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ALCOHOLISM AND THE FAMILY: THE DESTRUCTIVE FORCES  
IN HARDY'S TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

THESIS

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This study examines the forces which shaped the main character--Tess Durbeyfield--in Hardy's novel in terms of the effects which her alcoholic family had upon her mental and emotional potential and which ultimately become the determining factors in her self-destruction. Using the elements and patterns set forth in the literature regarding the dynamics of the alcoholic family, I attempt to show that Hardy's novel may best be understood as the story of a woman whose life and destiny are controlled by the consequences of her father's alcoholism. This interpretation seems to account best for many elements of the novel, such as Tess's destruction, and provides a rich appreciation of Hardy's technique and vision.

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## CHAPTER I

### ALCOHOLISM: THE TRAGIC FORCE IN *TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES*

Tess Durbeyfield's personality is so affected by spending her childhood in an alcoholic home that her destiny has been largely decided even before the novel begins. An examination of the self-destructive elements which she learned as a child and adheres to as an adult is necessary for two reasons: (1) It provides some illumination of her actions and motivations in the novel; and (2) Hardy critics have neglected to comment on the extent of the influence which Tess's alcoholic family has upon her. Although critics have acknowledged John Durbeyfield's drinking problem, no work has studied why Tess causes her own destruction as a result of being reared in an alcoholic home. She is a very complex character and, therefore, any one method of analysis will be insufficient. However, this study will show how the plot of the novel is often shaped by Tess's character, which was shaped by her alcoholic parental home where she developed several character flaws. "Pathological drinking becomes integrated into the family system and leads to predictable, compulsive behavior in individual family members" (Wegscheider 39).

In *Tess*, this conduct is characterized by a "strain likely to bring about her downfall, no matter what circumstances attend her" (Evelyn Hardy 447). Accordingly, she can be classified as a victim whose alcoholic family is her "chief anxiety" (Hardy 432). She is a "despairing soul" who is "destroyed by someone else . . . not only by the threats and persuasions, but by inner, unconscious consent" (Evelyn Hardy 449). Thus, I will attempt to show that Tess is a fixed, non-developing character who reacts to the circumstances in her life by using the methods that she learned in her dysfunctional childhood home. Tess is an Aristotelian tragic heroine whose downfall is brought about not by vice or depravity but by her errors in judgment and frailties. As Friedman notes, "Tess of the d'Urbervilles has fallen even before her story begins" (57).

Because fate made Tess one of the "six helpless creatures, who had never been asked if they wished for life on any terms, much less if they wished for it on such hard conditions as were involved in being of the shiftless house of Durbeyfield," she is not responsible for either her poor judgment and frailties or for the messages and behaviors which she internalized while she was "entirely dependent on the judgment of the two Durbeyfield adults for [her] pleasures, [her] necessities, [her] health, even [her] existence" (Hardy 61). Therefore, Tess has no control over

her own life and is continually victimized by the destructive behaviors which she learned from her parents.

Hardy obviously intends for John Durbeyfield's alcoholism to create problems for Tess. As Thomas suggests,

The plot immediately provides tragic consequences of his [John Durbeyfield's] alcoholism. Because he is drunk, the inexperienced and drowsy Tess must be at the reins when Prince's death removes their meager source of income and compels the guilt-ridden girl to accept Alec's employment offer—and thus to become vulnerable to him. (196)

More subtle consequences of Durbeyfield's drunkenness also appear in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and these also contribute to Tess's destruction. The idea that Tess is not responsible for the fact that she was a "passenger in the Durbeyfield ship" and, therefore, acquired the destructive comportment common in alcoholic households, is consistent with Hardy's views on alcoholism and the cosmos (Hardy 61). As Thomas asserts, "Drunkenness has become one more manifestation of the essential tragedy in life" (209). Suffering is a necessary element in Hardy's characters' lives because of the "brutal social circumstances within which they live" (Thomas 202). Therefore, when Hardy's characters become inebriated, the blame is "attributable to the cosmic situation in which all men necessarily find themselves" (Thomas 193).

Regardless of Hardy's belief that the cosmos should be to blame for human suffering, he does, as the Hardy scholar will recall, make frequent contradictions within his narrative regarding the actions of his characters. Hardy attempts to make Tess more than a victim of an alcoholic home, and because of his sentimental treatment of her, her behavior is more than merely predictable and compulsive. In fact, Hardy seems unwilling to destroy the power and beauty of the heroine whom he created (Alvarez 22). Thus, Friedman states, "[Although] the line of that motion [disintegration] is relentless, that is not to say there are no movements in the opposite direction—toward solution, resolution, a way out. Of these *Tess* has perhaps more than its fair share" (57). Given enough freedom of choice, Tess sometimes resists the damaging effects of her childhood but never has the power to "escape and annihilate" her past (Hardy 150). Hence, her inescapable past (wherein she acquired the dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors that are typical of children of alcoholics) destroys her.

*Tess* works as a tragedy because the protagonist is a tragic heroine who makes a series of errors in judgment which results in her downfall. This study will show that Tess has very little control over her decisions because her mental and emotional faculties are governed by the effects that her dysfunctional childhood had upon her. During her

childhood she learned the rules that are adhered to in alcoholic homes; she witnessed and played the roles common in such homes, and she acquired the traits which influence her behavior throughout her life. Consequently, when we as readers meet the teenage Tess, she has already developed the tragic frailties and poor judgment that will cause her destruction.



## CHAPTER II

### THE FAMILY: THE VEHICLE HARDY USES TO EXECUTE THE TRAGEDY

Although John Durbeyfield is a minor character in the novel, he is a major component of Tess's family and homelife, which is "the reiterated melody of the stanzas of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* " (Marken 325). Accordingly, Tess should be examined in relation to the dynamics of her family because it is there that she contracts the frailties that ultimately dominate her life. Beckingham endorses this methodology:

Hardy makes it clear that the individual in the family can be of no importance; for time and time again individual characters in Wessex families have to sacrifice all hopes of personal happiness because of the more pressing interests of family success. (63)

This potential family success is made possible in *Tess* when John Durbeyfield finds out from Parson Tringham that he is the "lineal representative of the ancient and knightly family of the d'Urbervilles" (Hardy 43). Thus, he and his wife see the means for their imagined prosperity materialize by sending Tess to claim kin with the d'Urbervilles in

Trantridge. Therefore, Tess becomes the "representative of the Durbeyfields" at the d'Urberville mansion because they "were putting their fairest side outward" (Hardy 76). Nevertheless, Tess decides to go to the d'Urbervilles because of her own guilt, passivity and loyalty to her family. Alec takes advantage of Tess one night in the Chase as a result of her going to work at the Slopes. After this, her personality is divided by an "immeasurable social chasm," around which the plot revolves (Hardy 119).

Tess loses control of her life as a result of the decisions made by her parents combined with the effects of being reared in a dysfunctional home. The idea that she cannot individually determine her own destiny reflects Hardy's view of alcohol and the family. As Ghinger and Grant indicate,

Looking at this issue [alcohol] in terms of the family, Hardy certainly sees a complex web of interdependent, conscious, sensitive, continuous decisions as the basis of family life. The functioning family is supposed to represent fulfillment. Where that fulfillment breaks down . . . a chain of events is set into motion that takes the protagonist far from the initial cause. They have ceased, therefore, in a fundamental sense to have control over their lives. (46)

In as much as Tess loses control of her life, Hardy explores "the nature of random events or of fate" (Ghinger and Grant 46). For example, as Hardy says, Tess "hoped to be a teacher at the school, but the fates seemed to decide otherwise" (88).

Nevertheless, the basis of my argument is not that Hardy allows random events to determine Tess's destiny, but that because she reacts to random events by utilizing the dysfunctional behaviors which she acquired in her childhood, she becomes a victim of her upbringing. That is not to say that fate does not figure into her story because at the core of the plot is the fact that she was born into the "shiftless house of Durbeyfield" and is, therefore, also a victim of fate (Hardy 61).

Since the Durbeyfield household "had not been shining examples of either temperance [or] soberness," we should look at Tess's behavior as "an equal and opposite reaction to the dysfunctional attitudes and actions of the Dependent [John Durbeyfield]" (Hardy 436; Wegschieder 80). Moreover, in Tess's case, it is also true that she is "affected not only by the alcoholic parent, but also by the non-alcoholic parent . . . and by the abnormal family dynamics created as a consequence of alcoholism" (Black xv). Thus, Tess's childhood is spent on a "blighted star," where the obvious results of her father's drunkenness are not only his coughing and creeping

about and getting too tipsy to take the beehives to the market, but also the fact that her mother is always washing and never getting finished (Hardy 70). More subtle characteristics are also involved in alcoholic homes, such as "parental immaturity, often expressed in extreme selfishness, lack of consistency, cruel teasing or inappropriate discipline," which also influence Tess (Black 22). Tess becomes a virtual prisoner of her upbringing because "it is in the give and take of [her] relationships with [her] parents that the child finds a sense of security, self-esteem and an ability to deal with complex inner problems" (Wotitz 2). She is obviously lacking in these qualities and, therefore, cannot handle the problems Hardy has her encounter in the novel.

## CHAPTER III

### THE DURBEYFIELD HOME: THE ENVIRONMENT WHICH CREATES TESS'S DESTRUCTION

#### Rules in the Alcoholic Family

Because John Durbeyfield is drunk (or is drinking) in almost every scene he is in in the novel, the reader can safely make the assumption that he is dependent on alcohol. Tess implies that her father has a drinking problem when she tells Angel "there was trouble in my family; father was not very industrious, and he drank a little" (Hardy 252). Therefore, the reader knows that she is aware of John Durbeyfield's problem drinking. Hardy also asserts that the once powerful d'Urbervilles are now "heavily handicapped" (Hardy 58). Consequently, readers can suppose that the Durbeyfield family is an alcoholic home.

Claudia Black asserts that there are three major rules that dominate life in alcoholic families. These are "Don't Talk," "Don't Trust," and "Don't Feel" (Black 25). These rules affect both the family members as individuals and the family system as a whole (Wegsheider 80).

The first rule, "Don't Talk," is often called denial and has long been acknowledged as a factor in alcoholism. The

family usually denies not only that the alcoholic's drinking is a problem but also that the alcoholic's drinking is causing related problems for other family members. Therefore, the family makes excuses for the drinker so it will not have to acknowledge and deal with the source of its problems (Black 32).

A prime example of the Durbeyfield's denial is Tess's defense of her father's need to ride home in a chaise after he hears about his grand ancestry. She declares to her companions, "He's tired, that's all . . . and he has got a lift home, because our own horse has to rest today" (Hardy 51). When she arrives home, she asks her mother why her father was "making such a mommet of himself in thik carriage," and then easily accepts her mother's excuse that they had "been found to be the greatest gentlefolk in the whole country. . . . 'Twas on this account that your father rode home in the vlee; not because he'd been drinking, as people supposed" (Hardy 58-59).

Additionally, when Tess tries to assert that her father has a drinking problem, the consequences of speaking the truth overpower both her and the atmosphere. On the night she ends up taking the beehives to the market, she chastises her mother for allowing her father to "go to the public-house to get up his strength! . . . [and her] rebukes and her mood seemed to fill the whole room, and to impart a cowed look to the furniture, and candle, and children playing about, and to

her mother's face" (Hardy 60).

Accordingly, Tess learns that she will be better able to protect herself from shame and embarrassment if she isolates herself and keeps quiet about her family's problems. As a consequence of the "Don't Talk" rule, she becomes like the children of alcoholic families who do not "perceive others, inside or outside of the family to be available to them for help" (Black 43).

After Tess has made her first journey to Trantridge and has ascertained that Alec is the "wrong man," she does not confess her doubts about returning to his house, but instead lets her mother make the decision for her (Hardy 82). As Hardy writes, "And to please her parent the girl put herself quite in Joan's hands, saying serenely—'Do what you like with me, mother'" (89).

This lack of communication is also responsible for Tess's being violated by Alec, which she tells her mother resulted from her ignorance regarding the "danger in men-folk" (Hardy 131). Thus, when she returns home pregnant after her disastrous affair with Alec, she blames her mother. She says to Mrs. Durbeyfield, "I never had the chance o' learning in that way, and you did not help me!" (Hardy 131). Mrs. Durbeyfield did not warn Tess about the potential dangers inherent in adult relationships because she does not trust Tess to be compliant. Joan says, "I thought if I spoke

of his [Alec's] fond feelings and what they might lead to, you would be hontish wi' him and lose your chance" (Hardy 131). The Durbeyfield home is a typical alcoholic home which strongly enforces the "Don't Talk" rule and thus, as Irving Howe reasons, "Tess will find no help here, as she will find little anywhere" (447).

The second rule in alcoholic homes is "Don't Trust." As Black observes, "Children raised in alcoholic family structures have learned how to not trust others in talking about the real issues. They have also learned it is simply best to not trust that others will be there for them emotionally, psychologically and possibly even physically" (53).

Tess is a prime example of a child who finds "it is difficult to trust a person who repeatedly embarrasses, humiliates, disappoints or puts you in physical jeopardy" (Black 37). An example of the Durbeyfield's placing Tess in jeopardy is Mrs. Durbeyfield's "projick," which is to send Tess to claim kin with the false d'Urbervilles (Hardy 64). Tess's parents know that this is a selfish plan and it is, therefore, not in Tess's best interest. Yet, they manipulate her into complying with their wishes because Tess is, according to her mother, "tractable at bottom" (Hardy 65).

Unfortunately, Tess witnesses a scene between her parents wherein she learns that her parents do not trust her. This occurs when she returns home after her marriage to Angel



fails. Tess overhears her mother tell her father of her "collapse," and her father's reply is "D'ye think he really have married her?--or is it like the first [her affair with Alec]" (Hardy 330). Hardy points out that Tess is deeply wounded by this remark:

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 parental house, set her mind against the spot as nothing else could have done. (Hardy 330)

Thus, Tess learns to not trust her parents and, therefore, withholds her true reason for leaving home again. She tells her parents that the letter she received from Clare is a request to join him, (in reality the letter informed her that Clare was leaving for Brazil). She does this "to hide from her parents the vast extent of the division between them [Tess and Angel]" (Hardy 330).

Black explains why the "Don't Trust" rule is so harmful to children of alcoholics: "Trust is one of those vital character-building blocks children need in order to develop into healthy adults. Being raised in an alcoholic family often denies or distorts this portion of a child's development" (41).

The third rule in alcoholic families is a natural result of the "Don't Talk" and "Don't Trust" rules, and it is called

"Don't Feel." Because children in alcoholic families cannot find appropriate outlets for their feelings by talking to other family members, they isolate themselves with their feelings of worry, embarrassment, guilt, anger and loneliness. According to Claudia Black, this state of isolation "does not lend itself to survival, so the children learn how to discount and repress feelings and some simply learn not to feel" (43). Tess does feel, but she is a typical child of an alcoholic in that she disregards her own feelings so that her family can survive. She puts herself in her mother's hands and "with calm abandonment" is sent to the false d'Urbervilles to earn money for her family (Hardy 89). She does not trust that her feelings will be validated, so she never shares or even lets herself feel the serious nature of her doubts regarding the fact that she does not "quite like Mr. d'Urberville being there [at Trantridge]" (Hardy 87). According to Claudia Black's description of alcoholic homes, the Durbeyfield's is a typical "house beset with alcoholism [wherein] emotions are repressed and become twisted. Emotions are often not shared, and, unfortunately when they are expressed, it is done in a judgmental manner placing blame on one another" (5).

When she returns to her parental home after her unfortunate experience with Alec, her mother expresses her disappointment by blaming Tess for not having convinced Alec to

marry her. She says to Tess, "Why didn't ye think of doing some good for your family instead o' thinking only of yourself?" (Hardy 130). Thus, Tess learns to repress and deny her feelings because of her mother's lack of understanding of her emotions and her mother's own selfish motivations and accusations. Unfortunately, "it is this ability to deny which ultimately interferes in the emotional and psychological stability of children of alcoholics when they reach adulthood" (Black 47).

#### The Effects the Rules Have on Tess

As a result of having spent her childhood in an alcoholic environment, Tess is passive, guilt-ridden, and suffers from very low self-esteem. Her tragedy arises largely due to these factors.

Tess's passivity (or "tractability" as her mother calls it) renders her unable to deal with the circumstances that cause her difficulties (Hardy 65, 89). Hardy believed that tragedy ensues when a character is passive. An entry that he made in his diary confirms this:

Note. A Plot, or Tragedy, should arise from the gradual closing of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices, and ambitions by reason of the characters taking no trouble to ward off the disastrous events produced by said passions, prejudices, and ambitions.

(Florence Hardy 354)

Tess's passivity makes her actions either too late or impulsive, or both. Claridge supports this view when he declares, "Certainly the surface movement of the plot directs us to understand Tess herself as a passive heroine, acting most often out of a last resort to survive" (325-26).

This passivity is a consequence of the rules of Tess's alcoholic childhood home. She is aware of her parents' lack of stability. Hyman notes this in stating, "When she tells her brother Abraham that 'we live in a blighted world,' she is not as fatalistic about it as her mother, for she is also aware that her parents' irresponsibility is at least partially responsible for their present condition" (108). Although she does tell Angel that her father's drinking was the reason she did not become a teacher, she still does not realize that her own behavior is affected by growing up in an alcoholic home; therefore, she remains passive.

Two psychological/emotional factors cause her inertia: low self-esteem and guilt. Tess acquires both of these traits as a result of her interaction with her family. Wotitz illustrates how children develop low self-esteem because of their alcoholic homes in the following quotation:

Although the suffering manifests itself behaviorally in different ways, children of alcoholics seem to have in common a low self-esteem. This is not surprising, since the literature indicates that

the conditions which lead an individual to value himself and regard himself as a person of worth can be briefly summarized by the terms 'parental warmth,' 'clearly defined limits,' and 'respectful treatment.' There is considerable literature in which it is argued that these conditions are absent or inconsistently present in the alcoholic home. (2)

Parental warmth, clearly defined limits, and respectful treatment are conditions that are absent in the Durbeyfield home, so Tess inherits a chronic sense of her own worthlessness. These feelings and the role she plays in her family result in her becoming devoid of spirit. As Gordon observes, "Having always been an agent, either to fetch her straying father from the enchantments of a nearby tavern or to bring her strayed family into an alliance with the mythology of nobility, Tess comes to believe in her own lack of will" (378). Accordingly, she assumes she is responsible for both her own personal failures and for the problems which her family encounters. Therefore, she becomes very depressed, as is evidenced in the remarks she makes during times of crisis. On her way home from Trantridge after her affair with Alec is over, she tells him, "I wish I had never been born—there [Marlott] or anywhere else!" (Hardy 124). When Tess and her family are unsuccessful in finding lodgings after they are

turned out of their family home, she wishes to join her family tomb, and says, "Why am I on the wrong side of his door!" (Hardy 449). This sense of gloom proves to be a powerful force in the shaping of her character. Giordano suggests,

Not only the blaming, however, but the repeated heaping of reproach upon herself reveal the intensity of Tess's self-destructiveness: they amount to a subversive destructiveness of her worth as a person. There is something positively morbid in Tess's response—and nothing that could even remotely be viewed as life affirming. (164)

Tess does not realize that she has a chronically low sense of self-esteem, and she certainly does not attribute its cause to her parents. In fact, she feels that she is a burden to them. She feels guilty not only for inhabiting "the fleshy tabernacle with which nature had endowed her," but also for not being able to release her parents from the tight grip which poverty has upon them (Hardy 207). Thus, when she returns home from the May-Day dance to find her mother singing, "The interior, in spite of the melody, struck upon the girl's senses with an unspeakable dreariness. . . . Besides the jar of contrast there came to her a chill self-reproach that she had not returned sooner, to help her mother in these domesticities, instead of indulging herself out-of-

doors" (Hardy 57).

Tess's guilt pervades her entire being; in fact, as Hardy states, she "looked upon herself as a figure of Guilt" (135). This emotion is not only her reaction to the circumstances, but also the motivating factor behind some of her actions. Therefore, when she unwittingly kills the family horse, Prince, the incident becomes the point on which the plot turns. As Kettle suggests,

It is her sense of guilt over this accident that allows Tess to be persuaded by her mother into visiting the Trantridge d'Urbervilles to 'claim kin' with the more prosperous branch of the family. And from this visit (itself an attempt to solve the Durbeyfield's economic problems) the whole tragedy derives. (438)

Guilt is also the motivation behind her impulsive murder of Alec (which eventually results in her own death).

Giordano states, "Tess has accumulated so much irreparable guilt and self-loathing because of her 'murder' of Prince, her 'fall' to Alec, her 'sin' in marrying Angel [that her] life has long been worthless to her" (177-78). Thus, with nothing to lose, she impulsively kills Alec.

#### Roles Played by Family Members in the Alcoholic Home

As a result of the attention paid by psychologists to alcoholic families in the recent past, numerous labeling

devices have been given to specific family members. The most obvious label is that of the "Dependent" or alcoholic, and in this novel, the dependent is John Durbeyfield. The other prominent Durbeyfield family members can also be analyzed by using the current methods of examining alcoholic families. Even though Hardy obviously had no knowledge of this research, and therefore, could not have intended the Durbeyfield home to fit so precisely into this model, both Joan and Tess Durbeyfield are typical in the roles they play as the "Enabler" and the "Hero," respectively. The following statement by Sharon Wegscheider reveals that these roles are part of the natural evolutionary cycle in alcoholic homes: "role-playing and the adoption of particular roles are not calculated behavior, of course. They happen subconsciously" (85).

The tragedy in *Tess* is especially poignant because the Durbeyfields (Tess in particular) come to see their roles as part of their existence. This is typical of what happens in alcoholic families according to modern research. "One might say that family members eventually become addicted to their roles, seeing them as essential to survival and playing them with the same compulsions, delusion, and denial as the drinker plays his role as Dependent" (Wegscheider 88).

Each family member has a separate motivation or reason for playing his or her role. As Wegscheider says, "Each role



grows out of its own kind of pain, has its own symptoms, offers its own payoffs for both the individual and the family, and ultimately exacts its own price" (85). Researchers have also concluded that the role played by a particular person "is more related to his position in the family than to personality factors . . . [the] most usual sequence of roles [is] with the spouse playing the Enabler; the oldest child, the Hero" (Wegscheider 87).

#### The Enabler

The person playing the role of the "enabler" usually makes it possible for the dependent to drink by making excuses and covering-up the irresponsible behavior.

Joan Durbeyfield fits into the model of the alcoholic home because "the Enabler is predictably the person emotionally closest to the Dependent, usually the spouse" (Wegscheider 90). She also has the characteristics involved in being an enabler. These are anger, martyr-like behavior and feelings of powerlessness. Joan Durbeyfield may be motivated by anger, as is suggested by the remarks that she makes to Tess regarding Tess's failed relationships with Alec and Angel. Mrs. Durbeyfield says, "O, Tess, what's the use of your play at marrying gentlemen, if it leaves us like this!" (Hardy 447).

Hardy also makes it evident that Joan sees herself as a martyr. Several references exhibit how much responsibility

Joan has in the family, and she feels that she is an essential part of the Durbeyfield clan. Thus, she had a certain way "of making her labors in the house seem heavier than they were by prolonging them indefinitely" (Hardy 88).

Joan also has strong feelings of powerlessness which "insulate her from guilt and preserve her from worrying about repairing evils that an external power caused" (Giordano 164). She reveals these feelings in two critical situations, both of which relate to Tess and her destiny. The first is immediately after Tess leaves for her new job at the d'Urbervilles. Joan apparently has some doubts as to whether Alec is "really a good-hearted young man," but these do not trouble her long and so "by the time she had got back to the village she was passively trusting to the favor of accident" (Hardy 93). Mrs. Durbeyfield expresses the same type of impotent feelings when Tess returns home pregnant and is looking to her mother for some advice and/or consolation. Joan quickly dismisses both the matter and Tess's feelings saying, "Well, we must make the best of it, I suppose. 'Tis nater, after all, and what do please God!" (Hardy 131).

Joan Durbeyfield's most suggestive act as an enabler occurs when she protects her husband from the consequences of his own irresponsible behavior (and thus enables him to continue his drinking). Because he gets drunk after hearing from Parson Tringham about his grand ancestry, he cannot take

the beehives to the market to be sold, so Joan assigns this duty to Tess. It is this action that results in the death of Prince and leaves Tess feeling like a murderess. It must not be overlooked that Mrs. Durbeyfield condones her husband's drinking (and even joins him at Rolliver's on this night). She is also responsible for arranging for Tess to make the journey when her father cannot.

At half-past one Mrs. Durbeyfield came into the large bedroom where Tess and all her little brothers and sisters slept. 'The poor man can't go,' she said to her eldest daughter, whose great eyes had opened the moment her mother's hand touched the door. (Hardy 67)

If Mrs. Durbeyfield had not been so busy trying to cover-up for Mr. Durbeyfield's mistakes, it is quite likely that Tess would have remained in bed on that fateful night.

Tess's mother also insulates her husband by giving "irrelevant information by way of answer" to Tess's inquiries as to his whereabouts after his visit to the doctor in Shaston (Hardy 59). Mrs. Durbeyfield describes for Tess the frightful condition of her father's heart so that Tess immediately worries that her father might possibly "go behind the eternal cloud" (Hardy 59). When Tess again asks where her father is, her mother puts on a deprecating look and attempts to disarm Tess by saying, "Now don't you be bursting

out angry!" (Hardy 59).

### The Hero

This section will illustrate how Tess exemplifies the alcoholic family hero. It will explain: (1) how she is assigned this role; (2) why she plays it, and what it consists of; (3) what happens to her as a result of playing this role; and, (4) how playing the hero becomes an essential part of her destruction.

Tess assumes this role because in the typical alcoholic home "the oldest son or daughter usually plays the Hero. Of all the children's roles in the alcoholic family, this one is most often determined by birth order" (Wegscheider 104). Whether or not the oldest child assumes this role depends on the individual family's motivations.

Sometimes the responsible children are directed to assume this role, other times they assume the role voluntarily. . . . Thus, when the oldest child becomes responsible for household and parenting responsibilities she makes life easier for the parents by providing more time for the alcoholic to be preoccupied with the drinking, and for the co-alcoholic [or enabler] to be preoccupied with the alcoholic. (Black 11-12)

Once Tess is placed in this role, her demise has begun. As Hyman declares, "Tess's moral development begins with her

family's economic and social exploitation of her. As a result of their dependence upon her, she assumes the responsibility of her family" (109).

Thus, Tess becomes "humanely beneficent toward the smaller ones," and according to Hyman she is "the physical and moral mainstay of her family and is looked upon as their best representative" (Hardy 76; Hyman 108). She sacrifices her own hopes of becoming a teacher and devotes her life to her family's needs. She does this because she is trying to save her family from the inevitable destruction she knows will be caused by her parents' irresponsible behavior. Tess is the typical hero of the alcoholic home. "Being part of such a tight system also leaves the Hero feeling obliged to do something to correct its imbalances, make up for its weaknesses, heal its pain in order to heal [her] own. It is to this impossible dream that the Hero dedicates [her] life" (Wegscheider 105).

Tess seems to have internalized the expectations of her family. By the time the reader meets her, she is already compulsively playing this role. Her mother feels comfortable leaving the young children with Tess while she goes to the tavern to fetch her husband and drown her sorrows because Tess had "a deputy-maternal attitude when she was alone with her juniors" (Hardy 61). Therefore, Tess takes responsibility for the environmental structure and also provides consis-

tency for the other family members who are affected by the alcoholic's and enabler's behavior. She also performs the same duties as those of the typical alcoholic home hero. As Black contends, "While mom and dad are out drinking together the responsible one directs the other children to their bedrooms, ensures they complete their homework, instructs them to change their nightclothes and go to bed" (11). The reader will recall these are some of the duties Tess performs before retrieving her parents from Rolliver's Inn on the night Prince is killed (Hardy 62).

The effects upon Tess as a result of playing this role are both profound and far-reaching, affecting her spiritual, mental and emotional potential. Tess tells Alec that she is "forbidden to believe that the great Power who moves the world would alter his plans on her account" (Hardy 399). Tess's lack of spirituality is also evidenced on the night before her mother and the children are forced to leave their family home. The children begin singing the following tune:

Here we suffer grief and pain,

Here we meet to part again;

In Heaven we part no more. (Hardy 441)

Tess cries in this scene because she realizes she doubts the existence of a power greater than herself. Due to her parents' irresponsible behavior and her own lack of spirituality, she feels totally responsible for the fate of her

family. Hardy writes,

If she could only believe what the children were singing; if she were only sure, how different all would be now; how confidently she would leave them to Providence and their future kingdom! But, in default of that, it behooved her to do something; to be their Providence. (441)

Tess is an example of what Wegscheider classifies as the alcoholic family hero because "in spite of [her] sincere efforts to be a really good child to [her] needy parents, the poor Hero reaps little spiritual reward" (112).

Tess is also a prime example of the hero in her emotional and mental spheres. As noted in the last section, she suffers from low self-esteem and guilt. According to Wegscheider, "the characteristic feelings of the family Hero are inadequacy and guilt" (109). Unfortunately, these feelings interfere with the hero's mental processes. Thus, her thoughts are "governed, not by truth and good judgment, but by fake perceptions and an overriding compulsion to pursue a goal that is forever out of reach [which in Tess's case is saving her family]" (Wegscheider 111). Tess's decisions are clouded by her feelings of inadequacy and guilt, and thus she is destined to fail. As Giordano asserts, "If we examine Tess's actions in terms of their production of pleasure or pain, we notice disturbing patterns, as her choices and impulses are not directed toward or productive of enjoyment

of life" (162).

When examined in this light it becomes evident that Hardy has fate or random events prey upon a protagonist who makes a series of bad decisions. As Evelyn Hardy says in her article "The Self-Destructive Element in Tess's Character,"

Tess was not only the victim of Fate, Circumstance, a malign progenitor of shiftless, cowardly or bestial people, she was also the victim of her own strong sensuality, and the insidious need to immolate herself under the deceptive guise of benefitting others. (449)



## CHAPTER IV

### THE METHODS TESS USES TO CREATE HER OWN DESTRUCTION

#### Failure to Act Conscientiously

Presumably, by this point, it has been shown that Tess's parents are not only failures as role models but that they also have a tremendous impact on Tess's emotions and behavior. This study has provided reasons for the motivating factors which control her behavior; now it will show how her conduct contributes to her destruction.

Tess's emotional life as an adult is motivated primarily by what she experienced as a child in the Durbeyfield household. Thus, she is often driven by guilt and feelings of inadequacy. These feelings operate in conjunction with certain behaviors that she acquired during her childhood. Sentiments felt by the eldest children in alcoholic families are often conflicting (e.g. feelings of inadequacy versus the need to take responsibility). Thus, Tess develops certain traits that are likely to cause her downfall, including an inability to act conscientiously. As Claridge asserts,

We confront not the tragic flaw in an otherwise notable character, but a characterization formed by competing major instincts that never coalesce

into an ordered coherent personality. In 1892, *The Spectator* expressed reader displeasure in this way: "If she be 'faithfully presented,' she was not at all faithful to her own sense of duty in the course of the story. Again and again Hardy shows her shrinking from the obvious and imperative duty of the moment when she must have felt the whole sincerity of her life was at the stake." (326-27)

Several examples of Tess's conduct illustrate this tendency. One such case is when she fails in her original attempts to tell Angel of her affair with Alec. During the summer of Tess and Angel's courtship, Angel corners her while she is milking a cow and declares his devotion to her. She begins to cry, but decides not to tell Angel of the affair even though "she saw and felt clearly the position she was in" (Hardy 210). Tess again fails to tell Angel of the affair during the journey she and Angel make to town to deliver Dairyman Crick's milk. This time she tells Angel of her father's drinking problem but she neglects to tell him of the affair (Hardy 252-53). Daleski is of the opinion that Tess is responsible for the disaster which results from Angel's lack of knowledge of the affair before he marries Tess.

Tess does not hold to the decision to keep her relationship with Alec secret, but when her attempt

relationship with Alec secret, but when her attempt to inform Angel of it by letter miscarries, she fails though 'in her conscience' she knows there is 'still time' before the marriage—to tell him. For all the mitigating circumstances, Tess is responsible for this failure, which is at the very heart of her story. It is the kingpin of the plot, for it results in Angel's abandonment of her; it is the essential cause of her tragedy, for its irreparable error leads, in the end, to her murder of Alec and her execution; and it is the crux of her attitude to Angel, for it signifies her shrinking from the facts of the flesh in relation to him. (338)

Her relationship with Angel seems doomed by her inability to act conscientiously. Thus, after she does tell him of her past relationship with Alec, she does nothing to prevent him from rejecting her. As Hyman observes,

At the most crucial moments she becomes entirely passive. When, for example, Angel lays down the conditions for their separation, Hardy makes it clear that she could still have won him back, and it accounts for her total submission as stemming from that 'pride . . . which was perhaps acquiescence in chance too apparent in the whole

d'Urberville family.' (109)

Indeed, Tess's self-esteem is so damaged that she is rendered defenseless. Lawrence describes this event in the following quotation: "When he [Angel] accused her she could not plead or answer. For she had no right to his goodness. She stood alone" (409). Hardy himself admits that with a little bit of courage and effort Tess might have overcome Angel's rejection of her.

There was, it is true, underneath, a back current of sympathy through which a woman of the world might have conquered him. But Tess did not think of this; she took everything as her desserts, and hardly opened her mouth. The firmness of her devotion to him was indeed almost pitiful; quick-tempered as she naturally was, nothing that he could say made her unseemly; she sought not her own; was not provoked; thought no evil of his treatment of her. (312)

Therefore, she recoils from taking action herself and instead relies on Angel, "believing that the magnanimity which she perceived in reckoning the chief ingredient in [his] character would lead him to rejoin her" (Hyman 117). When this does not happen (until it is "too late") and she and her family fall upon hard times, she succumbs to Alec's offer to provide for them (Hardy 466). Tess moves in with

him to a "stylish lodging house" in Sandbourne and has all the material comforts she could ever desire (Hardy 464). Nevertheless, she now becomes a "totally irresponsible being" ("A Chat with Mr. Hardy" 153). Thus, at this point, "we are to understand the spirit goes out of her" (Daleski 342). When Angel finally decides to try to reclaim Tess and finds her in Sandbourne, he gets the impression that she has "spiritually ceased to recognize the body before him as hers--allowing it to drift, like a corpse upon the current, in a direction dissociated from its living will" (Hardy 467).

Without the confines of moral responsibility and spiritual recognition, Tess feels free to act totally impulsively, failing to take a conscionable course of action. Accordingly, she murders Alec and then catches up to the fleeing Angel. They then roam the countryside without any practical consideration of evading the authorities. Hardy writes,

There was an unpractical vagueness in their movements throughout the day; neither one of them seemed to consider any question of effectual escape, disguise, or of long concealment. Their every ideal was temporary and unforefending, like the plans of two children. (476)

Tess and Angel eventually find themselves at Stonehenge, which is visible from miles around and is obviously a very

poor hiding place. Here Tess flings herself upon an oblong altar and accepts "the community's condemnation to suffering and death, [which] reveals [her] capacity to be the scape-goat" (Begiebing 74-75).

#### Denial, Reverie and Escape

Another method Tess uses which results in her destruction is denial. It is a common factor in alcoholic families.

Lying is basic to the family system affected by alcohol. It masquerades in part as overt denial of unpleasant realities, cover-ups, broken promises, and inconsistencies. It takes many forms and has many implications. The first and most basic lie is the family's denial of the problem. (Wotitz 30)

The denial of John Durbeyfield's alcoholism by both Tess and the other members of her family has severe implications for Tess's personality and causes her some very real problems. The denial which Tess uses can be broken down into three forms: denial of the problem (alcoholism), reverie, and escape.

Denial works in the Durbeyfield family in its refusal to acknowledge the father's alcoholism and prevent him from having to take responsibility for the consequences which it causes. Thus, both Tess and her mother enable John Durbeyfield to continue his excessive drinking. As Marken

states,

We know Durbeyfield's women support him. I do not mean that they encourage him or condone his actions; I mean that they keep him from falling on his face, permanently from the height of his haze of theoretical pomp. (322)

A prime example of Tess's denial regarding her father's fecklessness involves a critical incident in the novel—the death of Prince. Hardy prefers to call denial "pride" when Tess decides not to take her mother's advice to let one of the young men whom she had been dancing with earlier in the day drive the family's beehives to Casterbridge (68). She rejects the suggestion, "'O no—I wouldn't have it for the world!' declared Tess proudly. 'And letting everybody know the reason—such a thing to be ashamed of'" (Hardy 68). Because of Tess's desire to conceal her father's drunkenness, she is responsible for Prince's death, which makes her feel extremely guilty. This guilt motivates her "to be more deferential than she might have otherwise been to the maternal wish" (to go to the d'Urberville poultry farm to try to help her parents out of the "quagmire" which she had "dragged" them into) (Hardy 74).

Another form denial takes in Tess is through what Hyman refers to as "reverie." Tess continually falls into a state of wakeful dreaming or mental abstraction which Hyman

believes is related to Tess's parents' alcoholism:

"Although she does not share her parents' predilection for liquor, and is, in fact, consciously abstemious, she can never overcome the impulse, at crucial times, to escape from the consciousness of pain" (Hyman 108). Tess falls into reverie when she is driving Prince to Casterbridge and reflecting upon her father's vanity and her mother's fancy. Hyman declares, "This reverie and the sleep that follows is the result of the same desire to escape from the pain that impels her parents to visit Rolliver's" (108).

Tess also tries to avoid trouble and pain by escaping from the places associated with problems and painful memories. Therefore, after she ends her affair with Alec, she returns to her parents' home where "her sole idea seemed to be to shun mankind" (Hardy 134). Then after holding herself "aloof" for a couple of years while she was in Marlott, she feels a "pulse of hopeful life still warm within her" and decides that "she might be happy in some nook which had no memories" (Hardy 150). She believes "to escape the past and all that appertained thereto was to annihilate it, and to do that she would have to get away" (Hardy 150). So she goes to Talbothay's dairy farm where neither she nor her history are known. However, this cannot work because she must not hide from her past but confront it. As Hornback says, "Escape, as Tess sees it, is a matter of space, but in Hardy's world it



is time—the undying moments of an oppressive and retributively demanding past—that must be reckoned with" (114). At Talbothay's she tries to escape from the truth (about her past with Alec) by withholding it from Angel and then isolating herself. Angel repeatedly questions Tess regarding why she says that she is unworthy of his love. She repeatedly avoids telling him the truth and then hides out by herself when the exchange is over. Hardy writes,

After these tender contests and her victory she would go away by herself under the remotest cow, if at milking-time, or into the sedge, or into her room if at a leisure interval, and mourn silently, not a minute after an apparently phlegmatic negative. (238)

The foundation for these forms of denial was laid when Tess was living at home with her parents and denial is a significant factor in her immolation. As Sommers notes, she becomes a spiritual outcast as a result of using these devices: "As Tess attempts to deny the past and obliterate her identity, since it is quite clear that without a past, there can be no present (or future), she becomes a person without a place, without any home at all in the world" (163).

### Impulsiveness

Several forces divide Tess's character and determine her actions. When her attempts to deny and/or escape her

problems fail, she reacts impulsively. Accordingly, she is a typical child of an alcoholic. As Wotitz states,

Adult children of alcoholics are impulsive. They tend to lock themselves into a course of action without giving serious consideration to alternative behaviors or possible consequences. This impulsivity leads to confusion, self-loathing, and loss of control over their environment. (50)

Children of alcoholics become impulsive for two reasons. First, they "tend to look for immediate as opposed to deferred gratification" (Wotitz 51). Also, these individuals tend to view the world in unrealistic terms. As Claudia Black declares, "for these children everything is black or white, one way or the other, with no in-between" (52). Thus, such characters have poor judgment and make bad decisions.

Tess commits several impulsive actions in the novel. Her most obvious and consequential unplanned act is her murder of Alec. Although the critics have analyzed this action (and I will also), they have overlooked the other acts that Tess performs in an impulsive manner. The first of these impulsive actions occurs when Tess escapes the abuse of Car Darch and her companions by accepting Alec's "proffered aid and company" (Hardy 113). Hardy says,

Coming as the invitation did at the particular juncture when fear and indignation at these adver-

saries could be transformed by the spring of the foot into a triumph over them, she abandoned herself to her impulse, climbed the gate, put her toe upon his instep, and scrambled into the saddle beside him. The pair were speeding away into the distant gray by the time the contentious revelers became aware of what had happened. (113)

Giordano explains that Tess's impulsivity is a result of her divided personality when he declares, "Continually evident in this novel is the damaging effect of self-division, and nowhere is this clearer than when Tess's untimely impulse delivers her from Car Darch into the far more threatening company of Alec" (167). Thus, as Car's mother says, Tess gets "out of the frying pan into the fire" (Hardy 113). The reader will recall that it is in this "distant gray" that Alec takes advantage of the sleeping Tess and "traces a coarse pattern" on her "beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet" (Hardy 119).

Tess also acts impulsively with respect to organized religion. When she gives birth to a child as a result of her liaison with Alec and the baby dies, she wants to give it a Christian burial. However, when the Vicar refuses to give the baby such a burial, Tess immediately rejects the Church. She rashly tells the Vicar, "Then I don't like you! And I'll

never come to your church no more!" (Hardy 147). Accordingly, she loses a possible source of emotional and moral support until she gets together with Angel and suddenly adopts his brand of spirituality.

Tess also impulsively tells Angel she will return to her parents' house after his decision that he and she can no longer live together after they are married. When he accepts Tess's idea of returning to her parental home, Tess is locked into a course of action that she had not really desired or thought through. She discovers, "There was a difference between the proposition and the covenant, which she had felt only too quickly" (Hardy 315). This same impulsiveness motivates her when she returns to her parents' home and overhears her parents' discussion of her predicament. Her father doubts that she is really married, and so Tess again acts rashly and decides to flee. Therefore, she chooses and endures the harsh conditions at Farmer Groby's that are, as Alec tells her, "harder than [she] deserves" (Hardy 393).

By far the most serious impulsive action which Tess commits is her murder of Alec. As Gregor argues, the murder is "at once an act of blind impulse, and an act which her whole being endorses" (201). Several critics have attempted to explain how and why Tess murders Alec. Daleski believes that Tess's slaying of Alec results from the unfortunate direction her life had taken. He contends that "Tess's

situation is tragic, but wanting Angel and given to Alec, it is she who has torn her life to pieces—and breakdown is her only recourse" (342). Therefore, when Angel seeks her out in Sandbourne, Tess quickly devises and executes a desperate plan that she believes will solve at least some of her problems. As Hyman observes, "She experiences one last burst of energy, one last 'impulse for joy.' In returning to Angel she would, as she had the first time, obliterate her past" (118).

Since Tess consistently tries to escape from her problems instead of learning from her mistakes, she assumes that by murdering Alec she will be free to pursue Angel.

She cannot undo her life nor can she escape from herself, but, since at this point she has not learned the true lesson of her experience—that there is no escaping the past one carries within—she can attempt one last desperate flight by raising her arm against the past, in the person of Alec and slaying it. (Sommers 164)

Owing to the impulsive nature of Tess's actions, her plans are poorly executed. Nonetheless, impulsiveness is a fact of life, especially for children of alcoholics. Thus, Lawrence contends,

The murder is badly done, altogether the book is botched, owing to the way of thinking in the

author, owing to the weak yet obstinate theory of being. Nevertheless, the murder is true, the whole book is true in its conception. (407)

#### Difficulty with Intimate Relationships

Due to the fact that Angel is a motivating factor in many of Tess's bad decisions, her relationship with him must be examined as a cause of her destruction. I argue that their union is doomed from the start because of Tess's background as the child of an alcoholic. As Wotitz says,

Adult children of alcoholics have difficulty with intimate relationships. They want very much to have healthy, intimate relationships, and it is extraordinarily difficult for a number of reasons. The first, and most obvious reason, is that they have no frame of reference for a healthy, intimate relationship, because they have never seen one.

The only model they have is their parents. (39)

The health of the Durbeyfield's marriage is ailing at best. Therefore, Tess will obviously be ill-prepared for any type of intimate relationship because of the lack of healthy models in her parental home. After all, a sound relationship "requires a lot of give and take, and problem solving [because] there is always some disagreement and anger which a couple [must] resolve" (Wotitz 41). Although Tess had years of practice in catering to other people's needs, wholesome

relationships "call for openness and honest assertiveness" (Wegscheider 115). These requirements are in direct opposition to the alcoholic family rules, "Don't Talk," "Don't Trust" and "Don't Feel," which Tess adheres to. Accordingly, her relations with others (and particularly with Angel) are ill-fated from their conception.

Nevertheless, Tess does love Angel. Unfortunately, her love for him can be classified as what Giles Mitchell calls "romantic love," which is "characterized by possessiveness and idealization, and prevents the lovers from developing either intimacy or trust" (Mitchell 12). The fact that Tess desires to be possessed, i.e. romantically, by Angel is shown in the sleepwalking scene in which Angel symbolically buries Tess.

So easefully had she delivered her whole being up to him that it pleased her to think he was regarding her as his absolute possession, to dispose of as he should choose. It was consoling, under the hovering terror of to-morrow's separation, to feel that he really recognized her now as his wife Tess, and did not cast her off, even if in that recognition he went so far as to arrogate to himself the right of harming her. (Hardy 318-19)

Plenty of evidence in the novel illustrates that Tess idealized Angel, too. Hardy writes, "She loved him so

passionately, and he was so godlike in her eyes; and being, though untrained, instinctively refined, her nature cried for his tutelary guidance" (246). This idealization of Angel is another method Tess uses to try to escape her past. Her feelings for Angel help her to dispel thoughts of her childhood. As Hardy says,

Her affection for him [Angel] was now the breath of life of Tess's being; it enveloped her as a photosphere, irradiated her into forgetfulness of her past sorrows, keeping back the gloomy spectres that would persist in their attempts to touch her—  
doubt, fear, moodiness, care, shame. (260)

Although Angel is attractive to many women in the novel, Tess falls in love with him as a result of her idealization of him. Tess's idealization of Angel results from a deficiency of what the previous men in her life had possessed. As Hyman says,

In falling in love with Angel, Tess falls in love with an abstraction rather than the man. He is a projection of her own needs. She begins by respecting him for what both her father and Alec had lacked . . . 'a self-controlling sense of duty . . . a quality she had never expected to find in one of the opposite sex.' (111)

Perhaps the most important indication of the inevitable



failure of Tess and Angel's relationship is her admission that she knows that he is incapable of sustaining his love for her. Therefore, Tess takes the ultimate escape route by choosing death so that she will not have to face a life in which Angel no longer loves her. She tells Angel,

I fear that what you think of me now may not last. I do not wish to outlive your present feeling for me. I would rather not. I would rather be dead and buried when the time comes for you to despise me, so that it may never be known to me that you despised me. (Hardy 481)

Perhaps Tess realizes that Angel's love for her has also involved idealization and possessiveness and therefore, must be temporary. Nevertheless, she remains loyal to Angel to the very end. Unfortunately, this propensity toward loyalty to Angel and to her family proves to be the final factor in her destruction.

### Loyalty

Tess's loyalty to her family is the cause of several of her errors in judgment which ultimately result in her downfall. Unconditional loyalty is a typical trait of children of alcoholics. As Black says, "Children [of alcoholics] feel very loyal to their parents, and invariably, they end up defending their parents, rationalizing that it isn't really all that bad, and continuing in what has become a denial

process" (33).

Thus, after Tess has to cover for her father by taking the beehives to the market and has the tragic accident with Prince, she denies that the real problem is her father's drinking and instead feels totally responsible for Prince's death herself. So she tells her parents, "I killed the old horse, and I suppose I ought to do something to get ye a new one" (Hardy 87). Thus, she agrees to go to the d'Urbervilles to secure a job tending the poultry farm. Unfortunately, her experience at the d'Urberville's house is lamentable, and she returns home. Regardless of her mother's involvement in the plot to claim kin with the d'Urbervilles, Tess remains loyal to her family and continues to find herself at fault. This is characteristic of children of alcoholics.

Adult Children of Alcoholics are extremely loyal, even in the face of evidence that the loyalty is undeserved. . . . The fact that other people may treat you [the child] poorly does not matter. You can rationalize that. Somehow, no matter what they do or say, you can figure out a way to excuse their behavior and find yourself at fault. This reinforces your negative self-image and enables you to stay in the relationship. (Wotitz 49)

Since Tess sees herself as the source of her family's problems, she is continually searching for a way to make

their lives easier. Accordingly, a couple of years after her return from Trantridge she decides to leave home again.

"This leaving of the younger children she had decided to be for the best; were she to remain they would probably gain less good by her precepts than harm by her example" (Hardy 155).

Thereupon she finds employment at the Crick dairy farm, where she meets and eventually marries Angel. When she confesses her past misdeeds involving Alec, Angel rejects her. She then retreats to her parental home and then to Farmer Groby's, where Alec finds her and tries to win her back. Alec immediately protests against Tess's working so hard at the swede farm. Tess's response is, "But I like doing it—it is for my father" (Hardy 432). Alec then says he has been thinking of Tess's brothers and sisters, and "Tess's heart quivered--he was touching her in a weak place. He had divined her chief anxiety" (Hardy 432). When Tess's sister, Liza-lu, finds Tess at the farm and tells her that their father died, Tess immediately returns home again and shortly after this the Durbeyfields lose their home because of their financial insecurity. Tess eventually returns to Alec (and sacrifices both her body and soul to him) in a final attempt to save her family from the misfortune which she "perceived [as] her own evil influence" (Hardy 436-37).

Therefore, Tess's tendency to be excessively loyal to

her family is an obvious factor in her poor judgment and bad decisions. However, she also extends this type of loyalty to Angel, and it is also a cause of her moral weakness and impoverished judgment. This propensity is shown on several occasions during their relationship: (1) on their wedding night when Angel is sleepwalking; (2) when Tess mutilates her own appearance after Angel leaves for Brazil; and, (3) in a conversation between Tess and Alec which takes place at Farmer Groby's regarding Tess's spiritual beliefs. She also kills Alec (an obvious and blatant error in judgment) as a result of her loyalty to Angel.

After Tess and Angel are married, they spend the night at an old farmhouse near Wellbridge Mill. Tess tells Angel about her previous affair with Alec, and Angel is shocked and disappointed by her disclosure; thus, he physically separates himself from Tess by sleeping downstairs on the sofa. Nevertheless, during the night he sleepwalks into Tess's room and carries her to the Abbey and places her in "her stone coffin" (Hardy 318). Tess wishes that while he was carrying her "they could only fall together, and both be dashed to pieces" (Hardy 318). She overlooks her perilous position because of her need to be accepted by Angel. Tess also refrains from awakening Angel because "it would mortify him to discover his folly in respect of her" (Hardy 320). Accordingly, she never tells him of their somnambulant journey

because "the reflection would anger him, grieve him, stultify him, to know that he had instinctively manifested a fondness for her of which his common sense did not approve; that his inclination had compromised his dignity when reason slept" (Hardy 321).

Hardy likens Angel's loss of control while sleepwalking with the consequences of drunkenness. Tess does not tell Angel of his sleepwalking because "it was too much like laughing at a man when sober for his erratic deeds during intoxication" (Hardy 322).

Tess's propensity to be loyal to Angel motivates her to mutilate her own body. This event occurs after he has rejected Tess and has left for Brazil. She mangles her appearance and justifies her action by saying,

I'll always be ugly now, because Angel is not here, and I have nobody to take care of me. My husband that was is gone away, and never will love me any more; but I love him just the same, and hate all other men, and like to make 'em think scornful of me! (Hardy 354-55)

Hardy writes that after she destroys her appearance, "tears came into her eyes for very pity of herself" (354). This is significant because it gives the reader further insight into how Tess's character was shaped by growing up in an alcoholic home. As Giordano observes, "Her devotion to him [Angel] as

an infinitely superior being not only rules out her condemning him, it also reinforces her sense of unworthiness and the tendency toward self-pity and self-sacrifice" (173).

Tess's loyalty to Angel is so strong that she allows him to pervade all aspects of her being, including her spiritual beliefs. Although she believes that she has no hope for a reconciliation with Angel, her mind is "enslaved to him" as Alec points out to her while she is working at the swede farm (Hardy 400). Alec asserts, "whatever your dear husband believed you accept, and whatever he rejected you reject, without the least inquiry or reasoning on your own part." Tess stubbornly defends herself by saying she acquired Angel's beliefs "because he knew everything." However, even Hardy seems to think Tess's loyalty has been extended too far in this case because he writes that she made the above remark "with triumphant simplicity of faith in Clare that the most perfect man could hardly have deserved, much less her husband" (400).

Furthermore, Tess's loyalty to Angel is part of her motivation for killing Alec. She murdered him in order to free herself and return to Angel. The assassination was also motivated by Tess's attempt to punish Alec for his endeavor to harm Angel. In the following passage she describes the murder to Angel:

I have done it—I don't know how. . . . Still, I

owed it to you, and to myself, Angel. I feared long ago, when I struck him on the mouth with my glove, I might do it some day for the trap he set for me in my simple youth, and his wrong to you through me. He has come between us and ruined us, and now he can never do it any more. (Hardy 474)

Hardy obviously places much importance upon Tess's loyalty to both Angel and her family because he closes the novel by having these characters unite after Tess dies. Some of Tess's loved ones (Angel and Liza-lu) seem to inherit each other as Tess hoped they might, after she is hanged for murdering Alec. Thus, she might have hoped that her struggles would not be totally in vain.

After the execution, the two speechless gazers [Angel and Liza-lu] bent themselves down to the earth, as if in prayer, and remained motionless; the flag continued to wave silently. As soon as they had strength they arose, joined hands again, and went on. (Hardy 489-90)

## CHAPTER V.

### AN ANALYSIS OF HARDY'S THEORIES OF HEREDITY AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

#### Hardy and Heredity

Clearly, ample evidence exists which suggests that Tess is affected by being reared in a dysfunctional home. Her character and judgment are severely marred as a consequence of being raised in the Durbeyfield home. Perhaps Hardy gave birth to *Tess* in order to produce a novel that personifies his vision of the lamentable forces of heredity. Beckingham asserts that Hardy "believed that parents transmitted by their blood their own characteristics" (64). Tess acquires her frailties and poor judgment as a result of both her genetic inheritance and the unhealthy environment in which she was reared.

Heredity was, according to Beckingham, a subject that Hardy was concerned with. He reports that "blood" and the transmission of character trait and physical trait through the blood were subjects Hardy "worked at, studied and portrayed in his work" (66). Bailey notes that Hardy was interested in the issue and reviewed a substantial amount of material regarding what we now call genetics.



[Hardy] may have read Francis Galton's "Heredity Talent and Character" in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1865, which set forth the theory that acquired characteristics may be inherited, including the craving for drink or for gambling, strong sexual passion, and a proclivity to pauperism, crimes of violence and crimes of fraud. . . . He [also] may have read Robert L. Dugdale's *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease, and Heredity* published in 1887. Dugdale set forth the theory that environment produces habits that can become hereditary through modification of the cerebral tissue that is passed on to the genes. . . .

[Hardy] notes in his biography that in 1890, at the time he was working on *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, he read August Weismann's *Essays on Heredity*, published in English translation in 1889. (10-11)

According to Bailey,

Such books and articles set forth the nineteenth century theories that ancestral traits are passed down, generation by generation, in more or less their original strength, and that even acquired characteristics (for example a tendency to alcoholism and to crime) are inherited. (11)

Consequently, Hardy's reflecting upon heredity and fate

may have caused him to examine his own circumstances. In the following quotation Beckingham relates the results of Hardy's contemplating his own inheritance: "Later, towards the end of his career he began to jot down and trace the declined fortunes of his own family, and . . . the result of this was 'Hardy's growing personal sense of being himself a prisoner of inherited tendencies'" (67).

As a result of Hardy's studies and reflections on heredity, his vision of humanity and fate was formed. As Beckingham suggests,

He [Hardy] perceived a dualistic pattern where human consciousness was beset by opposing environmental forces such as indifferent nature, fate, chance, as well as, the social forces of marriage and family. At the centre of the forces, conscious man, who could think, aspire, feel, was in Hardy's view, trapped in addition by more personal influences such as the sex drive and heredity power. All of these combined to form 'the inevitable' environment which was indifferent to man, and beyond his conscious control. Yet this environment was so powerful, it ruled him and forced his future into a pattern not of his choice or making. (68)

Hence, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* Hardy voices his

thoughts and feelings about hereditary and environmental powers.

The novel's strength is "above all in the power and beauty of the heroine whom he created and then unwillingly, destroyed" (Alvarez 22). Hardy's identification with Tess can be sensed by the reader. As Howe claims, "Only one 'character' is almost as important as Tess, and that is Hardy himself. Through his musing voice, he makes his presence steadily felt. He hovers and watches over Tess, like a stricken father" (455). Therefore, Hardy tries to protect Tess, but he cannot save her. As Howe asserts,

the clash between sterile denial and vital existence occurs repeatedly in a wide range of episodes, yet through none of them can Hardy protect his heroine. And that, I think, is the full force of the darkness of his vision: how little can be done for Tess. (455)

Tess's fate is determined by heredity and her upbringing in a dysfunctional home wherein she acquired the characteristics which Hardy believed "are preconditioned by mechanical forces outside humanity's control" (Beckingham 66). Thus, because heredity and fate made Tess "a passenger in the Durbeyfield ship," she was subjected to environmental forces which caused her to develop character flaws that dictate her behavior throughout the novel, and are eventually responsible for her destruction (Hardy 61). These forces are not only

outside of Tess's control but they actually control her, and therefore, she is destroyed by them. The novel is tragic because as Aristotle declares, "We feel pity for someone who has ill-fortune without deserving it, and fear when the person is like ourselves" (421).

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