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“Rape and Censorship in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* in the Late 1800s”

In my thesis I argue that the limitations of the publishing environment during the late-Victorian era led Thomas Hardy to practice self-censorship when writing the rape scene in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. Though a close reading of the scene, I show how Hardy makes characterization, syntactical and narrative choices to further his purpose of drawing reader’s attention to the social problem of rape in late 1800s rural England. Then, I present an analysis of the evolution of the rape scene from manuscript to serialized text to the volume editions. Hardy revised the scene for twenty-two years after its publication, and I show how these revisions reflect the restrictions he was under as a writer during this era. Finally, I highlight the prefaces Hardy wrote for each edition of *Tess*, and how they reveal his attitudes about the barriers he faced when publishing the rape scene.

I am aware that each of these topics could be a study in itself. However, I am interested in how all of these variables work together to give a sense of why *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and the rape scene were so important to Hardy. I argue that there is value in stepping back to see the bigger picture, beyond the text itself. I seek to understand the reasons why Hardy chose to write on the topic of rape and why he so tenaciously attended to its presentation. My intention is not to give all the possible answers to that question, but to provide one possible answer based on my research and personal interpretation of the novel.