

# Tess of the d'urbervilles essay



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Alec and Angel are the principle male characters in Tess Of The D'Urbervilles, who have a direct impact on the destiny and ultimate tragedy of the heroine Tess. Hardy skilfully creates two complex and contrasting characters whose relationships with Tess evolve and mature in distinctive ways. I will analyse how their personality traits and temperaments affect their relationships with, and treatment of Tess. Hardy's introduction of Alec and Angel gives us an indication of their physical appearance, complex characteristics, and future destiny.

Angel's first appearance is at 'The May-Day dance', where Tess is one of the maids. He appears to be a 'desultory tentative student' who is still finding his way in life and 'the entrance to his professional grove'. This indicates his youthfulness and openness of mind and spirit. In contrast to his brothers Angel stays to 'have a fling' with the girls in the field, showing his individuality and resistance to conform.

When leaving the field he noticed Tess and was sorry that 'he had not observed' her sooner as he would have wished to 'inquire her name'. Angel unknowingly rejected Tess for the first time. Our first introduction to Alec, a false D'Urberville, is at his home 'The slopes' with its artificial name and settings. His appearance is stereotypical of a Victorian stage villain with a 'swarthy complexion', curling black moustache, and 'bold rolling eye'. Tess has been sent by her mother to claim kin and Alec does not 'regret her step'. Immediately his lustful attraction is apparent as his eyes rivet on her 'fullness of growth' and his dominance and forcefulness are evident when he continues to feed the strawberry directly into Tess's mouth, even though she shows 'slight distress'.

Alec's obsessive nature emerges as he plans how he can 'find a berth for' Tess and bring her back to the Slopes permanently. Angel was a romantic idealist who only through time, experience and suffering was able to understand the true meaning of life long love, albeit too late. He was a well educated, 'musical' and poetic, free thinking young man, who broke away from his family traditions in the ministry. His decision to become a farmer led to his meeting with Tess and her 'touches of rarity' compelled him to select her company 'in preference to the other pretty maids', and the romance began and their love blossomed and grew. His love was passionate, he was 'driven towards her by every heave of his pulse'; sensitive, declaring his love 'dearly and truly'; and considerate, he was careful not to underestimate the great 'seriousness' of her 'affection'.

Angel was a good kind considerate and 'well being young man', with a strong sense of honour, respect and self-control. When he carried the maids one by one across the flooded lane he declared that he had 'undergone three-quarters of' the labour just to get to 'Tessy'. He had the opportunity to kiss her but did not because he would have been 'unfairly taking advantage of an accidental position'. From that first ill-fated meeting onwards, Alec had a significant impetus on Tess's fate and on both her physical and emotional development. He was a wealthy, selfish philanderer who was used to getting his own way and showed little concern for Tess, putting 'his arm around her as he desired' and giving her the 'kiss of mastery' against her wishes.

He was impatient and her rejection of him 'for near three mortal months' led to him taking advantage of her when the opportunity arose. He stole her innocence and purity with his selfish and cruel animalistic self-gratification

and left her to cope with the depression and 'Sorrow' caused by his actions. He exploited and manipulated Tess and became 'the blood-red ray in the spectrum of her young life', causing her irreparable damage that would plague her future. Alec did portray some redeeming qualities; he became repentant of his sinful and lustful past and became a Christian Preacher. On learning 'what had resulted' from his fornication with Tess, he offered to marry her.

He was charming and impulsive and consistent in offering Tess financial help and assistance. Alec was honest and readily admitted to being a 'bad fellow' and a 'wretch' and can be admired for his open attitude and self-awareness. However, his all consummated passion and desire for a woman who would never reciprocate his feelings drove his actions, his abuse, blackmail and obsession to possess her under any circumstances led to his ultimate and justifiable down fall. Angel's stubborn persistence in obtaining Tess's hand in marriage and its consequences revealed many contradictions in his character. He declared he loved Tess for 'herself', her 'soul', her 'heart' and her 'substance', yet wanted to educate her.

He was snobbishly proud of her being a direct lineal descendant of the ancient and knightly D'Urberville family when previously he could not 'stomach' them, showed him to be insensitive, with a superiority complex. His selfish hypocritical tendencies are illustrated in him making light of his own sexual escapade, whilst not forgiving Tess; even though he knew she was 'more sinned against' than sinner and had forgiven him for the 'same'. This shattered his illusion of Tess 'you were one person', 'now you are another' led to Angel's ultimate rejection of her. Angel's heart was swept away by his

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romantic idealism but his head was ruled by convention and social correctness. Although Angel was unable to accept Tess's deceit he remained responsible and protective.

He made sure she was provided for financially handing her a 'fairly good sum of money' before they parted and telling her to write to him if she needed 'anything at all'. His love for her remained and he told her 'There is no anger between us, though there is that which I cannot endure at present' but 'I will try to bring myself to endure it.' Tess had broken an accepted social law and because of Angel's moral integrity he found it difficult to deal with the social implications. On learning that the 'man' was still 'alive' 'despair passed over Clare's face', and he questions how they can 'live together while that man lives..

'Only in his sleepwalking did Angel confess his true deep and loving feelings, 'my dearest, darling Tess! So sweet, so good, so true!'. Angel needed time to come to terms with his shattered dreams and accept 'that he loved her still'. Unfortunately for Angel and Tess he was a slave to 'custom and convention', so the head prevailed and the heart suffered and he abandoned Tess for the second time. Both Alec and Angel professed to being in love with Tess but their behaviour and motives led me to question whether this was true. Love can be defined as 'a warm liking of affection, sexual passion, a loved person.

From this it is possible to deduce that both men loved Tess, Alec with 'sexual passion' and Angel with 'a warm liking or affection'. A 'loved person' however would not be some one that you would hurt emotionally or

physically. Both men inflicted pain and suffering on Tess and this was something that she became aware of, even telling Alec when referring to the farmer, ' He won't hurt me. He's not in love with me'. Neither of the men fully understood or appreciated Tess, she was abused by Alec's cruelty for lust and deserted by the fragility of Angel's ' ethereal' love but it was Alec's treatment of Tess that led to Angel's desertion. Alec and Angel's actions from the beginning to the end of the novel significantly shaped Tess's life; from an innocent and pure existence to a desolate and depressed one.

Alec, the more obvious villain, destroyed any hope of future happiness for Tess; he manipulated and ensnared her throughout. Angel was profound in his destruction, unable to accept Tess's faults and deserting her without consideration for her feelings; but it was Angel that bought Tess the happiest times in her short and tragic life. It is with Angel that I have more sympathy, if Tess could find it in her heart to forgive him, then so can I.