

# [How does hardy use setting in tess of the d’urbervilles in order to portray tess ...](https://assignbuster.com/how-does-hardy-use-setting-in-tess-of-the-durbervilles-in-order-to-portray-tess-status-in-life-essay/)

Hardy’s clever use of setting in order to wrap it’s emphasizing meaning around Tess’ present status in life in ‘ Tess Of The d’Urbervilles is one of the main reasons why his book became a best seller. In every phase, Hardy would somewhat use the surroundings of Tess at her present status and wind it with descriptions which reflect around Tess’ feelings during her stage in life. Since, each phase is used to describe a chapter of Tess’ life (where chapter in this case means a difficult or important stage in her life), Hardy decides to label each one with a different title of which is related to the present event or “ setting” around Tess which surrounds the atmosphere of the situation. However, despite the fact there might have not been an extreme change in setting between the phases, the way he describes the setting within each phase or chapter is altered in order to keep up with Tess’ never-ending string of tragedies or to prepare the reader for tragic, up-coming events. Although the narrator of the book may not include Tess as the main character in every phase in ‘ Tess of the d’Urbervilles’, Hardy somewhat uses poetic description of the setting which surrounds the main situation in order to relate it to Tess’ life, as mentioned before. For example, in the beginning of chapter two of phase the 1st, The Maiden, Hardy had began the chapter by, firstly, describing the area around Tess before her and Angel were introduced to the setting.

It may not seem clear at first why Hardy would do so in such a descriptive manner without making it obvious to how the area is related in any way to Tess or what is happening (or going to happen) – other than the fact that Tess is surrounded by the describing scenery – but as the reader goes further in the story, they will find that every event which takes place around Tess is portrayed in that one description of the Vale of Blackmoor. Hardy describes the Vale of Blackmoor as a “ beautiful, engirdled and secluded region”. During the moment of this description, Tess was thought to be the personified terms of these words – a beautiful, wholesome and quiet girl, “ isolated” from the dangers of the world; however, these words were hardly mentioned in the book when Hardy eventually describes Tess as a character; they are merely general impressions brought to the reader from Hardy’s description of Tess. Instead, he uses words such as “ handsome” in order to signify her beauty and describes her as a “ mere vessel of emotion untinctured by experience” in order to portray her “ seclusion” from the venomous world which surrounds her.

Her wholesomeness is also portrayed when Hardy mentions that passers by “ grow momentarily fascinated by her freshness”. Nonetheless, despite the fact that Hardy had to embed an emphasizing depiction of a setting in order to reflect Tess’ persona within a page long description, he has also used other, much shorter techniques in order to convey Tess’ atmosphere, making it less obvious he is talking about her surrounding rather than her present mood. In phase the 1st, just before the end of chapter 2, Hardy describes Tess’ setting (including the people surround her) in order to convey the envious feelings of Tess’ fellow dancers towards the girl who had been chosen to dance with the only male (Angel) that had accompanied the group of dancing females in the May-Day band. However, although it’s the girls that are jealous and not Tess, Hardy later on comes to portray this in his description. At this point, Hardy had only enveloped a proportion of the setting in his text and used it to describe the girls’ envious feelings and Tess’ everlasting pride without making it too obvious yet conveying that he is relating the setting to her current state of mind. When Angel had walked away in a “ flying run” to join his brothers, he took a moment to pause and catch breath – a queue to where Hardy begins to portray Tess’ present atmosphere.

Hardy describes how Angel could see the “ white figures of the girls” whirling within the “ green enclosure”. Here Hardy emphasizes the innocence of the dancing girls by calling them “ white figures”, ironically dancing amongst an envious, green landscape. During this point of the story, Hardy had used colour instead of expressive vocabulary in order to portray the general atmosphere of the situation. He had cleverly situated this in order to refer to what he had mentioned earlier on in the book when he narrated that Tess was yet an emotional vessel “ untinctured by experience” – in other words, “ uncoloured by experience”. However, he later comes to mention that Tess was a “ white figure, stood apart by the hedge alone”, from Angel’s point of view.

This may be emphasizing that, while the rest of the band were caught up in a temporary whirl-wind of envy, Tess was the only outstanding one, depicting a strong symbol of pride upon her. Or this could also mean that, the “ white figure”, which is portrayed to be Tess, may be a reference to her purity. However, as we progress on in the book, we reveal Tess’ evolving troubles, thus Hardy’s altering tone in his use of description of Tess’ settings. In phase the second, Maiden No More, Tess has left Tantridge after Alec impregnates her – following a rape – and returns back to the Vale of Blackmoor.

Unfortunately, during the 19th century, pre-marital pregnancy was viewed as a severely sinful act due to the highly religious era – despite it not being an intended act by the soon-to-be mother. When Tess returns to Vale of Blackmoor, Hardy begins a series of descriptive text focusing on the weather surrounding Tess. He begins his descriptions with “ it was a hazy sunrise in August” – possibly relating “ hazy”; a synonym of confused, with Tess’ current state of mind. He might have tried to convince his reader’s of Tess’ mind frame by describing the weather which surrounds her, carefully associating the words with the feelings that are most likely to be portrayed by her. So in this case, when Hardy mentioned the “ hazy sunrise” in August, he might have referred to an indistinct beginning (in relation to sunrise) for Tess. The descriptions following this statement provides a grotesque image which would have been embedded in the reader’s minds prior to reading it; he uses words such as “ attacked” and “ dried away to nothing” possibly in reference to the event which had occurred before her pregnancy – the rape – resulting in Tess’ feeling of possible emptiness (as in dried away to “ nothing”).

When Hardy mentions that the denser nocturnal vapours are “ attacked by the warm beams”, the reader might have instantly achieved a phallic image in reference to this. Hardy might have related the “ warm beams” as a link to Alec’s penis when he was “ attacking” (in other words, raping) Tess – just like the beams are attacking the “ nocturnal vapours”. In relation to this event, Hardy goes on to describe the physical aspect of the sun, personifying it into a masculine persona – “ demanding the masculine pronoun for its adequate expression”. If we refer back to what was mentioned about the “ nocturnal vapours” being “ attacked by the warm beams”, we can relate this description to the description provided about the sun, providing further evidence of Hardy’s intention to personify the sun as Alec, since it is the source of the warm, attacking beams. Hardy might have done this in order to give the reader a full insight as to how Tess’ surroundings – in this case, a reference to the summer sun – has instantly altered from something that should be perceived as positive to be viewed as negative by the reader and the narrator.

This might be a link to Tess’ overview of life during this phase, allowing herself to see all that should be positive into negativity. At the end of the starting description of the August sunrise, Hardy finishes the chapter off with a series of “ dark” descriptions. He might have ended the chapter in darkness in order to refer to the burying of Tess’ child – an indication to the depreciation of sunlight that is provided beneath the soil. So in this case, not only does Hardy describe Tess’ surroundings but also her child.

Or if this is not the case, he might be intending to portray the fact that a part of Tess is provided with the baby – resulting in the description of also the baby’s surroundings, even after its death. After the end of every phase, we notice Hardy’s effort in describing Tess’ setting, due to the fact that he mostly finishes off the phases with a summation or conclusive description of the setting surrounding Tess. We notice how before the end of every phase, Hardy’s description of setting allows the readers to compare the description provided of the setting during the end of the phase with the description provided at the beginning of the phase. This allows readers to contrast the feelings being felt by Tess (or so it seems due to the descriptions) at the beginning and end of the phase, allowing us to observe her emotional transition. Hardy’s build up of his descriptive criteria of the setting surrounding Tess provides readers with, not only the insight of Tess’ feelings, but also how she views her surroundings (if we assume that the narrator’s depiction of her surroundings are shared by her emotions). This allows readers to view the setting from her perspective, observing what she might be feeling during her phase in the novel.

If it weren’t for Hardy’s poetic use of description, his readers would have found Tess’ feelings and any emotional relevance to her state of mind, hardly significant.