Tess, a Victim of her Society

in Thomas Hardy’s "Tess of the D’Urbervilles"

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C EXTENDED ESSAY

Tess
a Victim of her Society

in Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*

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Introduction

Many things have happened, the past two centuries, when it comes to women’s situation, but one might sometimes wonder if we really have come that far. As a woman today, in Western societies, you can do almost whatever you want to do. However society will always treat some of your actions as a woman in a less positive way. It is sad that we have not come further when it comes to equality. We still, to some extent, live in a patriarchal society where men are the norm and women mostly do as they are told. In 19th century Victorian Britain, laws and customs were founded by men. You cannot but feel sympathy for the vivid Tess in Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Ubervilles*. Tess does what she thinks is right by following the rules and concepts of her society. Tess also lives in a changing society and it is common knowledge that changing societies tend to hold on to old rules and principles in fear for what is new. These are also circumstances that affect Tess in a less positive way. Furthermore, in society it matters if you are a woman and not a man. It matters what family you are born into. In addition it also matters how the Church act according to circumstances. However Tess is a simple peasant maid, a beautiful young woman who could have been better off.

In this extended C-essay about Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Ubervilles*, the aim is to show that Tess is a victim of her society. Three different aspects which present evidence that she is a victim of certain circumstances in her society will be discussed; that she is a woman, that she is born into a poor family and that she is a member of the Church during the Victorian time.

The first chapter will deal with Tess, as a woman (sex) in a male society and what the consequences are. I will also discuss oppression from men in the Victorian society and what it does to Tess. There are also double standards when it comes to the way men and women are treated in *Tess of the D’Ubervilles*, and this essay will present examples of these double standards.

The second chapter will deal with what role the family play in Tess’s situation. Could it for example have been a different story if she had been born into a wealthy family? Are there circumstances that she cannot do anything about? Is it really her fault that bad things happen to her? Is she to be blamed for being a girl and being the eldest out of seven children?
Chapter three argues the role Church and religion play in the text and furthermore discusses the oppression from the Church when it comes to Tess’s situation. Could she have been better off if the Church had followed the words from the Bible? Could the parishers have helped her out during her hard times?
**Tess - a victim of her sex**

Being a woman in a male society was not easy during the Victorian period. Women had a lot of obligations and very few options, something which led to consequences, especially for Tess. Tess is a victim of her sex, oppressed by men and their society. Also there are significant double standards in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*¹, when it comes to men and women and the way their actions are treated or looked upon. The first man that comes in Tess’s way is Alec D’Urbervilles, her so called cousin, who is obsessed with her. Secondly, Tess meets Angel Clare, the son of a priest, who could have been her Guardian Angel but is not.

The novel starts with a ritual, where the women and girls of the village, among them Tess, dressed up in white, celebrate the event of the forthcoming spring. They have a procession around the parish and at the end of their promenade they begin dancing. Here Tess is introduced, for the first time. She is an innocent country girl, full of life. There is a sense of hope and joy in the air, since she has her whole life ahead of her. The author describes her as follows:

> She was a fine and handsome girl – not handsomer than some others, possibly – but her mobile peony mouth and large innocent eyes added eloquence to colour and shape. She wore a red ribbon in her hair, and was the only one of the white company who could boast of such a pronounced adornment.²

In this description of Tess as a possibly beautiful young woman, there is a sense of hope for her future. However it can be noted that there is something special about her appearance, and it is obvious that things will happen since she is “the chosen one”, being the only one wearing a red ribbon. The red colour also indicates that love is coming to her, since red is the colour of love. Red is also the colour of blood. Furthermore the following description of Tess, by the author, gives the reader more information about Tess and the situation in her society:

> Tess Durbeyfield at this time of her life was a mere vessel of emotion untinctured by experience. The dialect was on her tongue to some extent, despite the village school: the characteristic intonation of that dialect for this district being the voicing approximately rendered by the syllable UR, probably as rich an utterance as any to be found in human speech. The pouted-up deep red mouth to which this syllable was native had hardly as yet settled into its definite shape, and her lower lip had a

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² Hardy. 8
way of thrusting the middle of her top one upward, when they closed together after
a word.3

In this passage, Tess is a young and innocent countryside girl with a traditional way of
speaking. On the other hand the school which represents the authority imposes rules
concerning people talking in a different way. Tess is caught in the middle. She has to learn the
language of her masters to be able to succeed in life and get married, which is what is
expected of her. Tess is not yet hard and defined which is described in the detail about her
mouth not yet having settled into its definite shape. This might also indicate that she will
become hard eventually.

As the text progresses, Tess is once again described more than once, by her looks. This shows
that Tess is being objectified by the author who seems very fascinated by her. He talks about
her mouth and her lips, as though he wants to kiss her. He comes back to the description of
her lips in various ways, constantly. In Tess’s first meeting with Alec, her so called cousin, he
offers her some strawberries: “… he stood up and held it by the stem to her mouth. “No -
no!” She said quickly, putting her fingers between his hand and her lips. “I would rather take
it in my own hand.” “Nonsense!” he insisted; and in a slight distress she parted her lips and
took it in.”” 4

This is when the reader first gets the feeling that things will not work out that well for Tess,
since she is more or less forced to do as Alec tells her. She does not know how to say no in a
convincing way, and her social situation does not give her the option to refuse. This is also a
foreshadowing of what is to come. However, this also gives us an idea of what kind of man
Alec is. He does not take no for an answer. It also shows the fact that men are the norm and
women do as they are told.

Eventually this leads to the scene when Tess is raped by Alec. Many critics 5 over the years
have discussed whether she actually is raped, if she is to some extent to be blamed for being
ignorant. Hardy, however, in this part of the novel, makes it absolutely clear that she is raped:

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3 Hardy. 9
4 Hardy. 36
Darkness and silence ruled everywhere around. Above them rose the primeval yews and oaks of The Chase, in which were poised gentle ruling birds in their last nap; and about them stole the hopping rabbits and hares. But might some say where was Tess’s guardian angel? Where was the providence of her simple faith? Perhaps, like that other god of whom the ironical Tishbite spoke, he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was in a journey, or he was sleeping and not to be awaked.

Why was it that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; [...] As Tess’s own people down in those retreats are never tired of saying among each other in their fatalistic way: “It was to be.” There lay the pity of it.  

According to this paragraph, life is full of innocent victims, Tess being one of them. The birds, rabbits and hares represent these victims. She is described as an innocent, pure woman, particularly in the phrases “beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer and practically blank as snow [...]”. Hardy has made it very clear that Tess is a victim of her sex, being oppressed by Alec, the man who is supposed to be her kin. Alec takes advantage of the situation. This is a clear case of rape, and the situation itself makes it even worse, since Tess in some way, trusted him. She should have been able to trust the person who she thinks is her cousin. She has now ended up in a very difficult situation which also leads to other consequences.

When Tess first meets Angel, she remembers that she actually has seen him before, at the May-dance. However, he did not dance with her. Now when they work at the same place she grows more and more fond of him. He eventually shows interest in her too. At dawn, when they are milking:

> It was then, as has been said, that she impressed him most deeply. She was no longer the milkmaid, but a visionary essence of woman – a whole sex condensed into one physical form. He called her Artemis, Demeter and other fanciful names half teasingly, which she did not like because she did not understand them. “Call me Tess,” she would say askance; and he did.  

Angel is more in love with the image of a perfect woman, than Tess herself, which is obvious in this part. She is merely an object to him since he compares her with Greek goddesses. It is not possible for Tess to be perfect since she is a living person, with a past. She cannot live up to his standards which are unreal and therefore impossible to achieve. This is oppression from

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6 Hardy. 68-69
7 Hardy. 125-126
men at its worst. In the critical text, *Why women are oppressed*, Serena Jones quotes D.H. Lawrence:

> Man is willing to accept woman as an equal, as a man in skirts, as an angel, a devil, a baby-face, a machine, an instrument, a bosom, a womb, a pair of legs, a servant, an encyclopedia, an ideal or an obscenity; the only thing he won’t accept her as is a human being, a real human being of the real sex.  

Furthermore, it can be said that Tess is now in a situation she cannot do much about. She is in love with Angel, and she wants to be happy. Tess does not see the signs of oppression. According to Serena Jones, it is like this: “On the negative side, however, feminists recognize that harms done to women by oppression are real and can be emotionally and physically damaging. This damage can affect one’s ability to analyze the oppression from which one suffers.”

However Tess ends up married with Angel even though the wedding is never completed. When they had got married he told her about his past and she forgave him. But when she told him about her past, he rejected her. He thinks that she is no longer the woman he knew. He has however, been idealising the love they shared and the consequences are severe for Tess. This shows the double standards in Tess’s society. They have both had a past but only Angel’s past is forgiven, as he is a man. This proves that Tess is a victim of her sex.

Tess leaves Angel, to go back to her parent’s house which is the only thing for her to do, considering the circumstances. While living there, Alec constantly hunts for her, trying to persuade her to be his woman. He even asks her to marry him but she denies the proposal. He is obsessed with her and does not give up until he gets what he wants. Eventually she does not find a way, other than to do what he asks her to, to come and live with him, since he has been helping her family.

While Tess is out looking for a job she walks about and constantly gets remarks about her looks. Since her appearance has got here in conditions before she decides to do something about it. She tries to make herself ugly. She does not care because her husband does not want

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her, and she does not want anybody else. She dresses down and makes what she can to look ugly:

As soon as she got out of the village she entered a thicket and took from her basket one of the old field-gowns which she had never put on even at the dairy – never since she had worked among the stubble at Marlott. She also, by a felicitous thought, took a handkerchief from her bundle and tied it round her face under her bonnet, covering her chin and half her cheeks and temples, as if she were suffering from toothache. Then with her little scissors, by the aid of a pocket looking-glass, she mercilessly nipped her eyebrows off, and thus insured against aggressive admiration she went on her uneven way.\textsuperscript{10}

At the end of the story Tess and Angel end up at Stonehenge where she lays to rest on the stone altar before the men come to get her. Angel wants her to get up and flee, but Tess is satisfied and tells him: “One of my mother’s people was a shepherd hereabouts, now I think of it. And you used to say at Talbothays that I was a heathen. So now I am at home.” \textsuperscript{11} In this way the novel also ends with a ritual. Tess is being a sacrificial victim. She later gets hanged for the crime she had committed, that is killing Alec. One can discuss whether it is Tess who should be blamed entirely or if there are one or two other persons to be blamed as well.

\textsuperscript{10} Thomas Hardy. \textit{Tess of the D’Urbervilles}. (England: Penguin, 2002). 275
\textsuperscript{11} Hardy. 387
Tess – a victim of her family

One does not decide what family one is born into. The innocent child, Tess, cannot be blamed for being born into a poor family. Tess is a victim of her upbringing, the situation of her father and mother as well as the knowledge of her ancestors, who were rich and prosperous. The fact that they had existed did not help Tess. However, it would have been a different story if she had been born into a wealthy family. Tess is the eldest of the family’s children and being a girl in that time was more complicated. As Joan Perkin in *Victorian Women* says:

> Girls learned early in life that they were less important than boys, and the welcome a girl could expect when she was born depended to some extent on social class. [---]
> The vast majority of English girls, however, were born to working class parents, who accepted whatever God sent, but were somewhat disappointed if it was a girl. Any child was an extra mouth for a poor family to feed, but also a potential wage-earner.12

Tess was the family’s cash cow. She worked and helped the family financially but also took care of the parents whenever they needed. She had to as she was the eldest child.

Tess’s family consists of seven children, a father who is a haggler and a drunkard and a mother who is trying to do her best, caring for the family. The family constantly lack for money. When Tess’s father is told by parson Tringham that he has ancestors who were once rich and prosperous, he gets ideas about how things could have been different for his family. He starts to daydream about it and stays a lot at the public house, where he talks about his ancestors to everyone who wants to listen. However it is the mother who finally gets the idea that Tess should go and claim kin with the old lady that they had heard of with the name D’Urbervilles. Her mother even hints that it might turn out to be a marriage. This shows how Tess is oppressed by her family. The mother thinks only of the opportunity to get her daughter married to someone wealthy, and the good it would do to the family. Some men at the pub overhear her conversation with her husband and they say:

> “Tess is a fine figure o’ fun, as I said to myself to-day when I seed her vamping round parish with the rest,” observed one of the elderly boozers in an undertone. “But Joan Durbeyfield must mind that she don’t get green malt in flower.” It was a local phrase which had a peculiar meaning, and there was no reply.13

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13 Perkin. 22
Tess’s mother had herself been in similar circumstances before. However she does not warn her daughter about men and what they can do which can lead to negative consequences. Tess later on, thinks that she could have avoided an accident, if only she had known.

Tess feels responsible when the family’s horse dies in an accident, since she was driving the carriage, and she feels that she has to do something to make it right. She has no other option than to go and see the old lady D’Urberville to claim kin. Tess’s family needs a horse to be able to make a living. Since she is the eldest child and because she feels responsible for her family she goes even though she does not want to. As Albert J La Valley puts it: “she goes to Trantridge despite her apprehensions of danger, in an effort to do something about a situation with which neither she nor her family can cope in the old ways.”

In doing this Tess can be seen as a victim of her parents situation, being poor and also of her mother’s motives, that is that it could lead to a marriage which would benefit the family.

However, things do not work out that well for Tess at Trantridge. Alec rapes her, she leaves and ends up at her parent’s house, pregnant and without a husband, or even a prospect. As Perkin says: “It was accounted no shame for a child to be begotten out of wedlock – the shame was when there was no wedding to follow.” Her mother does not like this and asks her if she does not think about her family and their wellbeing. She even blames her: “You ought to have been more careful if you did not mean to get him to make you his wife”.

Tess answers in agony:

O mother, my mother! Cried the agonized girl, turning passionately upon her parent as if her poor heart would break. How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house four months ago. Why didn’t you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o’ learning in that way, and you did not help me! Her mother was subdued.

Her mother had not told her about men and Tess is in agony because of this. Her mother blames her when she should have told her one or two things about life. Also working class girls and women of that time did not receive education about things like this.

15 Perkin. 59-60
16 Hardy. 77
17 Hardy. 77
The other parent, the father is not concerned in this matter. His biggest concerns are about going to the public house, daydreaming and talking about his noble bones. The only time he worked hard was when the horse died: “He worked harder the next day in digging a grave for Prince in the garden than he had worked for months to grow a crop for his family.” 

However his health does not allow him to work that hard which eventually causes the situation where Tess had to do his job, going with the beehives at night. It is actually him being responsible for the “accident” in more ways than one since he does not do his work. He also drinks too much and does not at all contribute to the family.

Tess stays at home for some years. She works on the fields and takes care of her baby which dies. She leaves home for a fresh start elsewhere and starts thinking about herself and her own future. This leads to her meeting with Angel Clare and eventually a proposal of marriage, which her mother is very happy about. Tess writes a letter to her mother to ask her if she should mention her past to Angel. However her mother advises her not to when she replies:

Dear Tess, we are all glad to hear that you are going really to be married soon. But with respect to your question, Tess, I say between ourselves, quite private but very strong, that on no account do you say a word of your Bygone Trouble to him. I did not tell everything to your Father, he being so proud on account of his Respectability, which perhaps, your Intended is the same. Many a woman – some of the Highest in the Land – have had a Trouble in their time; and why should you Trumpet yours when others don’t Trumpet theirs? No girl would be such a Fool, especially as it is so long ago, and not your Fault at all.

Tess does not feel sure about this answer but finally after some torment and agony she accepts Angel’s proposal and marries him. Tess really wanted to tell him from the beginning and she even wrote him a letter to tell him everything, but the letter never reached him. However she was persuaded by her mother not to, which also shows the power and oppression from her mother.

Eventually, after Tess and Angel had married, Angel wants to make a confession about his past to Tess and then Tess feels that she can do the same, telling Angel about her past; her being raped, having a baby that died and Alec pursuing her. However, Angel does not think it is the same and he does not feel that he knows her anymore. This leads to Tess coming home again, ashamed, and her mother tells her off, for confessing to Angel; “Well, well; what’s

18 Hardy. 29
19 Hardy. 186-187
done can’t be undone! I’m sure I don’t know why children o’ my bringing forth should all be bigger simpletons than other people’s – not to know better than to blab such a thing as that, when he couldn’t ha’ found it out till too late!”

Tess’s mother was right about one thing; Angel had not liked her confession, which put her in this position. Tess’s mother shows little sympathy for her daughter and she also seems a bit too hard on her. The father however at certain times had shown himself to be more sympathetic, although he was mostly drunk. It is too much for Tess when she overhears her parent’s conversation:

“D’ye think he really have married her? – or is it like the first – “ Poor Tess, who had heard as far as this, could not bear to hear more. The perception that her word could be doubted even here, in her own parental house, set her mind against the spot as nothing else could have done. How unexpected were the attacks of destiny! And if her father doubted her a little, would not strangers and acquaintance doubt her much? O, she could not live long at home.

As her father seems to believe that the marriage is not valid, she decides to leave as soon as possible. She cannot bear that her father doubts her. This shows that not only the mother but also the father oppresses her. When she receives a letter from Angel she pretends that all is well. She gives half of the money that she got from Angel, to her parents, and leaves.

Tess finds work and lives under hard conditions, meanwhile she does not tell her parents of her situation. When her money is almost gone she receives a letter from her mother about their difficulties and the need for money to be able to repair their house after the autumn rains. They needed twenty pounds which leaves her with only ten pounds left. Her situation is getting harder and harder since she is trying to not reveal the fact that she does not live with her husband.

Alec starts coming after her again and constantly wants to help her and her parents out. His motives are a bit doubtful, though it seems he wants her and also wants to help her situation. She is unconsciously aware of the threat in Alec pursuing her. The threat being, her having to give in to him, which is what she does not want.

20 Hardy. 252
21 Hardy. 253
Liza-Lu, Tess’s younger sister comes to get her from the field when she is working, since their parents are sick. Tess goes home to take care of them. Tess’s mother gets better but her father dies and she has to take care of the entire family. If she had been a man this would have been easier. She could for instance have inherited the lease, which is not the case, when her father dies. Therefore they have to leave their cottage:

Her father’s life had a value apart from his personal achievements, or perhaps it would not have had much, it was the last of the three lives for whose duration the house and premises were held under a lease; and it had long been coveted by the tenant-farmer for his regular labourers, who were stinted in cottage accommodation. Moreover, “liviers” were disapproved of in villages almost as much as little freeholders, because of their independence of manner, and when a lease determined it was never renewed. 22

Alec appears and she tells him they have to leave because she is not a proper woman. He suggests that she and her family come to live in his garden-house. However she refuses him. Tess suddenly feels upset and she writes an angry letter to Angel to ask him why he left her in this situation. Angel does not answer her letter. However Alec seems to always be at her side and finally she has to give in to her so called cousin’s demands, to come and live with him. What can she do other than to take care of her family? She has no option. She is not happy at all about the arrangement, but her mother is, now when she is taken care of, living in a nice house with a servant and the rent paid for. The price is being paid by Tess.

When it is too late, Angel comes back and asks her for forgiveness. She seems chocked to see him, since Alec has convinced her that Angel will never come for her. She does not know what to do, so she kills Alec and follows Angel and they live happily together for one week.

The whole time these events are taking place it is Tess who takes care of her family. Even when she knows she will be hanged for murder, she does what she can to help her family out. Now that Angel has forgiven her, she asks him to marry her younger sister Liza-Lu and he promises that he will. Then she is content, because she knows that her family will be taken care of. Until the end she is a victim of her family and their situation.

22 Hardy. 345
Tess – a victim of her Church/religion

Being a woman and being poor in a Victorian society was not easy. However one expects the Church to be the institution which helps people who live under hard conditions. When it comes to Tess, this was not the case as she was an unmarried woman with an illegitimate child. As a good Christian, Tess does what is expected of her and visits Church. It is not her fault that she was raped and had a child without being married. However when she wants to baptise her illegitimate child the Church refuses. She wants to do the right thing. When her baby dies she wants to bury him in the Churchyard but the Church does not allow this. This is a clear case of oppression from the Church.

In the beginning of the novel, Parson Tringham tells Tess’s father about their ancestors. Her father becomes interested and asks a lot about it and what he can do about this news. Parson Tringham answers: “Oh - nothing, nothing; except chasten yourself with the thought of “how are the mighty fallen.” which initially shows oppression from the Church. Parson Tringham, the representative of the Church, is sitting on his horse when he talks to the pedestrian, her father. He would have been better off not knowing his own history as it couldn’t help him and his family and the knowledge also put Tess in several difficult positions.

Tess has to help her father and mother out whenever they are in difficulties. That is what is expected of her as she is the eldest child. As it says in the Bible: “Thy shall honour thy father and thy mother” and that is really what Tess is doing all the time, whenever they need her. Firstly, she goes to claim kin with the man that later takes advantage of her and secondly she has to let him help her family financially. This is not what Tess wants to do, however it is Tess doing the right thing following the words from the Bible, honouring her father and mother. In this way she is hooked by the rules and principles of religious belief in Victorian time.

When Tess has been raped she goes back home to her parents and initially visits Church every Sunday, like a good Christian. However, in Church, she always stays at the back, knowing her place and trying not to be seen by so many people: “The people who had turned their heads turned them again as the service proceeded; and at last observing her they whispered to each

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23 Hardy. 3
other. She knew what their whispers were about, grew sick at heart, and felt that she could come to church no more.”  

After this she is so ashamed over her situation that she decides to stay indoors and only go out at dusk. The parishers of the Church in this way do not help her situation as one could have hoped. As it says in the Bible: ‘Do to others what you wish others to do to you.’ This is not what is happening to her; instead she is a victim of everything bad that had happened to her. She cannot be saved by the Church or even the parishers.

However, Tess carries on with her life and tries to do the best she can considering the circumstances. She gives birth to a baby boy and takes care of him and also starts working on the fields since it is harvest time. Her younger sister comes to the field with the baby when he needs to be fed. One can sense that she is really fond of her child despite how it came into the world. Tess is rather content with her life. Her baby, however, is weak and she returns home one day to find him very ill. She is worried that he will be damned since he is not christened. Her father does not allow her to send for the parson and he locks the door so she does what she thinks is best to save his soul, she baptizes the child herself, and names him Sorrow. She is in agony and she is afraid of the consequences for her baby:

She thought of the child consigned to the nethermost corner of hell, as its double doom for lack of baptism and lack of legitimacy; saw the arch-fiend tossing it with his three-ponged fork, like the one they used for heating the oven on baking days, to which picture she added many other quaint and curious details of torment taught the young in this Christian country.

Tess is a victim of her religion since she gives birth to an illegitimate child and the fact that the child is not baptized by the parson but by Tess. She feels responsible for her being ignorant and having done a sinful act by taking the situation in her own hands. However it is the Church who refuses her when she asks for help.

Tess goes to see the parson to ask if Sorrow will be saved. He assures her that his soul is safe. She also asks him to bury her baby but he tells her that the baby cannot be buried on consecrated ground. This makes her sad and angry. However Sorrow is buried at night in the light of the lantern where all unbaptized infants and drunkards are laid.

25 Hardy. 80  
26 The Bible  
27 Hardy. 88
Tess stays at home for a couple of years and then decides to move on. She goes somewhere she can start afresh. She starts working as a milkmaid at Talbothays and while walking there she sings:

She tried several ballads, but found them inadequate; till, recollecting the Psalter that her eyes had so often wandered over of a Sunday morning before she had eaten of the tree of knowledge, she chanted: [--]

She suddenly stopped and murmured: ‘But perhaps I don’t quite know the Lord as yet.’

In this section, as many times earlier in the novel, there are foreshadowing’s, as here: ‘she had eaten […] knowledge’ referring to the Biblical scene, when Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden of Eden when they ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge. In this way, we know that not only good news is ahead. Tess is Eve in the Garden of Eden and we all know that story.

Furthermore, when Tess and Angel begin to fall in love they often get up earlier than the others: “Being so often – possibly not always by chance – the first two persons to get up at the dairy-house, they seemed to themselves the first persons up of all the world. [---] as if they were Adam and Eve.” Now, we know for sure that the author refers to the Garden of Eden and also the Edenic fall. What is at first the happiest time in Tess’s life will turn out to be something entirely different when everything eventually falls apart.

Tess can also be seen as a victim of religion in terms of the way she is treated by Angel’s family. They cannot accept that she is a simple dairymaid, not good enough for their fine family. They do not approve of the marriage and they do not come to the wedding. When Angel has left the country after their separation, Tess after a while has difficulties. She decides to go to Angel’s parents to ask for help, and she ends up at the road behind Angel’s brothers and Miss Chant, and overhears their conversation:

‘Here’s a pair of old boots,’ he said. ‘Thrown away, I suppose, by some tramp or other.’

‘Some impostor who wished to come into the town barefoot, perhaps, and so excite our sympathies,’ said Miss Chant. ‘Yes, it must have been, for they are excellent

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28 Hardy. 99
29 The Bible: Genesis 3:3.
30 Hardy. 125
walking-boots – by no means worn out. What a wicked thing to do! I’ll carry them home for some poor person.  

After this Tess returns home and feels heartbroken and ashamed by the experience. She did not receive the help from Angel’s family that she had hoped for. One could have thought that a family as theirs, with a father and two sons working for the Church, would have had other values. However when it comes to social hierarchy, things worked in another way in that time, even when it comes to men of the Church.

Furthermore, this experience that Tess had when she was trying to find help from Angel’s family, made her believe that it was no idea to struggle and wait for Angel. He would not come to her rescue and when he eventually did it was too late.

Tess did not receive any help from the Church, the Parson or the parishers. She did not even get help from her husband’s parents or brothers in law. She was also doomed beforehand if we consider that Hardy compared her with Eve in the Garden of Eden. Tess is a victim of her Church and religion.

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31 Hardy, 295
Conclusion
In this essay about Tess in Tomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Ubervilles* the aim was to give evidence to the fact that Tess is a victim of her society. When three different aspects of society have been studied the following conclusions are made: 1) Tess is a victim of her sex. 2) Tess is a victim of her family. 3) Tess is a victim of her Church/religion. These circumstances mentioned show that Tess is a victim of her society.

Tess is a woman in Victorian Britain where rules and principles are set by men. She tries to do the right thing and does not deliberately break any of the rules. However she is by circumstances put in several difficult positions where she does not have a choice other than to do what she does. Tess is raped and gives birth to an illegitimate child. She is haunted by Alec, the pursuer and when she tries to start afresh he does not take no for an answer. Tess is oppressed not only by Alec but also by Angel, the man who could have been her saviour. Angel is more in love with the image of a perfect woman than the real Tess. However Angel marries her but leaves her because she has a past that he can’t forget. This is a case of double standards since Tess has forgiven Angel for his past. Tess is also objectified by Hardy who seems very fascinated by her. He describes her looks and her lips especially, many times, which shows that he has a special interest in her. Finally at the end of the novel Tess is a sacrificial victim when laying at Stonehenge waiting for justice.

Tess is born into a poor family, with seven children, a father who is a drunkard and a mother who does what she can to help her family out. Tess is the eldest and not being a boy this is more difficult. She has to work and help her family the best way she can. Her once rich and prosperous ancestors did not help her situation; on the contrary, they all would have been better off not knowing about them. Her parents’ desire to find a rich relative causes Tess much heartache at the end. Tess’s mother wanted Tess to get married to be able to support the family. The mother shows a lot of oppression by telling her what to do and not telling her things she could have been better off knowing. However Tess is the family’s cash cow. Whenever they need money or help they send for her. Tess does what is expected of her and helps her family out as much as she can. She even puts herself in difficult positions to be able to help. At the end she sacrifices herself when giving up her husband to her sister Liza-Lu in terms of helping her family out, when she is gone.
Tess is a member of the parish and the Church and she does all that she can to live by the words from the Bible, serving God and honouring her parents. However the Church does not help her situation out. The parishers talk behind her back and do not help her either as one could have expected good Christians would do. The ultimate betrayal from the Church is when Tess wants to bury her dead son and the Church refuses, as the child is illegitimate. Tess is torn apart and she tends the grave as if it would have been a proper burial. Also when Tess is in difficulties after Angel has left her, Angel’s parents do not show her any affection. Angel’s parents did not approve of Tess, as she was a simple dairy maid, not good enough for them. Furthermore her brothers in law who are priests do not care either. This is a case of oppression from the Church as the men of the Church should have cared but did not. Moreover Hardy compared Tess with Eve in the Garden of Eden which also shows that she was not only a victim of her society but also that she was doomed beforehand.

Tess was a woman like many other women. She had the family she got. Also, she was a member of a parish like so many others. There are many Tess’s today just as there were in Victorian Britain.
Bibliography

Primary sources

Secondary sources