

# The tess of the d'urbervilles



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Tess writes only a small part along with the many authors that write her misfortune. In fact I believe that you can take any of the main characters from Tess and you would find that they were either partly or largely to blame for her misfortunes whether their intentions were good or bad. For example; Jack Durbeyfield, Tess's father; he is a proud, sometimes irresponsible and poverty stricken man. It is Jack who doesn't take Parson Tringham's advice to "do nothing" and so instead of bringing his family to fortune, which are his intentions, he becomes proud and brings his own family to misfortune.

In fact from that very instant Durbeyfield begins 'doing' to such an extent that in the course of five years he completely undoes, not only himself and his family, but a number of other people as well, and his own daughter Tess is the principal victim. " Jack is partly to blame for Tess's misfortune of accidentally killing prince. If Tess had a responsible father he would have been able to take the beehives to Casterbridge and Tess wouldn't have been obliged to. Joan is also partly to blame for Tess's first misfortune. When Joan goes to get Jack from Rolliver's she has no intention of bringing him home early so he would be able to take the beehives: " To discover him at Rolliver's, to sit there for an hour or two by his side and dismiss all thought and care of her children during the interval, made her happy. " However, Tess does have pride that stops her from asking 'some young feller' (as suggested by her mother) to take the bee hives to Casterbridge for her family.

It could be said that Tess has inherited her sense of pride from her father: “... See the vanity of her father’s pride;”<sup>\*</sup>But this doesn’t mean that in this case her sense of pride is misplaced.

On this journey we experience Tess’s fatalistic view of our world being a ‘blighted star’. This view doesn’t really change what happens to Tess, it is just a brute fact; Tess’s circumstances are pretty bad and they are about to get much worse. It doesn’t really make any difference to Tess’s future whether Tess knows that her circumstances are bad or not. It only helps us to understand her character.

It is Joan’s ‘project to send Tess and claim kin’ with their fake D’Urberville relations. It is Joan’s idea that gets Tess into the trouble with Alec from the very beginning. The fact that Tess kills the family horse, Prince, only makes Tess feel guilty about leaving her family in yet more poverty. Joan had already decided that Tess should go. Tess is, in a way, offered a choice whether to go or not and it is down to her that she would go for her family’s sake. Tess takes responsibility for Prince’s death and therefore believes that she should do this for her family: “ Well, I suppose I killed the horse mother,” she said mournfully, “ I suppose I ought to do something.

<sup>\*</sup>I don’t believe Tess to have a passive ‘temperament’ but there are parts in the novel where her actions seem incredibly passive and do have an impact on her future: “ She passively sat down on the coat that he had spread and shivered slightly. <sup>\*</sup> It could be argued that Tess is being passive in this dangerous situation and it is her fault that her misfortune with Alec takes place. However, we need to consider Tess’s physical state. She is in ‘

reverie' and is cold. She is also completely lost in this wood. She, in my opinion is incapable of escape and she would have collapsed if she had tried to run away.

We also have to consider that men are a lot stronger than girls are. So taking the whole situation into perspective we can give Tess a fair judgement that she was much weaker than Alec and couldn't prevent this misfortune from happening. Laura Claridge argues that " Tess is sharp-tongued and sure" 4. This may seem a harsh judgement to portray Tess as but Tess shows her initial reactions to cases where she is uncomfortable or unwilling to act: Tess is said to have " sudden impulses of reprisal". It is only after she is cornered and appears to have no choice but to ' obey' that Tess loses her determination and gives in. People ' insist' or ' beg' that she acts; they don't ask; she is not complying to be passive but obeying.

Tess also seems to be most passive in times when she is very depressed. An example of this is when she has just left Alec and has returned home: " Her depression was then terrible and she could have hidden herself in a tomb. "\* The time when Tess is so desperate to have Angel forgive her and love her after she confesses her misfortunes to him is another example of being passive when she is depressed or in this case desperate. Angel is in a ' somnambulistic state' and he is walking with Tess in his arms.

Tess is being passive and she lets him take her: " If it had been to save her weary life she would not, by moving or struggling, have put an end to the position she found herself in. " This example put together with the other example of Tess' depression shows that Tess is exhibiting her own death

wish. In times when Tess is depressed she doesn't only become passive but wants to die. In the last chapters of the novel Tess has had all her spirits broken. She is not consciously aware of what she is doing.

Tess is “ a mere corpse drifting with the current” 5. This is the time when Tess is being most passive. But this isn't Tess's true temperament that we are seeing here; this is a temperament of a truly heartbroken and grief-stricken woman. Tess cannot be blamed for this as all her other misfortunes, which are debatably caused by other people, that have caused her to be like this. Society plays a major part in contributing to this depression. Not only does society condemn her as a ‘ fallen woman’ but offers her no help throughout all her difficulties.

An example of society casting her away is the way the church and the people of the church are towards her: “ She knew what their whispers were about, grew sick at heart, and felt she could come to church no more. ” The church, as I understand, is supposed to be a place of sanctuary and forgiveness. But in this novel Hardy shows the church to be quite the opposite. We are shown two clergymen, Angel's brothers, and from one scene can understand them to be cynical and prejudiced men: “.

.. Regretting his precipitancy in throwing himself on a dairymaid or whatever she may be. Tess is doomed to be condemned by society because “ She had been made to break a necessary social law”.

This law being “ marriage before means”. \* We are also reminded of the parson who refused to bury Tess's baby because of what the public would think. Despite Tess begging him and he saying that it was “ just the same”

but that giving him a Christian burial was “ another matter”. If society hadn't had such an impact on this parson then he may have buried Sorrow and Tess wouldn't have to cope with yet another worry. Society also has an impact on Angel Clare, her husband. He sees Tess as a different person because of her misfortune with Alec: “ You were one person; now you are another.

“\* If society didn't look on people in such a strict way then Angel would have no negative opinion of Tess, society has put it into his mind that being a virgin is a highly desired characteristic- but only for women. The patriarchal society Tess is living in takes women's affairs before marriage to be extreme sins and dismisses men's affairs. Tess dismisses Angel's, because she loves him so much and isn't at all a hypocrite. It is ironic that their confessions are, as Tess describes them, “ exactly the same” action wise, but not in the eyes of society and therefore not in the eyes of Angel Clare. Tess isn't asking for more than she has given to Angel, she only asks for justice: “ Forgive me as you are forgiven! “\* Tess isn't being passive here at all.

She has ‘ got on her knees’ and is begging Angel to forgive her. If she had a passive temperament she would not act to save her marriage- then it could be said that it was her passive temperament that had caused Angel to leave her. This, in my opinion, isn't the case. She is reacting strongly here, although it is in vain, it is not down to passivity that Tess suffers from this misfortune. This aspect of society being against the main character in Tess reminds me of another of Hardy's later novels, Jude the Obscure. Jude is also against society because he and his lover break one of the same social laws that cause them to be condemned by society.

Sue Bridehead, like Tess, loses her spirit and gives in to a man she doesn't love because she feels that she can't be with the man that she truly loves because of society and circumstance. A theme that is also parallel to both Tess and Jude is fate. The quotation that relevantly connects the two is: "Tess had hoped to be a teacher at this school but fate seemed to decide otherwise. "\* Jude had hoped to be a scholar also but like Tess fate seemed to stop him. There is one 'author' of Tess's misfortunes who I have yet to mention; 'the President of the Immortals'.

Tess believes in God and through her misfortunes recognises that if He is to exist then He must have some part in her 'life story': "... Whom she could not class definitely as the God of her childhood, and could not comprehend as any other. "\* 'Justice' is the word Hardy uses to describe Tess's execution.

It is unclear whether Hardy meant that it was justified that Tess should be hanged in the eyes of society or whether it was justice that Tess's sufferings have finally come to an end. Hardy may have been sarcastic when he used this word. To the people in Tess's society who didn't hear the whole story, those who didn't make any exceptions for people like Tess and those were so manipulated by society's rules believed that justice had been done. Perhaps Tess was a 'Pure woman' in the eyes of God and it was his 'sport with Tess' that made her anything less.

In my opinion, Tess doesn't have a passive temperament. Though she can be seen to be passive in the novel I believe that other people, their views put

there by society and fate have a much bigger part to play in writing Tess's misfortunes.