She is in an odd
position, distancing herself morally from the only environment she has
ever known. As Alec remarks she is "very sensitive for a cottage girl"
(p. 85) and acts like a d'Urberville as she certainly would have even
without knowledge of the family skeletons. Still, Tess learns to join in
the frivolity of Trantridge Saturday nights: "Her first experience of the
journey afforded her more enjoyment than she had expected, the hilariousness
of the others being quite contagious after her monotonous attention to the
poultry-farm all the week" (p. 94). Her attendance at market-day becomes
a strange combination of enjoyment and aloofness; she is not shown drinking or dancing with the others, yet looks forward to the companionship and holiday gaiety. Tess's haughtiness explains Car's fury when Tess laughs with the others at the curving snake of treacle on Car's back. Tess's automatic reaction is clearly miscalculated and easily identifies her as John Durbeyfield's daughter: "'Indeed, then, I shall not fight!' said [Tess] majestically; 'and if I had known you was of that sort, I wouldn't have so let myself down as to come with such a whorage as this is!'" (p. 100). Her triumph at escaping the women ironically lowers her to the state she accuses them of; she supplants Car Darch as Alec's mistress.

If the community at Trantridge, as at Marlott, seems to be an indigenous one, the community at Talbothays does not. Critics usually read Talbothays as a pastoral; work and human relationships there seem intimately related to nature. In the context of the rest of the novel Talbothays certainly represents a fast-disappearing form of labour; in comparison to Flintcomb-Ash, it seems idyllic. Nonetheless it cannot be accepted simply as a conventional Arcadia. Natural descriptions and scenes of labour combine to introduce every chapter save one in "The Rally": activity plays as big a role in Tess's recovery as the clement weather. Moreover, the work is hard, although pleasant; the hours are long, although passed in friendly company. Although the dairy seems like a community or family, Tess is a hired labourer and she, like Izz, Retty and Marian is dismissed at the end of the season. Hardy specifically emphasizes the fact that the dairy is a part of a larger economic network in Chapter 30, when Tess and Angel take the milk to the railroad station. The
temporary idyll of the dairy farm is broken, as the suspended time of falling in love now gives way to real decisions and problems for Tess. Just as it is clear that summer will pass, and that falling in love cannot last forever, it is evident that Talbothays is a transitory phase for Tess. Tess's marriage is supposed to take her away from farm work; idyllic though the dairy farm may be, any of the women would prefer to marry Angel and enjoy an easier life and a rise in status.

There are no Gabriel Oaks or Giles Winterbournes in Tess, no male figures who have the wisdom and strength of a centuries-old link with the land. Again, at Talbothays, Hardy focuses almost exclusively on the women. Again, the women center their attention and affections on the same man. The fact that the men of Tess's class are never developed as individual characters (Dairyman Dick remains a rather comic minor figure) reflects the women's perspective on eligible males and makes Angel's prominence even greater. The fact that Angel is a member of a higher class as well as the only important male reinforces the connection between economic and sexual power first suggested at Trantridge.

The romanticism of "The Rally" does serve a function beyond Hardy's rural nostalgia. Talbothays is partly a psychological landscape, reflecting Tess's state of mind. The novel's emphasis on the fertile, regenerative aspects of nature reflects as well as adds to Tess's revived sense of power and worth in the world:

Either the change in the quality of the air from heavy to light, or the sense of being amid new scenes where there were no invidious eyes upon her, sent up her spirits wonderfully. Her hopes mingled with the sunshine in an ideal photosphere which surrounded her as she bounded along against the soft south wind. She heard a pleasant voice in every breeze, and in every bird's note seemed to lurk a joy. . . . The irresistible,
universal, automatic tendency to find sweet pleasure somewhere, which pervades all life, from the meanest to the highest, had at length mastered Tess. . . . Let the truth be told—women do as a rule live through such humiliations, and regain their spirits, and again look about them with an interested eye. (p. 140-141)

Because her "familiar surroundings had not darkened because of her grief, nor sickened because of her pain" (p. 127), she seems to feel a sort of freedom. Far from making her a mere cell of nature, her loss of virginity has set her apart, given her a sense of herself as an individual separate from nature and culture.

And it is as an individual that Tess must go on. While the alienation of the workplace that Marx describes as endemic to individual experience under a capitalist mode of production is only suggested at Talbothays, it becomes clearly evident at Flintcomb-Ash. If at Talbothays both nature and work seemed particularly humane, Flintcomb-Ash "is nothing less than a calvary of labour, something never shown before in Hardy, in which human beings are sustained by nothing but the sheer will to endure."23 Again, nature is a symbolic expression of Tess's emotional state, but the bleak desolation of the landscape reflects and exacerbates the conditions of labour too. The workers there appear to be without much hope of any kind, and, except for the friends from Talbothays, seem isolated from one another.

Many critics have focused on the threshing machine scene as representative of the crucial difference between Talbothays and Flintcomb-Ash. Machinery has appeared in the novel before, but in a far less threatening way. The reaping machine in Marlott controls the workers' activities: they follow behind it binding up the sheaves. But Hardy describes it
as almost an adjunct of nature, a fundamental part of the scene:
"... of all the ruddy things that morning the brightest were two broad
arms of painted wood, which rose from the margin of a yellow cornfield
hard by Marlott village" (p. 122). At Talbothays, too, machinery is
incidental, subsumed to the natural and human rhythms of farming. Stories
involving machinery, such as that of Jack Dollop jumping into the churn
("and it was turned by handpower then"--p. 173) are more amusing than
threatening. At Flintcomb-Ash work is not determined by seasonal,
climatic or human factors. The thresher is described as a demanding god
"for, as 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..." (p. 374). Working on this machine, Tess becomes less than
human: "The incessant quivering, in which every fibre of her frame
participated, had thrown her into a stupefied reverie in which her arms
worked independently of her consciousness. She hardly knew where she
was..." (p. 381).

The incident with the threshing machine is based on fact, for Hardy
describes in "The Dorsetshire Labourer" the experience of a woman forced
to stand all day on the threshing machine: "... she was so dizzy from
the work as to be unable to find the opposite gate, and there she walked
round and round the field, bewildered and terrified, till three o'clock
in the morning, before she got out."24 But the non-mechanized labour is
just as bad. Swede-hacking in the winter is not a product of industrial-
ization, yet, as David Meakin points out, "... here the figures of the
labourers stooping over their arduous tasks suggest not harmony so much
as 'a mechanical regularity,' rural paternalism gives way to a more modern
and anonymous form of economic exploitation. . . . nature itself is harsh, desolate and cruel here, and the work of digging up swedes in the driving rain can be nothing but miserable."  

Even apart from its machinery, Flintcomb-Ash exemplifies a change in the social relations of labour: people are seen by their employer as if they are parts of a machine; there is no mutual responsibility except in terms of labour and wages. If we look at Tess historically, this is a step away from the happy paternalism of Dairyman Dick. In another sense, however, this farm work is the converse of the dairy work at Talbothays: each presupposes the other. Farm workers must stay alive in winter as well as in summer, and digging swedes is one of the few ways to do so. This grim reality is the other side of the pastoral. Crick is kinder than Groby, and the weather at Talbothays is better, but the existence of Talbothays implies the existence of Flintcomb-Ash as well.

To some extent the women at Flintcomb-Ash protect each other against the tyranny of Farmer Groby, help each other daydream away the harsh conditions of life and support each other in the disillusionment of love. It is a bloc of the powerless, however. Protection for Tess and financial security for her family must ultimately come from a man; in Angel's absence, from Alec. Tess at least has a way out again; for the other women sexuality, like labour, continues to be torture. The human urge toward emotional and sexual connection is thus distorted by the conditions of life as, in Marx's definition of alienation, the worker becomes estranged from nature, from his or her own human nature (the definition of which becomes henceforth problematic) and from other people. Tess describes these latter forms of alienation in the collapse of a rooted community.
and the substitution of a transient community based on common oppression. Individual relationships are formed and mediated by the distant market; survival is based on one's ability to sell one's labour. Self-awareness is problematic.

'Tess is created as an individual by the collapse of an old culture which has become oppressive because it is irrelevant. As an individual she finds herself trapped by new conditions of labour and, as we shall see, social relationships. In the course of the novel Tess becomes a conscious being, apparently aware of her choices, but the limited nature of the possible choices also becomes increasingly clear. The process of becoming more individualized does not lead to more freedom, either within the context of Tess or in Marx's theory. The crisis of community leads to a crisis of consciousness; the crisis of social identity indicates an accompanying crisis of sexual identity. Hardy's focus on work in Tess indicates a changed basis for the individual's relationship to society, indeed a changed consciousness of the meaning of "individual." The novel's focus on women implies a breakdown in the possibility of sexual relationships and a failure in the male, despite the maintenance of the traditional patriarchal power structure of Victorian England. Thus it is in the sexual relationships that alienation becomes most striking in Tess. Raymond Williams' comment about Hardy expresses succinctly the connections between work and sexuality in the novel:

Hardy does not celebrate isolation and separation. He mourns them, and yet always with the courage to look them steadily in the face. The losses are real and heartbreaking because the desires were real, the shared work was real, the unsatisfied impulses were real. Work and desire are very deeply connected in his whole imagination. The passion of Marty or of Tess or of Jude is a positive force
coming out of a working and relating world; seeking in different ways its living fulfilment. That all are frustrated is the essential action: frustrated by very complicated processes of division, separation and rejection. People choose wrongly but under terrible pressures: under the confusions of class, under its misunderstandings, under the calculated rejections of a divided separating world.26

The next chapter will deal with some of these issues.
CHAPTER III

"CALL ME TESS":
THE STRUGGLE FOR CONSCIOUSNESS

The connections between economic, social and individual alienation explored in the previous chapter can be taken even further than Raymond Williams is prepared to go. It becomes painfully apparent in Tess that when social and economic alienation is translated to an emotional level it is experienced most strongly in personal relationships. Both in the novel and historically this occurs partly because personal relationships reflect the values, assumptions and power structure of the dominant economic system and partly because, as they are cut off from the increasingly alienated working part of an individual's life, personal relationships take on the entire burden of personal fulfillment. Thus the love tragedy becomes the dominant mode of fiction as the dominance of capitalism increases in the nineteenth century. According to John Lucas, the crux of Tess is the novel's exploration of "the meaning of separation from self, the denial of identity." The word "alienation" might just as easily be used. What emerges from the increasing sense of alienation or separation in the novel is a character who is more
complex than a stereotyped country lass.

Although Arthur Efron's statement that Tess is about the "sexual possibilities in a woman's life"\(^2\) is rather reductive, nonetheless sexuality is at the core of Tess's experience and forms the focus of her conflicts. Although sexual love is supposed to re-integrate the self, to celebrate individual identity, it does not do so in Tess. Each of Tess's sexual relationships in the novel demands that she deny part of herself. Tess's alienated experience of herself, the experience of not knowing where and how she fits into the world, is compounded by the views of others, particularly Alec and Angel. Her experience of herself in sexual relationships follows the pattern described by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex.*\(^3\)

Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. . . . She is simply what man decrees. . . . She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the in-essential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other.\(^4\)

What deBeauvoir is talking about is a woman's difficulty in experiencing herself as a subject, an active being, when the male world insists on reducing her to an object. In a literal sense, Tess often is an object, frequently observed through the eyes of other characters, from Angel in Phase the First to Angel and 'Liza-Lu on the last page. As noted earlier, Hardy himself is constantly watching, a detached but definitively male presence immanent in the novel. Much of Tess's struggle, usually conscious although not always thought out and sometimes verging on neurotic, is against this objectification.

Thus Tess's 'alienation from herself and from the world is particularly
connected to her femaleness. Tess experiences her sexuality both as a means to social and economic security and as the crux of her oppression. These are clearly two aspects of the same thing. In both cases Tess's personal identity is secondary to her experience of her body as a commodity or an object beyond her control: "And there was revived in her the wretched sentiment which had often come to her before, that in inhabiting the fleshly tabernacle with which Nature had endowed her she was somehow doing wrong" (p. 356-7). Because of the social constraints upon Tess and the nature of male sexuality in the novel, there is scarcely any room for her to respond sexually or to see her own sexuality in positive terms. Despite John Bayley's interesting comment about "the air of freedom in a Hardy story," there is little space for Tess. By the end of the novel there is none.

What does develop in the spaces she manages to find, however, could be termed a tentative consciousness. The novel, in tracing the evolving complexity of modern society and its accompanying alienation, isolation and confusion, also lays the groundwork for an exploration of modern consciousness. Ian Gregor sees Hardy's attitude to consciousness and experience as almost Blakean. He notes "Hardy's continuous preoccupation with human consciousness, a consciousness which has found, in the conflict with itself and with its environment, the price of its development." No matter how great our sense of alienation and rootlessness, we could none of us, not even Hardy, choose to return to sixteenth-century Wessex. Consciousness of our own alienation has within it the possibility for a radical sense of our own individuality and potential for freedom. Tess's response to an alienating world implies her beginning to exist as an
individual. The reader thus experiences a dual sense of Tess: on the one hand, she seems to be doomed, fated, trapped; on the other hand, she "conveys the feeling that she is greater than destiny."7

The tradition of Freud, Reich and Lawrence, despite all their differences, has seen that a truly revolutionary consciousness of self would imply sexual self-determination at its base. But sexual liberation cannot be equated glibly with sexual experience. For a woman like Tess, sexual experience only exists within a framework of economic and sexual oppression. If some critics gnash their teeth at Tess's refusal to commit herself sexually and others bend over backwards to claim fulfillment for her, it is because of the anxiety and ambiguity in the novel. For Tess there are no easy solutions.

Throughout the entire novel, Tess is never really at ease, is always set apart from her environment: at Marlott she has middle class values; at Trantridge and Talbothays she is the chosen woman; even at Flintcomb-Ash she has options and hopes that the other women only dream of. Never completely identifiable with her environment, she is not completely unique either. Thus there is a continuous sense of tension and struggle around her, as she is engaged in a usually very conscious struggle with her past, her environment and with people who attempt to define her.

However Hardy attempts to ignore this struggle and chooses to see Tess in one of a number of static ways. He calls her "a pure woman faithfully presented," yet this is a simplification both of the character herself and the novel's treatment of her. She is not just an exemplar of purity; she demolishes that concept. On a simple level, Tess is a combination of several of Hardy's earlier female characters into the culmination
of his fantasy of the ideal country woman. Just as the novel sometimes reduces itself, as noted in Chapter 2, to a yearning for the good old days when women were women and life was simple, Hardy sometimes defines Tess as merely a representative of that life. If Hardy expends so much emotional energy on Tess, it is partly because she represents his nostalgia for Wessex. Through her, Hardy seeks the ancient values which he sees being obliterated to the detriment of Victorian England. There is thus a sense of cultural potential, a possibility of social redemption surrounding her; as a woman, and particularly as a country woman, she is for Hardy both a life-giver and a cultural guardian.

Hardy's final emphasis on Tess as a victim and martyr is particularly frustrating because it is not wholly true to the reader's experience of the character. It is clear that Tess understands the issues in her relationships with men and understands much of what she herself needs. That she is also an emotional character, giving in to grief, confusion and anger does not negate her struggling sense of herself, nor does it make her the totally passive, unconscious creature that many critics see. Hardy's patronizing remarks, such as calling her "a vessel of emotions" (p. 277), obscure the fact that she is conscious, although not on his terms. Lucas notes that

on more than one occasion he refers to Tess . . . as a vehicle for sensations rather than thoughts. . . . the fact that she lives by sensations rather than thoughts may not be totally demeaning—though . . . Hardy puts the matter badly and . . . it occasionally allows him to condescend to her. More justifiably, however, it implies that Tess tries to intuit rather than rationalize or arrive by intellectual means at her sense of self, that she has no words to compete with the men's sense of her, only a determination to live—if she possibly can—from some centre, some awareness of
herself as pure woman, purely a woman. . . . If the centre will not hold it is because of the ways in which it is constantly denied, as men think of her in their terms as pure or impure and try to fix her identity. 8

Since Hardy so often colludes in the male characters' view of Tess, it is necessary to take particular note of what Tess herself says and does. To focus on Tess in her relationship to men reveals where the contradictions are most acute and where the possibilities for fulfillment are greatest.

As noted in Chapter 2, Tess always stands out. In Marlott, although she is just one of a group of girls, her values are already moving away from her parents'. Ian Gregor sees this singling out as a question of different generations; he refers to a "divisiveness of consciousness which separates her from her parents." 9 It is more than this, however. The fact that when Tess and her mother "were together the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed" (p. 51) indicates that the rapidity of social change is more pertinent than family relationships in the abstract.

Tess has been to the national school and has internalized its values. Thus, as Paris notes, Tess refuses to hear her father mocked as he comes drunkenly home in the wagon. 10 She "wouldn't have it [known] for the world" (p. 57) that John is too drunk to go to market, and instead sets out on her fateful journey with Abraham. She criticizes her mother's easy-going nature as if she herself were the mother of the family. In general she acts more like the parent in the Durbeyfield family than Joan and John do: although she seems to avoid menial chores like washing clothes, she
takes on the task of keeping the family organized, respectable and fi-
nancially solvent. She makes sure they keep up to what is essentially an outside standard. In fact Joan later tells Angel that she has never understood Tess. Despite Joan's influence on her, Tess operates out of a morality that her parents do not share. She internalizes her mother's fantasies which she pragmatically translates into middle class values and ambitions. The duty toward her family that Paris calls self-effacing, although sometimes obnoxiously moralistic and self-righteous, is not a neurosis. Certainly, as the eldest child of a family in straitened circumstances, it is both psychologically and traditionally realistic that Tess would take partial responsibility for her family's welfare. And as the member of a transitional generation, she defines their welfare in a way that begins to resemble Angel Clare's definition.

As the novel progresses and the situation changes, Tess is far less in control that she appears to be in Marlott. The fact that the reader has a less firm sense of her identity after she leaves Marlott reflects her own insecurity in a new world. Her class origins show themselves in her frequently feeling intimidated throughout the novel, yet she almost always retains a degree of the pride she showed in relation to her family. Thus, although Tess is clearly out of her league with Alec and passes their first interview in a dream, "half-pleased, half-reluctant" (p. 70), she still manages to regain some degree of control over the situation and could scarcely be called Alec's passive dupe. Her apparent tractability in Chapter 8 hides much more willfullness. She allows Alec to kiss her, then wipes the spot his lips have touched. It is not the "kiss of mastery" (p. 85) that d'Urberville wants. She timidly begs leave to fetch her hat,
then refuses "in defiant triumph" (p. 86) to climb back into the wagon. Later, in finally leaving Alec, she says "'I have said I will not take anything more from you, and I will not--I cannot! I should be your creature to go on doing that, and I won't!'" (p. 112). Her actions throughout this section of the novel show particular evidence of pride and independence.

The question of what exactly happens between Tess and Alec at Trantridge is left ambiguous by Hardy, perhaps because of Victorian prudery, perhaps because the answer is more complicated than he can say. As noted in Chapter 2, this question cannot be divorced from the position of Tess's family in relation to the Stoke-d'Urbervilles; however there is clearly more going on than class struggle. Alec is a typical melodramatic villain; he talks like one, acts like one, looks like one:

He had an almost swarthy complexion, with full lips, badly moulded, though red and smooth, above which was a well-groomed black moustache with curled points, though his age could not be more than three- or four-and-twenty. Despite the touches of barbarism in his contours, there was a singular force in the gentleman's face and in his bold rolling eye.

"Well, my Beauty, what can I do for you?" said he. . . . (p. 68)

He sees himself as a ladies' man, and Tess, like many others, falls for him, even though he is an incorrigible blackguard, and does not pretend to be otherwise. From the day when Alec forces roses and strawberries upon her, Tess feels Alec's sexual force. Burns very astutely comments that "any number of previous Victorian heroines had of course responded to roués . . . but in almost every instance they had responded to what they thought was good and virtuous in their seducers, whereas Tess . . . responds to what she later recognizes and acknowledges as the power of
What may be a "natural" urge is applied to a man who is certainly eligible in terms of appearance and class, yet totally unacceptable in character. The naive Tess is confused both about what she ought to do and what she wants.

If it is clear that Tess knows from the beginning what Alec is, she also knows how he sees her. His "Coz" is sarcastic; he is most interested in her "luxuriousness of aspect . . . fulness of growth" (p. 71). He wants to possess her. In Lawrence's words, she is "the embodied fulfilment of his own desire: something, that is, belonging to him. She cannot, in his conception, exist apart from him nor have any being apart from his being." John Lucas argues that Alec sees Tess as an extension of the "pastoral fancy" at the root of his family's move to the country under an assumed ancient name. This interpretation is suggested particularly in the scene of the strawberries and roses. Surrounded by spring fruits and flowers, "Tess is reduced to a townsman's cliche of a pastoral shepherdess. As pretty as a picture. And as unreal." It is true that Alec seems to have a predilection for country women. Yet unlike Angel Clare, Alec at least allows Tess to be a physical being; he is the man of her mother's fantasies finally recognizing Tess's beauty. But there is something missing for Tess, perhaps because her affair with Alec is such a stereotypical case of rural England and because it does not meet the standard of "love" that is evolving as a cultural imperative.

At first Tess responds to Alec's aggressive sexuality by fluctuating erratically between resistance and passivity. At crucial points she simply abdicates responsibility: that is, she loses consciousness, either totally or in part. For instance, Hardy tells us that after the strawberry
and rose scene she only wakes up to her appearance when fellow-travellers comment on it. As well, Tess, who never again becomes lost, does not realize that Alec is riding away from The Slopes on the fateful night in The Chase.

... instead of remaining alert and resisting Alec's advances, as she has done up till now, Tess "passively" sits down in the leaves he has heaped, falls into a reverie when he leaves, and is asleep when he returns. She is tired, to be sure, but her passivity and drowsiness are more symptoms of psychological than of physical fatigue. She can neither resist nor submit; nor can she contend any longer with her inner conflicts. By going to sleep she escapes her conflicting emotions, eliminates the need of choosing a course of behavior, and puts herself in the hands of fate.14

They are not fate's hands, of course, they are Alec's. Paris, like many other critics, succumbs to Hardy's misapplication of blame. As well, one wonders whether Hardy emphasizes Tess's passivity so much in order to avoid the possibility of willingness in her response to Alec.

Paris blames Tess's behavior on the bribery of Alec's generosity to her family, but the answer is not this straightforward. J. T. Laird documents changes in the manuscripts of the novel which indicate an increasing complexity in Tess's response to Alec. In the later editions, Hardy emphasized Tess's willingness more than in the original version. Chapter 11, the last chapter of "The Maiden," provides the best example. In the manuscript, Tess's response "Because I cannot help myself here" to Alec's question: "Why haven't you told me when I have made you angry?" emphasizes the theme of socio-economic exploitation and supports Paris's interpretation. But the later addition of "I suppose" before "because I don't love you" and Tess's silence when Alec asks if his love-making always offends her are additions that indicate physical attraction and resulting
emotional confusion. This sense is reinforced by "the deletion of the forthright 'Quite' from the beginning of her second reply [to 'You are quite sure?'], and the substitution of 'I am angry with you sometimes!' for 'I am angry with you often.' Early manuscripts of the novel have Alec forcibly giving Tess a draught of alcohol, suggesting thereby that Tess is incapable of helping herself. Although Laird says that the passage was removed because "it was essential in the 1892 edition that there should not remain any suggestion that the heroine had been rendered either complaisant or unconscious by the effects of alcohol," the omission of this detail suggests at least passive acquiescence, if not active participation. Surely Tess didn't sleep through the whole thing!

In other instances in the later editions, however, Hardy puts more emphasis on Tess's victimization, thus making his attitude quite ambiguous.

The question of seduction or rape, which has been discussed vehemently by many critics, remains unanswered and unanswerable in the novel. Certainly there is some amount of coercion if not actual force involved: Alec alternately bullies Tess, flatters her, and bribes her with gifts to her family. When Tess meets him later in the novel he assumes the fault was all his. As well, the 1892 edition added a comment on Sorrow by a Marlott rustic: "A little more than persuading had to do wi' the coming o't, I reckon. There were they that heard a sobbing one night last year in The Chase; and it mid ha' gone hard wi' a certain party if folks had come along" (p. 126). Alec exercises his power if not physical strength; rape-like sex seems to be the norm for him. The act in The Chase is an example of what Christopher Lasch terms "the counterconvention of droit de seigneur." This "counterconvention," so called because it is both
counter to and compatible with the convention of chivalry,

justified the predatory exploits of the privileged classes against women socially inferior to themselves... [and] showed that men at no time ceased to regard most women as fair game. The long history of rape and seduction, moreover, served as a reminder that animal strength remained the basis of masculine ascendancy, manifested here in its most direct and brutal form... The symbiotic interdependence of exploiters and exploited, so characteristic of paternalism in all ages, survived in male-female relations long after the collapse of other forms of patriarchal authority.17

Thus the sexual attraction involved in Tess's fall is a complicated, although crucial, factor. Tess and Alec may be the most sexually responsive characters in the novel, but in very different ways. While Lawrence is more wishful than realistic in seeing Alec and Tess as potentially perfect mates, the text supports his assertion that Alec "could reach some of the real sources of the female in a woman, and draw from them."18 Ian Gregor agrees with this assessment of Alec and adds:

What Alec presents irresistibly to Tess is a sense of power. In spite of his crude and self-conscious role-playing he recognises her as a woman, and this gives to her, in a way that she has never experienced before, a sense of her own power, her own attraction. It gives her a new sense of her individuality and she is right to think that if she betrays that she imperils her own being... In Alec, she senses both her creator and destroyer. It is the attempt to do justice to the extent and range of these feelings that makes Hardy so calculatedly ambiguous about the nature of their encounter in the Chase; it is both seduction and a rape. If it were merely a rape, then there would be no sense in Tess's profound feeling throughout the novel that her whole being has been invaded by Alec, so that in one sense she feels she "belongs" to him, belongs because he brought to consciousness her own sexuality. If it were simply a seduction, then there would be no sense in Tess's equally profound feeling that her past with Alec is a nullity.19

Gregor overestimates Hardy's consciousness of this contradiction;
nevertheless he is right to see that, without exonerating Alec, the novel recognizes Tess's role in the seduction.

Tess certainly does not view herself as an unwilling victim, although she might be better off if she did. It is not the loss of virginity alone, but her own complicity in the act that makes her feel so guilty and unworthy. As Arthur Efron says, her acquiescence is due to "a strange tangle of weariness, loneliness, indignation, impulse, some vague sexual attraction... and... willingness... to be associated... with someone who seems able to lift her out of her depressing family life." 20 As well, whatever the events of the night in The Chase, it is clear that Tess stayed with Alec for a while as his lover. There is a significant gap in the narration between the night in The Chase and Tess's departure; we do not know her feelings during those few weeks. Afterwards, when she again resists Alec and returns to Marlott, she sees herself as having been a victim, claiming "I didn't understand your meaning till it was too late. ... My eyes were dazed by you for a little, and that was all" (p. 112). Again the excuse is unconsciousness. She goes on to explain, "I made up my mind [to leave] as soon as I saw—what I ought to have seen sooner" (p. 113). This is a puzzling statement because the novel never explains what she sees. That Alec wouldn't marry her? That she is an immoral woman? That she doesn't like Alec's love-making? Efron suggests the latter in blaming "low-grade sex" 21 with Alec; Hardy doesn't really seem to know.

Whatever Tess's reason for leaving, however, she does not do so passively. "'My God!'" she tells Alec, "'I could knock you out of the gig! Did it never strike your mind that what every woman says some women
may feel?'" (p. 112). It is partly her independence in leaving him, as earlier in resisting him, that makes Tess so attractive to Alec. Yet her self-assertion is again modified by apparent passivity. Thus in the final scene with Alec in Phase the Second, he accuses her of haughtiness: "One would think you were a princess from your manner, in addition to a true and original d'Urberville" (p. 112). Minutes later, however, when Alec tries to kiss her:

"If you wish," she answered indifferently. "See how you've mastered me!" She thereupon turned round and lifted her face to his, and remained like a marble term while he imprinted a kiss upon her cheek. ... Her eyes vaguely rested upon the remotest trees in the lane while the kiss was given, as though she were nearly unconscious of what he did. (p. 113)

This passage has a very strange tone; there is a sense that Tess is play-acting. Her passivity, more so than her earlier coyness, seems a calculated response: perhaps to offend Alec by her indifference; perhaps because she is, as Alec says, "absurdly melancholy" (p. 113) and acts the part of wronged woman as if she were a heroine of melodrama; perhaps because Hardy wants to emphasize her victimization. In any case, even though she leaves by choice, she consciously, probably both sarcastically and self-pityingly, acts the role of victim in Alec's mythology of mastery. (This mythology is summed up later when Alec tells her, "I was your master once! I will be your master again."--p. 379) She assumes the role Alec has demanded that she play, although she uses it in part at least against him. In her alienation from her own action, Tess's own sexual self-consciousness is missing. The reader worries that perhaps the novel is becoming a melodrama after all.

Tess's realization that she does not love Alec means, for Hardy and
sometimes for Tess herself, that her sexual response must have been wrong. For this reason Hardy would have us believe that when she is not resisting Alec she is being victimized by him. On some level Tess herself comes to believe this also. What is easily forgotten is that although Tess is partly a victim of Alec and of circumstances, the novel shows that her sexual response to him is real; even when she has left she does not "hate him . . . quite" (p. 117). The reader never sees her as a self-conscious, sexually responsive woman because neither she nor Hardy accepts this part of her. The novel implies that, for a woman, sexuality must exist in particular relationship to a worthy man, not positively for her own sake.

Thus Hardy is ambiguous about Tess's experience: on the one hand he calls it "incapacitating" (p. 134), on the other "a liberal education" (p. 135). But the novel shows that Tess's move from innocence to experience is in many ways a positive one for her; it separates her from Marlott and puts the emphasis on whom she will become, what she will do. In leaving Alec rather than trying to marry him, and in recuperating rather than fading away as Victorian heroines are supposed to do, Tess makes her first conscious choices.

Thus, Tess's initial response to Angel is far more conscious than her response to Alec; although Hardy later can only describe her as "drifting into acquiescence" (p. 289) as any good Victorian heroine would do, she is not overwhelmed as she was in Phase I, but aware both of her inclinations and of her will to resist. Her first reactions to Angel are informed by the fear and shame left over from her encounter with Alec, as well as by her own tendency toward middle-class morality, what Hardy calls "her conventional aspect" (p. 127). Nevertheless, she never denies her passion
for Angel, which grows steadily from the time she meets him: "Tess was trying to lead a repressed life, but she little divined the strength of her own vitality" (p. 164). She never seems to mind Angel's rare embraces, for which he nonetheless always apologizes.

Hardy and Tess herself see her passion for Angel to be based on his spiritual qualities: "At first Tess seemed to regard Angel Clare as an intelligence rather than a man" (p. 164). Hardy later implies not only that she sees Angel as far above her, but that she is right to worship him:

There was hardly a touch of earth in her love for Clare. To her sublime trustfulness he was all that goodness could be—knew all that a guide, philosopher, and friend should know. She thought every line in the contour of his person the perfection of masculine beauty, his soul the soul of a saint, his intellect that of a seer. The wisdom of her love for him, as love, sustained her dignity; she seemed to be wearing a crown.... She had not known that men could be so disinterested, chivalrous, protective, in their love for women as he. (p. 234)

Tess is elevated in her own eyes through contact with Angel. He responds to a part of her that hitherto has been untouched.

Tess's love for Angel is clearly a repudiation of Alec, and the novel reinforces the contrast between the two men by placing them in situations that parody each other. Most significant is the fact that Angel, like Alec, has the honour of the female farm workers in his keeping; the girls spend many hot evenings writhing in passion for him. (And later Izz readily agrees to be his mistress, whatever the consequences.) Angel's name, of course, is suggestive of the women's idolization, and on another level, of Tess's belief in his spirituality. In a strange parody of heaven, he plays the harp in the attic above her bedroom with its writhing
inhabitants. Because of her experience with Alec, Tess reveres Angel's self-control: "... her perception of his care to avoid compromising [the dairymaids' happiness] ... in the least degree bred a tender respect in Tess for what she deemed rightly or wrongly, the self-controlling sense of duty shown by him ..." (p. 180-1). Yet one cannot help but wonder at Angel's behaviour, as the phrase "rightly or wrongly" implies that Hardy does. From his actions later in the novel we know that Angel is more afraid of sexuality than he is respectful or moral. He seems strangely ignorant of the girls' feelings, and consistently misses their loving looks. One wonders whether ignorance is only an excuse. While he leaves their purity intact, he toys with them in a way that is hardly defensible. His attitude toward the three women leads Merryn Williams to call Angel "a dilettante in his emotions," citing his "irresponsibility in playing with feelings deeper than his own."²² Although Angel appears to be unconscious of his power, the strangely erotic scene when he carries all four through the flooded lane belies his innocence.²³ His first view of the four women on that Sunday morning is quite voyeuristic:

The rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed quartet looked so charming in their light summer attire, clinging to the roadside bank like pigeons on a roof-slope, that he stopped a moment to regard them before coming close. Their gauzy skirts had brushed up from the grass innumerable flies and butterflies which, unable to escape, remained caged in the transparent tissue as in an aviary. Angel's eye at last fell upon Tess .... He came beneath them in the water, which did not rise over his long boots; and stood looking at the entrapped flies and butterflies. (p. 183)

Despite the emphasis on gauziness, Angel is preoccupied with their skirts. Although he camouflages his sexual response, even from himself, there is
nonetheless an Alec in him, a less straightforward Alec whose lust is mediated by intellect and sublimated into romanticism. The reader becomes increasingly aware that he is a sham angel.

Although Angel is in love with Tess he consistently denies her sexuality and to some extent his own. He carries her across the flood last and most happily, but despite their physical proximity, he persists in seeing her as non-corporeal. Although he nearly kisses her, he calls her "an undulating billow warmed by the sun. And all this fluff of muslin about you is the froth" (p. 185). Apparently solicitous of female feelings, he does not try to kiss her for fear of "unfairly taking advantage of an accidental position" (p. 185). In this, he is clearly different from Alec. Apparently it is not sexual contact he wants so much as to have Tess literally dependent and in his power. Just as he frustrates the women, he deliberately tantalizes himself. This would perhaps be a normal stage in courtship for a shy and courteous young man, unless one looks at it in light of his later actions when he has a wife who is dependent on him but with whom, citing concerns of conscience, he does not have to sleep.

Angel distances himself from sexuality by abstracting and objectifying Tess. He sees her as, among other "things," a "rosy warming apparition" (p. 168), a "visionary essence of woman" (p. 170), "an undulating billow" (p. 185), "a mate from unconstrained Nature" (p. 214), "a dear dear Tess . . . this little womanly thing . . . the creature of my good or bad faith or fortune" (p. 260). At other times he moves Tess to a mythical level, as if the distance of the mythical is necessary to his equanimity.
The spectral, half-compounded, aqueous light . . . impressed them with a feeling of isolation, as if they were Adam and Eve. . . . The mixed, singular, luminous gloom in which they walked along together to the spot where the cows lay, often made him think of the Resurrection hour. . . . She looked ghostly, as if she were merely a soul at large. . . . his own face, although he did not think of it, wore the same aspect to her. . . . It was then . . . that she impressed him most deeply. 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; and he did. Then it would grow lighter, and her features would become simply feminine; they had changed from those of a divinity who could confer bliss to those of a being who craved it. (pp. 169-70)

We know very little of Tess's perceptions of this scene, only that Angel too looks ghostly to her, but she accepts this appearance without mythologizing. Angel, however, although a self-avowed atheist, translates natural fecundity and human sexuality into religious terms, both pagan and Christian. It is as an "essence" that he primarily sees Tess, and he must remind himself, or be reminded, of her humanity. As Lucas points out, calling Tess by her real name ends the spell. If a fall is prefigured in this Eden-like scene, for Angel the imminent danger is the fall into carnality.

Angel loves Tess because he sees her as a sensuous but pure woman, an innocent that he can, in Tess's words, "bring . . . up for [his] own self" (p. 445). He wants the best of both worlds: a beautiful woman, but one whose sexuality has not yet been awakened and who will therefore become dependent on him. His love, in good bourgeois fashion, is also very proprietary. He calls Tess "my property" (p. 244), and " . . . he perceived how intimately the notion of having Tess as a dear possession
was mixed up with all his schemes and words and ways" (p. 305). Most pointedly, he complains: "I thought--any man would have thought--that by giving up all ambition to win a wife with social standing, with fortune, with knowledge of the world, I should secure rustic innocence as surely as I should secure pink cheeks...." (p. 281 Emphasis added.)

Merry Williams comments on "the self-centredness of this speech, the self-pity, the acquisitive attitude to people which it reveals so damningly...it proves he has always regarded her as an abstraction." These several passages show that Angel is not seeking a person but an ideal incarnate in a woman. Furthermore, he clearly is trying to avoid worldly and sophisticated women because he sees them as sexually threatening. Perhaps his earlier affair with a city woman has scared him into looking for a more innocent lover.

That Angel's actions are determined by repression and not chivalry becomes increasingly clear as the Talbothays section wears on. There are increasingly specific references to Clare's passion for Tess: descriptions of her mouth, orgasmic sneezes, an "excitation from the sky" (p. 191) that make clear to the reader, although not always to Clare, the physical basis of his attraction. Angel fears his own passions are uncontrollable and attempts to control himself by spiritualizing Tess. Thus, even when Clare admits his own desires, he still insists on pretending to see Tess as other than flesh and blood. It is no coincidence that he first notices her when she talks about going outside of her body. If she were not attempting to repress her sexuality he would not love her, yet he wants her to have a sexuality to repress. Paradoxically, he is attracted to her because of her physical appearance, yet he refuses to acknowledge her
own physical consciousness. Within this context Angel can persist in thinking his love pure. Although he impresses himself with the idea that Tess is "no insignificant creature to toy with and dismiss, but a woman living her precious life" (p. 195), he has no real sense of who she is. Somehow whenever Angel expresses his care for Tess, he always sounds condescending and afraid. Before their marriage he says: "To tell the truth, my Tess, I don't like you to be left anywhere away from my protection and sympathy" (p. 245). Clearly his protectiveness masks his fear of her individuality.

Tess goes along with Angel's objectifying condescension, feeling herself to be unworthy insofar as she does not fit into his view of her; and, superficially, she tries to fit in. Thus Tess adamantly refuses to marry Angel out of what she deems consideration for him. Her resistance to marriage, however, is not pure altruism; fundamentally it springs from a fear of the consequences should her past become known to him and from a sense that her own unworthiness is based on what she rightly perceives to be Angel's moral standards.

Angel, ever true to his own assumptions, attributes her reticence to maidenly modesty. Thus, when Tess proposes confessing her faults or recounting her history, Angel reacts in a highly condescending manner, as if she has nothing worth telling and as if her own sense of the importance of past events were merely child-like. Angel is not interested in knowing that she had a history before meeting him. One wonders whether he really understands that "the universe itself ... came into existence for Tess" (p. 195) at birth, or whether, underneath the rhetoric, he thinks it started when he noticed her at Talbothays. Her terror of Angel
thus makes sense. If she behaves "honourably" and confesses, he will reject her; if she keeps her secret, she betrays his assumptions and is thus doubly dishonest. In Gregor's terms:

... he is not a man with a biography, he is an occasion of awe. And it is of course because of this that she shrinks from telling him her past. If she felt that he was a man capable of erring himself, she might risk his condemnation in the hope of winning his magnanimity. But for her, Angel is not flesh and blood in that kind of way, he is Justice itself and such Justice will surely not just see her, it will see through her, and this she cannot bear. She longs to continue simply to be. 

But it is not only Tess who sees Angel in this way: Angel himself believes he cannot err and therefore has the right to judge. It is only when he himself is dealt with harshly in Brazil by a combination of weather, disease and dishonest entrepreneurs, that he even begins to sympathize with Tess. (I will argue in Chapter 4 that even this change is superficial.)

Angel's ideals come to seem so absurd because we see them through Tess's tortured ambivalence. On the one hand she knows that she is not what Angel wants her to be, but nonetheless she loves him for his idealism and likes the distorted reflection of herself she sees in his eyes. On one level she would like to be what he thinks she is. Thus, wishing she could negate all that has happened in between, Tess somewhat dramatically cries, "'Why didn't you stay and love me when I was sixteen; living with my little sisters and brothers, and you danced on the green? Oh, why didn't you, why didn't you!'" (p. 237). It's a good question. Part of the answer, Hardy would have us believe, is that Tess was a different person then, less womanly, less interesting, less complex. And less sexual. The novel comes close to implying that Angel would not have loved
her before she was sexually awakened. Certainly Hardy is more attracted to her after her affair with Alec.

If Hardy's comments in "Maiden No More" on how Tess has changed are somewhat patronizing—"Her eyes grew larger and more eloquent. She became what would have been called a fine creature; her aspect was fair and arresting." (p. 135)—she has nonetheless changed. She knows, intuitively if not intellectually, that, contrary to Victorian morality, her experience does not define her entire being, yet still has become an essential part of her. Her experience forces her, as well as Hardy and the reader, to redefine purity and, more important, to reassess the importance of that quality. Thus, because of the discrepancy between Angel's view of her and the reality of her past, Tess remains separate from him. She is in love and tormented by moral qualms, but she is both incapable of being the Tess he wants and ultimately unwilling to be that person. Her past experience has made her an individual apart from all other individuals. Her consciousness of this and her understanding of the relationship of her individuality to society and culture cannot be denied. In fact, although Hardy tells us that Angel's "influence over her had been so marked that she had caught his manner and habits, his speech and phrases, his likings and his aversions" (p. 245), her relationship to Angel actually confirms her separateness from him.

But if Tess understands the relationship between her experience and her individuality, she knows she will not be able to justify her past to Angel. Despite her doubts, her mother's pragmatic values win out and she does not tell Angel about her past during the courtship. Her long-delayed acceptance of his marriage proposal is in one sense an acceptance
of her own right to happiness, her right to sexuality despite social
customs. In another sense, however, she is capitulating to Angel's
view of her. Her own knowledge of herself as an imperfect but real
individual with a unique past is subsumed to his stereotype of a sheltered
milkmaid, still half child. This is a deadly contradiction: the only
way for her to be happy is to deny herself. Ultimately, if Tess likes
seeming to be what Angel sees, she cannot live with the masquerade.
Although the economic future for herself and her family depends on her
marriage, she attempts to achieve purity through truth. The confession is
a test of her guilt: she does see Angel as justice incarnate (or at
least the bourgeois version thereof) and accords him the power to judge
her, hoping he will tell her that her crime was, after all, not so heinous.
However her confession is also a test of Angel and of his love for her;
for Tess, it is the penultimate step in their union. In risking her
marriage (foolishly and unnecessarily by Joan's standards), she demands
that she be loved for the woman she is. She finally chances the confession
only after Angel has owned a like failing. She is joyous at his story;
it seems to her that some kind of egalitarian marriage is now possible,
with mutual knowledge of each other's secrets and mutual forgiveness
forming the bond. She is giving Angel an opportunity for the same kind
of independent moral stance as she herself has taken.

But Angel fails the test quite effectively:

"I thought, Angel, that you loved me--me, my very self!
If it is you do love, O how can it be that you look
and speak so? It frightens me! Having begun to love you,
I love you forever--in all changes, in all disgraces,
because you are yourself. I ask no more. Then how can
you, O my own husband, stop loving me?"

"I repeat, the woman I have been loving is not you,"
(p. 271)
This is not so surprising; Tess always knew what Angel's response would be, and her original impulse to fear the revelation was well-founded. In a horrible and pathetic moment of truth on the morning of her marriage, she prays to Angel instead of God: "'O my love, my love, why do I love you so . . . for she you love is not my real self, but one in my image; the one I might have been!'" (p. 256). Yet when her own words come from Angel's lips twelve hours later she is horrified.

Where Angel once saw an innocent dairymaid he now sees a fallen woman. Even the idea that she was "more sinned against than sinning" (p. 274) does not change things, and he adheres to the letter of the law. Seeing himself as a cuckold, the butt of centuries of jokes, he tells Tess, "'You don't in the least understand the quality of the mishap. It would be viewed in the light of a joke by nine-tenths of the world . . . .'" (p. 276). Hardy makes it clear that it is sometimes a struggle for Angel to remain so unrelenting, but Angel shows remarkable tenacity, ignoring Tess's pleas, her beauty and his own desires in order to satisfy social convention and his pride.

The man with whom Tess fell in love was much kinder, gentler and more rational than the new Angel. Nevertheless her fidelity to this new being includes an acceptance of his condemnation. In offering herself wholly to Angel, past and all, in mediating her experience through his eyes, she herself ceases to exist for a time. Tess makes the odd protest against Angel's cruelty, even feels "an impulse to anger" (p. 275), but basically becomes passive if not catatonic in the face of his obstinate refusal to recognize her in any way: "Terror
was upon her white face . . . her cheek was flaccid, and her mouth had almost the aspect of a round little hole. The horrible sense of his view of her so deadened her that she staggered . . . " (p. 272). She no longer has any resistance to the literal morality she denounced earlier in the novel as "horrible . . . Crushing! killing!" (p. 115). Angel's behaviour has become a proof of the sign-painter's words; now that he has refused to forgive her, her guilt increases, its power strengthened by her loss of identity.

Although Hardy titillates the reader with "if only's," suggesting that a wilier or wiser woman would have brought Angel round, Tess and the reader experience the reality of Angel's hard core. The depth of his rejection is shown in the sleepwalking scene: Tess is really dead for him. Yet he mourns her death, and his emotion makes the sleepwalking incident the best part of the honeymoon for Tess. She prefers his somnambulic affection to none at all, even if his unconscious kisses might lead to their deaths in the stream. In this scene Tess experiences herself with near total detachment:

Self-solicitude was near extinction in her. . . . So easily had she delivered her whole being up to him that it pleased her to think he was regarding her as his absolute possession to dispose of as he should choose. It was consoling, under the hovering terror of to-morrow's separation, to feel that he really recognized her now as his wife Tess. . . . (p. 291)

If being his wife means being his absolute possession, the above passage explains Tess's passivity: the only way for her to feel she is truly his wife, since the marriage has not been consummated and there is no other kind of intimacy between them, is to place herself
completely in his power. Thus the loyalty she continues to feel and act upon after his departure is her own guarantee to herself that she is really married.27

In this way perhaps we can get at the uneasiness that one feels about Tess's reaction to Angel's rejection of her in such passages as the following:

Tess . . . took everything as her deserts, and hardly opened her mouth. 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. (p. 284)

Clearly the fact that these are Hardy's words is a partial explanation for their strangeness. He needs to see Tess as pathetically patient in order to forgive her. Nevertheless, the reader cannot help but feel frustrated at Tess's self-immolation. It is not believable; it is as if Tess were merely playing out the role of sinning wife. Statements like, "Angel am I too wicked?" (p. 272), and "I will obey you like your wretched slave" are somehow less convincing than "What have I done--what have I done! I have not told of anything that interferes with or belies my love for you. You don't think I planned it, do you? It is in your own mind what you are angry at, Angel; it is not in me" (p. 274). But the "impulse to anger" (p. 275) here is short-lived. Bernard Paris finds this behaviour neurotic:

Tess finds a kind of romance in the sorriness of her plight and the magnitude of her despair. This gives her a vested interest in preserving or intensifying her misery. If she is the most wretched person in the world, she is not an ordinary person, one of a long row only. Her wretchedness, moreover, is a proof of her love and nobility, especially since she does not blame Angel for it and remains loyally devoted.28
He is right in seeing Tess's behaviour as melodramatic, but it is questionable whether this melodrama is proof of neurosis. People do act this way out of shock or guilt. For Tess, the shock of trusting someone with full knowledge of herself and then being rejected totally is psychologically profound. Her reaction is not an individual neurotic symptom; it is the normal self-effacing behaviour the culture would expect from a woman in such a situation. Moreover, Paris pointedly ignores the fact that Angel is guilty of a veritable orgy of self-indulgence.

Tess has been playing a role anyway and this one is not so different. She is self-effacing because she thinks this is the way Angel wants her to act. It is understandable that Tess should want to preserve the relationship that has promised her gentility and an escape from her difficult past by whatever means she can, even on Angel's terms. Yet one senses that it is only with a great deal of effort, on the part of Hardy or Tess or both, that Tess's sense of fairness and "the irresistible, universal, automatic tendency to find sweet pleasure somewhere (p. 140)" are repressed. Hardy both imposes and ratifies Tess's suffering; if she is a victim, if she endures patiently, then she must be pure.

For a time, then, Tess becomes a martyr to middle-class morality and the double standard. Angel delivers the blow. She obeys to the letter Angel's wish that she not write to him, yet thinks of him fondly and longingly as her husband. She thinks of herself as belonging to him, as if her body were not her own. She perhaps becomes slightly suicidal in mutilating herself by cutting off her eyebrows.
and binding up her face, deliberately attempting to look ugly. She represses all positive sense of her own sexuality, even her own identity, confining her activity to bone-chilling work. Emotionally she goes into hibernation. In some sense she finishes off the execution for Angel, just as she kills the birds for the hunters who leave them half-dead.

On the other hand, however, in punishing herself and in mourning her loss, she is also destroying Angel's possession; Mrs. Clare ceases to exist, but Tess goes on living. The incident with the birds is a catharsis, a turning point for Tess. The birds are victims of male hunters: "... rough and brutal as they seemed ... they were not like this all the year round, but were, in fact, quite civil persons save during certain weeks ... when ... they ran amuck, and made it their purpose to destroy life ..." (p. 324). Hardy, it seems, wants us to make a symbolic connection between Tess and the birds as men's victims. But Tess is human and alive and she realizes this: "And not a twinge of bodily pain about me! I be not mangled, and I be not bleeding, and I have two hands to feed and clothe me" (p. 324). While Tess attempts to take strength from this thought, Hardy insists on pitying and sentimentalizing her:

Thus Tess walks on; a figure which is part of the landscape; a fieldwoman pure and simple, in winter guise. ... Inside this exterior, over which the eye might have roved as over a thing scarcely percipient, almost inorganic, there was the record of a pulsing life which had learnt too well, for its years, of the dust and ashes of things, of the cruelty of lust and the fragility of love. (p. 326)

But with the pragmatic outlook of her mother, Tess puts her emotional troubles into perspective and again begins to experience a
sort of rally. Even Hardy admits that "the circumstantial will against enjoyment" co-exists with "the inherent will to enjoy" (p. 332). There is a certain contentment for Tess in work, companionship, and relief from sexual pressures. It is difficult for Hardy as well as for many critics to accept the fact that Tess once again enjoys self-esteem and contentment after Angel has left: in the morality of the novel, just as sex with a "bad" man is unacceptable, so is the ability to go on after the loss of a "good" man's love. But slowly Tess is drifting away from Angel.

Yet her sense of herself is tied up with having been Angel's choice, even though, as the weeks go on, no letters arrive and Flintcomb-Ash affirms the class difference between them. In a sense she tests the reality of her marriage in attempting to visit the Clares. When she is immediately confronted by the ecclesiastical morality she fears so much, the congealed pride which is all that is left of Tess's sense of her marriage keeps her from venturing too far and risking too much. She prefers cold and hard work to the risk of being snubbed by Angel's kin. Overt rejection by the Clares would destroy her own knowledge of her relationship to Angel and her fantasy of reconciliation. What some critics have seen as self-effacement in her decision to return to Flintcomb-Ash without having seen the Clares is rather self-affirmation. Tess will not lower herself to endure self-righteous snubs. The process of rejecting Angel's morality begins right here.

Immediately after the disastrous trip to Emminster Tess meets Alec again. Her "hunger for affection too long withheld" (p. 353), made keener by her abortive journey, is brought into sharp focus by the living
reminder of her only sexual consummation. Tess is never taken in by Alec's conversion and immediately fears him in the old way, partly because of her own neediness. As well, it is apparent that beneath the facade of religion Alec has the same physical presence and is the same sensualist. He threatens the middle-class value system to which she is desperately clinging by taking it to its absurd extreme, forcing her to recognize its repressive aspects. His question, "What sort of husband can he be ... to stay away from you—to leave you to work like this!" (p. 365), puts into words Tess's own growing but repressed doubts about Angel. Just as Tess calls Alec's religion into question for him, he shakes her devotion to an absent husband. The seeds are planted for her to see Angel as foolish, misguided and cruel, and to demand that he be responsible to her. Despite its pleading tone, the first letter she finally writes to Angel is a breakthrough for Tess:

I must cry to you in my trouble—I have no one else! I am so exposed to temptation, Angel. ... Can you not come to me now, at once, before anything terrible happens? ... The punishment you have measured out to me is deserved—I do know that—well deserved—and you are right and just to be angry with me. But, Angel, please, please, not to be just—only a little kind to me, even if I do not deserve it, and come to me! ... I am the same woman, Angel, as you fell in love with; yes, the very same! not the one you disliked but never saw. What was the past to me as soon as I met you? It was a dead thing altogether. I became another woman, filled full of new life from you. How could I be the early one? Why do you not see this? Dear, if you would only be a little more conceited, and believe in yourself so far as to see that you were strong enough to work this change in me, you would perhaps be in a mind to come to me, your poor wife. (p. 383-4)

Criticism of Angel lurks just beneath the humble lines. The reader cannot help but applaud the final angry letter: "O 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!" (p. 405).

Initially Tess does not encourage Alec, not out of maidenly modesty as before, but because of her husband's transplanted values and her memory of self-loathing. Gradually and subtly, however, she gives him opportunities to win her back. She admits to him unnecessarily that her husband has abandoned her. She lets him into the cottage when she is alone, giving quite limp excuses for doing so:

Tess jumped up, but her visitor had knocked at the door, and she could hardly in reason run away... She thought that she would not open the door; but, as there was no sense in that either, she arose, and having lifted the latch stepped back quickly. (p. 367 Emphasis added.)

She isolates herself from the other workers by eating her lunch alone on the hay rick, thus giving Alec an opportunity to speak to her in private. She even tells him her weak spot: "Don't mention my little brothers and sisters--don't make me break down quite!" (p. 383). Surely Tess is not still guileless enough to trust d'Urberville with this kind of information. She is almost providing herself with an excuse for going back to him.

Perhaps most telling is the scene where Tess strikes Alec with her glove. Usually read as a foreshadowing of the murder, it also shows the passion that she can still feel for him. As Alec well knows, "anything was better than frigidity" (p. 103). Despite the bathos of Hardy's sparrow metaphor, which makes the scene seem rather silly and unconvincing, the degree to which Tess has learned to associate emotion and punishment is evident. Her experience equates
sexuality with emotional or physical mastery and overtly she acts out the role of victim:

One of her leather gloves, which she had taken off to eat her skinner-cake, lay in her lap, and without the slightest warning she passionately swung 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. . . . A scarlet oozing had appeared where her blow had alighted, and in a moment the blood began dropping from his mouth upon the straw. . . . "Now, punish me," she said, turning up her eyes to him with the hopeless defiance of the sparrow's gaze before its captor twists its neck. "Whip me, crush me . . . I shall not cry out. Once victim, always victim—that's the law!" (p. 378-9)

The law of melodrama, perhaps. Hardy's growing desperation in the last pages of the novel is demonstrated by the persistent presence of this sense of melodrama. As Tess moves out of Hardy's imaginative reach, melodrama translates and defines her experiences and feelings, obscuring rather than illuminating them. The resulting emergence of a sense of separation between Tess and the novel makes the end of the novel difficult to deal with. Clearly we cannot dismiss the sentimentality that appears both in Hardy's narrative and in Tess's responses, yet neither can we ignore Tess's continuing vibrancy as a character and allow melodrama to reduce Tess's story to meaninglessness. (I will return to this point later in the thesis.)

Thus, we can say that although she is unwilling to take the initiative in repudiating Angel and returning to d'Urberville, Tess allows Alec to corner her into returning. This is the extent to which Hardy will allow her to be overtly sexual. As well, caught between two men who are manipulative in different ways, she has little choice. Still, in going back to Alec Tess resists Angel's treachery and
escapes the alienation of work at Flintcomb-Ash. She is also demanding some kind of sexual fulfillment in spite of social morality. Although her family's eviction is what finally leads her back to Alec, Tess writes to Angel that she is being tempted while she is still at Flintcomb-Ash. Izz and Marian as well warn Angel that "continual dropping will wear away a Stone--ay, more--a Diamond" (p. 414), also indicating Tess's attraction to Alec is not just out of family duty. On the other hand, there are years of hatred and self-hatred in Tess's feelings for Alec. In returning to him, Tess seems to feel she is renouncing part of herself. Despite the fact that Alec at times seems genuinely to care about Tess (unlike Angel, he at least supports her financially), Lucas is right in seeing Tess's life with him as "depersonalizing." Their life cannot be other than on Alec's terms which she accepts in giving up her dream of Angel's return, her position as his wife and her self-respect as a woman.

When Angel returns he has "a vague consciousness . . . that his original 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" (p. 429). Angel's perceptions have never been too reliable and in some sense this perception is wishful thinking. In fact Alec would hardly pursue Tess so hotly if she reacted to his love-making like a corpse. Angel fled to Brazil in order to avoid the reality of Tess's sexual experience. Now, confronted with a Tess who is clearly a kept woman, he must feel that she cannot really be "his" Tess. In a sense she is far less dead, however, than when he placed her in a coffin. But even if we mistrust
Angel's perceptions and the motives behind them, there is a sense of death or defeat associated with Tess's return to Alec; on a symbolic level this sense is conveyed by their confrontation in the d'Urberville tomb. Tess has not found fulfillment with Alec; she has merely chosen the body over the spirit. Alec has made her a lady and a sexual being, but only part of her has responded--hence her dream-like state. The dreaminess associated with Tess from the time she fell asleep on her father's cart and talked about soul-travel at Talbothays has become her permanent condition. Useful at Flintcomb-Ash to deal with a too-harsh reality, it now, as in The Chase, eliminates her emotional confusion.

Tess herself cannot fully accept the part of her that responds to Alec. Thus the murder of Alec in a sense seems suicidal; as if her saying in effect, "Now punish me. I will not cry out," leads to Hardy's final symbolic and literal sacrifice of Tess at Stonehenge. In another sense, however, it is Tess's ultimate act of resistance. When she first saw Alec preaching, she had the "sense of an implacable past which still engirdled her... the break of continuity between her earlier and present existence, which she had hoped for, had not, after all, taken place. Bygones would never be bygones till she was a bygone herself" (p. 354). The murder effectively eradicates her past which engirdles her, and has always done so, in a very human form. It is Alec and it is Angel who keep her tied to old experiences, moralities, ideals. Finally, when she is literally caught between the two one-dimensional men, she has no more power to recover and reacts in a way that is both self-destructive and liberating. This is not insanity,
but desperation. Every step she has taken has been met with punish-
ment. The murder is no different.

The murder allows the long-postponed but brief marriage with
Angel. Tess runs after him, as she followed him on their wedding
night, but this time as a sexually aggressive woman. The murder
liberates her from her inertia and, despite the fact that she is con-
fused and tired, Angel feels in her the sexual power that has been
too-long repressed. In breaking the deadlock she achieves a temporary
synthesis between spirit and flesh.

Clare is almost passive before her. Tess knows that Angel has not
changed, but she does not apologize for either living with Alec or
killing him. It is as if her understanding of the forms of her
exploitation has led to a final self-acceptance. Her last words in
the novel are: "... and now I shall not live for you to despise
me ... I am ready" (p. 447). This is, of course, melodrama, but it
is nonetheless crucial to the whole of the novel in defining the
difference between Angel and Tess. Because Tess is right, of course.

Burns suggests

that it is because Tess has murdered Alec (and thus
overcome Angel's prime objection: "How can we live
together while that man lives?") that Angel can, for
the moment at least, overcome his earlier fastidiousness
and take her for his wife.30

Hardy does not know what to do with Tess once he and Angel have
forgiven her. In the end he has to get rid of her; she is too dangerous.
Sexual passion seems to imply murderous passion; these passionate
women just cannot be trusted on either score. Both he and Angel
settle for 'Liza-Lu, less experienced, less buxom, but just as
sensitive as Tess: "a tall budding creature--half girl, half woman--a spiritualized image of Tess, slighter than she, but with the same beautiful eyes" (p. 448). And, most important for Angel, more pliable than Tess. The most horrible thing about "Fulfilment" is that Tess knows exactly what Angel wants: "Liza-Lu is so gentle and sweet, and she is growing so beautiful... If you would train her and teach her, Angel, and bring her up for your own self!... She has all the best of me without the bad of me." (p. 446: Second set of ellipsis in the original.) Tess knows herself by now and knows that she is not acceptable to either Angel or the world his morality represents. It is more than Angel himself knows, but the truth of Tess's perception is demonstrated when he readily follows her advice.

Hardy and Angel find Tess pathetic in her last scene of the novel: "He went to the stone and bent over her, holding one poor little hand; her breathing now was quick and small, like that of a lesser creature than a woman" (p. 447). They can feel sorry for her now that she will soon be out of their way. She is sacrificed to the state on the altar of the Druids--an appropriate symbolic connection of the ancient and the modern.

The fact that Hardy makes more of the victim theme in later versions of Tess indicates that it is meant as a final solution to the questions raised by the writing of the novel. The theme begins when Marlott is initially introduced in the novel by reference to the "legend of... the killing... of a beautiful white hart" (p. 40). The hunted animal motif which continues throughout the novel is clearly meant to reflect Tess's experience. Her eyes stare "like those of
a wild animal" (p. 85); she "wore the look of a wary animal" (p. 235); she "had been caught during her days of immaturity like a bird in a springe" (p. 238); she "winced like a wounded animal" (p. 261) at a flippant remark from Angel. The wounded birds and the hunted rats continue this theme to its culmination at the Stonehenge altar and at Wintoncester where "the President of the Immortals . . . had ended his sport with Tess" (p. 449).

But the fact that Tess is hunted does not make her a victim and this sentimentality is the ultimate tyranny. In becoming Alec's lover and then leaving him, in demanding Angel's forgiveness, in returning to Alec and finally murdering him, even in antagonizing Farmer Groby, Tess demands life on her own terms. If she cannot always articulate her demands, it is because this kind of self-consciousness and self-esteem, especially in a woman, is neither acceptable to Victorian society, nor to Hardy, its implied spokesman. Thus Hardy imposes guilt on Tess and only then excuses her by seeing her as a victim, an ultimate patronization which even denies her responsibility for her own mistakes.

Neither can Tess be dismissed as a neurotic. Paris and critics like him who want to see Tess in this way end up demanding from her behaviour inconsistent with the nineteenth-century rural reality integral to her character. There are particular reasons for Tess's impasse and they have more to do with society than with fate, heredity or madness. D. H. Lawrence, on the other hand, despite the fact that he often projects his own characters onto Tess, at least attempts to see from her perspective:
Tess is passive out of self-acceptance, a true aristocratic quality, amounting almost to self-indifference. She knows she is herself, incontrovertibly, and she knows that other people are not herself. This is a very rare quality, even in a woman. And in a civilization so unequal, it is almost a weakness.

Tess never tries to alter or to change anybody, neither to alter nor to change nor to divert. What another person decides, that is his decision. She respects utterly the other's right to be. She is herself always.31

Tess's attempt to create herself as an individual in the face of alienation is free of the constraints that Alec, Angel and Hardy are tied by. Ultimately they do not, cannot, separate themselves from their culture. While she participates in cultural assumptions and social morality, Tess can also separate herself from these values; at least she recognizes her struggle with them. Tess's ultimate tragedy arises from the material she has to work with: male sexual attitudes, in particular, define her identity so much that the struggle against them saps her strength. Thus, Tess is destroyed before finding any real answers.

In Walter Benjamin's terms, "The 'meaning of life' is really the centre about which the novel moves. But the quest for it is no more than the initial expression of perplexity. . . ."32 Tess fails because men and their world cannot deal with her demands for fulfillment. She is not perplexed at the end, but Hardy, the novel, and we, the heirs of its morality, are. Tess's conflict with Victorian values, both those imposed from without and those existing within herself, provides the novel's only critique of society; her struggle is an attempt to demand an individuality which does not negate instinct.
Tess is, in many ways, an idealist. But her ideals take the form of personal demands rather than theoretical liberalism. The novel shows that the former is both far more radical and far more threatening.
CHAPTER IV

"TERROR AND DISMAY":
ANGEL, HARDY AND VICTORIAN CULTURE

... a dialectical study of literature is concerned with literature as a material element of the social totality. ... it understands literature (as all forms of consciousness) not simply as a means of interpreting reality (which is actually separated from literature) but as an operative factor of this reality itself, as a social force. Therefore, texts are to be understood in their double character: as products and factors of the socio-historical formation of human beings. From them we gain insight and critique, and at the same time, they are themselves elements of insight and critique.

To discuss Tess in terms of Richter's statement is to seek to understand its ideological character in a dual sense: that is, not only to see the ways in which the novel dramatizes the cultural and ideological characteristics of its age through the consciousness of author and characters; but also to understand that the novel is itself an element of Victorian consciousness, an expression of an ideology. While it is easier to discuss a particular novel as a fictional representation of culture rather than as an expressive element of culture, we must not lose sight of the latter aspect of this
definition in the following discussion.

Hardy himself seems to have had some understanding of this concept. He wrote: "... the best fiction ... is more true ... than history or nature can be." This is so because the novel, in expressing the relationships among economics, public events, social structures and political systems on the one hand, and individual emotion, action and consciousness on the other, is an exploration of human history. Thus Hardy, as a writer of fiction in a particular historical context, both exposes and expresses certain aspects of the culture of his time. In writing the novel he creates history, both by producing a commodity to be read, experienced, thought about and perhaps acted upon, and by creating in the novel a world which reflects his own historical period. Moreover, he unconsciously focuses on the most crucial anxieties of his time. One of the most interesting and important aspects of Tess both for Victorian readers and for us, is its exploration of how the culture's dominant ideology functions. In other words, it shows how the "dominant material relationships" are expressed as the ideology which informs individual action.

The Victorian era was at best a time of transition, at worst a time of chaos. In either case, people were finding it both increasingly necessary and increasingly difficult to define and redefine their social, political and moral selves. Because the world that Hardy writes from does not provide him with solutions to the problems of the age, neither the narrator, the characters, nor the fictional world of Tess have answers either. Tess is not confronted and destroyed by an abstract world. Neither does she merely have the
bad luck to meet neurotic men. Rather, Alec and Angel have particular but typical relationships to the dominant culture and are in the position to structure Tess's world. The alienation that both men feel, the sense of meaninglessness for which they desperately seek solutions, was a real and crucial factor of their time, brought on by the collapse of the security of traditional institutions, social structures and cultural forms, as well as the refusal to see the real economic and social reasons for this collapse. Thus Alec and Angel cannot allow themselves to simply be; they are continually involved in the process of imposing ways of being and ways of seeing on themselves, on their environment and on Tess as well. In a world which is determined, even on a personal level, by those with the economic and cultural power to impose their own ideological perspective, Tess necessarily appears passive.

While Alec and Angel are not, strictly speaking, of the ruling class, they represent that class in their secluded environments. If Alec's family has money, Angel's family, with its affiliations to the Church and the university, represents ideological power. Yet neither Alec nor Angel actively participates in the usual meaningful pursuits of young nineteenth-century Englishmen of their class—money, business, politics, the military or the church. To this degree they are both rebels from family and culture; both are in a sense unconventional, yet in contrast to the rural folk whom Hardy idolizes, are firmly within the bounds determined by late-Victorian thought and values. The resulting contradictions in these characters are a major concern of the novel.
Alec d'Urberville is sometimes seen as representative of the rising bourgeoisie in the novel. For instance, Ian Gregor says: "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." For Gregor, Alec's reappearance in the novel at Flintcomb-Ash confirms this relationship: "Economic and physical possession is the object of both [Alec and the engineer running the threshing machine], money the common means." But Alec's role in the novel is somewhat more problematic. Although Gregor is right about Alec's attitude toward money, in a sense both he and his relationship with Tess are anachronisms, throwbacks to days when the landowner had his pick of the local maidens. Still, Alec differs from that stereotype too. Not only has his family bought his position, his anxiety and alienation reflect the new forms that capitalism has brought to the countryside. That is, he really has nothing to do: he bounces from woman to woman to religion, "a jolly new idea" (p. 356), in a desperate search for some kind of meaning. Thus, Alec is not a complete villain. Although he sometimes fancies himself Satanic: "You are Eve, and I am the old Other One come to tempt you" (p. 397), and Hardy editorially colludes in this view, this is a rather self-conscious pose. Alec shows feelings of loneliness and tenderness not totally compatible with the traditional role of melodramatic villain. His kindness, when shown, can switch quickly into sarcasm and he seems ultimately unable to be loving or lovable. But although he cannot be dismissed entirely as a representative of social forces or a cad, he is nevertheless more one-dimensional
than most of the other characters. We do not learn enough about him to understand him or even to be sure that there is much to understand.

Angel's desperation is ultimately more interesting, complicated and difficult because of its subtlety and because Hardy develops the character much more fully. Angel's desperation does not take the forms of gross exploitation, as Alec's does, but of internalized values which are all the more pervasive for their being hidden. Yet there is a contradiction in Hardy's presentation of Angel that is central to the entire novel. On the one hand, Hardy basically treats Angel positively: he seems to have faith that, although misguided, Angel ultimately can change; and he implies at the end of the novel that Angel does so. On the other hand, Hardy consistently excuses Angel by carefully developing the cultural obstacles that explain his failure to change. Thus Hardy both claims that Angel transcends his cultural conditioning to become the man of the future, and exonerates him for not doing so. At the same time, the novel experientially presents ways in which Angel could have escaped from culture, ways in which Hardy wants to allow Tess to save Angel, if only Angel were not so obstinate. As this chapter will argue, the reader begins to suspect that Hardy fundamentally identifies with Angel. Ultimately, it seems to be Hardy's own identification with Angel's sexual guilt and his own ideological justifications of that guilt that will not allow Angel to experience what the reader does.

Religion is a traditional answer to confusion and anxiety and J. Hillis Miller sees the desperation of Hardy's male characters as specifically due to their disillusionment with religion:
In Hardy's world there is no supernatural hierarchy of ideals or commandments, nor is there any law inherent in the physical world which says it is right to do one thing, wrong to do another, or which establishes any relative worth among things or people. Events happen as they do happen. They have neither value in themselves nor value in relation to any end beyond them.6

Miller sees this situation to be caused by changing intellectual philosophies:

Only a world of hierarchical levels in participation easily allows for a God who is both within His world and outside it. In the dispersal which is likely to accompany the separation of existence into two realms, subject and object, mind and world, God may at first be seen as separating himself from his creation. He withdraws to a distant place and watches the universe from afar.7

But this perspective is not a peculiarity of Hardy's writing, as Miller sometimes seems to imply in Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire; it is the spirit of the age, "the chronic melancholy which is taking hold of the civilized races with the decline of belief in a beneficent Power" (p. 156). Moreover, while this crisis in religious faith was surely a reality, it had its roots in other aspects of Victorian life, and was not in itself a prime cause. Miller blames science, but science was determined by the course of the Industrial Revolution. What we are talking about here is a vast series of changes in economic and therefore social life, and an accompanying upheaval in people's views of themselves, their society and each other. It was becoming increasingly clear, even to the middle classes that Walter Houghton writes about in The Victorian Frame of Mind, that England had its faults, that the classes were becoming mortal enemies, that the rural working classes were not made up of quaint, happy rustics and that
the new social structure was not God-given but man-made. That is, that men were responsible for society.

Still, Miller is right that the concern with religion is a real one in *Tess*. The feeling in the novel is not so much that God is distant as that he is dead or irrelevant. Clearly religion is part of Hardy's own personal crisis. He is critical of organized religion and sees the Marlott pastor as a "tradesman" who has few "nobler impulses . . . left in him after ten years of endeavour to graft technical belief on actual scepticism" (p. 132). The "ecclesiastic" is superimposed on the man, whom, Hardy implies, it usually destroys. Narrative references to a deity are usually sarcastic: for instance, "the President of the Immortals" makes God seem a bourgeois politician. And religion in the novel is largely a bourgeois problem. For Tess, all religions are alike. Since she does not know the difference between high and low church, Alec's conversion appalls her more because of its absurdity than its fundamentalism. Her main concern with religion in the novel comes at her baby's death, and appears to be largely due to her schooling. Her uneducated parents are not concerned at their grandchild roasting in hell. Concern about Sorrow's salvation gives a focus to Tess's worry and guilt. Organized religion seems to reflect society's usual class structure: for the Clare brothers, the Church is an outlet for very worldly social ambitions; for Tess's people the Church is either an overtly oppressive or irrelevant social institution.

Alec converts to fundamentalism ostensibly because of his mother's death, but mainly in order to give some purpose to an otherwise meaningless
existence. His religion, like his sexuality, is crude. The grossly exploitative sexual indulgence that leads Burns to call Alec "not much more than a walking, talking phallus," \(^8\) spins over to become a crude attempt at repression based on a traditionally simplistic view of heaven and hell, reward and punishment, good and evil. In Freud's terms:

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Religion restricts [the] play of choice and adaptation, since it imposes equally on everyone its own path to the acquisition of happiness and protection from suffering. Its technique consists in depressing the value of life and distorting the picture of the real world in a delusional manner—which presupposes an intimidation of the intelligence. At this price . . . religion succeeds in sparing many people an individual neurosis.\(^9\)
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Or, in this case, in sparing young girls a traumatic experience. The "unconditional submission"\(^10\) demanded of the devout is precisely what Alec demands of Tess in the novel; in one sense he has just put himself on the other side of a master-slave situation. But in another sense he has not even changed this much. What horrifies Tess about her first view of him preaching is that his manner is no different. Alec the preacher is still the centre of attention, still aggressively, even forcibly, trying to influence people: "... the bold rolling eye that had flashed upon her form in the old time with such mastery now beamed with the rude energy of a theolatry that was almost ferocious" (p. 352).

For Angel, religion is an entirely different matter. He prides himself on being an agnostic, and sees himself as a humanist. Still, while he has intellectual disagreements with the Church, he has strong emotional ties to it. He tells his father:
I love the Church as one loves a parent. I shall always have the warmest affection for her. There is no institution for whose history I have a deeper admiration; but I cannot honestly be ordained her minister, as my brothers are, while she refuses to liberate her mind from an untenable redemptive theolatry. (p. 153)

There is a sense here that he wishes he could embrace the Church, just as he later wishes he could embrace Tess. He is the rebel in his family, and much of what Hardy calls his heterodoxy seems an unthought-out desire to rebel: however it does not necessarily follow that he understands the implications of his intellectual positions. Because religion is still an important issue to Angel, he feels he must prove to his parents that his own choice of vocation will be principled, viable and meaningful even without the sanction of the Church. As well, when Angel wishes his parents to know that Tess is a religious woman, one wonders whether this is merely out of consideration for them or on his own account as well. The degree to which his stance is a reaction becomes clear in the course of the novel. That Angel has rejected ordination and his father's Christianity does not mean he is irreligious; indeed without a God or Church, his own beliefs and values become his religion as if they were written on stone tablets.

Angel believes in the intellectual man, and has enough education and mental talent to call himself one. What this means in the novel, however, is that he largely functions in a world of ideas and categories. When he rejects the goal of ordination and the chance of further study, he wants to remain an intellectual, but his thoughts have no object. Hardy says that "something nebulous, preoccupied, vague, in
his bearing and regard, marked him as one who probably had no very
definite aim or concern about his material future" (p. 152). Looking
for an aim, apparently disgusted with society as well as religion,
he turns to the country. But he is always an outsider at Talbothays:

At first he lived up above entirely, reading a good
deal, and strumming upon an old harp . . . . But he
soon preferred to read human nature by taking his
meals downstairs. . . . The longer Clare resided
here the less objection had he to his company, and
the more did he like to share quarters with them in
common. (p. 155)

From this passage it is clear that, although his sensibilities cease
to be repelled by the dairy-folk, Angel never becomes one of them
or talks to them on a personal level; rather he studies them—they
become fodder for his thoughts. Moreover, the fact that "he was
ever in the habit of neglecting the particulars of an outside scene
for the general impression" (p. 157) calls into question how much
Angel learns from studying people. He does not see the Talbothays
people as anything so derogatory as "Hodge," but he does see them
one-dimensionally, categorized from his own perspective. Thus his
first reaction to Tess is that she is "a fresh and virginal daughter
of Nature" (p. 158), a suitable object when he wishes "to contemplate
contiguous womankind" (p. 159). Later he finds it impossible to
forgive her, because he generalizes from her sexual experience to
define her whole being.

In Chapter 3 we have discussed how Angel distances himself from
both experience and emotion; his pseudo-rationality helps him avoid
sexuality and detaches him from his environment, thus repressing and
sublimating his instincts and leading him to misunderstand and
stereotype Tess. The following passage from Phase the Fourth is a good example of Angel's thinking. While the language may be Hardy's, it is nonetheless appropriately awkward and intellectual enough to be seen as Angel's rationalization:

If she had said "Yes" instead of "No" he would have kissed her; it had evidently been his intention; but her determined negative deterred his scrupulous heart. Their condition of domiciliary comradeship put her, as the woman, to such disadvantage by its enforced intercourse, that he felt it unfair to her to exercise any pressure of blandishment which he might have honestly employed had she been better able to avoid him. He released her momentarily-imprisoned waist, and withheld the kiss. (p. 222)

Hardy goes on to say that Tess wanted to be kissed, and that a kiss would have broken her resistance to Angel's proposal. Either Angel really wants to be resisted or he is so afraid of physical contact that he sabotages his own interests. (As well, the above passage clearly shows his denial of female sexual feelings. It never occurs to Angel that Tess wants him to kiss her!) Later, he uses thought specifically as an agent of repression:

His thought had been unsuspended; he was becoming ill with thinking; eaten out with thinking, withered by thinking; scourged out of all his former pulsating flexuous domesticity. (p. 285)

Thus thought becomes for Angel a way of avoiding both pain and pleasure. 

Ironically, however, Clare thinks himself more rational than he is. As Hardy points out when Angel chooses the old d'Urberville mansion as a honeymoon site: "This was always how Clare settled practical questions; by a sentiment which had nothing to do with them" (p. 246). Similarly, his rejection of Tess is first of all an
emotional response, only secondarily reinforced by his ideas about sexuality. But since Angel can only relate to his emotional response in the context of a system of thought, his reaction becomes a principle to him, and "with regard to the other sex, when he ceased to believe he ceased to follow" (p. 284). Spontaneous impulses are then repressed, disregarded, checked or rationalized. Thus, once made, his decision is final, and he fights his own doubts.

He waited in expectancy to discern some mental pointing; he knew that if any intention of his, concluded over-night, did not vanish in the light of morning, it stood on a basis approximating to one of pure reason, even if initiated by impulse of feeling; that it was so far, therefore, to be trusted. He thus beheld in the pale morning light the resolve to separate from her; not as a hot and indignant instinct, but denuded of the passionateness which had made it scorch and burn; standing in its bones; nothing but a skeleton, but none the less there. Clare no longer hesitated. (p. 294)

Clare trusts thought more than feeling. He keeps his dream, a resurgence of instinct, very distant from his waking consciousness. Just before leaving England and just after the incident with Izz, he thinks impulsively of going back to Tess, but does not do so because of "a sense that, despite her love, as corroborated by Izz's admission, the facts had not changed. If he was right at first, he was right now" (p. 317).

Angel's sojourn in Brazil could be interpreted as a way for him to escape enough from his own cultural determination to be able to examine his fundamental values. Hardy probably means the reader to believe that this is what happens. In fact, however, there is something unsatisfying about Angel's supposed transformation. In severing all connections with Tess in order to be able to think about
her, he is still only able to relate to her intellectually. When
the harshness of reality has been brought forcibly to his attention
he is able to make the decision to love her, but his change of heart
is brought about by his own hardships, not by any growth in empathic
understanding. That is, his experience of real natural hardship
makes him more understanding of human frailty, and puts social mores
in perspective, but he still does not have any positive sense either
of Tess or of the real possibilities for human sensuality. Even
after dealing with basic survival, Angel still operates on a level
of abstractions and concepts. His final decision to return home comes
about through a stranger's words which were "sublimed by his death,
and influenced Clare more than all the reasoned ethics of the
philosophers" (p. 389). It is not the experience of the stranger's
death that effects a change in Angel; it is only when the stranger's
words become abstracted from reality that they can compete with
philosophers.

Even when he thinks positively about Tess, he is still ego-
tistically condescending:

He thought of Tess as she had appeared on the day of the
wedding. How her eyes had lingered upon him; how she
had hung upon his words as if they were a god's! And
during the terrible evening over the hearth, when her
simple soul uncovered itself to his, how pitiful her
face had looked by the rays of the fire, in her in-
ability to realize that his love and protection could
possibly be withdrawn. (p. 389)

Moreover, Angel still categorizes Tess. Upon his arrival in Sand-
bourne it does not occur to him that her situation might have changed:
"Where could Tess possibly be, a cottage-girl, his young wife, amidst
all this wealth and fashion? The more he pondered the more was he
puzzled." (p. 426) (Subconsciously he may have his suspicions; he does in fact ring the front door bell at the lodging house although he assumes that Tess must be a servant there.) Angel ought to have had an idea of what was threatening Tess when she wrote him her first desperate letter; she practically told him. Instead, he notices only her words of affection: "The sentences touched him now as much as when he had first perused them" (p. 419).

It is because Angel is so determinedly intellectual that he is so caught in Victorian conventions (and vice-versa). His shortcomings are not so unusual: the very fact of subjecting all impressions to supposedly rational analysis and seeing thought as inherently true places him in the mainstream of Victorian culture. But Houghton points out that if "the critical spirit" was one Victorian tendency, the "will to believe" was another:

Whether to follow the critical mind, whatever its destructive effect on religious faith or to follow the will to believe and abandon reason could become for some Victorians, perhaps a majority of the intellectuals, the two horns of a dilemma. They could do neither.12

The combination of a desire to believe and the idealization of thought leads to an unquestioning acceptance of what appears rational,13 a dangerous and self-deluding religion of "rationality." Although Angel supposedly rejects convention, his thought-processes themselves, whatever their content, are rigidly conventional and he clings desperately to them. The "intellectual liberty" (p. 155) which he refuses to compromise is a mirage.

Intelle~tually, Angel tries to share the attitudes of the genera-
tion of dissatisfied intellectuals whom Arnold Hauser calls:
the younger romantics. . . . Their uncompromising humanism is their protest against the policy of exploitation and oppression; their unconventional way of life, their aggressive atheism and their lack of moral bias are the different modes of their struggle against the class that controls the means of exploitation and suppression.14

But the radical elements in Romanticism have long since been purged and are now either idealized or rigidified into an impotent intellectual stance. Angel's belief in his own responses is a left-over of Romanticism, but his responses remain unexamined, unanalyzed ideals; rigidified into concepts, they assume for him a universal validity.

We noted earlier that Angel's calling Tess "Artemis" and "Demeter" is a way of not seeing her. What Hauser says of Shelley's use of mythology is also pertinent to Angel Clare's:

This mythologizing is again merely an instrument of flight from ordinary, common soulless reality—a bridge to the poet's own spiritual depths and sensibility. It is only a means whereby the poet can come to himself. The myths of classical antiquity arose from a sympathy and a genuine relationship with reality; the mythology of the romantics arises from its ruins and to some extent as a substitute for reality.15

Fundamentally egocentric, then, Angel uses mythology to define nature and people and to distance himself from real experience. And he deludes himself about his Hellenism. Although he sees the Greeks as "natural" and pagan, the Platonic idealism that he essentially follows is integral to Victorian (as well as modern) civilization:

For Plato there is an order in the universe that escapes the human eye. That order, is . . . composed of forms or essences which must ultimately be conceptualized; they cannot be perceived by the senses. There is a radical split between perceptions and conceptions in Platonic discourse, a split that has been elaborated endlessly in Western science to
the point of morbidity and at the expense of the
senses. Reality has become increasingly reified
and, at the same time, thrown into question; the
conceived object has been detached not only from
the perceiving subject, but from itself. When a
Platonist looks at an object, the reflection in
his eye represents an inferior order of reality;
he has no faith in either the perception or the
object realized in the world. The object exists
only as the shadow of a conceptual meta-reality,
as an instance of a class, an analytic construction.
The majority of civilized men, it is assumed, see
only superficially (they are not "seers"), and
they look at the object in a utilitarian, unthinking
way. Being incapable of probing more deeply into,
analyzing, the nature of their experience, they
see but do not see. Therefore, they are compelled
by their limited conceptual capacity to follow
those who can see.16 (Emphasis in original.)

Platonism, under the guise of a rational naturalism, is the intellectual
and philosophical source for Clare's justification of his own
estranged vision and ultimately of his own social and intellectual
superiority.

Angel shares Hardy's nostalgia for the good old days, seeing
nature as the salvation from the urban institutions that he dislikes.
His latter-day Romantic view of nature is an attempted solution to
late nineteenth-century disillusionment:

Unexpectedly he began to like the outdoor life for
its own sake, and for what it brought, apart from
its bearing on his own proposed career. Considering
his position he became wonderfully free from the
chronic melancholy which is taking hold of the civilized
races with the decline of belief in a beneficent
Power. For the first time of late years he could
read as his musing inclined him, without an eye to
cramming for a profession . . . . He grew away from
old associations, and saw something new in life and
humanity. Secondarily, he made close acquaintance
with phenomena which he had before known but darkly--
the seasons in their moods, morning and evening, night
and noon, winds in their different tempers, trees,
waters and mists, shades and silences, and the voices of
inanimate things. (pp. 156-7)
And this commitment to rural life changes Angel; his parents and brothers notice and are shocked at the difference in him. While Angel is never one of the dairy-folk, it becomes apparent that he is no longer comfortable in his family's world either: "Latterly he had seen only Life, felt only the great passionate pulse of existence, unwarped, uncontrolled, untrammelled by those creeds which futilely attempt to check what wisdom would be content to regulate" (p. 199). This is Hardy rhapsodizing, and perhaps Angel too, for he feels quite superior to his family because of his experience. Angel, like many another young rebel, thinks he has turned his back on his family's ways; his smugness in fact makes the trap of his family's values all the more dangerous. In this case the novel shows us that in abstracting and then rejecting his family's traditionally conservative values, Angel loses the essential humanitarianism of Rev. and Mrs. Clare.

Nevertheless, Angel's impulse toward rural life, like Hardy's, is an inherently progressive one, insofar as it is critical of Victorian society. Seeing that human potential cannot be realized within the existing social structure, Angel turns to that culture which, according to a certain Romantic philosophy, might once have fostered this potential. But whatever once existed in Wessex is only vestigially present when Angel goes to Talbothays. The very fact that an Angel can exist means that a Hardyesque Wessex cannot. If Stanley Diamond is right, the institution of the kind of world Angel comes from and the destruction of the world of Tess's people is doubly oppressive by its very nature. That is, the centralization of state
power is historically associated with the split between mind and senses and always leads to a greater degree of totalitarianism:

. . . this growing division between classes and occupations, and their consequent reification, is the social basis for the split in human consciousness which civilization institutionalizes. The potential integrity of the person remains unrealized; only society as a whole seems to have this integrity, and the conception of the person as a social reflex becomes credible because it reflects social reality. The related breach between mental and manual labor to which Marx alludes is both a symptom of and a cause for the alienation of persons from themselves, reflected in the mind-body dualisms with which civilization conjures . . . 17

Separated from the reality of Wessex by prejudice, class, idealism and a vague pseudo-romanticism, Angel cannot see how closely rural life is bound up in English culture. Committed to his ideal as his salvation, Angel ends up exhibiting exactly the split he wants to obliterate. In accepting the myth of the peasantry, underlaid by the assumptions of Platonic idealism, Angel validates the split between reason and experience.

In this context Angel's attitude to Tess is particularly important. For him she is an extension of nature. Moreover, Angel "seemed to discern in [Tess] something that was familiar, something which carried him back into a joyous and unforeseeing past, before the necessity of taking thought had made the heavens gray" (pp. 158-9). Angel is thinking of his personal history here, but the passage has almost anthropological ramifications, as if Tess reminds him of the youth of the human race. While he worships thought, it is clear here that he wishes he did not have to. In Tess, Angel hopes to possess "natural instinct" without the necessity of recognizing feeling in
himself. It is clear that Tess becomes for Angel, as for Hardy, an individual representative of the way of life which will save him.

Tess, as a country woman, is a particularly good candidate for this role. The Victorians, however, to some extent ascribe similar attributes to all women:

The whole attitude is exactly what we call Romantic, and it was, in fact, a direct inheritance from Romanticism: partly from its naturalism, which found the instincts good and appealed to the feelings or the heart as the supreme guide to conduct and wisdom; partly from its idealism, whether Platonic or chivalric. The study of Victorian love is the study of how this tradition ... was domesticated under the powerful influence of Evangelical and family sentiment, and then emphasized, as a protection against, or a solution for, some major concerns of the time: sensuality ... the painful mood of baffled thought, and the decline of religious faith.18

Thus the idealization of women and of love itself becomes almost religious in character in the nineteenth century. The clearest example of the link between religion and love in the novel occurs when Alec drops his preaching; itself originally a substitute for promiscuity, to follow Tess. But Angel's case is far more interesting both psychologically and ideologically. Reflecting both the "naturalistic and Platonic"19 forms that, according to Houghton, are allowable in the Victorian religion of love, Angel wants to see Tess as both natural and pure (that is, sensual and chaste). Because, as Houghton suggests, the worship of women is partly based on "... the weakness consequent upon a baffled search for truth,"20 (Emphasis added) the Victorian male has to regain his power in other ways. Thus the idealization of women is turned into a moral imperative controlling
women's behaviour. The alienation nineteenth-century men feel from all aspects of nature including their own sexuality is turned against women.  

Thus, while Angel sees Tess as natural and sensual, he is, by Houghton's definition, a typical middle-class Victorian male: he wants to see the object of his desire as sexually naive, scarcely mortal, ennobling. His clinching argument for leaving Tess is that about their children—for him maternity is totally incompatible with conscious female sexuality. The mother is to hold the home together and exert a pure and positive influence over her husband and children; Angel sees Tess's sexual experience as disqualifying her for such a role. He, for one, would not be able to believe in it.

That the two views of woman—as saint and sinner—can co-exist without even appearing contradictory, implies that one is a response to the other. That is, the only way to tame woman's natural sexuality (which, in being seen as particularly strong and evil, allows men to distance themselves from their own sexuality) is to etherealize it, sublimate it. When Angel Clare does this unconsciously, he is reflecting an accepted cultural neurosis. The novel, as I have argued, shows how oppressive and destructive these ideals are for Tess.

While Hardy does not at first glance appear as conventional as Angel in his attitude toward marriage and morality, his view of women also reflects this Victorian duality. In fact, Hardy's view of women, to the extent that it is culturally conventional, provides the ethical basis for the narrator's anxious ambiguities. Hardy's endorsement
and idealization of Tess focuses on her as a saviour who has escaped cultural destruction, someone who can point the way for a weary world. At the same time he wants her to be pure, and never allows her any real sexual fulfillment. He sometimes seems to engineer obstacles—the finding of Tess's boots, the paintings of the d'Urberville dames, the chance re-encounter with Alec—in order to avoid having to deal directly with sexuality itself and with the contradictions posed by sexual love in Victorian England: the difficulty of a man and woman really understanding each other; the possibility that love on its own may not be able to hold the universe together; the fact that the concept of love is meaningless outside of culture. For both Angel and Hardy the repressive culture cannot be escaped through love, because love reflects its very forms; conversely, to have a radical understanding of sexuality would be an attack on the culture. Hardy's and Angel's fear of confronting these problems adds to the vicious circle of repression, situates them solidly within cultural bounds and guarantees the impossibility of real sexual and emotional fulfillment in _Tess_. When Havelock Ellis says that "for Hardy . . . the problems of women's hearts are mostly independent of the routine codes of men," he is speaking of Hardy's idealization of women. Yet he is right in another sense too. Tess is separate, and her separateness is what allows the novel to transcend petty Victorianism. Yet while both Hardy and Angel are attracted by this quality in her, they alternately worship it and try to destroy it.

If the deification of another human being is, in Hillis Miller's terms, a response to a "Godless world," it is needless to say
doomed to disappointment. Miller points out that much of Hardy's writing deals with unconsummated love or the love of a person who is absent or dead. Angel's physical separation from Tess is a manifestation of his emotional distance, created by the difficulty he experiences in loving her or even knowing her. Angel, it may be argued, deliberately postpones consummation; despite the suffering, an absent lover is more interesting than a present one to an idealist. Love feels more intense when the pain of betrayal or separation is confused with the emotion of love itself. Moreover, if, as Miller argues, emotional experience is the centre of the world for Hardy's characters, it makes sense that a character who has so much at stake in his love relationships should be afraid of love at the same time.

This terror permeates the novel. Ultimately it is Hardy's fear of Tess's sexuality that leads him to identify so closely with Angel. Lucas's comment that Hardy "takes [Angel] more seriously than feels justified" is quite understated; there is at times a definite affinity, if not identification, between the two. Hardy enters into Angel's thoughts no more frequently than into other characters', but it is more difficult to separate Angel's thoughts from Hardy's. For instance, is "the ache of modernism" (p. 163) what Angel or Hardy perceives in Tess? Such questions are crucial: Hardy and Angel seem to have such similar perceptions, particularly of Tess, that often no clear distinction can be drawn. Hardy is as attracted to Tess as Angel is. The following passage, for instance, starts out explicitly as Angel's perception but gradually fuses into Hardy's words:
She was yawning, and he saw the red interior of her mouth as if it had been a snake's. She had stretched one arm so high above her coiled-up cable of hair that he could see its satin delicacy above the sunburn; her face was flushed with sleep, and her eyelids hung heavy over their pupils. The brim-fullness of her nature breathed from her. It was a moment when a woman's soul is more incarnate than at any other time; when the most spiritual beauty bespeaks itself flesh; and sex takes the outside place in the presentation. (p. 210)

Both Hardy and Angel romanticize nature and idealize women as part of nature. Although the novel takes Angel to task for having ridiculously romantic beliefs, Hardy makes similar observations before Angel even enters the novel:

Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman the man, many thousand years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order. (pp. 107-108)

Although these worshipful yet condescending remarks are supposed to be those of the narrator, they could as easily be Clare's thoughts on his way home from Brazil. For Angel, purity is a woman's essence; therefore sexual experience clearly makes Tess someone else. Hardy agrees, but has a different definition of purity which, he wants us to believe, Angel ultimately accepts. In Hardy's view, Tess's apparent purity is not nature's "fantastic trickery" (p. 280), but reflects her real being. In other words, she looks pure because fundamentally she is. Hardy might almost be an older, more liberal brother who knows a few things that Angel has yet to learn. But Hardy's defense of Tess is still based on her being essentially pure,
"essentially . . . as deserving of the praise of King Lemuel as any other woman endowed with the same dislike of evil" (p. 309).

Thus, although he is sometimes critical, Hardy always seems to believe in Angel. Even when Hardy seems to be more aware than Angel, he sometimes forgets what he knows. At Talbothays Hardy clearly knows where he is going with Angel, because he makes a point of mentioning that Angel's delicate looks do not mean he is indecisive, and he comments that Angel Clare is "absurdly far, indeed" from the "disinterested, chivalrous, protective" (p. 255) man Tess thinks him. Hardy should know (as the reader does) when Angel is being foolish or deluding himself. He should know that despite Angel's facade of freedom from middle class values, Angel will later demand conventionality of Tess. Yet there always exists a sense of an authorial stamp of approval which validates Angel. The language of the novel sometimes becomes more heavy-handed, intellectually precious and self-conscious when Angel is being ridiculous (See the first passage quoted on page 99 of this chapter, for instance), but there is no overtcriticism in the Talbothays section and little deliberate irony. Hardy seems to want to believe in Angel.

Hardy's first real criticism of Angel comes just before the wedding:

... there was in truth an element of precipitancy in the step, as became apparent at a later date. He loved her dearly, though perhaps rather ideally and fancifully than with the impassioned thoroughness of her feeling for him. (p. 245)

Hardy goes on to explain this fault partially by Angel's poor knowledge of rural life and the unexpectedness of his infatuation. He
finishes by saying, "The secret lay in the tinge of recklessness imparted to his career and character by the sense that he had been made to miss his true destiny through the prejudices of his family" (p. 245). Hardy is clearly on Tess's side during and after the confession, yet he does not condemn Angel outright. Angel seems misguided, immature, unversed in the ways of the world, but there is never the sense, as with Alec, that he cannot possibly change. Thus we are expecting a change when Angel is in Brazil, and it is disappointing that Hardy seems to take Angel's return to Tess at face value. There are no further criticisms of Angel after his return. Instead Hardy exonerates him by saying:

Men are too often harsh with women they love or have loved; women with men. And yet these harshnesses are tenderness itself when compared with the universal harshness out of which they grow; the harshness of the position towards the temperament, of the means towards the aims, of to-day towards yesterday, of hereafter towards to-day. (p. 390)

This passage is completely contrary to the sense of the novel. Like Angel, Hardy philosophizes away reality.

Ultimately, then, Angel's failure to understand Tess, like his attempt to avoid real experience, is ratified by Hardy's approach to the novel. If Angel sees Tess as determined, alternately for good and for bad, by her ancestors, Hardy echoes this view. She is, to both Hardy and Angel, both naturally noble and naturally murderous because of those pagan ancestors. For both, ancestry begins to seem fate. Laird points out that the d'Urberville theme becomes more important in the course of the novel's writing. In combination with the victim motif, Hardy relies increasingly on Tess's heredity to
explain and excuse her behaviour: ". . . it becomes apparent that
Hardy sees much of the responsibility for Tess's effete-ness as
circumstantial, rather than personal, and believes that she should
not be judged too harshly by the reader. . . ."25 (That Hardy sees
Tess as effete in the first place is problematic; the novel as a
whole does not take this view of her.) As Angel says, more judge-
mentally, "I cannot help associating your decline as a family with
this other fault--of your want of firmness. Decrepit families imply
decrepit wills, decrepit conduct" (p. 275).

What evolves in the novel, then, is a sense of destiny that sees
Tess's fate to be implied in her being. History, whether that of the
d'Urbervilles or that of Tess as an individual, becomes absolutely
deterministic. For instance, Hardy at times comes close to stating
outright that Tess's affair with Alec, or perhaps even Prince's
accident, starts her on a path from which she cannot turn back. Thus

Tess Durbeyfield did not divine, as she innocently
looked down at the rose in her bosom, that there
behind the blue narcotic haze was potentially the
"tragic mischief" of her drama--one who stood fair
to be the blood-red ray in the spectrum of her
young life. (p. 71)

If Angel had only stopped longer at the Marlott dance, everything
might have been fine, but out of his failure to do so "sprang
anxieties, disappointments, shocks, catastrophes, and passing strange
destinies" (p. 72). This narrative perspective is reflected in Angel's
inability to separate Tess from her sexual past. But it is not only
the affair with Alec that ruins Tess's life; ultimately she is
sacrificed by Hardy to Angel's ideals, and by Angel to the culture's.

One of Hardy's strongest apparent criticisms of Clare is really
an attack on the culture:

This night the woman of his belittling deprecations was thinking how great and good her husband was. But over them both there hung a deeper shade than the shade which Angel Clare perceived, namely the shade of his own limitations. With all his attempted independence of judgment this advanced and well-meaning young man, a sample product of the last five-and-twenty years, was yet the slave to customs and conventionality when surprised back into his early teachings. (p. 309)

Although this attack on custom is probably Hardy's intent in the novel, he is not completely aware of how culture defines the individual, and the narration therefore remains ambiguous. Hardy puts himself in the strange position of narrative identification with the character who most exemplifies what he set out to criticize. Despite the above passage and the novel's evidence to the contrary, he wants us to believe first of all that Angel can and does change and secondly that he is blameless because he is a victim of forces beyond his control. Ultimately this contradiction means that Hardy, despite his criticisms, does not really question the culture in any radical way; he wants to believe that individuals like Angel, and for that matter mankind, can advance without questioning the fundamental structure of society. Thus, just as he overemphasizes Tess's victimization, Hardy refuses to see Angel as an active being, genuinely capable of taking a stand outside his cultural determination. We wind up with a sense that Angel is a member of a chosen race, that everything will always turn out right for him in the end. There is no sense of his struggling. Tess does change, although editorially Hardy does not admit it. Angel does not change, although editorially Hardy would have us believe he does, and that he and 'Liza-Lu can save England and the
human race better than Tess could have. She was too pushy, sexy and demanding; they are nicer. Hardy clearly does not want to say that everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds; his novel repudiates this idea. But in being unable to distance himself from Clare, in being frightened by Tess's potential, he waters down his vision and shows that he himself is more a victim of English society than Tess is. Although both Angel and Hardy "forgive" Tess, Angel does not need to test his forgiveness because Hardy conveniently dispenses with her. The best both Angel and Hardy can do is rationalize what they end up seeing as Tess's failings and opt for "Liza-Lu's more ethereal and controllable femininity. In other words, they remain trapped in their original vision. Hardy, like Angel, tries to save Tess. Instead he traps her because he himself is caught in a self-justifying ideological dead end. He literally can neither experience nor think outside his culture. Tess finally becomes an expression of his own frustration and confusion.
CONCLUSION

The last paragraph of *Tess* is one of the few specifically ironic ones in the novel. If "the President of the Immortals" really had been playing with Tess, Hardy's vision would not be so negative. Gods, even capricious ones, at least imply some kind of purpose to life. But Hardy does not believe in gods any more than we do, and the final paragraph implies that all his attempts to create a meaningful, understandable world have failed.

The last paragraph accentuates the fact that we are left with a novel of contradictions. It is clear that the "two speechless gazers," with whom Hardy obviously identifies himself, have no way of understanding what has happened. The paragraph connects the state concept of "justice", cosmic purpose and history ("the d'Urberville knights and dames") in a sort of incomprehensible conspiracy. The penultimate image of two abject people bent to the ground while a black flag waves above them is a horrible picture of human powerlessness and incomprehension. For Hardy the irony of the paragraph ends with the first two sentences. The abject pose of Angel and Liza-lu is not ironic to him; it is a reality that he experiences
alongside them. His "terrible sincerity" has led him to "the triumph of the crowd over the hero, of the commonplace majority over the exceptional few." However, Hardy expresses this "triumph" not as "high tragedy" but as, in its inevitability, something one must learn to get used to.

Although Hardy set out to write a novel critical of both the economic relations and the morality of Victorian England, *Tess* escapes him and becomes at once less and more critical than he intended. His criticism stops at exposure and falls short of its own implications. For instance, he ultimately blames the fall of Tess's family on her father's shiftlessness and her immorality even though he has set up a social context that clearly places such a development in a larger historical process. Similarly he criticizes the morality that condemns Tess but sees this morality as non-ideological, that is, unconnected to the rest of the world presented in the novel. Thus Hardy suggests that there is something inherent in the make-up of Alec and of Angel that determines their morality: Alec is presented as fundamentally bad; Angel as fundamentally good although misguided. Hardy apparently does not see the connections between what he calls "the ache of modernism," or "the chronic melancholy which is taking hold of the civilized races" and the entrapment of Tess.

Neither does Hardy accept the degree to which Tess as well is determined both ideologically and economically: for instance, the economic and social factors which underlie her attraction only to bourgeois men remain largely unexplored. At the same time as Hardy creates in Tess a realistic portrait of a woman participating in a
period of social change, he wants to see her as a peasant and does not admit her to be anything else. Yet he idealizes her: that is, she is a peasant in concept only, not in any specifics of language, mannerism or ambitions. Although the reader can see the personal and cultural contradictions within the character, to Hardy as well as to Angel she becomes at times more a symbol than a woman, her very apparent vitality expressed in mythological terms.

Tess brings to the middle class world of the novel a vitality that it inherently lacks, but for a very different reason than Hardy suggests. It is not Tess's peasant stock or Norman ancestry, it is her conflicts and her sense of alienation both from herself and from the world that makes her struggle the formal and emotional centre of the novel. Out of the contradiction between the stasis of Hardy's concept of Tess and the actual dynamic of the character's experience against an unstable yet repressive social background, there emerges a crucial process of individuation. This process is defined both by Tess's consciousness of her self and of her relationship to the world. In John Goode's terms:

At the beginning of the novel, it is accurate to see Tess's consciousness as 'alienated': subject, that is, to an 'inner contradiction' between 'conscience' and 'reverie' which responds to, but does not correspond with, an external contradiction in the social structure that demands individual integrity but disintegrates the individual through labour and sexual exploitation. But the movement of the novel is away from this inner contradiction towards the rupture, open and articulate, of [Tess] and [her] world. . . 2

Tess herself experiences and interiorizes the split between traditional rural and modern middle class morality and thus her very real
and understandable impulses toward both sexuality and gentility must become contradictory for her. Her movement towards the middle-class, which begins before the novel opens, implies a continuing struggle with guilt and self-questioning.

If Tess is on some level always conscious of her alienation and experiences it directly, Angel is not, and this is a crux of the novel. Despite the differences with his family which set him apart from his brothers, he has little understanding of his own relationship to the world. That one rupture with tradition defines for him his whole being, as if his radicalism has become a given and requires no further struggle. Thus he is incapable of recognizing the substantial differences between himself and Tess. Both he and Alec, who rebels sexually and then religiously against his family's values, remain within the allowable range of Victorian male bourgeois behaviour.

Neither man ever recognizes his alienation from his own being.

As the novel explores these issues in more depth, Hardy becomes less critical. His growing desperation demands a desperate answer and a straightforward one. Thus his nostalgia for the past translates itself directly into the future with the marriage of Angel and Liza-lu. Although Hardy, in his "terrible sincerity," wants to find a solution for Tess, he is incapable of conceptualizing either a place in the world for such a person or a world which could allow her a place.

Thus Hardy ultimately shies away from the significance of the experience the novel recounts and oscillates between myth and melodrama. The possibility of significant consciousness remains trapped
between these two poles of cosmic significance and ponderous banality. Melodrama, in providing an answering echo to the mythological, becomes the modern myth. If the classical references in the novel suggest that the characters' lives merely echo those of greater beings, the melodramatic level implies that they are merely acting out a continuing and rather predictable story like that of "thousands' and thousands'". Alec and Angel accept these limitations as well and experience the world almost completely within their boundaries. Tess also sometimes becomes melodramatic, in desperation, confusion or self-pity, in order to distance herself from a too-awful reality, or in response to the realization that absurdly minor events can have huge significance. Thus, after Cuthbert Clare finds her shoes:

As she again thought of her dusty boots she almost pitied those habiliments for the quizzing to which they had been subjected, and felt how hopeless life was for their owner.

"Ah!" she said, still sighing in pity of herself, "they didn't know that I wore those over the roughest part of the road to save these pretty ones he bought for me--no--they did not know it! And they didn't think that he chose the colour o' my pretty frock--no--how could they? If they had known perhaps they would not have cared, for they don't care much for him, poor thing!" (p. 347)

But it is one thing for a character to become melodramatic and another for the author himself to succumb. Hardy shows an increasing tendency to use melodrama in such a way that it almost obscures Tess. Thus the meaning of Tess's "I am ready" at Stonehenge is mediated by Hardy's melodramatic conception of the whole event. While for Tess, melodrama is a way of becoming conscious of her life as a tale and thus providing herself with some sense of both perspective and importance, for Hardy it is ultimately trivializing.
Hardy's mythologies, like those of Angel and Alec, create an air of unreality about Tess that does not allow for her ambivalences and conflicts. Hardy compels the reader to defend or condemn her absolutely, not to see her as a developing character in a developing world; in other words the reader becomes another Angel Clare. Yet, although Hardy's lack of imagination about what Tess could become, other than a murderess, attempts to reduce her experience to triviality or sublimate it to irrelevance, Tess remains for the reader an authentic woman involved in believable struggles in the context of a very real world. Hardy's ideological bias in making her downfall and death seem inevitable in fact echoes the ideological bias of Victorian England and his fictional representation of that society. Thus, although Hardy's social criticism falters because of its own naiveté and his own terror, the novel itself connects his superficial comments with their underlying ideological roots and allows the reader to stand outside Hardy's commentary with Tess.

The struggle within the novel, then, goes on in the reader as well. If we are "to rescue our way of seeing things from the ideology that structures our response," we must at one and the same time experience the novel in all its contradictions and be critical both of it and of our own responses. The novel requires the reader as well as Hardy and the characters to become conscious of the contradictions of its world and in so doing to come to clearer consciousness of self. We can respond with horror, as many of Hardy's contemporaries did, with terror, as Hardy and Angel do, or with some attempt at critical and self-critical understanding. The novel demands the profound
emotional reaction that many readers have experienced since its publication. Contrary to what Hardy thought, it is not the subject of the novel that makes it radical, but the demand that the readers themselves become involved in its moral questions.

To see Tess as an important figure because she is a d'Urberville or a pagan is ludicrous; to see her as a symbol is irrelevant. The novel asks us to see her as herself, without labels, blame or defense, as imperfect but real, even while Hardy encourages our own ideological stumbling blocks to this acceptance. The universality of the novel is implied in Tess's individuality. Hardy's discovery that Tess has something in common with both nature and myth seems to him a profound one. In the end, however, Tess is more important. She is the individual that the myths merely imitate. If the history of the Wessex people is a part of Tess, it is because of the illumination Tess's life brings to history and myth, not vice-versa. It is the struggle with her own time that makes Tess and the novel live.
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5 Goode, p. 255.

CHAPTER I


5 Laird, p. 124.
6 Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, The New Wessex Edition (London, 1974), p. 117. All future citations will refer to this edition and will be noted internally.


9 Richard le Gallienne, rev. of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the Star (December 12, 1891) in Cox, p. 179.


15 Ibid., p. 28.


17 According to J. T. Laird, the discontinuity between the two levels of the novel may be due to the theme of heredity being a late addition; in a sense it is an overlay on the original novel.

18 Burns, p. 29.

19 Laird, p. 176-177.


CHAPTER II


2 Millgate, p. 265.

3 Raymond Williams, The Country and the City, p. 38.


5 Quoted in Millgate, p. 284.

6 Thomas Hardy, "Candour in English Fiction" in Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings, ed. Harold Orel (Kansas, 1966), p. 127.


8 See Millgate, especially "The End of Prose," in Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist.


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15 Ibid., p. 243.

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CHAPTER III


2 Efron, p. 73.

3 Ann Foreman argues in Femininity as Alienation (London, 1977) that deBeauvoir is incorrect in postulating that these categories exist outside of history. She says, "It was only with the onset of capitalist organisation . . . that the conditions for women's alterity were developed (p. 87)." The point, however, remains relevant here.


5 Bayley, p. 9.

6 Gregor, p. 178.

7 Forster, p. 93.

8 Lucas, pp. 178-179.

9 Gregor, p. 181.


11 Burns, p. 32.

12 Lawrence, p. 192.


14 Paris, p. 223.
15 Laird, pp. 155-156.

16 Ibid., p. 178.


18 Lawrence, p. 193.

19 Gregor, p. 182.

20 Efron, p. 59.

21 Ibid., p. 67.

22 Merryn Williams, pp. 96-97.

23 It should be noted that in the serialized version, due to censorship, Hardy had Angel take the women across the flood in a wheelbarrow.

24 There is a fine line here between Angel's and Hardy's thoughts. We will return to this point in Chapter 4.

25 Merryn Williams, p. 95.

26 Gregor, p. 189.

27 Bernard Paris has a somewhat similar explanation of this, although I find his emphasis on Tess as a neurotic misleading: "Having transferred her pride to Angel, she must protect her image of him as a glorious creature. In order to do this, she accepts total responsibility not only for her own faults, but for his behaviour. The worse he behaves, the more culpable she is. Tess can live with almost any amount of self-condemnation as long as Angel remains God-like and remains hers." (pp. 227-228)


29 Lucas, p. 186.

30 Burns, p. 38.

31 Lawrence, p. 192.

32 Benjamin, p. 99.
CHAPTER IV


2 Hardy, "The Profitable Reading of Fiction" in Personal Writings, p. 117.

3 Raymond Williams, Keywords, p. 127.

4 Gregor, p. 192.

5 Ibid., p. 193.


7 Ibid., p. 18.

8 Burns, p. 33.


10 Ibid., p. 32.


13 Raymond Williams has a good discussion of the value judgments associated with "rational" and "reasonable" in Keywords, pages 211-214. He suggests that rationalism was so strongly defended originally because it was seen as an alternative to the Church and therefore had to be set up as a complete and invulnerable system in opposition to religion.


15 Ibid., p. 198.


17 Ibid., p. 15.

18 Houghton, p. 375.

19 Ibid., p. 385.
20 Ibid., p. 388.

21 See also Houghton, p. 352 and Havelock Ellis, "Concerning Jude the Obscure," Savoy Magazine (October, 1896) in Cox, p. 310.

22 Cox, p. 304.

23 Miller, p. 114.

24 Lucas, p. 182.

25 Laird, p. 114.

CONCLUSION

1 Hardy, "Candour in English Fiction" in Personal Writings, p. 127.

2 Goode, p. 254.

3 Ibid., p. 255.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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