

# [In society of the victorian era was](https://assignbuster.com/in-society-of-the-victorian-era-was/)

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In his novel “ Tess of the d’Urbervilles” Thomas Hardy writes aboutVictorian women being victims of male dominance, specifically through thecharacter of Tess who’s presented in a tragic light due to the dominance shehas been subjected to.  “ The World’sWife” by Carol Ann Duffy also explores the effects of male dominance bypresenting historical figures anew for the reader to look at women that werepreviously obscured behind the men who dominated their society. In Hardy’s novel ‘ Tess of the D’Urbervilles’ the concept of maledomination is first explored in the Tess’ relationship with her father, JohnDurbeyfield. Whilst he does not directly exert any dominance onto her his roleas the ‘ shiftless head of the house’ is what predominantly controls Tess’ fate.

Due to the patriarchal society of the Victorian era all of John’s actionsinadvertently reflect upon the rest of his family, especially Tess due to herbeing the oldest female. As a result of this it becomes Tess’ duty to make upfor her fathers shortcomings as his ‘ shiftless’ nature implies that he isunable to properly provide for his family. John’s indolence indirectly harmsthe character of Tess, as it is what forces her to find work in a society whereshe should not be relied on as the main breadwinner.  This demonstrates how the male orientedsociety of the Victorian era was harmful towards females as they were oftencoerced into situations that they did not want to be involved in order toplease male figures. It can also be argued that her father’s reliance on her toprovide for the household is a catalyst for Tess’ eventual downfall due to thefact that if she did not have to find work she would’ve never experienced theevents that caused her fate. The inherent dominance that Tess’ father has overher also strips her of what little independence a Victorian woman would have, thus causing her to live a life that puts her parents needs before her ownforcing her to abandon aspirations of socially rising and living a better life. Whilst Tess accepts the notion of not being independent the titular characterof Carol Ann Duffy’s poem ‘ Thetis’ spends the majority of the poem trying to maintainthe little independence that she has. In the poem she is unable to live withoutbeing in the constant fear of being attacked by an unnamed male figure that isconstantly trying to dominate her.

The concept of the antagonistic character ofthe poem being unnamed could be implying that they are a representation of menin general and even though we have progressed from the male dominated societypresent in ‘ Tess’ society is for the most part still patriarchal. In contrastto how the character of Tess conforms to the abuse and dominance that is placedupon her, Thetis incessantly tries to escape the harsh reality of abuse thatthe male figure tries to place upon her. In the first stanza Thetis isinitially portrayed as a sweet ‘ bird in the hand of a man’. The imagery of abird suggests freedom and independence, as a bird is able to roam the sky asfreely as they wish.

However, this idea is juxtaposed by the fact that she is ‘ inthe hand of a man’ which implies any freedom is dependent on whether he allows heto be free or not. The false security of freedom that Thetis believes she hasis quickly stripped by her dominator who  abuses his power and “ squeeze(s)” her with his “ fist”. This initial demonstration of violence makes it obviousthat she is not in control as much as she believes to be and makes her aware ofthe posing threat of violence and dominance that men pose towards her. Similarly in ‘ Tess’ the initial sexual violations of Alec towards her is whatcauses the character to become more wary and uneasy in the presence of men. Whilst Thetis does not initially accept the thought of being controlled by aman and giving up her freedom the character of Tess never truly has any form offreedom with her decisions constantly being manipulated to suit the needs ofthe male characters in her life (i. e.

her father, Alec, Angel). Throughout Hardy’s novel it is reinforced that Tess is a ‘ pure woman’and is often described in a way that depicts her as innocent such as her firstintroduction at the May Day dance where she is in a company of girls wearing awhite dress. The white implying purity, innocence and chastity that she issupposed to represent. However the purity of the white is offset by the redribbon in her hair, red being a colour typically associated with sin, sexualityand danger. She is described as “ the only one of the white company whocould boast of such a pronounced adornment” suggesting that out of theentire company of girls it is her fate to be tainted with the sexual violencethat she will have to face at the hands of Alec, thus the ribbon being aphysical representation the eventual ruining of her innocence. Alec firstexercises his dominance over Tess when he coerces her to eat a strawberry fromhis hand and even though she is uncomfortable “ in a slight distress she partedher lips and took it in”.

The verb ‘ distress’ displays that she feltuncomfortable in giving in to what Alec wanted but due to his position as arich, white, powerful male she felt an obligation to give in, as it is whatwould be expected of a woman in Victorian society. Alec abuses his position ofbeing at the top of the Victorian hierarchy to abuse Tess knowing that shewould be too afraid to go against him, especially due to her position of beingpoor and a woman. The red colour of the strawberry reiterates the fact that sheis in a dangerous position, which is also sexually charged as strawberry’s canbe considered to be symbolic of passion and sexual desires. This initialviolation, whilst small, displays that Alec believes he can successfully have controlover Tess, as she is unlikely to fight back against him. The peak of hisdominance and control over the character of Tess is when the implied rapehappens in ‘ The Chase’. The sexual dominance and violence that Tess goes throughduring the rape shows how little control that she has even over the mostintimate aspects of her life with her virtue being taken away against her will. The rape ultimately exhibits who holds the power in their relationship.

Hardy makesit clear to the reader that Tess is unwilling in the entire situation and that “ Uponher eyelashes there lingered tears”, signifying that the event caused painand hurt for her. The line “ Where was Tess’s guardian angel?” displaysthe fact that Tess herself could not fight back against the injustice that washappening to her and instead was hoping to rely on an ‘ angel’ to save her fromthe dominance exhibited by Alec. As a direct result of the rape, Tess becomespregnant and due to this becomes a social pariah, whilst Alec continues withlife as normal highlighting the double standards between Victorian men andwomen. Even though she did not fight against Alec’s sexual dominance, Tess doesmanage to insure that he doesn’t dominate every aspect of her life by refusingto marry him despite him being her only potential suitor due to her being an “ impure” woman. This would’ve shocked Victorian reader as modern critic Ann Micklesonput it “ Tess is part of a class-conscious society, which regards thepeasant as an inferior member of society and woman as inferior to man”, thus meaning that they wouldn’t have expected her to have her own free will tomake such a brave decision due to her lowly status.