

How does Hardy portray Tess as a pure woman essay



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There are many ways in which Hardy describes his character Tess, but the theme of purity often emerges within the subtext. He does this by using Tess' physical features, language, mannerism, social interaction and he contrasts her to the other characters in the novel. The meaning of pure can be interpreted in many ways.

One definition of pure is to be free from adulterants. As we learnt from the novel, Tess is not pure in that sense. Therefore, Hardy's definition moves away from the traditional Victorian perception of purity. The Victorian readers would have seen Tess as a 'fallen' woman.

Many thought she was a 'harlot' who deserved hanging. It was disgraceful for yourself and your family to have been a 'fallen' woman, but Tess gave birth to her baby Sorrow. (In Victorian times this would have been one of the worse possible things to do). Not only had Tess not been married when she lost her virginity, but she also had a child out of wedlock.

However, Hardy disagreed with that way of defining purity in a woman. The way I think Hardy defines pure is pure minded and good hearted. There are several examples of this. One being that Sorrow was christened even though she was angry at the church and her religion. She did this because she was scared that her child was going to hell because of something she had not done. She felt guilt at something that wasn't her fault showing her complete love and worry for her baby.

Before Tess even talks, Hardy describes her in a completely different way than all his characters. When we first meet her, Hardy is describing a group of young girls heading towards the fields for the May Day dance (which is <https://assignbuster.com/how-does-hardy-portray-tess-as-a-pure-woman-essay/>)

where young girls dance and seek to find husbands). Hardy then, very cinematically, 'zooms into' a few girls, none of whom he names. He refers to them as "the young girls".

Hardy then focuses onto our protagonist Tess. Usually, when an author describes their main character, they focus on the colour of their hair or the clothes that they wear, but Hardy focuses on the smaller details, such as her "peony lips" and her "large innocent eyes". The lack of detail on any other parts suggests that she is something completely special in Hardy's eyes. Her behaviour plays a big part in describing her 'purity'. For instance in Phase the First, when we are first introduced to Tess, she is being humiliated by her father's drunken claims which he is shouting out as he passes the May dance things such as 'I've-got-a-great-family-vault-at-Kingsbere - and-knighted-fore-fathers-in-lead-coffins-there'.

However she refuses to join in the mockery and threatens to stop dancing with her friends if they continue. 'Look here; I won't walk another inch with ye, if you say any jokes about him'. This shows her love for her ignorant father even if it means she is made a mock of as well and gets very embarrassed. Hardy shows her as very sensitive, perhaps another meaning of pure. This boldness of Tess' doesn't appear often through most of the Phases and certainly not in Phase the first.

She is often described as a shy and naive girl. For instance, when she is alone with Alec on the coach. Alec is trying to seduce Tess and Tess has made several attempts to reject him, when Alec confronts her as to why she refuses to kiss him. She replies "but I don't want anybody to kiss me, sir!

She is obviously desperate for him to leave her be, however she still feels guilt for killing the family horse, and feels that the only way to make up for it is to claim 'kin' from Alec, so she gently and childishly attempts to refuse him.

Tess didn't want to claim 'kin' from the D'Urbervilles. However, Prince was one of her family's most prized possessions and without him, they couldn't travel as far as they used to, which jeopardises their livelihood. Tess goes in the end for her family. Tess very rarely puts herself first or even does things to please her.

Her selfishness is another way in which Hardy presents her as pure. In phase the second, after she leaves Alec with his unborn child, Tess meets a strange man with a tin pot full of red paint. His 'job' was to spread the word of God by painting on gates, walls and sides of buildings. His scene is very important because it shows how much Tess' religion is against her and the people who follow it.

This shows the strength Tess had through the next few months of her life as we read later on. In our eyes (and in Hardy's) Tess' pregnancy is not at all her fault and she is still pure because she feels a guilt, which she should not feel. Religion was important to the Victorians and not many authors would dare write against it, but the way Hardy presents the church suggests he doesn't agree with it's beliefs. One example of this is when Tess goes to church just after Sorrow is born.

Tess is there because she finds the music soothing and enjoys singing the hymns. However she soon has to leave because women gossiping about her <https://assignbuster.com/how-does-hardy-portray-tess-as-a-pure-woman-essay/>

and the baby surround her. ' Rested three-quarters of a minute on their foreheads as if they were praying, thought they were not', the church, in this scene is being used as a meeting place instead of a place of worship. Hardy port Even though she was embarrassed and angered by the church people, she still wanted Sorrow to be christened. However, Tess' father refused to let the priest into the house because he felt it would further destroy his dignity. Tess is desperate.

' O merciful God, have pity; have pity upon my poor baby! Heap as much anger as you want to upon me, and welcome; but pity the child! ' Once again she wishes nothing for herself. In the end she is so desperate that she baptizes him herself, showing her devotion and desperation towards her child. She is also shown as an innocent young girl when she asks the priest if baptizing Sorrow herself would allow Sorrow to go to heaven just as he would if the priest had done it. He knows that in Christianity you had to have been baptized, but he takes pity on Tess and says " My dear girl, it will be just the same"; she believes him.

Hardy often uses nature to symbolize Tess. In phase the third, in the garden of Talbothays, when Tess is secretly watching Angel play the harp, Hardy makes many comments about how Tess ' listened like a fascinated bird' and ' she went stealthily as a cat'. These suggest how ' unspoiled' she is by mankind; another definition of pure. Another example of her selflessness is that she refuses Angel's proposal many times because she doesn't want him to unknowingly marry a ' fallen' woman.

When she finally accepts the proposal, she tries many times and many ways to tell him, but bad luck always ends up getting in the way. For instance when the letter gets stuck under the carpet. Tess is continually sacrificing her own happiness for others. When Tess does tell Angel about Alec and of Sorrow, we feel no sympathy for Angel. Hardy ensures this by Angel telling Tess of his weekend in London with a woman.

Tess forgives him and tells him of her past. Angel's past is much worse than Tess' because he had control of everything. Tess was raped/seduced by an older man. While Tess forgives him, Angel does not forgive Tess.

Hardy makes this even worse by adding details such as ' Clare preformed the irrelevant act of stirring the fire'. This has several connotations to the devil and hell. Even at Tess' weakest moments we still feel sympathy for her and see her as an innocent, pure woman. Hardy often uses short sentences with Tess.

This means that she does not take over the conversation and stands back. This shows her as helpless, making us sympathise for her even more. When she murders Alec, she does it because her limits had been pushed by everything Alec has done. He raped her, got her pregnant, he had manipulated her into becoming his mistress and persuaded her into thinking that Angel was never coming back. After she had sent Angel away telling him ' it is too late', she returns upstairs, and finally starts shouting at Alec. We only hear parts of the argument because we are briefly put into the eyes of the housekeeper of ' The Herons, Mrs Brooks, who is eaves dropping on them through the keyhole.

Tess herself refers to herself as ' a caged bird'.