**YEAR 12 TESS OF THE D’URBRVILLES KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER**

**SUMMARY OF THE TEXT (A) KEY CONTEXT (B)**

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| 8. | **The Long Depression (1873-1879):** English society was also going through some major changes during this time. Most important for the novel are the shift from an agricultural to an industrial culture, which is emphasized in the novel as a tension between nature and modernity, and the decline of the old aristocracy. Old aristocratic names meant little in terms of power anymore, except as status symbols that could be purchased by the newly wealthy. |
| 9. | **Victorian Realism:** Hardy makes it clear that Tess of the D'Urbervilles relates to issues of its time by setting it 'in the context of recognisable English society and ensuring the narrative is held together by an original plot, realism of time and place and a vivid and descriptive prose style. Realist fiction offers an authentic and believable account of human experience. |
| 10. | **Sexual morality:** Victorian sexual morality was very conservative which meant that *Tess* aroused controversy. Hardy demonstrates his deep sense of moral sympathy for England’s lower classes, particularly rural women. He became famous for his compassionate, often controversial stance on fallen women, his relative openness about sex and the female body and his criticism of religion, all of which emphasised the self-righteous rigidity of English social morality. |

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|  | ***Phase*** | ***Summary*** |
| **1.** | ***First - ‘Maiden No More’***  ***(Ch. 1-11)*** | 1. John Durbeyfield is given the impression by Parson Tringham that he may have noble blood, as "Durbeyfield" is a corruption of "d'Urberville", the surname of an extinct noble Norman family, knowledge which immediately goes to his head. 2. Tess Durbeyfield participates in the village May Dance, where she first sees Angel Clare who is on a walking tour with his two brothers, but stops to join the dance and partners several other girls. He notices Tess too late to dance with her and Tess feels slighted. 3. Due to her father’s drunkenness, Tess undertakes the journey to market with her younger brother. However, she falls asleep at the reins, and the family's only horse, Prince, encounters a speeding wagon and is fatally wounded. 4. Guilt-ridden, Tess agrees to visit Mrs. d'Urberville and "claim kin". She is unaware that in reality, Mrs. d'Urberville's husband adopted the surname, even though he was unrelated to the real d'Urbervilles. 5. Tess fails to meet Mrs. d'Urberville, but encounters her libertine son, Alec, who takes a fancy to Tess and secures her a position as poultry keeper on the estate. Tess’s parents encourage her to accept the job, secretly hoping Alec might marry her. 6. Tess dislikes Alec, but endures his persistent unwanted attentions while earning enough to replace her family's horse. 7. One night, walking home from town with some other Trantridge villagers, Tess inadvertently antagonizes Car Darch and finds herself in physical danger. When Alec rides up and offers to "rescue" her from the situation, she accepts. 8. Instead of taking her home, Alec rides through the fog until they reach an ancient grove in a forest called "The Chase", where he informs her that he is lost and leaves on foot to get his bearings. 9. Alec returns to find Tess asleep, and it is implied that he rapes her. |
| **2.** | ***Second – ‘Maiden No More’***  ***(Ch. 12-15)*** | 1. Tess goes home to her father's cottage, where she keeps almost entirely to her room, feeling both traumatized and ashamed of having lost her virginity. 2. The following summer, she gives birth to a sickly boy who lives only a few weeks. On his last night alive, Tess baptises him herself, as her father will not allow the parson to visit out of shame. 3. The boy is given the name Sorrow, but despite the baptism Tess can only arrange his burial in a "shabby corner" of the churchyard reserved for unbaptised infants. |
| **3.** | ***Third – ‘The Rally’***  ***(Ch. 16-24)*** | 1. Two years later, Tess, now twenty, has found employment as a milkmaid at Talbothays Dairy, where her past is unknown. 2. She befriends three fellow milkmaids, Izz, Retty, and Marian, and again meets Angel Clare, now an apprentice farmer who has come to Talbothays to learn dairy management. 3. Although the other milkmaids are in love with him, Angel singles out Tess and the two fall in love. |
| **4.** | ***Fourth – ‘The Consequence’***  ***(Ch. 25-34)*** | 1. Angel spends a few days away from the dairy, visiting his family at Emminster. His brothers Felix and Cuthbert, note Angel's coarsened manners, while Angel considers them staid and narrow-minded. 2. The Clares have long hoped that Angel will marry the pious Mercy Chant, but Angel argues that a wife who knows farm life would be a more practical choice. He tells his parents about Tess and they agree to meet her. 3. His father, the Reverend James Clare, tells Angel of his efforts to convert the local populace, mentioning his failure to tame a young miscreant named Alec d'Urberville. 4. Angel returns to Talbothays Dairy and asks Tess to marry him. This puts Tess in a painful dilemma: Angel clearly thinks her a virgin, and she shrinks from confessing her past.  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | ***11.*** | ***Tess Durbeyfield*** | The protagonist, an attractive young woman from the rural village of Marlott. Her family is poor, but she has been educated and seems to stand out from other girls. She has a discerning intelligence and independent spirit, and is very loyal to her family and Angel. Her misfortunes are hardly ever of her own doing, but her innocence, naivety, and unrealistic ideals sometimes increase her suffering. She is also a very tempting figure for the men of the novel, often to her detriment. | | ***12.*** | ***Angel Clare*** | The intelligent, idealistic son of the parson James Clare. He rejects his father's and brothers' profession to instead study agriculture, and remains sceptical of religion. Tess, Izz, Retty, and Marian all fall in love with him at Talbothays, but he chooses Tess. He loves an idealized, “child of nature” version of Tess, however, and is shocked to learn about her past sexual experiences | | ***13.*** | ***Alec D’Urberville*** | The principle antagonist, the handsome, libertine son of the wealthy d'Urberville-Stokes. He is fickle and impetuous by nature, but his infatuation with Tess seems more lasting than his feelings for other girls. His rape of Tess is the beginning of her misfortunes and the tragic undercurrent of the entire novel. Alec briefly takes up religion and becomes a preacher, but he discards his faith when he sees Tess again. | | ***14.*** | ***John Durbeyfield*** | Tess's father, a peddler with a bad heart condition and a love of alcohol. The news that he is the last descendent of the ancient d'Urberville family immediately goes to his head and he acts entitled for the rest of the book. He hopes to profit from his ancestry, and sends Tess off to connect with the wealthy d'Urberville-Stokes, which leads to her many misfortunes. | | ***15.*** | ***Joan Durbeyfield*** | Tess's mother, a housewife with many children and responsibilities. She loves to sing and is very superstitious, often consulting her book the *Compleat Fortune-Teller*. She likes to make matches for Tess and first proposes the visit to the d'Urberville-Stokes. Joan maintains a sense of cheerful fatalism throughout the novel and takes her family's many misfortunes in stride. | | ***16.*** | ***Izz Huett*** | One of the Talbothays dairymaids who befriends Tess and falls in love with Angel. She is heartbroken when Angel rejects her, but never grows bitter towards Tess. When Angel is leaving for Brazil he briefly asks Izz to accompany him. Later she and Marian write him a letter appealing on Tess's behalf. |     **KEY CHARACTERS (C)**   1. Such is her love for him that she finally agrees to the marriage, pretending she had only hesitated because she had heard he hated old families and thought he would not approve of her d'Urberville ancestry.   **KEY CHARACTERS (C)**   1. As the marriage approaches, Tess grows increasingly troubled and writes to her mother for advice; Joan tells her to keep silent about her past. 2. Her anxiety increases when a man from Trantridge, named Groby, recognises her and crudely alludes to her history. Angel overhears and flies into an uncharacteristic rage. 3. Tess, deciding to tell Angel the truth, writes a letter describing her dealings with d'Urberville and slips it under his door. 4. When Angel greets her with the usual affection the next morning, she thinks he has forgiven her; later she discovers the letter under his carpet and realises that he has not seen it. She destroys it. 5. The wedding ceremony goes smoothly, apart from the bad omen of a cock crowing in the afternoon. 6. Tess and Angel spend their wedding night at an old d'Urberville family mansion, where Angel presents his bride with diamonds that belonged to his godmother. 7. When he confesses that he once had a brief affair with an older woman in London, Tess finally feels able to tell Angel about Alec, thinking he will understand and forgive. |
| **5.** | ***The Fifth – ‘The Woman Pays’***  ***(Ch. 35-44)*** | 1. Angel is appalled by the revelation and makes it clear that Tess is reduced in his eyes as she is no longer the woman he thought she was. 2. After a few awkward days, a devastated Tess suggests they separate, saying that she will return to her parents. Angel gives her some money and promises to try to reconcile himself to her past, but warns her not to try to join him until he sends for her. 3. Angel briefly visits his parents, planning to take a ship to Brazil to see if he can start a new life there. 4. Before he leaves, he encounters Tess's milkmaid friend Izz and impulsively asks her to come with him as his mistress. She accepts, but when Izz reveals the purity of Tess’s love for him, he abandons the whim, and Izz goes home weeping bitterly. 5. Tess returns home for a time. However, she soon runs out of money, having to help out her parents more than once. 6. She decides to join Marian at a starve-acre farm called Flintcomb-Ash where they are later joined by Izz. On the road, she is again recognised and insulted by Groby, who later turns out to be her new employer. 7. At the farm, the three former milkmaids perform hard physical labour. 8. One winter day, Tess attempts to visit Angel's family at the parsonage in Emminster, hoping for practical assistance. As she nears, she encounters Angel's older brothers, with Mercy Chant and overhears them discussing Angel's unwise marriage. She dares not approach them. 9. On the way home, she overhears a wandering preacher and is shocked to find that it is Alec d'Urberville, who has been converted to Methodism under the influence of the Reverend James Clare. |
| **6.** | ***The Sixth – ‘The Convert’***  ***(Ch. 45-52)*** | 1. Alec claims that Tess has put a spell on him and makes her swear never to tempt him again as they stand beside an ill-omened stone monument called the Cross-in-Hand. 2. Alec continues to pursue her and soon comes to Flintcomb-Ash to ask Tess to marry him, although she tells him she is already married. 3. He begins stalking her, despite repeated rebuffs, returning at Candlemas and again in early spring, when Tess is hard at work feeding a threshing machine. 4. He tells her he is no longer a preacher and wants her to be with him. When he insults Angel, she slaps him, drawing blood. 5. Tess then learns from her sister, Liza-Lu, that her father, John, is ill and that her mother is dying. 6. Tess rushes home to look after them. Her mother soon recovers, but her father unexpectedly dies of a heart condition. 7. The impoverished family is now evicted from their home, as Durbeyfield held only a life lease on their cottage. 8. Alec tries to persuade Tess that her husband is never coming back and offers to house the Durbeyfields on his estate. Tess refuses his assistance several times. 9. She finally begins to realize that Angel has wronged her and scribbles a hasty note saying she will do all she can to forget him, since he has treated her so unjustly. 10. The Durbeyfields plan to rent rooms in the town of Kingsbere, ancestral home of the d'Urbervilles, but arrive to find they have already been rented to others. All but destitute, they are forced to shelter in the churchyard under the D'Urberville window. 11. Tess enters the church and in the d'Urberville Aisle, Alec reappears and importunes Tess again. The scene ends with her desperately looking at the entrance to the d'Urberville vault and wishing herself dead. 12. In the meantime, Angel has been very ill in Brazil and his farming venture has failed. He heads home to England. 13. On the way he confides his troubles to a stranger, who tells him he was wrong to leave his wife; what she was in the past should matter less than what she might become. Angel begins to repent of his treatment of Tess. |
| **7.** | ***The Seventh – ‘Fulfilment’ (Ch. 53-59)*** | 1. Upon his return, Angel has two letters waiting for him: Tess's angry note and a few cryptic lines from Izz and Marian, warning him to protect his wife from "an enemy in the shape of a friend". 2. He sets out to find Tess and eventually locates Joan, now well-dressed and living in a pleasant cottage. She tells him Tess has gone to live in Sandbourne, a fashionable seaside resort. 3. When Angel asks for Tess (“Mrs d’Urberville”), she appears in elegant attire and stands aloof. He asks her forgiveness, but Tess, in anguish, tells him he has come too late. Thinking he will never return, she has yielded to Alec d'Urberville's persuasion and become his mistress. 4. She asks Angel to leave and never return. He departs and Tess goes back to her bedroom, where she falls to her knees and begins to lament. She blames Alec for causing her to lose Angel's love a second time, accusing him of lying when he said that Angel would never return. 5. The following events are narrated from the perspective of the landlady, Mrs. Brooks, who tries to listen in at the keyhole, but withdraws when the argument between Tess and Alec becomes heated. She later sees Tess leave the house, then notices a spreading red spot – a bloodstain – on the ceiling. She summons help, and Alec is found stabbed to death in his bed. 6. Disheartened, Angel is leaving Sandbourne; Tess hurries after and tells him she has killed Alec, saying that she hopes she has won his forgiveness by murdering the man who ruined both their lives. Angel does not believe her at first, but grants her his forgiveness and tells her he loves her. 7. They walk inland, planning to hide somewhere until the search for Tess is over and they can escape abroad. They find an empty mansion and stay there for five days in blissful happiness, until their presence is discovered by the cleaning woman. 8. They continue walking and stumble upon Stonehenge, where Tess lies down to rest on an ancient altar. Before she falls asleep, she asks Angel to look after her younger sister, Liza-Lu, saying she hopes Angel will marry her after she is dead. 9. At dawn, Angel sees they are surrounded by police. He finally realises that Tess really has committed murder and asks the men in a whisper to let her awaken naturally before they arrest her. 10. When she opens her eyes and sees the police, she tells Angel she is "almost glad", because "now I shall not live for you to despise me". 11. Tess is escorted to Wintoncester prison. The novel closes with Angel and Liza-Lu watching from a nearby hill as the black flag signalling Tess's execution is raised over the prison. Angel and Liza-Lu then join hands and go on their way. |

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| ***17.*** | ***Phase 1*** | 1. *‘Don't you really know, Durbeyfield, that you are the lineal representative of the ancient and knightly family of the d'Urbervilles..?’* **Parson Tringham, Phase the First, Chapter 1**   **KEY QUOTATIONS (D)**   1. *'But I don't want anybody to kiss me, sir!' she implored, a big tear beginning to roll down her face, and the corners of her mouth trembling in her attempts not to cry.* **Tess Durbeyfield, Phase the First, Chapter 8** |
| ***18.*** | ***Phase 2*** | 1. *‘I was born bad, and I have lived bad, and I shall die bad in all probability. But, upon my lost soul, I won't be bad towards you again, Tess.’* **Alec d'Urberville, Phase the Second, Chapter 12** 2. *‘Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn't you warn me?’* **Tess Durbeyfield, Phase the Second, Chapter 12** 3. T*he baby's offence against society in coming into the world was forgotten by the girl-mother; her soul's desire was to continue that offence by preserving the life of the child.* **Narrator, Phase the Second, Chapter 14** |
| ***19.*** | ***Phase 3*** | 1. *All the while they were converging, under an irresistible law, as surely as two streams in one vale.* **Narrator, Phase the Third, Chapter 20** |
| ***20.*** | ***Phase 4*** | 1. *It is that this sound of a non-existent coach can only be heard by one of d'Urberville blood, and it is held to be of ill-omen to the one who hears it. It has to do with a murder, committed by one of the family, centuries ago*. **Alec d'Urberville, Phase the Fourth, Chapter 33** |
| ***21.*** | ***Phase 5*** | 1. *‘You were more sinned against than sinning, that I admit.’* **Angel Clare, Phase the Fifth, Chapter 35** 2. *‘How can we live together while that man lives?—he being your husband in nature, and not I. If he were dead it might be different.’* **Angel Clare, Phase the Fifth, Chapter 36** |
| ***22.*** | ***Phase 6*** | 1. *‘O, will you go away—for the sake of me and my husband—go, in the name of your own Christianity!’* **Tess Durbeyfield, Phase the Sixth, Chapter 46** 2. *The oblong white ceiling, with this scarlet blot in the midst, had the appearance of a gigantic ace of hearts.* **Narrator, Phase the Sixth, Chapter 51** |
| ***23.*** | ***Phase 7*** | 1. *Never in her life—she could swear it from the bottom of her soul—had she ever intended to do wrong; yet these hard judgments had come.* **Narrator, Phase the Seventh, Chapter 57** 2. *‘I do love you, Tess—O, I do—it is all come back!’* **Angel Clare, Phase the Seventh, Chapter 57** |

**SYMBOLS AND MOTIFS (E)**

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|  | ***Symbol*** | ***Meaning*** |
| ***24.*** | ***Prince the horse*** | The Durbeyfield family horse, and their principal means of livelihood. His accidental death catalyses the action of the story. Prince acts as a symbol of the d'Urberville family, in that he has a noble name but is reduced to menial labour to survive. His death is also a symbol of the theme of Nature versus modernity, as Prince the rural horse is gored to death by a modern mail cart. The death by stabbing and his blood spreading over Tess's white dress foreshadows Alec's murder as well. |
| ***25.*** | ***Seal and spoon*** | The seal and the spoon with the d'Urberville crest are the only things the Durbeyfields have left from their noble heritage. The smallness and uselessness of the items is a symbol of how the d'Urberville name means nothing anymore in terms of real wealth or influence. Tess thinks angrily of them as essentially causing her misfortunes by proving her kinship to the wealthy d'Urbervilles. They are also associated with the old tombs of the d'Urberville knights, which again seem grand but are in effect worthless, full of nothing but the dead. |
| ***26.*** | ***Brazil*** | Brazil, where Angel goes to seek his fortunes after rejecting Tess, is a symbol of Angel's idealized vision of the world. Brazil is an exotic, far-off fantasy land to the 19th century English characters, and Angel thinks of it as an unspoiled place to practice his agricultural skills. When he actually gets there, however, he becomes sick and weak, and all his farming endeavours fail. Angel's experience in Brazil is symbolic of his relationship with Tess; it is romanticized and idealized, but then the stark reality appears and destroys his fantasy. |
| ***27.*** | ***The D’Urberville Coach*** | The d'Urberville coach is an old legend of the family which Angel mentions and Alec later explains to Tess. It concerns some ancient d'Urberville who abducted a beautiful woman and then inadvertently killed her when she tried to escape his coach. Whenever a d'Urberville hears the sound of an invisible coach it is supposed to be a bad omen, or even to forebode that murder is about to be committed. The coach is a symbol of foreshadowing and the theme of fate that looms over all the characters in the novel. Tess cannot escape the cruel things that happen to her, no matter how “pure” she remains at heart. The coach also symbolizes the ancient idea of being punished for one's ancestors. Tess's murder of Alec is also associated with this legend, as the symbol of the fateful coach implies both that she is the woman capture in Alec's "coach" and that, as a d'Urberville she always had an inescapable murderous strain in her blood. |

**THEMES (F)**

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|  | | ***Theme*** | | ***Analysis*** | |
| ***28.*** | | ***Injustice and Fate*** | | The cruel hand of fate hangs over all the characters and actions of the novel, as Tess Durbeyfield's story is basically defined by the bad things that happen to her. Hardy obviously causes the many unfair coincidences and plot twists that beset Tess, but as narrator he also manages to appear as her only advocate against an unjust world. Tess's hardships are described as mere sport for the “President of the Immortals,” which contrasts with the Christian idea of a God who has a benevolent plan for everyone, and connects with the notes of paganism throughout the novel. Hardy points out and emphasizes the multiple unhappy coincidences that take place, like Tess overhearing Angel's brothers instead of meeting his father. The novel asks the age-old question “why do bad things happen to good people?” | |
| ***29.*** | | ***Nature and Modernity*** | | The novel is set in both a time and place of societal transition from the agricultural to the industrial. The rural English towns and farm women often represent Hardy's idea of Nature, while machines and upper class men are associated with the modernizing forces of industrialization. Many of the descriptions and situations of the novel focus on the way that the characters and society are being separated from a more ancient lifestyle, “the ache of modernity” that Hardy felt as a loss of innocence. | |
| ***30.*** | | ***Paganism and Christianity*** | | Hardy struggled with his own religious beliefs, and that struggle comes through in his work. He idealized the paganism of the past, but was also attached to his family's Christianity, and generally he accepted some sort of supernatural being that controlled fate. Tess herself is usually portrayed as an embodiment of that pagan innocence, a sort of English Nature goddess. She first appears performing the fertility ritual of May-Day, then bedecked in flowers from Alec, whistling to Mrs. d'Urberville's birds, and mercifully killing the wounded pheasants. Angel describes her as a “new-sprung child of nature” and compares her to mythical women like Eve, Artemis, and Demeter. There is another side of Tess's “divinity” as well, however: the role of sacrificial victim, which is a figure associated with both paganism and Christianity. Like Jesus, Tess is punished for the sins of another, assuming the weight of guilt for Alec's crime. When the police finally come to arrest her for murder, she is lying asleep at Stonehenge like a sacrifice on an altar. | |
| ***31.*** | | ***Women*** | | Hardy muses a lot about Tess's status as a woman and the various roles women assume in society. Tess often plays the part of a passive victim, falling asleep and inadvertently killing Prince, falling asleep before her rape, and falling asleep at Stonehenge where she is arrested. She and many of the other female characters also act as symbols of fertility, nature, and purity. They are linked with the lushness of Talbothays and the bleakness of Flintomb-Ash, as well the fertility ritual of May-Day. Hardy also places a lot of emphasis on the power of men over women, in terms of both society and strength. Alec obviously dominates Tess in many terrible ways, but Angel also wields power over the women at the dairy, driving Retty and Marian to a suicide attempt and alcoholism. Tess finally assumes the role of an active agent in her own life when she writes angrily to Angel, and her final murder of Alec takes it to the extreme, underscoring Hardy's critique of the oppression of women in Victorian society. Tess is only able to actively change her life and escape her male oppressor by murdering him, which then leads to her own execution. There is no place for a woman in her position to escape. | |
| ***32.*** | | ***Social criticism*** | | As in many of his other works, Hardy used Tess as a vessel for his criticisms of English Victorian society of the late 19th century. The novel's largest critique is aimed at the sexual double standard, with all the extremities and misfortunes of Tess's life highlighting the unfairness of her treatment. Society condemns her as an unclean woman because she was raped, while Angel's premarital affair is barely mentioned. Angel himself rejects Tess largely based on what his community and family would think if they discovered her past. Hardy saw many of the conventions of the Victorian age as oppressive to the individual, and to women in particular, and in Tess's case the arbitrary rules of society literally ruin her life. | |

**LINKS TO TRAGIC GENRE (G)**

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|  | ***Tragic Convention*** | ***How/where it appears in Tess*** |
| ***33.*** | ***Inevitability*** | Hardy gives a title to each of the seven phases of his novel to point towards its tragic structure (Tess’ journey is from ‘Maiden’ to ‘Fulfilment’). In the end, Hardy’s narrator tells us the *“The President of the Immortals (in Aeschylean phrase) had ended his sport with Tess.”* The reference to Aeschylus makes Hardy’s intention clear: Tess travels a tragic path and her death is inevitable. |
| ***34.*** | ***Hamartia*** | Hardy’s defines tragedy as: “the worthy encompassed by the inevitable”. In subtitling his novel *A Pure Woman*, it is clear that Hardy wanted to elevate Tess. Her flaws are never presented as being of her own making. Tess’ journey from “a mere vessel of emotion untinctured by experience” to a murderer, whose life story allows her to judge her arrest objectively “It is as it should be” is painful to read. On the way, she is raped, married, abandoned and made destitute; she lives “in sin”, buries her infant child, and experiences only brief moments of happiness and fulfilment. An Aristotelian reading of the novel may focus on Tess’ fatal flaw: is it her pride, her passivity, or simply her beauty that singles her out for the punishment of the fates? |
| ***35.*** | ***Tragic victim*** | The social structures and attitudes of Tess’ world dominate her life and are presented as playing their part in her tragedy. Tess as a young working class female is at the mercy of patriarchy. Alec’s power and status allow him to rape with impunity. Her poverty, the need to work to survive and her sense of shame keep Tess moving from place to place. Angel’s hypocrisy destroys Tess’ marriage before it has even begun. These forces are seen to be as implacable and as impossible to challenge. Tess is clearly a tragic victim. |
| ***36.*** | ***Peripeteia*** | It is Angel who provides some hope that her fate might be altered, but he hypocritically fails Tess, and his change of heart comes too late for any meaningful reversal of fortune to take place. |
| ***37.*** | ***Tragic Villain*** | Alec is the mustachioed, partly pantomimic and certainly predatory and conniving villain. He becomes the adversary, or nemesis, to whom Tess’ fate is locked. |
| ***38.*** | ***Setting*** | In each of the settings Hardy uses, Tess attempts to live free of the restrictions of her world, tries to live a virtuous existence but after her rape by Alec she is always haunted by the shadow of her past. Much of the novel’s narrative drive is provided by the frustrating sense of inevitability that Hardy creates about that past catching up with her; Tess is a victim of her circumstances and hostile forces working against her (her parents, Alec, the draconian church, farmer Groby, for example). In some of the settings, Tess is allowed moments of happiness and peace, particularly when Angel is present (at Talbothays and Stonehenge). Although some of these settings (Flintcomb-Ash and Wintoncester in particular) are presented as being horrible or menacing in themselves, there is an implication that order will be restored once Tess has moved on. Perhaps the novel also suggests that Wessex will be considered a more stable place in her absence. |
| ***39.*** | ***Status*** | Hardy seems caught between two impulses: to construct a working class character that inspired ‘pity and fear’ (as Miller states) and to convey nobleness as an essential characteristic of the tragic hero (as in Classical and Renaissance tragedy). His protagonist is a member of the rural working class, but he works hard to aggrandise her status. The novel’s first chapter establishes Tess’ noble blood. She is educated beyond the level of most of her peers, and her father holds a life-lease. The setting of her arrest at the altar at Stonehenge suggests a certain divinity in her nature. Tess’ marriage ceremony prefigures her funeral: the river crossing and the placing of Tess in a coffin in which she immediately sits up have mythic significance. |
| ***40.*** | ***Fate*** | Hardy is explicit in presenting Tess as the “Plaything of the Immortals.” He manipulates coincidence and chance to play an exaggerated role. When considering this novel in the light of other tragic texts, it is easy to see the recurring aspect of fate. Hardy uses fate to shape a great deal of the novel’s action, and hence Tess’ downfall. Chance meetings, accidents and sheer bad luck are all telling. |
| ***41.*** | ***Catharsis*** | There is tension between the desire for the narrative satisfaction of Tess’ arrest and death, and the emotional desire to prevent it. The endings of tragedies are never straightforward and this one is no exception. Hardy suggests that the ‘gradual closing in’ of forces hostile to Tess are an essential aspect of the tragic mode, but at the end of his narrative he, as do most who write in the tragic tradition, gives a hint at restoration. Tentatively some positives emerge. Angel and Liza-Lu, having watched Tess hang, join ‘hands again’, and go on. Readers may feel very uncomfortable that Angel is rewarded with a “spiritualised” version of Tess, especially in respect of his proposition to Izzy before leaving for Brazil. For all his shame and regret, his love and his principles, it seems that any girl will do. A Hegelian reading of the tragedy may be helpful finally. The two world views proposed by Hegel might be seen in Tess’ perceived purity in opposition to the practicality or pragmatism and compromise of the world. The reconciliation of these forces can only be resolved by her death, leaving readers to pity her, and also perhaps, leaving them terrified at the potential for change in society. In the end, Tess is removed, and the practical world can continue without her, compromised, diminished but otherwise unchanging. |