

# Is tess a victim of society essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Thomas Hardy wrote "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" in 1891 in the height of the Victorian ideals and a social constraint. Society was restrictive to individuals and appeared controlling to its members. Tess is a modern character who is victimised by the society. Her strong willed personality clashed with what was desired and required of women in that society. Tess is a modern character for the time period, she is portrayed as strong willed and not as passive as women were throughout that time period.

The family The landowners, who towards the end of the novel make the family move out of their home that is on conditional ownership, oppress her and her family. Tess has been brought up in this home where they have to work to live and often cannot work enough to survive. Tess has been made a victim of society by this, in being brought up like this, she is encouraged to work to help pay for her family when they are struggling to survive. Her proud character prevents her from accepting gifts, from Alec in particular which is what gets Tess into more trouble.

Tess has grown up in relative poverty compared with Alec and so feels that she has to repay him in some way for the gifts in which he gives to her family. It is only after Alec tells Tess that he has provided a horse for her family and toys for her siblings that she falls into despair and her ultimate ending. Alec can tell that Tess is subject to the social guiding of looking after yourself and he abuses his power over her with money. He gets her to fall for his kindness and therefore feel in debt to him. Alec understands the society and realises that even though Tess is stubborn in nature, her nurture has taught her some passivity.

When he rapes her she is under the illusion that he cares and that she owes him something in repayment for all he's done for her family. Tess feels a strong responsibility for her family in the novel. Her upbringing has taught her responsibility and a mature attitude beyond her years. If it wasn't for this responsibility she feels Alec would not have the power over her. From the beginning of the novel we learn that Tess is dependable and in some ways more mature than her mother. In chapter iii Tess returns to the cottage and immediately offers to help her mother with the household chores, which are still being done.

Tess's mother then goes off to the alehouse to fetch her husband. It is later understood that her mother hasn't gone to fetch her husband but instead to join him leaving Tess in control of the family that she has the responsibility for. In this way the society that Tess has been brought up in with added accountability for the family and the attitude of helping out and being mature, has affected her and added to her downfall. As well as being responsible to the family Tess is alone and separated from the support in which a child needs.

Her adult actions have separated her from her mother who now knows that Tess is able to look after the children and so she can enjoy herself and be less responsible. With this separation from her family Tess has less guidance and an abandoned attitude. It is this that adds to Tess's independence and ultimately Alec's success in controlling her. Her mother doesn't offer Tess much guidance and so when she tries persuading Tess to go to try claim kinship with the D'Urbevilles, Tess feels pressured into it. She ultimately

doesn't want to go but her mother mentions how they are unlikely to survive without the horse that helped before.

She is almost bullied by her own mother and pushed away into an environment her mother is not sure is safe. Tess has no advice or guidance from her family other than to help them survive as she says when she returns in phase the second: " I was a child when I left this house four months ago. " Tess understands that even though she had responsibility she wasn't educated in the issues of life. Her mother hadn't told her about life because Tess showed maturity towards the family. It is these contradictions in Tess that makes her more of a victim towards the cruel society.

The contradictions in her create hard problems that she has to deal with. It could be argued that Tess is a victim of herself. Tess has been educated and speaks proper English but at the same time is a peasant and speaks common. This contradiction enables us to see that she is victim to poverty. We see that she could make a great teacher, she has an ability to control children and we know that Tess desires to be a teacher. Unfortunately the society she is in restricts her, her families poverty prevents her from being able to teach. Tess is opinionated in her personality but we see with the rape that she can be passive as mentioned earlier.

Her harsh opinion of herself means that Tess feels compelled to do certain things she would rather not. She feels responsible for the death of the horse so goes to claim kinship with the D'Urbevilles, which leads to her rape. The death of Sorrow leads Tess to the milk farm. When Angel leaves her after learning of her rape she feels forced to go and find work. Her work at turnip

farm leads her to rediscovering Alec and her final downfall when she murders him. The murder contrasts with her victim appearance, how can Tess be a victim yet acts against the status by murdering?

The murdering of Alec has been built up to in Tess's life. She has been constantly ruined and abused by him and the murder is her way out. Tess's character is frank and truthful. She tells Angel everything about her past and her troubles. The society emphasising purity gave Angel his teachings that made him leave her. It is this that throws Tess into the marriage with Alec, which she clearly is not happy with. Overall Tess is a victim of many aspect of society and her downfall is built up on her mistakes. Tess is a genuine character to feel sorry for.