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

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English 4995
Spring 2017
Introduction

In this essay I will argue that the rape scene in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is not only important to the novel as a whole, but it also held importance in Hardy's life. First, I examine the rape scene itself and the techniques Hardy uses to create ambiguity, how he navigates the fine line between seduction and rape. He 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. I discuss how Hardy's own self-censorship—the act of intentionally omitting material from a written work in order to be more appealing to a public readership—manifests itself in this scene. Then, I present an analysis of the evolution of the rape scene from manuscript to serialized text to the volume editions. Hardy repeatedly revised the rape scene over a twenty-two year time span, and I show how these revisions were a result of the pressure he felt from publishers and the Victorian reading public. In conclusion, I discuss the way Hardy used prefaces in every edition of *Tess* to communicate his exasperation with the censorship-heavy literary environment he was publishing in, and to convey how important he felt it was to tell the story of *Tess*.

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; understanding what goes into the creation of a text is just as important as analyzing the text itself. Both the complicated history of the rape scene and my close reading of the scene give insight into why this scene was so important.
to Hardy. He devoted much of his time and resources to ensuring the rape was presented in the way he believed it must be, and his work lives on today.

I understand that this is an ambitious process, and as such, I do not attempt to fully develop each subject. Much has been written about Hardy and the content and publication of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, and I have no doubt that there is even more to write. This essay is an attempt to add to the vibrant discussion that has taken place ever since *Tess* was first released. Here, I aim to add a new, broader perspective to the critical discourse. 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. This essay synthesizes and analyzes information currently available concerning Thomas Hardy and the rape in *Tess*, but it is possible that what is available to us is only part of the story. However, the pieces I have assembled here I believe to be the most compelling.

The idea of the Victorian Era as an age characterized by prudish behavior, sexual repression and reserved attitudes is well known. Victorian women in particular had strict expectations placed on them during this period. Elizabeth Lee, a Victorian scholar, writes:

> Earlier on in the century, women were considered the weaker, more innocent sex...no sexual appetite, often capturing all the sympathy and none of the blame over indiscretions. Men represented the fallen, sinful, and lustful creatures, wrongfully taking advantage of the fragility of women. However, this situation switched in the later half of the period; women had to be held accountable, while the men, slaves to their katabolic purposes and sexual appetites, could not really be
blamed. Therefore, women were portrayed either frigid or else insatiable. A young lady was only worth as much as her chastity and appearance of complete innocence, for women were time bombs just waiting to be set off. Once led astray, she was the fallen woman, and nothing could reconcile that till she died.

Although there is a shift in this general attitude during the century, overall, women were considered fragile creatures whose sexuality was unacceptable. The motif of an “Angel in the House” to depict the ideal woman is also representative of this era. Created by Coventry Patmore in his 1854 poem of the same name, the term refers to the domestic housewife who maintained an appearance of chastity and purity even as a wife and mother. The opposite of this was the “fallen women,” an iconic example of which is Tess D’Urberville. This was a woman who had a sexual experience outside of marriage, and was on the same level as adulteresses and prostitutes. To help avoid this fate, there were conduct books written in this period to guide the “correct” behavior of women. For example, *Etiquette for Ladies: With Hints on the Preservation, Improvement, and Display of Female Beauty* advised:

"A lady cannot refuse the invitation of a gentleman to dance, unless she has already accepted that of another, for she would be guilty of an incivility which might occasion trouble."

"Men frequently look with a jealous eye on a learned woman... be cautious, therefore, in a mixed company of showing yourself too much beyond those around you." (Berghausen)

These conduct books told Victorian women that tenderness, affection and devotion to her husband were of the utmost importance. (Furneaux).
Despite its conservative façade, there is no doubt that Victorian society had its sexually explorative side as well. The famous French critic, Michael Foucault, argued that sex works its way into a variety of nineteenth-century discourses, including law, medicine, religion and education. Sexology, the scientific study of sex, was first introduced in the 1880s. Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis pioneered this movement with their works *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) and *Sexual Inversion* (1897), respectively. Sexual preferences were categorized, and terms we use today like homosexual, heterosexual and nymphomaniac were introduced. Along similar lines, pornography and prostitution were much more common in the Victorian Era than we might think. In 1857, the estimated number of prostitutes in London was around 80,000. There was an “extraordinarily high level of tolerance” for prostitutes in Victorian society, and for most of the nineteenth century, the prevailing establishment view was of prostitution as a necessary evil (qtd. in Landow). One street in London, Holywell Street, was particularly known for publishing dirty books, and was the hub of a lucrative pornography industry. The government passed the Obscene Publication Act in 1857, but publication still continued. By the 1890’s, books with titles like *The Power of Mesmerism: A Highly Erotic Narrative* or *The Story of a Dildoe!* could be purchased if one so desired (Green).

The middle of the 19th century witnessed a rebellion from the strict pressures placed on women with one of the first feminist movements. The “New Woman”, coined by writer Sarah Grand in 1894, was “intelligent, educated, emancipated, independent and self-supporting” and usually middle class. Along with this, the number of unmarried women was rising in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Of those that were marrying, the age of marriage was rising. (Diniejko) Not only did women’s attitude evolve as the century
progressed, but the law did too. In 1839, the Child Custody Act was passed, giving mothers custody of their children under seven. K.D. Reynolds, a Victorian scholar, writes, “The act was the first piece of legislation to undermine the patriarchal structures of English law and has subsequently been hailed as the first success of British feminism in gaining equal rights for women” (qtd. in Simkin). In 1857, the Matrimonial Causes Act was passed. This act gave courts the power to make an ex-husband pay maintenance to his divorcee, and if a husband deserted his wife, he could no longer claim her earnings. Also, when a woman was divorced she could regain her property rights and identity she had before marriage.

Women continued to voice their grievances, and as the century progressed, more people listened. The Contagious Diseases Act, passed in 1864, allowed for authorities to arrest prostitutes and conduct degrading inspections for venereal diseases. Many women were upset about this act, and formed the Ladies’ Association against the Contagious Diseases Act. They were successful in getting the act repealed in 1886, which was viewed as a feminist triumph. This progression in women’s rights reveals why, by the 1890’s, Hardy saw it relevant to cover the topic of rape in Tess of the D’Urbervilles.

Although decidedly progressive in some aspects, the society of the late-Victorian era was regressive in its obsession with female virginity. Oliver Lovesey, a Victorian fiction scholar, has written extensively on this subject. He writes that as a result of revelations about child prostitution and increased prosecutions of child sexual assault, a mania surrounding virginity emerged. This obsession manifested itself in advances in plastic gynecology, with the first complete vaginal reconstruction done in 1870. There was a superstition at the time that having sex with a child virgin was a cure for male syphilis, a belief that even influenced child rape prosecutions. Also, virgins were so popular that
brothels employed medical staff to reconstruct young girls, presumably to resell them as virgins. Virginity was a marketable commodity that was heavily exploited.

Hardy showed a particular interest in women’s rights and the sexual stigmas females faced, which he highlights through many techniques in *Tess*. He was aware of the social pressures women were under, as well as the legal progress they were making due to a background in law, explained in the next paragraph. Lovesey points out one example of Hardy's consciousness: “Alec has read Tess's economic position as well as her mature body as signs that she cannot be a virgin.” *Tess* is highly sexualized in the story, but this does not justify Alec's actions. The late 1800s, when Hardy was writing *Tess*, saw “a persistent anxiety about the instability of virginity and its signs, and the difficulty of locating and reading it...virginity is not stable and demonstrable, save in the moment of its violation” (Lovesey). Another story published previously to *Tess*, in the 1880s, was *My Secret Life*, an account of a man obsessed with virgins.

He deprecates the moral depravity and financial improvidence of the working poor, among whom "a virginity was a rarity at fourteen years old" (p. 160). He legitimizes his activities by referring to the sexual precociousness of poor youth that causes an economic deflation of the article of sexual exchange: "street boys cannot appreciate the treasures they destroy. A virginity taken by a street boy of sixteen, is a pearl cast to a swine" (p. 280). His purse, false promises, and anonymity protect him from prosecutions for rape. In an illustration of circumstances similar to Tess's at Flintcomb Ash, the danger of a "field-girl" threatening to go to the local magistrate is dismissed: "[Y]ou can always have a field-girl, nobody cares" (p. 127). (Lovesey)
Many of the sentiments about rape and virginity expressed in *My Secret Life* are mirrored in *Tess*. Tess is poor and a field laborer. Had she gone to the courts, she would have had little chance at successfully persecuting Alec, as he, like the author of *My Secret Life*, had a deep purse and social status to protect him. Alec also seems to share the belief of the author of *My Secret Life* that “you can always have a field-girl, nobody cares.” He knew what he was doing when he seduced Tess, and it is hinted in the novel that he had done it before. But in fact, people did care, as Hardy shows by choosing to write about the rape of a rural woman.

As I have mentioned so far, there was a fair amount of legislation that reflected how social attitudes towards virginity and women’s rights evolved in the Victorian Era, and it is important to note that Hardy was familiar with these laws. In the 1880’s, Hardy became very interested in the law and took detailed notes on court cases that were reported in the *Times* and the *Dorset County Chronicle*. His notes covered over fifty cases as written in his notebook titled “Literary Notes III: Facts from Newspapers, Histories, Biographies, other Chronicles (mainly Local)”. In 1884, Hardy became a magistrate for Dorchester until 1919, and in 1894 became a magistrate for Dorset country until 1916. He showed a particular interest in women’s rights; especially cases involving divorce, marriage or a “fallen woman.” Hardy was also interested in women who had committed crimes and their sentences.

His preoccupation with the law carried over into his literature as well. William Davis, a Hardy scholar, writes in *Thomas Hardy and the Law*, “Everything we know about Hardy the writer clearly shows that he painstakingly researched his subjects before committing them to paper and publishing them.” *(Hardy and the Law 18)* There is no doubt, then, that Hardy’s knowledge of the law influenced the rape scene in *Tess*. English law in
the nineteenth century said that, “to constitute rape, it is not necessary that the connection with the woman should be had against her will; it is sufficient if it is without her consent” (qtd. in “The Rape of Tess” 223). The law also said that if a woman was asleep, as is the situation in Tess, and intercourse occurs, it is rape. Therefore, a court of law would have found Alec guilty of committing rape. Hardy would likely have known this law, but still Tess does not seek legal counsel or assistance of any kind. One wonders why this is. Davis writes, “One explanation may be that Hardy wished to raise this very question in the minds of readers in order to remind them of the status of working-class women and their relation to the law...With their lack of resources and legal 'know-how,' women were effectively outside the scope of the law.” (Hardy and the Law 82). This essay explores of Hardy's intentions behind writing about rape and the fallen woman.

This overview on the Victorian attitudes towards women and their sexuality, and the background on Hardy’s legal knowledge, is to give context to the analysis I will provide in the rest of this essay. As I am using a wide lens to view Tess and Hardy's presentation of rape, it is important to be cognizant of all the variables involved; this means understanding the public that Hardy was writing for and the tools he possessed when crafting the rape scene. As the rest of this essay will reveal, the importance of Tess involves much more than just the text itself.

Part 1: Motives and Manifestations of Self-Censorship in Tess of The D’Urbervilles

The literary environment of the late 19th century—when Hardy wrote and published Tess of the D’Urbervilles—was marked by battles over censorship. One example is the 1888
Vizetelly trial over the English translation of Emile Zola’s novels. Publisher Henry Vizetelly was put on trial for the publication of these translations. During the trial, Samuel Smith, the Member of Parliament who brought the motion against Vizetelly, argued for the potential dangers of reading Zola. He said that if a young boy was to come across an open Zola novel in a store window, the provocative translation “was of such leprous character that it would be impossible for any young man who had not learned the divine secret of self control to have read it without committing some form of outward sin” (qtd. In Leckie 166). Other censorship trials from this time period include Oscar Wilde’s infamous 1895 trial for indecency in his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and the 1889 trial of George Bedborough, a book seller, for publishing and distributing *Sexual Inversion*, a psychological book about the sex impulse. These trials highlight the desire to protect vulnerable readers, such as a young boy, during a time when reading material was easy accessible.

Publishers in the late 1800s were heavily concerned with the needs of their readers, as their profits were determined by how well they supplied the public’s literary demands. Periodicals were a popular medium at this time and therefore were a popular source of income for writers. However, these periodicals were much more concerned about their readers than they were their contributors. It was assumed that these publications were a part of “what is called household reading, which means, or is made to mean, the reading either of the majority in a household or of the household collectively” (Leckie 174). Since many authors wanted to be published in these periodicals, that meant shaping their text to be appropriate for a whole household. Hardy argued that the author “inevitably ends up submitting to ‘the Grundyist and subscriber’” (qtd. in Leckie 175). Grundyism, incidentally, is a prudish adherence to conventionality, especially in personal behavior, and has its roots
in an especially prudish character named Mrs. Grundy from Thomas Morton’s 1798 play, *Speed the Plough*.

Many authors were frustrated by the restrictions readership placed them under. One example of this is Oscar Wilde, who in his preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* wrote, “There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.” (41) This was a response to the controversy surrounding his novel, as mentioned earlier, and was an argument for the beauty of art, as opposed to its commercialization. Another example is the author Grant Allen, who wrote a science fiction novel in 1989 called *The British Barbarians*, which included a preface about the state of literature and how editors and publishers prevented authors from saying what they wished. Allen wrote, “It isn’t that I am not allowed: it is that we are not allowed...men can’t write as they would...because the public and its distributing agents dictate to them so absolutely how and what they are to produce that they can’t escape from it” (qtd. in Leckie 177). *The British Barbarians* was meant to be a part of a series of “Hill Top Novels” that refused to pander to the market, but was the only one to actually appear.

Considering this literary environment, it is no surprise that Hardy felt the constraints of censorship in his writing during the end of the 1800s. As we will see in the second chapter of my thesis, he struggled to find a periodical in which to publish *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and had to censor many scenes in order to finally have it approved. Even once he released it as a novel, Hardy exhibited self-censorship. Within the context of my thesis, self-censorship is the act of intentionally omitting material from a written work in order to be more appealing to a public readership. One example of this is chapter eleven, the point in the novel when the “rape scene” occurs. I argue that Hardy exhibits self-censorship by
writing an intentionally vague rape scene. He does this by crafting Alec as an ambiguous character and by utilizing a distanced narration style to reflect on the rape in place of describing the act itself.

The events leading up to the rape scene are important in establishing the conflicting emotions Tess feels towards Alec preceding her rape. Tess goes into town for a party with some other workers. There, she meets Alec who offers her a ride home. She refuses, instead opting to walk home with the workfolk with whom she came. On the walk home, the workers turn against Tess in their drunken states, antagonizing her and calling her a “hussy” and a whore. Alec arrives on the scene, offering Tess an escape. She impulsively accepts and climbs on the back of his horse in order to flee her adversaries. Tess assumes Alec is taking her back to Trantridge, but the night is misty and they still have a ways to go. Hardy sets the tone for chapter eleven by showing Tess’s conflicting feelings towards Alec in the very first paragraph.

The twain cantered long for some time without speech, Tess as she clung to him still panting in her triumph, yet in other respects dubious. She had perceived that the horse was not the spirited one he sometimes rode, and felt no alarm on that score, though her seat was precarious enough despite her tight hold of him. (83)

As this passage conveys, Tess is both triumphant at escaping persecution and dubious of Alec’s intentions in saving her. She feels safe at the realization that the horse they ride on is not the “spirited one he sometimes rode,” but this doesn’t stop her from still being fearful of falling off. The scene develops these conflicting emotions in Tess, as well as the reader. It generates skepticism towards Alec and introduces the ambiguity seen throughout the rest of the rape scene.
Hardy further develops Alec’s ambiguous character by demonstrating the power he has over Tess. At this point in the narrative, Tess has been up since five in the morning, and as “it was now nearly one o’clock,” she was understandably tired. When Alec puts his arm around her waist to support the drowsy Tess, it “immediately put her on the defensive,” causing her to push him.

‘That is devilish unkind!’ he said. ‘I mean no harm—only to keep you from falling.’

She pondered suspiciously; till, thinking that this might after all be true, she relented, and said quite humbly, ‘I beg your pardon, sir.’

‘I won’t pardon you unless you show some confidence in me. Good God!’ he burst out, ‘what am I, to be repulsed so by a mere chit like you? For near three mortal months have you trifled with my feelings, eluded me, and snubbed me; and I won’t stand it!’ (84)

Hardy’s use of the dash after Alec says “I mean no harm” provides a pause for the reader to question the verity of his statement. The long dash hints at a qualifier, something that suggests Alec might not be telling the whole truth. Hardy also utilizes words like “defensive” and “suspiciously,” diction that indicates Tess is on her guard and there might be something to fear in Alec. Next, in this passage, as in others, Alec’s speech is often marked by exclamation points. Hardy has painted Alec as an emotional character, easily aroused by his environment and likely to “burst out.” Finally, we see Alec assert his dominant societal role when he refers to Tess as “a mere chit.” This term works to lower Tess’s self-esteem, helping him realize the sexual entitlement he feels towards her. He also
insists that she has been eluding him, and he “won’t stand it” any longer, which is a threatening statement that suggests action and asserts his power over her.

Immediately following this aggressive exchange, Alec is suddenly affectionate towards Tess, which, in contrast to the preceding anger, adds to the ambiguity of his character. Alec asks, ‘Mayn’t I treat you as a lover?’ creating a sharp shift that is confusing to both Tess and the reader. This is demonstrated in Tess’s response: “She drew a quick pettish breath of objection, writhing uneasily on her seat, looked far ahead, and murmured, ‘I don’t know—I wish—how can I say yes or no when—’” (85). Here Hardy shows Tess go through a range of emotions, first of exasperation in her “breath of objection,” then discomfort as she writhes in her seat, then desperation when she looks ahead to see if they are arriving anytime soon. She explicitly answers with a non-answer to Alec’s question, which shows how difficult of a situation she is in. On the one hand, Tess doesn’t want to be unjustly mistrustful or ungrateful to her employer who has helped her family, but at the same time she is concerned for her safety. By using dashes in this situation, Hardy makes Tess pause in her speech, thus showing that she is thinking hard about how exactly to respond to the situation she is in. The dashes represent the ambivalence she feels towards Alec, and her uncertainty about how she should treat him.

It is understandable that Tess is doubtful of Alec due to Hardy’s characterization of him. Alec is not entirely villainous. In fact there are times when he shows kindness to Tess, as when she is cold in the Chase: “‘Nights grow chilly in September. Let me see.’ He pulled off a light overcoat that he had worn, and put it round her tenderly. ‘That’s it—now you’ll feel warmer,’ he continued” (87). Here Alec is described as acting “tenderly” and sacrifices his own warmth for the comfort of Tess. In moments like these, both Tess and the reader
question their feelings of distrust for Alec, as he demonstrates thoughtfulness and compassion. Hardy also doesn’t make the rape seem premeditated as he writes that Alec “had, in fact, ridden quite at random for over an hour, taking any turning that came to hand in order to prolong companionship with her, and giving far more attention to Tess’s moonlit person than to any wayside object” (87). Because it is the impartial narrator explaining Alec’s motives, instead of Alec himself, the reader is led to believe that Alec’s motivations for wandering into the Chase were only to spend more time with Tess, not to isolate and rape her. Alec’s conflicting characteristics heighten the ambiguity of the rape itself. Had Hardy chosen to depict Alec as a traditional villain, with only ill intentions, it would be easier to conclude that what happened in the Chase was rape, not seduction. However, by portraying Alec as seemingly compassionate and thoughtful, it is harder to assume that the same man would choose to rape Tess a moment later.

However, there is evidence in the text that would lead one to assume that what did in fact occur was rape. When Alec returns from figuring out their location, he almost steps on Tess: “‘Tess!’ said d’Urberville. There was no answer.” Tess is also described as “sleeping soundly.” If Tess were asleep, she would not have been able to consent to any sexual intercourse initiated by Alec. She does not respond when Alec says her name, and it is safe to assume that she remained asleep until it was too late. In chapter twelve, when Alec tries to stop Tess from leaving, she explicitly says, “‘I didn’t understand your meaning till it was too late.’” “Too late” implies that something occurred, and that she regretted what happened. Also, the fact that she didn’t understand his meaning suggests that had she, she would have responded differently, possibly fighting back before it was “too late.”
As mentioned previously, Hardy uses dashes in dialogue to build suspense, thus leading the reader to expect an event that resolves this tension. Every conversation that Alec and Tess have in chapter eleven contains dashes, with twenty total in the chapter. These dashes represent a hesitation of speech where the speakers are thinking about what they are going to say next, thus censoring themselves from revealing their true thoughts. For Tess, this means she conceals her fear of Alec and resists scolding him for being too forward. For Alec, these dashes allow him to express the sexual tension he feels around Tess. He doesn’t want to be too forward, but these long pauses work as a way for him to be suggestive, without saying anything explicitly. For example, Alec says to Tess, “You have only that puffy muslin dress on—how’s that?” The pause the dash creates suggests that the thought of Tess’s clothing and the warmth of her body distract Alec. This pause also gives the reader time to realize that Alec has noticed Tess’s clothing and comments in such a way that seems purely sensory, until he remembers to add “how’s that,” as if realizing that his comment alone was aggressively sensual. This building of sexual tension, paired with Tess’s increasing hesitation, lead the reader to expect a climactic scene in which these developments are resolved. However, that is not what Hardy gives.

The closest Hardy comes to saying that Tess was raped is when the narrator says, 

Doubtless some of Tess d’Urberville’s mailed ancestors rollicking home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time. But though to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children may be a morality good enough for divinities, it is scorned by average human nature; and it therefore does not mend the matter. (88)
This quote shows a comparison between Alec and the type of upper class gentlemen who abuse their status to sexually assault poor, common country girls. Purposely renaming Tess “Tess d’Urberville” gives a direct tie to her d’Urberville line as the ancestors the narrator is referencing. These men would have been ones of status and wealth, like Alec, and the “peasant girls” they were persecuting would have been similar to Tess. The evidence for rape comes in when these activities are referred to as “sin.” If what these men, including Alec, did was a sin, then that implies it was not consensual sex, but instead a violent act on behalf of the men. If it was an act done by both men and women they would both be guilty of sinning, but the narrator places blame only on the men, signifying sexual assault.

Just as the rape is about to take place, Hardy again demonstrates self-censorship when he chooses to omit the details of the rape and shifts to a distanced narrator, removed from the events instead. The story is no longer down on the ground with Tess and Alec, but instead is being told through a vague reflection on what happened. By keeping the reader at a distance from the scene, it exaggerates the fact that there was no one present to witness the scene, and no one there to help Tess. Despite this, Hardy has the narrator ask repeated rhetorical questions: “But, might some say, where was Tess’s guardian angel? where was the providence of her simple faith?” and, “Why it was that on this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive.” These questions call on the reader directly for an answer. However, Hardy chose to give the reader no insight into the actual rape, so the reader is left feeling helpless. This feeling of helplessness in the reader reinforces how hopeless Tess’s situation was.
By depicting the rape scene through the viewpoint of an omniscient narrator reflecting back on the scene, Hardy removes the burden on himself to explicitly explain what happened. The narrator never once uses the word “rape” but merely refers to the event through generalized statements. Ultimately there is no definitive statement from Hardy confirming that Alec raped Tess. However, the evidence in the text shows that Hardy crafted the scene to be intentionally ambiguous, from Alec’s contradictory characteristics to the ambiguity in the narrator’s reflection on the scene. Beyond causing the reader to question the nature of rape, this ambiguity serves as a form of self-censorship by Hardy. He has deliberately avoided depicting the specifics of what occurs in the Chase when Alec returns, and neither confirms or denies that what happened was rape anywhere in the text.

Finally, distancing the narration from Tess’s rape allows the narrator’s comments to be applicable to all cases of rape. The scene itself is censored, Hardy’s intention is not; by shifting to the detached, mythical narration to conclude the chapter, he makes the question of “why?” applicable to all situations of rape, no matter the time period or location. It is more than just a question of “why does rape happen?” but also “why is there no one stopping it?” This study shows how limitations and restrictions, such as those of the late 19th century publishing environment, can actually lead to a more creative and nuanced treatment. It is the ambiguity that makes the rape scene so powerful and allows it to transcend itself, becoming universally important when considering the complexities and consequences of rape.
Part 2: The Evolution of Tess

Thomas Hardy's first notion of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* came in 1887. W.F. Tillotson & Son approached Hardy with a thousand guineas if he could produce a story of similar length to *The Woodlanders*. Three months later, Hardy signed a contract to deliver the first four installments of his next serial by June 1889. He began writing *Tess* in September 1888, and it soon began to take shape as a story addressing seduction and female purity. When Tillotson read the manuscript, however, he was “distinctly taken aback...[W.F. Tillotson & Son] at once suggested that the story should be recast and certain scenes and incidents deleted entirely” (Gatrell and Grindle 4). Hardy would not concede this, so his agreement with Tillotson & Son was cancelled.

Following this incident, Hardy reached out to the *Graphic*, *Murray's Magazine* and *Macmillan's Magazine* about publishing a serialization of *Tess*. After reading the manuscript, however, both *Murray's* and *Macmillan's* had similar responses as Tillotson. The editor of *Murray's*, Edward Arnold, wrote to Hardy in November 1889:

I have now finished the perusal of the M.S. you sent me, and have also consulted Mr. Murray on the subject, and we are agreed that the story, powerful though it be, is not, in our opinion, well adapted for publication in this magazine.

When I had the pleasure of seeing you here some time ago, I told you my views about publishing stories where the plot involves frequent and detailed reference to immoral situations; I know well enough that these tragedies are being played out every day in our midst, but I believe the less publicity they have the better, and that
it is quite possible and very desirable for women to grow up and pass through life without knowledge of them. (Gatrell and Grindle 7)

Mowbray Morris, the editor of Macmillan’s, had a similar response, writing to Hardy:

You use the word succulent more than once to describe the general appearance & condition of the Frome Valley. Perhaps I might say that the general impression left on me by reading your story—so far as it has gone—is one of rather too much succulence. All this, I know, makes the story ‘entirely modern’, & will therefore, I have no doubt, bring it plenty of praise. I must confess, however, to being rather too old-fashioned—as I suppose I must call it—to quite relish the entirely modern style of fiction. (Gatrell and Grindle 9)

Both of these responses demonstrate how publishers deemed Hardy’s original manuscript of Tess inappropriate for their audiences. The main objection they seemed to have with Tess was that it violated “old-fashioned” values, and crossed the line into “immoral” subjects. Both responses are an odd mixture of overly polite speech, with complements to the power of Tess, while also seriously rejecting the idea of ever publishing the story. Reputation and image were clearly more important to these publications than important, albeit “modern,” literature.

It is surprising that Hardy did not edit the manuscript before forwarding it to potential publishers after the rejection he received from Tillotson. It would have been safe for him to assume that similar magazines would have the same grounds for rejection. One reason he may have done this is suggested by Hardy scholars Juliet Grindle and Simon Gatrell who write, “Hardy decided to build up evidence to support such a public outburst as this by consciously inviting rejections from the two magazine editors who he had best
reason to believe would provide them.” Hardy may have used these rejections as fuel for his essay “Candour in English Fiction” that he published in 1890 in the *New Review*. This essay expressed Hardy’s exasperation with the literary atmosphere of the late 1800s, particularly that of the serial-fiction writer like himself. He condemned those who tried to hide the truth of human behavior and wrote that an artist weeps “when he first discovers the fearful price that he has to pay for the privilege of writing in the English language.” (Gatrell and Grindle 10) This essay was critical as it expressed not only Hardy’s qualms, but also those of many writers at the time who felt creatively stifled. However, writers understood that to make a living as an artist, it required making sacrifices to publish their work in magazines that could provide an income.

Hardy eventually came to an agreement with the *Graphic* magazine to publish *Tess*. He had been corresponding with Arthur Locker, the publication’s editor, who had persistently asked Hardy for a full-length serial every year since 1887. Each time, Hardy declined, claiming too much work on hand. However, once his arrangement with Tillotson was no longer viable, he turned to the *Graphic*. The *Graphic* was an illustrated, weekly magazine that covered a variety of topics from arts and science to royal occasions and sport. Hardy agreed in December of 1889 to deliver the first part of the manuscript to Locker by September of 1890. However, it can be figured that at this time Hardy already had a large portion of the story written, as he had sent a manuscript to Tillotson. Therefore, he should have had an ample amount to send to Locker, but instead asked for another year. Tillotson’s rejection revealed to Hardy that he had to make serious edits to his story before it would be ready for publication in any magazine with a wide, public readership.
There is no evidence suggesting the Locker had any objection to the manuscript Hardy eventually sent him, but Hardy took it upon himself to edit the original manuscript in an attempt to make *Tess* more marketable. Some of the most significant omissions made to the serial manuscript were the rape scene in the Chase and Sorrow's baptism and burial. However, Hardy did not scrap these sections altogether. The baptism and burial of Sorrow were published as a separate story titled “The Midnight Baptism” in the *Fortnightly Review* in May of 1891, the first part of *Tess* to be printed. The rape scene and its preceding events were published in November 1891 under the title “Saturday Night in Arcady” in the *National Observer*, a paper with a more liberal reputation. The first serial installment of *Tess* appeared on July 4, 1891 in the *Graphic* and ran for twenty-four weeks. Hardy had independently secured publication for *Tess* in America in *Harper's Bazar*, when it first appeared in July 18, 1891 and ran for twenty-six weeks. It is significant to note that the manuscript Hardy sent to *Harper's* was the same he originally sent Tillotson, and therefore did not have the same omissions to the story that the *Graphic* did. Hardy was less concerned with the American version of the text, as there is evidence that *Harper's* made edits to the text in order to “Americanize” certain words, sometimes incorrectly.

Soon after releasing *Tess* as a serial, Hardy shifted his focus to publishing the story in volume form. By the beginning of December 1891, *Tess* was released in three volumes. The initial 1,000 copies sold quickly, but for the second edition Hardy made over sixty changes to the original, six or seven being substantive. This was likely as a result of the initial feedback from friends and the literary community on the first edition. As the demand for the book increased, Hardy's publishers Osgood, McIlvaine & Co. decided it would be more efficient to issue a one-volume edition of *Tess*. Before the end of 1892 there were five
more rounds of printing, each one offering Hardy a chance to make alterations to the text. In 1895, at Osgood’s proposal, Hardy released a collected edition of all of his works (except *Under the Greenwood Tree*). *Tess* was the first of the collection published, and the plates from *Tess’s* 1892 edition were used to set the style. Using the 1892 plates restricted Hardy from making further alterations, although he did make alterations to his other works that were republished for this edition. In 1900, *Tess* was released as a sixpenny paperback, for which Hardy, once again, made substantial revisions. In 1902, Macmillans took over as Hardy’s publisher and issued eight Uniform Editions and seven Pocket Editions of Hardy’s work between 1902 and 1914. The last edition Hardy was involved with was the Wessex Edition, published in 1912 by Macmillans. Hardy took on the task of rereading and revising *Tess* one last time, writing what is now accepted as the official wording of the text. Many editions of *Tess* have been printed since the Wessex Edition, but it is the Wessex Edition, with Hardy’s final alterations, that serves as the authority.

The nature of Hardy’s edits to the text varied from simple vocabulary changes to substantial plot points. The small changes he made regarding word choice show that he was tireless in refining his work and making sure its presentation was exactly how he wanted. Hardy was also concerned with character development, and made tweaks such as age and personality traits in Alec and Angel. Although these changes seem minor, Hardy felt that refining each scene and character was crucial to the overall story. He also made more substantive revisions, which included editing out sections of the text that were too sexual or sacrilegious. As mentioned previously, this was a result of the pressures Hardy encountered as a writer in the late-Victorian publishing environment.
One area of the text that was subject to many revisions throughout the publication of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was the rape scene and the events immediately preceding it. The original manuscript is the least sanitized version of the rape scene, whereas the *Graphic* version is the most cleansed. As subsequent editions were published, the rape scene gradually became more true to the manuscript, with the 1912 edition being the most true to Hardy's original presentation of the scene. In every version of the rape scene, Tess goes to Chaseborough, is rescued by Alec on her walk home and is then raped. This is consistent. However, her characterization is slightly different. Gatrell and Grindle explain:

Sue is still shown as being more timid, less outgoing than Tess: Sue on her way home from Chaseborough is ‘glad to cling to the friendly shelter of any elderly neighbour’, while Tess looks for her ‘fellows at nightfall, to have the protection of their companionship’; Sue doesn’t call the Trantridge villages a ‘whorage’, nor does she claim to be able to ‘floor half a doze’ of them—and she is ‘horrified’ when Car Darch strips off, Tess merely ‘surprised’. (28)

Alec's characterization and his relationship with Tess are also different in the original manuscript. In the manuscript, when Tess encounters Alec at the Chaseborough dance and declines his offer for a ride home, he says, “I am driving home. Come to The Stag and you shall ride with me. Do, Sue! I will start as soon as ever you like—say in a few minutes?” However, in the final version Alec instead says, “Do not. I have only a saddle-horse here today; but come to The Flower-de-Luce, and I’ll hire a trap, and drive you home with me.” The difference is small, but in the final version Alec is much more commanding in how he addresses Tess. The difference in his tone shows a very different kind of relationship, one less considerate and more aggressive. By making these edits in the characterization of Tess
and Alec, Hardy emphasizes Tess’s self-assurance but also Alec’s power over her. These changes make rape more likely and show that Hardy intended the scene to be read as such, as opposed to merely a seduction.

Originally, what occurred after the interaction at Chaseborough was the rape scene itself, but Hardy consciously chose to omit it from the Graphic serialization of the story. The Graphic was a successful illustrated weekly magazine that was read by the middle-class Victorian public. It was considered a “household reading”, as Hardy refers to it in Candour in English Fiction, meaning that the whole household, including younger members, read it. Knowing this, and having already received three rejections of the original manuscript, it is logical that Hardy would have practiced self-censorship by removing the rape scene in the Graphic version. As a substitute for the rape, Hardy wrote a mock marriage between Tess and Alec. Tess tells her mother:

“He made love to me, as you said he would do; and he asked me to marry him, also just as you declared he would. I never have liked him; but at last I agreed, knowing you’d be angry if I didn’t...I drove with him to Melchester, and there in a private room I went through the form of marriage with him as before a registrar. A few weeks after, I found out that it was not the registrar’s house we had gone to, as I had supposed, but the house of a friend of his, who had played the part of the registrar.”

(Laird 151)

By substituting a mock marriage, however, “the Graphic offered its readers a nonsensical story in which no seduction took place and no child was born to the heroine” (Laird 151). The story loses importance when the rape is removed; it still serves to warn young women of the dangers of men, but it trivializes the consequences that Tess, and girls like her, face
as a result of rape. *Tess* was Hardy's way of making a public service announcement about a topic that was avoided under the pretense of politeness. Hardy understood that ignoring rape didn't make it go away, and removing the rape scene diminished the power of the story. Despite this sacrifice, Hardy knew that self-censorship was the only way *Tess* was going to be published by a magazine like the *Graphic*.

When the First Edition volume of *Tess* was published in 1891, Hardy was no longer obligated to write for the *Graphic*’s readership and therefore reintroduced the rape scene back into the narrative. However, what was reintroduced still felt the aftermath of censorship. Laird writes:

> It is, of course, well known that, in general terms, the First Edition offers an infinitely more honest and satisfying account of the story than does the *Graphic*: what is not widely appreciated is the fact that some of the manuscript passages, modified or omitted on moralistic ground in the *Graphic*, were not fully restored when the First Edition appeared. (Laird 158)

With the release of the 1892 Fifth Edition, Hardy was able to reedit the text in order to make the story even less sanitized and closer to the original manuscript. There are three main differences in the rape scene from the 1891 First Edition and the 1892 Fifth Edition. In the First Edition, when Tess and Alec are lost in the Chase it reads: “He turned the horse’s head into the bushes, hitched him to a bough, and pulling off a light dust-coat that he wore, spread it upon the thick leaves.” (Hardy 136) In the Fifth Edition, Alec instead “made a sort of couch or nest for her in the deep mass of dead leaves.” This slight change shows the care Alec took to make Tess comfortable, but the word “couch” has sensuous
undertones that conflict with the protective act. This small change shifts the tone and furthers Alec’s moral ambiguity, as discussed in Section 1 of this essay.

The second main difference is that the Fifth Edition restores the only physical details of the rape, originally present in the manuscript, but omitted in the First Edition. “He knelt and bent lower, till her breath warmed his face, and in a moment his cheek was in contact with hers. She was sleeping soundly, and on her eyelashes there lingered tears.” (Hardy 90) In the restored passage, Alec physically touches Tess while she is asleep. This heightens the sensuality of the scene and shows that Alec has no problem touching Tess without her consent.

Finally, in the First Edition Alec offers Tess a draught of cordial to warm her up. This scene was present in the manuscript, but Hardy removed it by the Fifth Edition. Alec giving Tess a drink suggests that she is under the influence of alcohol or a sleeping draught, both of which would have made it easier for him to rape her. By removing this scene, Hardy “made Alec marginally less culpable and Tess freer to exercise her will.” (Gatrell and Grindle 45) It makes the possibility of rape slightly more ambiguous, yet reinforces this theme, which is central to the novel. These alterations show how it took two rounds of revisions for the rape scene to reach its truest form; it became increasing sensual and suggestive of rape with each subsequent edition. The initial versions of this scene show that Hardy felt pressure as an author in the Victorian period to censor his work.

After the Fifth Edition, the final alteration to the rape scene occurred in the 1912 Wessex Edition with the reintroduction of the Chaseborough dance. This scene had been removed from the narrative for the Graphic serialization of Tess, as it contained sensuous behavior Hardy deemed inappropriate for the Graphic’s readership, as evidenced by his
self-censorship of it. Instead, Hardy published the sketch under the title “Saturday Night in Arcady” in the *National Observer*, a magazine with a more liberal reputation and an adult readership. However, when restoring the novel for the 1891 First Edition, the dance scene was mysteriously omitted. Instead, the First Edition contained a conflation of two different scenes in the manuscript, originally separated by the dance itself. Hardy claimed that the scene had been “overlooked” and that there was “a preliminary description of a country-people’s dance accidentally omitted in the three-volume and subsequent editions until 1912.” (Laird 180) However, scholars agree that it was no accident that this scene was omitted:

When all the textual evidence is examined, it become obvious that the claim made in both of these statements—that the section referred to was omitted by accident—is completely unfounded. And, indeed, it soon becomes apparent that only one conclusion is valid: that Hardy deliberately chose to omit from the First Edition the manuscript material in question. This material is, in essence, the account of the Chaseborough dance. (Laird 180)

It is understandable that Hardy may have felt the need to omit the Chaseborough dance, as it contains drinking, sensual dancing, and immoral undertones that may have threatened a positive reception of *Tess*. Over twenty years after its initial publication, *Tess* was still affected by the constraints that necessitated Hardy to censor his work.

Finally, Hardy expressed his frustration with the limitations publication had placed on *Tess* through the prefaces he wrote for each edition. For him, a preface served as a way to shape the readers view of the story and make his case for the choices he made. For the First Edition, when the story was first restored, Hardy prefaced the novel by writing:
The main portion of the following story appeared—with slight modifications—in the Graphic newspaper; other chapters, more especially addressed to adult readers, in the Fortnightly Review and the National Observer, as episodic sketches. My thanks are tendered to the editors and proprietors of those periodicals for enabling me now to piece the trunk and limbs of the novel together, and print it complete, as originally written two years ago.

I will just add that the story is sent out in all sincerity of purpose, as an attempt to give artistic form to a true sequence of things; and in respect of the book’s opinions and sentiments, I would ask any too genteel reader, who cannot endure to have said what everybody nowadays thinks and feels, to remember a well-worn sentence of St Jerome’s: If an offence come out of the truth, better is it that the offence come than that the truth be concealed.

This statement is in direct response to the difficulties Hardy faced publishing Tess. He was clearly frustrated that he had to dissect Tess in order to publish it; the imagery of “trunk and limbs” is gruesome and violent, a clear sign of his anger. He stated that it is now “complete, as originally written two years ago.” This suggests that any previous manifestation was incomplete, and he had to wait an entire two years to see his intended narrative published as a whole. The second paragraph confirms his exasperation; he calls out the “too genteel reader”, referencing the magazines who rejected Tess in order to protect their subscribers. Hardy also emphasized “truth” in the preface. By saying that this edition of Tess is the truth, he implied that the edited Graphic version was not the honest story. In a way, the Graphic readers were swindled, and Hardy points this out as a sort of revenge for having to edit Tess in the first place.
Hardy wrote prefaces for each subsequent edition in 1892, 1895 and 1912. These prefaces demonstrate the same exasperated tone he expressed in his preface to the First Edition. He repeatedly references his critics and readers, which were clearly a concern to him. This offers an explanation for why he was so eager to make alterations to the text: pleasing his audience was important to him. That isn’t to say that he was willing to compromise his artistic integrity to do so. All of his prefaces are concerned with defending the topics he addresses in *Tess* as truths. He is concerned with his public reception, yes, but ultimately Hardy cared about addressing topics of importance that he felt were relevant to Victorian society. Therefore, it is understandable that the censorship of *Tess* frustrated him. It explains the dedication Hardy exhibited through the many years and editions he spent making *Tess* as poignant as possible.

**Conclusion**

Unfortunately, rape is something that still happens in today’s society. College campuses, big cities, small towns; stories of attack are everywhere. Even with medical and legal advancements, most attackers go unprosecuted. The blame often falls on the victim, shaming the woman for wearing revealing clothing or somehow “asking for it.” All of this is reminiscent of what Thomas Hardy wrote about in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. Hardy uses characterization, syntactical and narrative devices to create a rape scene that not only calls attention to rape in the late-Victorian era, but creates a situation that transcends itself, not limited to the era it was penned in. Hardy used *Tess* to speak up about an issue that was important to him, influenced partially by his familiarity with the unjust laws surrounding
women’s rights at the time. Unfortunately, not everyone felt the way Hardy did, as he struggled to find a magazine to publish Tess. Rape was deemed too impolite for family magazines like Murray’s and Macmillan’s. It was not until Hardy censored the rape scene that Tess was published in the Graphic. Despite a Victorian preoccupation with virginity, rape was not something the public readership wanted to think about. This is seen today as well, as women are too often shamed into silence. The fear of being labeled a slut, the modern equivalent of a “fallen women,” overcomes the desire for justice. However, Hardy was persistent in his cause, revising Tess for over twenty years to ensure that Tess’s tragedy, and the tragedy of many other women, was faithfully and honestly presented. Hardy shows us that even if we face opposition, we shouldn’t give up making our voices heard and our causes known; it is truth and justice we should aim for, even if you have to make sacrifices to get there.


