Tess Of The D'urbervilles – A Pure Survivor An Analysis Of Thomas Hardy, Victorian Women, & Modern Media

Jesse C. Marin

University of Texas at El Paso

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.utep.edu/open_etd

Part of the Comparative Literature Commons, and the Film and Media Studies Commons

Recommended Citation


https://scholarworks.utep.edu/open_etd/3994

This is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UTEP. For more information, please contact lweber@utep.edu.
TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES – A PURE SURVIVOR

AN ANALYSIS OF THOMAS HARDY,

VICTORIAN WOMEN,

& MODERN

MEDIA

Jesse Cristian Marin

Master’s Program in English and American Literature

APPROVED:

____________________________________________________________________
Barbara Zimbalist, Ph.D., Chair

____________________________________________________________________
Maryse Jayasuriya, Ph.D.

____________________________________________________________________
Oishani Sengupta, Ph.D.

____________________________________________________________________
Stephen L. Crites, Jr., Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School
Dedication

To all the pure women I have known in my life: my mother, my sister, colleagues, and friends.

To anyone who has ever been made to feel like a victim at the hands of an abuser.

To a mentor who never gave up on me through this turbulent chapter in my life, Dr. Jayasuriya.

To the next phase in my life and to the many who have helped me along the way.
TESS OF THE D’URBERVILLES – A PURE SURVIVOR

AN ANALYSIS OF THOMAS HARDY,

VICTORIAN WOMEN,

& MODERN

MEDIA

by

JESSE CRISTIAN MARIN, B.A.

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

inPartial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

December 2023
Acknowledgements

Thank you, Dr. Maryse Jayasuriya, who oversaw this project since its inception. Dr. Jayasuriya was an invaluable resource in providing materials and feedback that guided me to complete this project. Her unswerving faith in my writing and continued support has meant a lot to me throughout this time of highs and lows in my personal life that made this seem like an unattainable goal. Here’s to that attainment.

Thank you, Dr. Barabara Zimbalist, for helping make that final push and granting me the chance to put together this project. Dr. Zimbalist worked hard to ensure this project was kept on track and always pushed for my success.

Lastly, special thanks to Dr. Lauren Rosenberg and Dr. Joe Ortiz who helped facilitate my transition into graduate school by providing opportunities in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic that allowed me to not only continue my education but provide for those I care for.

I would like to acknowledge the support of my family and my colleagues in their kind words and support throughout this journey. Thank you all for sharing laughter, tears, hopes, fears, stress, and cheers along the way.

I would be remiss to not also acknowledge my cats for their constant supervision and joining in as guests during all virtual sessions throughout my graduate career. They have been rewarded with many snacks along the way.
# Table of Contents

Dedication ................................................................................................................................. iii

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. v

Table of Contents ...................................................................................................................... vi

Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1 ................................................................................................................................ 10
  Women in the Victorian Age ................................................................................................... 11
  Tess—Defining Purity, Roles in Victorian England, and Hardy’s Insights ......................... 25

Chapter 2 ................................................................................................................................ 37
  Parallels Between Art and Life in Roman Polanski’s *Tess* ............................................. 37
  British Media and the #MeToo Movement ........................................................................... 53

Works Cited ............................................................................................................................... 70

Vita 79
Introduction

“People need their lives reflected, that's the whole point...it matters to people.”

Maggie Radcliffe, *Broadchurch*

One of the most powerful experiences I had was learning that women in my family were survivors of sexual assault at young ages. Assault was committed against them by trusted partners or due to random coincidence. I led a life sheltered from such knowledge prior to this revelation at the cusp of my adulthood. I write this as a cisgender man, a positionality which may make my ignorance apparent on this subject. Yet the revelation of this all-too-common truth, “the danger in men-folk,” (Hardy 94) pervading the lives of those I had known all through my life encountering these evils was devastating and made me feel a sense of powerlessness.

It was also during this time that another, decidedly more positive experience began to have increasingly more influence in my life. I had begun discovering a love of literature in my adolescence and found myself immersed in the world of English Literature—be it Dickens, Wilde, or more contemporary authors such as Douglas Adams or Neil Gaiman. Their works resonated immensely in the mind of a fledgling Anglophile. I could easily have ventured into the postmodern, satirical, and surrealist visions of urban fantasy or science fiction in their vast array of meaning, and yet it was the endurance of these Victorian masterpieces that convinced me to turn my attention to them when I entered my undergraduate and subsequent graduate career.

These two experiences would collide when I first read *Tess of the D’urbervilles*. Hardy’s novel felt like a validation of a hard truth that too many women face in a patriarchal society that seldom reprimands predatory men. From an anthropological point of view, the circumstances are unlikely to be remarkable, but to take such a perspective is to remove the humanity that grounds
these experiences to each of our lives. In that respect, Hardy presents an adolescent heroine who is *innocent*, spirited, and offered the promise of greatness through a forgotten noble lineage. It is a journey that offers much in the way of prospects for Tess and her family, but the tone is dissonant and riddled with gothic, foreboding imagery as she stays in the company of Alec, a nouveau rich man who has no legitimate claim to the D’Urberville name. The ominous atmosphere culminates when Alec assaults her in the forest as she sleeps.

All this happens in the first phase of the novel, and what was once a tale of restoring some greatness becomes a survivor’s tale. Tess gives birth to a child following her assault, and names the baby Sorrow before the infant dies shortly thereafter. Hardy makes the reader believe that Tess is allowed to bury the past and even move past the most tragic event of her young life. Tess finds a new life as a dairy worker at Talbothays, which seems to offer a new beginning for her as well as offering a rekindled affection for Angel Clare, whom she met shortly before her sorrowful sojourn to reclaim the name of D’Urberville. Angel offers a promise of happiness, seeming to live up to his namesake as he pursues Tess, with the dairy serving as a veritable Eden for the pair “in a sight of fairy-tale lushness and fertility” (Lyons). The relationship is a kind and gentle bond that leads to marriage, but both lovers have a secret to impart.

Tragedy strikes, once again to the disadvantage of women, when Tess confesses her secret to her new husband. Angel finds himself married to a woman who is a “maiden no more.” Patriarchal hypocrisy is in motion, as Angel’s disgust follows his recollection of having a connection with a sex-worker by his own volition. Angel even acknowledges Tess as inculpable of that which was brought upon her, but he is unable to reconcile her experience with Victorian expectations of a bride, despite Angel being a contrarian to tradition and longing to find truth in nature. This moment leads Angel to become a missionary on a whim, leaving Tess on her own.
Tess endures, unwilling to bring shame to the Clare family or the Durbeyfields, as she accepts menial jobs until the passing of the family patriarch. Alec has re-entered Tess’s life, a reformed man of the cloth, robes that he quickly abandons upon hearing of Tess’s misfortune. With no other recourse, Tess is forced to go back to her assailant to ensure the financial security of her family. Although Tess claims she does not see Alec as some great evil, Hardy returns to the notion of paradise with Alec casting himself as, “the old other one, come to tempt you in the disguise of an inferior animal” (Hardy 369). The allusion makes for a fitting allegory as Alec is the source of Tess’s fall according to Victorian mores, including an unlawful union with Alec as a married woman.

Angel, returned from missionary work, arrives to find Tess in the hands of Alec. Yet this should not be mistaken as a passive action, as Tess becomes an active figure, more than ever, in a sequence that is not shown to the reader. The bloody aftermath of Alec’s murder is the only indication of his demise, a victim of the person he once preyed upon. Tess has committed murder as an act of retribution against a man who exploited her, and subsequently finds herself on the run from the authorities, assisted by her rightful husband. It is in these moments that a romance is rekindled in what promise the couple could have had if understanding triumphed over reactionary sentiments, but this glimpse is merely borrowed time for the pair. The tragedy ends in much the same way it begins, with Tess asleep in a clearing. She is found by the authorities and is resigned to her fate, which is execution.

This synopsis acts as a testament to Tess’s character, fueled by pride and humility in equal measure. The beauty and tragedy of the story lie in the opportunities found for this promising young woman before being abandoned by a grim reality. It is a novel that is a survivor’s tale, a revenge narrative, and a tale of simple perseverance. A myriad of complex
emotions fuel this novel, and as such make it accessible to a wide range of audiences. There is beauty and a harrowing message which was all too apparent, even in the Victorian age as made apparent by Clementina Black, a feminist writer and contemporary of Hardy, who received the novel as an unfortunate truth of the reality of the era, summarizing its message as “founded on a recognition of the ironic truth which we all know in our hearts, and are all forbidden to say aloud, that the richest kind of womanly nature, the most direct, sincere, and passionate, is the most liable to be caught in that sort of pitfall which social convention stamps as an irretrievable disgrace” (Cox 201).

This project was largely inspired by W.T. Stead’s “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon,” an exposé of the very real dangers of sex trafficking in Victorian England. Perhaps most shockingly, Stead was able to purchase a girl, Eliza Armstrong, for a meagre sum of five pounds. Coupled with baby farming—the practice of turning over children to dubious caretakers, where children were most commonly victims of infanticide—the dangers present in this urban environment were very real (Lee). There is a hint of the sensational, fueling the perception of an evil world without bearing credence to facts as a public reacts to spectacle rather than statistics. However, these are the dangers the public would be made wary of, have a significant influence in legislature by bringing major reforms back into a political discussion before being ratified a month after the exposé.

Tess is no child by the legal definition, but she is just as ignorant of the workings of the world. Tess is a figure who is innocent in the sense that she is not acquainted with the world. While Tess laments that Mrs. Durbeyfield had never informed her of the dangers of men, audiences are given a parable to combat such ignorance through Hardy’s fiction, which lays bare a situation that is all too common. I believe this is part of Hardy’s definition in labeling Tess as a
“pure woman,” a term which also comes to indicate all women based on the definition of wholeness or complete according to the Oxford English Dictionary, “complete, entire” (“pure,” OED). Tess is a representative of all women; through her women can see her example so that they may not have to face the same trials as the doomed protagonist. Tess is not the passive victim. I have touched upon the survival narrative, and while the end of the novel may defy such a genre, I feel there is much strength to be found in the novel.

The whole journey is a testament to her character, and her fidelity to a dysfunctional family and alcoholic father. Tess is a character filled with empathy and a very tangible, if overwhelming, sense of responsibility, as she laments every downfall for the family, including the passing of the family horse, Prince, after his fatal accident with a mail cart. Tess even esteems the name of Clare over that of her own well-being as a dutiful wife, exemplifying the ideal married Victorian woman by reflecting the words of Coventry Patmore’s seminal poem “The Angel in the House,” “At any time, she's still his wife,/ Dearly devoted to his arms;/ She loves with love that cannot tire…” (Patmore, Canto IX, lines 19-21). Furthermore, Tess expresses kindness and humility as she does not wish any ill upon the vast majority of characters she encounters and does not see herself as above any role, no matter how demeaning. Through her virtue, there is a notion of sisterhood to be found as well through her protection of her sister, speaking candidly with her mother, earning the respect and friendship of the maids at Talbothays, and retaining those bonds through her abandonment at the hands of Angel. Tess’s remarkable strength through adversity is what cements her as an icon of survival, never abandoning her sense of self and her morality even through the most difficult of circumstances.

It is revolutionary of Hardy to consider Tess as a victim to be treated with empathy and without blame. In a society that still questions whether how a woman carries or dresses herself
should factor into why such a brutal and malicious crime to be committed against her, it is important to make that assertion and stand against shifting the blame onto victims. Tess is innocent in her initial naivete of the world and is willing to accept society’s condemnation so long as she can provide for her family and maintain the Durbeyfield name, even to the point of her sacrificing herself for everyone she holds dear. However, it is important to remember that Tess is not portrayed as merely an object to elicit sympathy from readers, but a person with autonomy, complete with aspirations, hopes, and fears as she reconciles with her past and navigates the world as best she can. A similar thesis is proposed by F.B. Pinion as he explores where Hardy and Tess find themselves in the canon of literature: “Tess is not angelic, though a ‘pure woman’ who does no wrong deliberately, she is human and makes mistakes, her weaknesses being hereditary. Her tragedy begins and ends as a result of self-sacrifices for her family; at these junctures her decisions are willed” (Pinion 100). Tess is not a banal subject of a misbegotten morality tale but a subject who is deeply personal to Hardy and is clearly admired within the scope of the narrative. While the structure of the story may play off as an average tale condemning women, common for characters in Victorian literature who have had sexual encounters outside of marriage, it is a subversion with that structure serving only as bookends to a tale that offers more humanity and insight rather than bitter judgement.

The murder of Alec D’Urberville may make the aspect of purity appear to be cynical and disingenuous. Yet, I don’t believe that is Hardy’s intention as readers see a heroine who accounts for her transgression and is resigned to pay the ultimate price for the murder of her assailant. Additionally, blame is laid squarely at the hands of Tess’s abusers, whether it is the predatory behavior of Alec or the neglect presented by Angel, whose name quickly becomes a misnomer through selfishness and his rigid adherence to convention in spite of fashioning himself as an
iconoclast. Lastly, and somewhat radically, I believe there is a metatextual purification to be found in Tess as she offers an outlet through fiction, a catharsis through carrying out her revenge. Tess is the character who can act on impulse and, by proxy, grant any victim of sexual assault a means to fulfil a desire to be rid of their assailant in a stunningly visceral way. It is a fantasy and an outlet that validates the feelings of contempt a reader might have towards someone so malicious, and may have healing properties, with roots in literature through such works as “Agamemnon” by Aeschylus. Haen and Webber note that “[t]he ultimate goal of working through revenge fantasies is to help traumatized clients return to the stream of life, moving beyond the need for splitting, traumatized attachment to the perpetrator and dangerous impulsivity, better able to integrate their trauma experience(s)” (91). Fiction can serve as a medium towards that end, offering a sort of wish fulfillment without seriously indulging in something unlawful and even steering away from the epicenter of that trauma. In this way, Tess can help purify anyone who has been wronged by offering a compelling tale where an assailant gets his just-desserts.

Context is vital to understanding the circumstances and the society that produced Thomas Hardy’s novel. As such, I will be reviewing the era through canonically established authors, the literary trope that would condemn women and firmly entrench itself in England’s national identity, and political movements guided by the law of Victorian England. This will showcase the hurdles of basic women’s rights that would continue throughout the reign of Queen Victoria, as well as the dangers that would be faced in the public and domestic spheres, endangering a woman’s very life. When tied together W.T. Stead’s expose in the Pall Mall Gazette, there are plenty of double standards to critique and shed insight on. Understanding these circumstances
makes it all the more poignant to see such a full-hearted defense from Hardy, and the endurance of a character whose narrative has persisted for well over a century.

Looking ahead, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* would see many adaptations, but perhaps the most notable is the 1970s film adaptation entitled *Tess*. The film is a product of a masterclass director but is easily a controversial product when considering director Roman Polanski’s own past. Weaving art in conjunction with the artist is easily a cornerstone of literary analysis, though popular wisdom often suggests a separation of the two. In the spirit of the former, I wanted to examine the controversy surrounding Polanski’s life, primarily through his assault of an underaged Samantha Geimer, which would directly influence the logistics of making the film and almost act in defiance of the film’s message.

*Tess’s* story resonates today because there are survivors of sexual assault, in a social environment that has become riddled with complications as one considers sexual extortion, the rapid availability of pornographic content fueling unrealistic and sometimes dangerous desires in exploring sexuality, the magnification of issues due to social media and the destructive nature of the general public’s impulsive reactions. This is why I chose to examine two shows produced in the past decade that connect thematically to Hardy and his message to examine modern-day survivor narratives and to showcase that Tess remains as relevant as ever as a figure who can inform and empower audiences. In this vein, I will be analyzing a procedural drama loosely inspired by Thomas Hardy in *Broadchurch*, as well a survivor story based on the personal lived experience of Michaela Coel in *I May Destroy You*, sharing expressions of support and idealizations of revenge that may both work towards healing for victims of sexual abuse.

There is a richness to *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* that seems to transcend figures like Lavinia (an early modern English adaptation of the classic Greek Philomela). Tess is adherent to
conventions and yet is granted her own volition and agency that makes her powerful. It is possible to label her a victim of Victorian hegemony, but it seems more indicative of the character’s strong convictions and integrity. Therein lies the beauty of Tess as she confronts tragedy largely on her own terms and in a way that never robs her of who she fundamentally is, making her the purest survivor and an inspiration whose story can offer healing and advocates for positive change.
Chapter 1

The Victorian era represented a peak of conservative values, emboldened by a monarch espousing virtue, the separation of public and private spheres in society according to gender roles, and spreading the interests of industry and colonialization over that of marginalized groups, even within the sceptered isle as a hegemony that would ostracize and control women in England. Women of the Victorian age were expected to maintain a high moral standard in service to their husbands and their families, and faced severe repercussions in society if they did not adhere to gender norms. Chief among these moral standards was the concept of chastity, often leading women who had carnal knowledge through premarital or extramarital sexual activity being ostracized as a fallen woman, a cultural concept rooted in religion and expanded to condemn women away from the domestic sphere, often driving them to sex work or menial labor. Many prominent authors would lament the disparities of the age, including Thomas Hardy’s interrogation of the idea of “the fallen woman,” crafting a poignant tale that humanizes a victim through what is largely a survivor’s tale, as Tess tries to rebuild her life, unflinchingly holding on to her principles with every twist of fate, offering insight through perseverance rather than society’s persecution.

In this chapter, I seek to provide historical context to how women were treated within the Victorian era, as well as evoke literary traditions accompanying the portrayal of women prior to exploring the critical intervention found at the end of the 19th century, with Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. Hardy’s penultimate novel presents a tragedy that was all too common of the era in a manner that offers candor and compassion, redefining purity and creating one of English literature’s most enduring survival narratives. This analysis will conclude with the
double standards laid bare in Hardy’s faithful representation of the story and a message of hope within this bleak narrative.

**WOMEN IN THE VICTORIAN AGE**

In capturing the zeitgeist of the Victorian era, one of the most famous opening passages of the era stems from Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*, in which the author offers a broad overview of a time period, rife with contradicting ideals existing, almost paradoxically, in tandem with one another:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way… (Dickens, 2)

Within the original context, Dickens is remarking upon the radically different political situations between the rise of the British empire and the chaos in France during the Reign of Terror. Yet, the quote takes on a new life towards the end of the iconic paragraph: “—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only” (Dickens 2). The quote offers a witty retort to sensationalist tendencies to label an era as the best or worst by comparison, a timeless phenomenon that offers no legitimate insight beyond the veil of hyperbole. This aside seems to diminish the impact of such radical contrasts, making Dickens’s observations seem trivial in connecting concurrent disparities found towards the end of the 18th century. Yet Dickens does not deny the fact that these contrasts exist, which allows the quote to be taken in earnest and even applied directly into the era in which Dickens wrote.
In analyzing Dickens’s “present period,” many circumstances within the Victorian era evoke such polarizing differences, namely along the lines of class and sex. This anxiety fits perfectly with the contrasting existence between men and women in Victorian England, where the latter were only offered the bare minimum in terms of rights, serving as the ultimate irony in the Victorian era, an epoch whose namesake was a woman and the longest reigning British monarch up to that point. Queen Victoria was a figure representative of hegemony and did not necessarily encourage change in the condition of women during her reign. This disparity is a subject of interest for this analysis as the Victorian Age, a time period literally defined by a woman ruling the most powerful empire of the era, should offer such degrading conditions for women in general.

Arianne Chernock offered a critique of the monarch for her majesty’s 200th birth anniversary, sharing the following quote from Queen Victoria, as her majesty “is most anxious to enlist some one who can speak & write etc. checking this mad, wicked folly of ‘Woman’s rights,’ with all the attendant horrors, on which her poor feeble sex seems bent…God created man & woman different—and let each remain in their own position” (Chernock). Indeed, Queen Victoria’s position is one the monarch further acknowledges as knowing “what an anomaly her own position is—but that can be reconciled with reason & propriety tho’ it is a terribly difficult and trying one. But to tear away all the barriers which surround a woman…would be to introduce a total disregard of what must be considered as belonging to the rules & principles of morality” (Damrosch and Dettmar, 1551). Queen Victoria’s vehement adherence to tradition at the expense of women of the era, including her objection to any proposals for women’s suffrage dating back to 1866, is a disparity noted by many intellectuals of the era, including Mona Caird, Frances Power Cobbe, George Eliot, and Sarah Grand, who would each lament the conditions
faced by Victorian women, and these double standards would prompt engagement in an uphill battle throughout the monarch’s long reign to establish some semblance of autonomy for women.

Queen Victoria’s influence offered little to unite what she dubbed as two separate spheres of being or address the gender divide. This was evidenced in her actions and her letters, maintaining full fidelity to marriage vows, including to “honor and obey” Prince Albert, quashing the idea of women’s rights as a path leading to hatred and heathenistic behavior that would “surely perish without male protection” (Fling). The monarch would further be described as leading by example, rearing children in a happy home during the time her husband was alive and remaining faithful to her late husband until her own dying days, reifying the ideals of women in the Victorian era entirely through the epoch’s namesake. Queen Victoria’s adherence to conventional gender norms would be confronted in her reign and challenged by the likes of Caroline Norton, a remarkable figure of social reform.

To understand Norton’s position, it is important to understand details regarding her life. Around the time of Victoria’s ascension, Norton would implore a Radical member of Parliament, Sir Thomas Talfourd, to allow women to retain custody of children after attempting to divorce her husband. Much her advocacy had been drawn from her lived experiences, with a husband unwilling to honor custody or access rights to her children and imposing a strict allowance, in spite of the income she received from her work. Norton was denied access to her own earnings as an author, as her wages were considered the property of her husband, leading to a legal battle that would once again challenge the status quo of all women. It was with this latter dispute that Norton would appeal to the Queen regarding women’s legal rights and representation. Driven to action, Norton appealed to Queen Victoria in an open letter stating, bluntly, “A married woman in England has no legal existence: her being I absorbed in that of her husband. Years of
separation or desertion cannot alter this position…the legal fiction holds her to be ‘one’ with her husband, even though she may never see or hear of him” (Norton). The unhappy circumstances prevented women from composing a will, having a right to their earnings, signing a lease, facilitating a business, or even getting a divorce on the grounds of having an adulterous husband. The lack of legal protections for women would be an issue that Norton would advocate against, successfully, as evidenced by the passage of the Matrimonial Causes Act 1857. The law made divorce accessible to men if a wife committed adultery, as well as allowing women access to divorce if adultery and another marital offense had been committed (Holmes 601-602). The bill’s double standard was self-evident, but it nevertheless offered women a means to legally challenge an unhappy marriage where there previously was no recourse. While such a victory would seem to suggest a more progressive future ahead, Victoria’s reign would see far more legal obstacles to secure the rights to property, equal pay, and set forth efforts to establish women’s suffrage.

Reinforcing the notion of women in the domestic sphere was the poem *The Angel of the House* by Coventry Patmore. The poem would cast women as paragons of virtue within the domestic sphere, making women the ideal figures to raise children and offer solace to their husbands following the hardships of the outside world. Written, in part, as tribute to Patmore’s first wife, it elevates women to a godlike role with allusions to Juno as well as, “No mystery of well-woven speech,/ No simplest phrase of tenderest fall,/ No likene’d excellence can reach/ Her most magnificent of all…” (Greenblatt et al. 1585-1585). It is an idealization that is sincere, albeit not without irony to astute readers as Patmore alludes to the long-suffering wife of Jupiter, a god famous for infidelity. In this sincere presentation of women, Parmore acknowledges the sometimes-thankless role women were expected to play, but the poem espoused the virtue of such resilience and embedded an image of lifelong devotion. This would fall neatly in line with
Queen Victoria’s own views, espousing “let women be what God intended; a helpmate for a man—but with totally different duties & vocations” (Damrosch and Dettmar, 1551). The poem seemingly placed women on a pedestal, while the truth of the matter was that women were given an unrealistic burden by being consistently nurturing and self-sacrificing.

The guiding sentiment of *The Angel of the House* was not uncommon as Sarah Stickney Ellis delineated the obligation a woman has in *The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits*, as the passage describes the rigors a man must face in combatting the outside world to provide for his family. In response to this, the passage goes further as outlining the moral obligation women have to their families by emphasizing education of the heart over any intellectual pursuits. A missionary through and through, Ellis concludes the passage with the following statement, “‘What can I do to make my parents, my brothers, or my sisters, more happy?...I hope to pursue the plan to which I have been accustomed, of seeking my own happiness only in the happiness of others’” (Greenblatt et al. 1585-1585). The subservience present in this quote is a product of the hegemony present in Victorian England where the needs and desires of women were hardly a consideration next to the comfort of others. Further evidence showcases women were to forgive the transgressions of men and turn the other cheek with a meekness that would further confine women within bad relationships and abhorrent social dynamics. The mentality spawned by such works foists all responsibilities of the house as part of a woman’s duties to allegedly alleviate the turmoil faced by their husbands in the course of business outside the home. Outlining the moral obligation women have to their families, these mores would neglect the individual by turning them into an ideal, a form of objectification that would cause more harm than good.
The loftiness of this ideal would be confronted with the reality of domestic tyrants who could, with the sanction of the law, deny their wives property rights, child custody, and even the right to consent. Women were not safe in the domestic sphere, and divorce was virtually unattainable in this era. Adding insult to injury, women were often lumped in with children, convicts, and other marginalized groups in Victorian England, making women ostracized despite representing a majority of Great Britain’s subjects—unceremoniously dubbed “surplus women” after panic regarding the 1851 census (Smith 397). Virginia Woolf would compose a book entitled, Killing the Angel of the House, in which she would summarize this ideal as, “in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all—I need not say it—she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty—her blushes, her great grace” (Woolf 59). The connection of purity suggests an unadulterated figure, free of the impurities of autonomy or individual thought, as well as strong connotations of chastity as a figure free of anything remotely controversial. Woolf confesses “[the Angel of the House] would have plucked the heart out of my writing. For as I found, directly I put pen to paper, you cannot review even a novel without having a mind of your own, without expressing what you think to be the truth about human relations, morality, sex. And all these questions, according to the Angel of the House, cannot be dealt with freely and openly by women; they must charm, they must conciliate, they must—to put it bluntly—tell lies if they are to succeed” (Woolf 60). Excising this phantom of imagination is the objective for Woolf if she is to express herself, and thus The Angel of the House is an enemy to feminine expression and feminism as a whole. Yet the presence of the Angel would linger throughout a vast swathe of the Victorian era before the notion of the New Woman would emerge towards the Fin de Siècle.
This disheartening hegemony would cause havoc within canonical authors as Charles Dickens utilized the favor granted to him by gender inequalities. While he was certainly a voice of a generation, known as one of the seminal moralistic writers of the era rallying against the cruelty of crushing poverty in a way Queen Victoria herself deemed remarkable, he was also a man who epitomized many contemptible beliefs as a tyrant in his own home. An adulterer and a man who sought to commit his wife, Catherine Dickens née Hogarth, to an asylum on the grounds of moral insanity, Charles Dickens more than issued his fair share of transgressions against his wife (Bowen). There is some debate regarding how public the couple’s ultimate separation in 1858 were, but, regardless, the legacy of Charles Dickens endures, proving that his personal life did not do much to damage his reputation within his lifetime and even beyond it.

The legacy of Catherine Hogarth has often been chronicled in relation to her husband, but a history can be found within Lillian Nayder’s *The Other Dickens*. The impetus behind this collection of records is to restore autonomy and personhood to Catherine Hogarth as a figure of humor and a wife whose perceived coldness was only ever meant to support the career of her husband. Hogarth may have exemplified the angel of the hearth to her household, but her reward was a callous treatment by Dickens, which lends credibility to Woolf’s assertion that such a mindset meant only to subjugate women. It is impossible to separate Hogarth entirely from her famous husband, but the work conducted by Nayder is a worthy endeavor to explore Hogarth’s life as a survivor of emotional abuse and restore dignity beyond the title. This reclamation was generated within the past decade but showcases the worth that comes in confronting these problematic elements of the past. Additionally, this anecdotal account showcased the real stakes faced by women who could easily be locked away due to fairly mundane and innocuous practices.
This connection with carnal knowledge and morality would greatly impact the era in the stories that were told and have serious real-world repercussions. To be recognized as a “pure woman” meant to be virginal and failure to conform with such a standard would relegate women to the fringes of Victorian society. Such women would be diminished of prospects in middle-to-upper-class society, looked callously upon as damaged goods since the only real prospect for a woman to ensure social status and financial security was marriage to an eligible man. While institutions would be in place to support women in these situations, such as Magdeleine houses or relocation agencies, many would seek sex work as a means of obtaining a living. This would directly endanger their lives, showcasing the desperation of the profession and the lack of adequate resources or decency offered to women. Moreover, many of these women would occupy a dangerous space where they were directly at risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections from any number of clients simply to make ends meet after falling from grace in the eyes of society. This, in distinct contrast to men being encouraged to sow their wild oats as a something to be prized, was what made the gender inequality so pronounced in this domain and is symptomatic of a larger patriarchal structure that would deny rights to women beyond the Victorian Era (Matthews).

The Contagious Disease Acts of the 1860s would target the victims of unsafe sex practices and endanger the health and livelihood of women engaged in sex-work. The act was passed to advance the colonial agenda among British officers, ensuring that the safety of the Empire’s interests would not be compromised due to the lustful male gaze, all at the incredible expense of women. Sex workers were blamed for sexually transmitted infections among military officers and other men who held authority, with no accountability levied against these alleged moral authorities. Women would be forced into clinics for a period of time in the interests of the
Empire, all to create a “sanitary utopia” that entirely favored men (Walkowitz and Walkowitz, 97). The danger would disproportionately affect women as “unfortunately syphilis and other sexual diseases were rife, and many young men unwittingly passed on the infection to their wives. For those unlucky enough to develop full-blown tertiary syphilis, the result was a painful and lingering death, usually in the mid-40s” (Hughes). Such was the fate of those who contracted severe cases of sexually transmitted infections, making for a fatal and senseless occupational hazard for women who already occupied the fringes of society. Fears of police brutality also made many lives forfeit, offering no reprieve for women involved in the profession of sex work.

Even a profession with some respect in the eyes of society could often relegate women into de facto workhouses. Magdelene Houses or asylums were formed, often with a noble ambition of providing women who were considered fallen with an occupation. Women were demeaned in the eyes of society and earned little income, an unfortunate truth that would penalize victims with a scarcity of opportunities. The moral aim of the workhouses was punishment, according to Erin Blakemore, the impact of which was usually felt the lines of class; however it would become evident that this would be one of few opportunities available to women. The vicious cycle that fueled the workhouse culture was an abhorrent one that offered little in the way of self-betterment out of poverty level wages, yet what little it offered was what allowed women to survive thorough their own means.

Returning to the domestic sphere, women were not only subjected to a litany of abuses, but would also become figures who men were to be wary. Surveys of the age, compiled by Capital Punishment UK, confirm that over 28 women were hanged within prison walls from 1868 until 1900, 11 of whom had incorporated poison and 4 of which involved matricide. Prior to the passage of the Capital Punishment Amendment Act 1868, public executions offered a
staggering 142 women who were hanged for murder from 1800-1868, including 18 confirmed cases of matricide (“A Collection of the Public General,” *Capital Punishment UK*). It is not difficult to assume such sensational headlines made circumstances easier for married women, fully forming a conception of otherness along the lines of gender that fostered distrust, unease, and even contempt from male counterparts, making the subservient role in the domestic sphere all the more unbearable.

Thomas Hardy would witness a public execution in 1856 where one Elizabeth Martha Brown née Clarke would be an object for derision, bereft of life and dignity. Brown had committed mariticide with an axe against an abusive and adulterous husband, evoking some public sympathy. However, Brown had no hope for reprieve as she maintained that her husband had been killed by a horse until awaiting execution in the condemned cells where she confessed to her crime with some degree of pride. Thomas Hardy reflects upon the hanged woman with a peculiar reflection. Some interpret this moment as the genesis of some necro-romantic idealization, one that can be supported by the exoticization of the real-life hanged woman and the continued romanticization of his doomed, fictional protagonist (“Elizabeth Martha Brown.” *Capital Punishment UK*). While there may be validity to this claim, I am more interested in Hardy’s ideal of bringing life to the victims rather than stripping it away through such objectification in a rudimentary telling of a survivor narrative.

In the intervening years, there would be little changes in law to improve the condition of women. However, in July of 1886. W. T. Stead, wrote an exposé entitled *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon*, outlining the nature of sex trafficking within the city of London. The scandal attached to this report led to a tremendous reform that had languished in Parliament for nearly two decades. Thus, the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 was passed: raising the age of
consent from 13 to 16 and providing women greater legal rights in instances of sexual assault. The act would also reinforce what consent would be measured by, citing any advances of an unconscious party as rape, an unlawful and punishable offense. The act would, however, serve as a double-edged sword, further penalizing sex-workers and including an amendment that penalized homosexuality. The act would be used against a contemporary of Hardy’s, Oscar Wilde, who would be imprisoned due to his orientation and celebrity status. Wilde was only pardoned in 2017 under Turing’s Law, which shows just how wide-reaching the gender politics of the era were to many of its prolific writers, regardless of sex (McCann). All these factors establish exactly how women were treated within the Victorian era, including the uphill battle for legal rights and protection. This would serve as the literary backdrop from which Hardy would compose *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* in an effort to reflect the reality surrounding the novel.

A crucial concept in understanding *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and the cultural history that informed Hardy comes from the observations of Sigmund Freud in “On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love.” Freud postulated a dynamic of psychical impotence in reference to a man’s inability to combine the affectionate and sensual currents, referring roughly to platonic love and unbridled sexual attraction. Debasement is thus fundamental to fulfilling sexual desire, as a woman is rendered “ethically inferior, to whom he need attribute no aesthetic scruples, who does not know him in his other social relations and cannot judge him in them” (Freud 4). Thus, a woman is ostracized in the esteem of her male counterpart as a lesser, subordinate figure who exists solely for the fetishization of the male id. W.M. Bernstein summarizes Freud’s debasement theory as the product of a guilty conscience, as a man’s ability to reach a sexual climax would be coupled with a partner who was seen as “bad,” often connotating sex-workers (106). This gendered dynamic would become more popularly known as
the Madonna-whore complex or the virgin-whore dichotomy and remains a persistent concept within the realms of art and culture. While these theories would be published long after *Tess*, their foundation can be applied to many of these inequalities that have been discussed.

These ideas may be succinct and address the inherent inequality of how women were generally perceived in western society, but the tradition of alienating women is not new. Writers were not exempt from producing the harmful ideals that would marginalize women in Victorian society. The advent of the novel would repeatedly spew tales of morality that would demonize the so-called fallen woman. Links can be made between Biblical history and these more recent tales as women were seen as a source of either purity or damnation, with the sole distinction between these two markers having been identified as virginity. Examples include Nancy from Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*, the Elizas in Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*, the eponymous *Ruth* and *Clarissa* from the works of Elizabeth Gaskell and Samuel Richardson, among several others (Roberts). The novel tradition had been one riddled with the trope for centuries, with Hardy offering *Tess* in what is believed to be Hardy’s intervention on *Clarissa* within more comparative circles. There are exceptions, such as Emily Jolly’s novella, *Witch-hampton Hall: Five Scenes in the Life of its Last Lady* which sees an aristocratic victim of rape who is loved no less because of her past, but the trope of fallen women would become engrained into literature, elevated by the concept’s foundation in biblical lore (Braun 343).

The theological lineage of this concept to be traced within the scriptures of Christianity where the Madonna is a term used to represent the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus Christ. Mary, looked upon as a morally pure, was chosen as a vessel for the son of God, free from sin or carnal knowledge (Tumanov). Attributes ascribed to the Madonna would serve as the template for
defining moral purity among women well into the Victorian era despite the Christocentric view of Protestant England.

Conversely, the figure of Mary Magdelene was looked upon as a sinner and a prostitute within the Victorian conception of scripture. Megan Pickard notes “the consciousness of sin’ began to sweep across Britain, and Mary Magdalene's representation as a reformed prostitute once again became popular in English and Scottish culture” (Pickard 8). Magdalene’s namesake was lent to Britain’s first leper hospital in the Middle Ages and Victorian concerns regarding prostitution would often be related to public health concerns. Judith Walkowitz observes, “Prostitutes had become the social lepers of the eighteenth century, as syphilis replaced leprosy as the symbol of one kind of dreaded social contagion” (Walkowitz 59). Thus, this tale of two Marys would seemingly solidify the virgin/whore dichotomy within the eyes of Victorian society: the angel of the house and the fallen woman.

It is worth acknowledging that this duality can be traced to Eve, the Biblical progenitor of all women, thus being symbolic of all women and a figure who would be considered pure in both entirety and one who, initially, was free of impurities. Vladimir Tumanov posits Eve as the dialectical opposition to the Madonna, a fallen woman versus the redeemer of mankind by proxy in Christian theology, one who may be likened as a second Eve as Justin Martyr observes (Tumanov 515). Eve is brought into the world as an extension of man through Adam’s rib. At this point, Adam and Eve are without sin, and may be designated as pure on account of their innocence. However, Eve is tempted to partake of the forbidden fruit at the behest of a serpent in the garden of Eden. The phallic connotations of the serpent observed by Tumanov further develops the psychoanalytic analysis that is foundational to the virgin-whore dichotomy and holds a degree of validity as the fall of humankind is linked to sexual awareness. Succumbing to
worldly pleasures, equated to the pleasures of the flesh or carnal knowledge, Eve becomes steeped in sin. Eve brings the fruit to Adam, who also bites into the fruit, leading to the fall of humankind from this idyllic state.

With newfound shame, the pair are exiled from the garden of Eden by God. The woman pays, more so than her male counterpart, as a stipulation in their expulsion includes women being forced to endure the pain of childbirth and whose children are brought into the world marked by original sin. The parable of Eve is a cautionary tale, as a woman who once encapsulated virginal purity is tainted with knowledge and punished by a divine power as a result of her transgression. Or, to cite it within the sexual dynamics imposed by this binary, “Eve demonstrates that all women start out as virgins, but that is no guarantee of immunity from future cuckoldry for men” (Tumanov 514). It may be reductive to say that Eve, a proxy for all women, is defined solely by her fall or her ability to fall, yet to understand Victorian morality, it is important to establish this binary as being one of the sole defining conceptions of women of the age.

The tale of Genesis had been elevated by John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, a canonical staple alluded to in Hardy’s *Tess* (Hardy 369). Aside from being produced in a culture strongly embedded in Christian theology, the tale uses its references to symbolize several junctures. It is ironic that so much of the novel relies upon Christian theology as pagan imagery is what seems to define Tess, herself. I would not propose this is something so revolutionary as Hardy suggesting the pervasive influence of colonization from Roman and Germanic forces, nor the pervasive influence of the patriarchy, but it does form an interesting duality that presents those with privilege as God-fearing men versus the pure women that celebrate the solstice dances and lie among the pillars of Stonehenge with ease.
Understanding the Biblical representation of the fallen woman established that this figure would be a character destined to die for her perceived transgressions, whereas virtue would be rewarded so long as any union was made during marriage. Sole responsibility would belong to women, regardless of whether or not their agency, boundaries, or consent were respected.

**Tess—Defining Purity, Roles in Victorian England, and Hardy’s Insights**

Where this falls in line with *Tess* is Hardy’s desire to humanize victims of rape by validating feelings such as pain and trauma in his survivor narrative that was crafted long before such a term would be coined. Tess, while embodying the concept of the Victorian woman and even the archetypical fallen woman, remains three-dimensional and subversive as she is defined by her autonomy rather than the sole, vapid judgment of society. There is a beauty in what the novel has to offer, especially as Hardy challenges the conception of the word “pure.”

To the common Victorian audience, “pure” would indicate virtue and would be associated with virginity—also associated with “virtue,” “good character,” and “good reputation” for a woman protagonist. Thus, the title would be riddled with irony as Tess is looked down upon as a fallen woman by Phase the Second and ends the novel as a hanged murderer. There can be no virtue connected to her character from such a limited perspective, but the depth of Hardy’s narrative would seem to prove that his definition of pure is not a cruel parody of moral purity. It is a reclamation of such a narrow-minded definition, but to appreciate Hardy’s use of the term, it is important to consult what the term has been defined as historically:

Anglo-Norman peur, pure, Anglo-Norman and Old French, Middle French pur
(French pur; feminine pure) (adjective) unmixed (c1000 as pura, feminine, used figuratively with reference to faith), unstained, chaste (c1135), sole, mere, simple (c1170), without aesthetic fault (c1176), real, genuine (second quarter of the 13th cent.),
independent, unconditional (late 13th cent. in Anglo-Norman), complete, entire (c1292 or earlier in Anglo-Norman), (adverb) completely (c1292 or earlier in Anglo-Norman), (noun) person or thing that is not mixed (c1170), person or thing that has no faults (c1174)… (“purity” *OED*).

The earliest definition simply defines the word pure as “unmixed.” This may loosely be ascribed to the character of Tess as she is unacquainted with the world beyond Dartmoor, although the first scene has her in a throng of younger women in the village, in what might be colloquially cited a mixer in the present day. However, purity would envelop the notion of “chastity,” which, to reiterate, would have been viewed as a cruel irony as Tess is made a “maiden no more” by the end of the first phase due to her traumatic experience—specifically Alec’s assault on her—in *The Chase*. Yet I feel Hardy uses the term to suggest a person who demonstrates faultlessness as even an unsympathetic character like Angel notes “You were more sinned against than sinning, that I admit” (Hardy 251). Not one of the dairymaids finds fault in her, and she remains without fault up until the murder of Alec, a crime for which she is willing to resign herself to the consequences.

“Real” and “genuine” may be understood as the verisimilitude with which these dark assaults happened, while also appealing to Hardy’s pastoral sensibilities in shedding light on lives of people in rural areas, whereas so many authors flock to the more cosmopolitan areas in their prose. “Completeness” makes up something of a metatextual meaning of pure for Hardy’s narrative, which was significantly toned down for the story’s debut in magazine format. The novel pulls no punches and presents sexual assault as the inciting event for a large portion of the narrative as Tess reidentifies and even reinvents herself with each new change and challenge, doing her best to remain faithful to the titles that she has been given, as a daughter, a sister, a
wife, a worker. This leads to the other part of that definition, something that is “entire.” Tess is initially described as having all ages in her face, even at such a young age, representing the child, the adolescent, the woman, all the key phases of youth (Hardy 21). This coupled with the titles she earns, including mother, make her life and experiences one of every woman, and all women. Additionally, Tess is the encapsulation of the Victorian woman in all her aspects, offering no ill will towards any woman and navigating the world of men for all its cruelty and malice. Tess offers a revenge fantasy by the end of the novel, as Alec, her assailant, is murdered, and yet Tess still accepts the consequences with a resignation that seems akin to that of a martyr. Tess dies so that other women may live, perhaps free of one less source of cruelty in the world. She occupies so many stations that mark the good and bad of humankind, making her arc that of womankind in the Victorian Era. Early reviews of the novel acknowledge the empathy of such an approach, sharing Hardy’s novel as a publication that was self-evident and distinctly recognizable to any woman in the Victorian Era (Cox).

There is also a notion of purity established by the subtitle of “faithfully presented,” which alludes to the bowdlerized copy of the novel produced in the pages of The Graphic. As the magazine was a family publication, there is no sexual assault found in the serial, but simply a sham wedding to Alec without a child being born from this union. This re-write undercuts many of the larger thematic elements, as acknowledged by Hardy. Additional commentary from Hardy seems to maintain morality in his definition of pure, seeing his heroine as just, more so than any “so-called unsullied virgin” to cite from the author (Higonnet).

As mentioned earlier, Hardy’s heroine is held as a virtuous one who, in many ways, encapsulates the mentality of the angel of the hearth. Her duty is to her family, including her husband, and it is a role she fills without the slightest hint of reluctance, with full empathy and
respect for those who have cared for her, regardless of how deserving they may be of such kindness. By this, I mainly refer to the two men who Tess bestows such an honor. John Durbeyfield is an alcoholic with no real designs to improve his family’s station to the point where they are evicted and nearly destitute upon his passing. John squanders opportunities and is the catalyst that leads to Tess pursuing the D’Urberville legacy, a quest that would make her suffer and ultimately put an end to her life. It is debatable just how culpable John is, as Tess is prodded by her mother, rather than her father, to claim kin, yet circumstances immerge where he could attempt to improve the situation for him and his family prior to his own death that leaves his family homeless.

The other man is Angel Sinclair, a rebel among his parson family—in which every male is or aspires to be a parson—and a scholar who wishes to learn something more concrete than truths found in books, one who finds a kindred spirit in Tess who seems to feel “the ache of modernism” (Hardy 140). Yet, as noted by Lyons, what this kinship overlooks is the lived experience of Tess that has her showcasing such dread as they rest under a blighted star. Angel sees an intellectual equal and espouses the virtues of equality when they do not share the same formal education or lived experiences. The ideal sinks drastically further as the full irony of Angel’s name is on full display as he abandons Tess after she shares that she was assaulted, even though Angel had willingly had a sexual relationship prior to their marriage. Angel plainly acknowledges that Tess was wronged in what is such a pivotal moment of understanding, as a testament to his intellectual and iconoclast views that he ascribes to himself. yet nonetheless abandons her for travel to Brazil as he cannot sanction the idea of being with someone who is considered sullied. However, this impromptu trip does not happen before, insultingly, Angel asks another dairymaid to join him, an incident shared with the reader but spared from Tess. The
readers may see the blatant disrespect Angel has for Tess and are only reassured of her notion of sisterhood with the dairymaid refusing his offer out of respect for Tess. Thus, the men of the novel are reflected poorly in *Tess* with these two figures who should epitomize positive masculine influences.

Tess maintains a certain fidelity to both these patriarchs, yet a notable male figure who earns nothing but contempt would also be Tess’s assailant and sham cousin, Alec. Alec is a figure who imposes himself on Tess at nearly every turn, despite Tess rebuking any such advances throughout the entire first phase. The transition from “The Maiden” to “Maiden No More” showcases the exact nature of Alec’s transgression in the parlance of Victorian England, with the issue of consent being clear by any metric of Victorian law as Tess is assaulted by Alec while she is asleep—a legal misdemeanor as early as 1826.

Hardy’s choice of extended metaphor alludes to hunting as this pivotal moment takes place within the Chase. To a predator like Alec, women are sport, an object to be pursued for personal pleasure. Alec largely abandons the narrative as Tess abandons this alleged ancestral home, but his influence permeates throughout the novel, even in his absence. While other novels have relished in rakish rogues, Alec is undoubtedly unsympathetic and the de facto villain of the novel. Alec is a contemptable figure within Hardy’s Wessex. The very model of a literary rake, the Alec that meets Tess is an idle rich figure with nothing else to preoccupy his time. Alec continually makes advances, in part prompted by a correspondence between him and Joan Durbeyfield. Tess, oblivious to this, continues to spurn such advances. Hardy presents all of Alec’s advances as thoroughly unwarranted, with Tess even expressing her distaste for him.

Hardy even expresses what appears to be frustrations at the Christian notion of forgiveness as Alec reappears later in the narrative as a convert. Alec is now presented as a man
of the cloth who offers an apology to Tess for “allowing her to tempt him,” in a particularly patronizing pardon that is too often used as an excuse by sexual predators (Hardy 328). Alec appears sincere in his attempt at reform, adding nuance to this villain, but it is not without immense skepticism, or utter disbelief from Tess, a figure who can easily be a conduit for the narrator and the reader who have attached themselves to the character. Meeting those latter expectations, Alec abandons the cloth and eventually establishes himself as a safety net for Tess and her family. This supportive role comes at the expense of Tess abandoning her fidelity to her husband, still in Brazil, and is a clear ploy to get Alec what he wants as he tempts her with what she values most, the security of her family. Alec remains a predatory figure, with no hope of redemption. For this reason, Hardy seems to maintain that his murder at the hands of Tess is just, as are the consequences she willingly accepts.

There is another considerable male figure who is never seen by Tess, but whom she knows anecdotally. Enter Jack Dollop, a man who had taken the virginity of a young rural girl, not unlike Tess. Dollop is seemingly forced into marriage as the girl’s mother wants to uphold her daughter’s honor. Yet, the next mention of Dollop showcases that he has married someone else entirely. This betrayal deeply wounds Tess, showcasing a further lack of consideration or empathy on a blighted star. Adding insult to injury, this gossip regarding Jack Dollop at Talbothay’s is treated as a subject of amusement, a series of humorous hijinks from a silly man of the country. In these instances, Tess excuses herself, seemingly at a loss from the casual cruelty of society’s acceptance of the rake, knowing the irreparable damage such people leave in their victims through first-hand experience.

Hardy’s novel serves as a condemnation of the attitudes of men in the Victorian Age. They often abandon any familial duty out of negligence or deliberate malice, thereby failing to
uphold the standard of the husband so carefully attended to by “the Angel of the House.” The implications of Victorian domestic duties are that men are supposed to financially support their family, yet it is a message that was too often understated in the age, and is a source of hypocrisy that Hardy exposes. Even cruelty is exposed from a judgmental man from Tess’s hometown who sees the unwed mother and takes it upon himself to inflict a verdict upon her. It is a malice Tess humbly accepts, but is symbolic of the larger cruelty offered by society as the man condemns her without knowing an iota of her story or suffering. Hardy casts men in an unflattering light, presenting some of the worst impulses and malice, which makes it all the more important to see Tess rising above this, and where one reader might see meekness, I see resilience as Tess continues to live well, in what may be the healthiest takeaway from revenge fantasies—to paraphrase George Herbert.

Finally, Hardy’s naming of each phase of Tess’s life is significant in what it signifies, and, whether intentionally or not, may reflect the journey of a survivor. For example, “The Maiden” is a phase where readers are introduced to a young Tess, a girl who is innocent to the ways of the world, yet wise enough to spurn the advances of Alec. The only hint at anything remotely consensual would be drawn from the Victorian allusion of sleepiness as one of seduction. Yet Hardy does not present this facet of the young woman, and seems to bargain, wondering where Tess’s guardian angel was that night? There is perhaps more, as Tess seems to showcase a hint of cynicism and guilt, tracing back to the night of the family horse’s death. There is gothic foreboding and Tess seems almost preternaturally privy to this. The implications seem to showcase the threats that do exist within society, and even thought Tess is not privy to the likes of sexual advances, she does recognize a certain hostility in the world around her, which may not be dissimilar to what many women have to experience on account of sex or gender.
“Maiden No More” is a phase of grief and processing trauma. Using a standard example, Tess appears to bargain with her mother as she tearfully asks why was she never warned of the dangers men presented? The narration seems to suggest a certain despondence with the short life of Sorrow, a child who represents ignominy and is the embodiment of the horrible trauma she had endured.

“The Rally” implies an assembly in its verb form, which is not off the mark, but may be better defined in its more militant verb form, suggesting to recover in health, spirits and poise. Tess is offered a chance for tranquility, with a pastoral romance in full play. The images of paradise are, however, interwoven with gossip that reminds Tess of the bitter reality found in men like Alec by way of Jack Dollop. Yet, in spite of this, the recovery is so intense that Tess is able to entertain the notion of pursuing a romantic relationship with the man she once saw visit Blackmoor. There is a revival found in Angel’s acquaintance and even healing in his largely wholesome treatment of her in this phase. It is a compelling portion that might come off as saccharine in another novel, but with a book laden with tragedy, this comes as a welcome reprieve.

“The Consequence” hinges on Tess revealing the tragedy of her past to her husband. The narrative relies heavily on dramatic irony and Tess’s eager pursuit of Angel’s reaction. Many of the double-standards have been laid bare as this is where Angel admits to being a typical Victorian male and, moreover, betraying his allegedly modern sentiments by falling into the era’s conservative outlook at the expense of his wife. It is a section where there is an intense dramatic irony for readers as every attempt by Tess to convey the truth to Angel fails until after the two are wed. It is painful to disclose the trauma of the past, and Tess is unaided by her husband, and what should be a moment of triumph sours and leaves her isolated away from
family and her only romantic interest. Acceptance from support systems is vital to the well-being of a survivor, and the fact that Tess is denied this is detrimental to her recovery and showcases the stigma attached within the era.

“The Woman Pays” is an appropriate, if cynical, title that could be applied throughout much of the narrative. This part of the narrative is a pessimistic reflection of the suffering Tess must endure. There is dour atmosphere as Tess and Marian, another dairymaid at Talbothays, are now in Flintcomb Ash, evoking a grey and somber location, unaided by the toil and misery drowned in alcohol. This is a place where those expelled from paradise may be found, and it reflects an almost hell like structure of suffering. This seems less Miltonian as there is no way to rule this domain as a woman, and yet there is some of the optimism of the biblical Job and the hope that faith will be rewarded. Suffering defines this phase as easily as “Maiden No More,” yet this time the trauma is inflicted by society at large and the oppressive nature that doesn’t just affect Tess, but dairymaids she once knew. This section could be an argument against hegemony. Tess ventures out from Flintcomb Ash to seek her kin through the Clare family, but the journey is as ill-fated as before.

“The Convert” has a dual meaning. The phase begins with Alec D’Urberville having changed his ways from being the bane of the Clare family parsonage to a man of the cloth, a redemption that Alec wholeheartedly believes in. As mentioned earlier, Alec appears to be in earnest, but quickly abandons his habit after this fateful encounter with Tess, thus abandoning his conversion. Tess, on the other hand, is forced to return home to Blackmoor as her father is gravely ill and shortly passes away in ignominy, leaving the family homeless. Alec then enters, offering Tess’s family shelter and care in exchange for Tess living with him as his wife. Tess has been a character guided by self-determination, but she is facing a situation in which she cannot
offer any aid to her family alone. Thus, she is presented with a moral dilemma, to adhere to her values or to yield to this final advancement in spite of its inherent unlawfulness as a married woman and immorality as a victim of his predatory actions. Tess yields and is converted from the strong sense of self that had guided her through her trauma, to a defeated soul who concedes to Alec’s offer in an ultimate display of self-sacrifice. It is common in dysfunctional or abusive relationships to seek the stability offered by an assailant, showcasing a power dynamic wielded by the abuser. This power is magnified by the position of women in the Victorian age, making Alec’s offer Tess’s only resort in ensuring her family has the most basic of necessities. Hardy showcases a submission to the dreary reality of the age in what is plainly rekindling her trauma. The conversion is one of surrender and one that is meant to evoke sympathy from the reader.

“The Fulfillment” is the final phase of the novel where Angel returns from Brazil, Tess kills Alec, and Tess resigns herself to execution after a brief time in hiding with her true husband. Fulfillment comes in the form of radical justice. Tess breaks away from her surrender in the previous phase shortly after Angel’s return and, more importantly, claim’s Alec’s life as an act of vengeance for the vileness that he brought upon her. What was once seen in The Rally as hope, and healing is seen as Tess and Angel evade authorities, but the setting is far from an idyll. They seek refuge in an abandoned house, and it is apparent that the happiness they share cannot be sustained. The pair eventually wander into Stonehenge where she rests on one of the slabs, evocative of a tribute offered in sacrifice. Tess accepts her fate, and there is an implication that in her death, Liza Lu will be spared the trials of her older sister. Brutality is met with brutality, but it serves a purpose in safeguarding her family. Metatextually, this can be seen as Tess offering herself as a model to inform women who may not know the danger posed against them in a patriarchal society. Liza Lu can be interpreted as a preservation of innocence coupled with
wisdom from what Tess experienced, and is the ideal reader surrogate, a young woman who should never need to go through the painful experiences of womanhood in the Victorian era to know the era’s injustices. Additionally, I believe “The Fulfillment” is an ideal name for what the story ultimately feeds into, the fantasy of revenge in a healthy outlet secured in the safety of a novel and anchored to no particular reality. This is a concept that outlines the appeal of the survivor genre, through support and validation of the powerful sensations felt by individuals who undergo these horrible experiences. By providing a proxy, people can healthily disassociate with the worst of their experiences.

The revenge fantasy offers a gateway to catharsis, yet the brightest spot of the novel is the kinship formed between Tess and the dairymaids of Talbothay’s. There is little in the way of jealousy or ill will. This is a radical departure from the only other major woman in Tess’s life, Joan Durbeyfield, who ignores the evil of men-folk for the betterment of the family. Aloofness may be a part of her character, but ignorance is not, making it all the more perplexing that she would resign her daughter to such a fate. Yet, Joan is not what defines all women. Izz, Marian, and Retty show an initial dislike of Tess as a romantic rival, but soon come to appreciate her on her own merit and quickly forge a bond that endures after Tess’s marriage. There is a hint of sisterhood, a tone that is emphasized once more by Tess’s unfaltering allegiance to Liza Liu. Contrary to more cynical analyses, I feel this sequence is one that does not set up Liza Liu to relive the trauma her sister had endured, but one that liberates her, setting her into the care of a man who has recognized his mistakes and may restore his namesake yet. These bonds are more than simple trauma bonds, they are connections made with compassion and earnestness, feelings which are never betrayed in the course of the narrative.
Tying back to Victorian England, there is an irony in knowing that Dickens, a less than admirable figure in this analysis, would actually help fund Magdalene houses, which would allow women to start anew in Australia and work with many of society’s so-called fallen women. Prime Minister William Gladstone was also an advocate for social reform, yet the message of sisterhood would resonate most firmly with Christina Rosetti, a poet whose experience in the real world would be elevated with the works of fantasy as she crafted her seminal poem, “Goblin Market.” The poem features two sisters, Laura and Lizzie. Laura serves as an allegory for the fallen woman, complete with tasting an actual fruit of temptation before falling into dire circumstances due to her indulgence. What saves Laura isn’t the goblins who have magically sapped her of her youth and strength, but Lizzie who is faced with every temptation, but never yields. There is a certain strength, resilience, and even solidarity featured in this poem as the so-called fallen woman is redeemed through bravery and sacrifice on behalf of her sister. There is no punishment, creating an overall tone of healing and I believe this is the most important part of the survivor narrative, to meet an occasion without shaming or otherwise condemning a person, but advocating and doing whatever is possible as support. Hardy offers his support and allyship through words and would maintain interest in Tess as an illusive figure that captured his imagination. Yet, his prose may have showcased the best way forward through compassion and the bonds of solidarity.
Chapter 2

A question that remains concerns the relevance of Hardy’s novel in the present day. What makes *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* so important in a landscape inhabited by media that were in their infancy or nonexistent in Hardy’s time? This is a question I would like to explore in two sections. Firstly, I seek to provide an analysis of the 1979 film adaptation, *Tess*, with a thorough reflection of the controversy surrounding its director. The second portion will conclude by offering two survivor narratives present in contemporary television adjacent to Hardy that lend an insight into a generation heavily influenced, if not formed, by social media. The latter section will focus on ITV’s *Broadchurch* (2014-2017) and the BBC/HBO coproduction of *I May Destroy You* (2020) for their commentary on the #MeToo era, how they reflect narratives like *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, and the overall importance of the survivor narrative in an era where more people are having their voices heard, being met with greater representation, and generating conversations on the subject of sexual assault.

**PARALLELS BETWEEN ART AND LIFE IN ROMAN POLANSKI’S TESS**

Since its publication, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* has enjoyed a long history of adaptations, including a 1924 stage production that can be traced to Thomas Hardy himself, ultimately lending his blessing to seeing his heroine take to a different medium with Gertrude Bugler playing the eponymous Tess. *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* also had the privilege of receiving a film adaptation as early as 1913 under the direction of Paramount co-founder Adolph Zuckor. The story would see additional cinematic representation, though some of these initial outings have become lost media, including Zuckor’s production (Buckingham 4). Between international productions and television, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* was a story that would continually find new life in the 20th century. However, it was not until Roman Polanski’s 1979 adaptation of *Tess* that
the tale found a legacy in the age of mechanical reproduction as the director delivered one of the most prominent adaptations of the novel.

The medium of film coupled with less conservative sensibilities of post sixties cinema allowed for more graphic content to be addressed, far more than the bowdlerized copy of Hardy’s novel that was first produced in The Graphic. Hardy lamented this lack of honest representation in an essay entitled “Candour in English Fiction,” where Hardy observes “…the magazine in particular and the circulating library in general do not foster the growth of the novel which reflects and reveals life. They directly tend to exterminate it by monopolising all literary space” (Hardy, “Candour…”). With this less than favorable view of the medium of the magazine, Hardy did not provide salacious details to the readers, especially during the initial serialization of his work where one major change makes Tess the victim of a sham wedding rather than a more visceral victim of sexual assault (Stephens). It is another point of interest that Tess’s child, Sorrow, is omitted from the original narrative entirely in the tale’s initial publication, presumably to avoid presenting something so scandalous to Victorian sensibilities. Even the subsequent faithful presentation carefully navigates the restrictions of Victorian society, avoiding overt depictions of rape even with a harrowing portrayal of Tess begging her mother for an answer as to why she did not tell her of the evil of men folk, burying an infant child she never asked for, and dealing with the lasting consequences of a perceived offense that she was not responsible for. Yet in the 87 years dividing Hardy from Polanski’s Tess, culture had changed in such a way that an adaptation could forgo the subtlety employed by Hardy, even within a feature with a Motion Picture Association rating of PG for parental guidance.
Samantha Geimer, an author and a woman who would unfortunately come to know exploitation, had observed the zeitgeist of her youth and the penchant to commodify and exoticize adolescent women:

Young girls are eroticized to some extent in every culture, and at this point in time [the mid-to late 1970s] in our own culture that eroticization had become almost mainstream. Brooke Shields had posed nude for pictures when she was ten, and then, at twelve, she was starring in *Pretty Baby*, a movie about a child prostitute that probably couldn’t be made today. Just one year before, Jodie Foster had raised eyebrows with her portrayal of a teenage prostitute in Martin Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver*. *Manhattan* was Woody Allen’s homage not just to New York City, but to a middle-aged man’s longing for a young teenager. And of course there was that famous 1974 film where a young girl has an incestuous relationship with her father. That was *Chinatown*, directed by Roman Polanski. (Geimer)

In tandem with this objectification, there was a growing trend towards voyeurism. Films such as Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* allowed the director to overtly cast desires and obsessions onto the big screen, challenging the concept of viewership and its larger, metatextual implications for audiences: spectators living vicariously through the lens of the camera as surely as Scottie staring at Madeline. While this voyeuristic tendency may be mirrored in the sensationalist tradition of the late Victorian era, a conceit which was certainly familiar to Hardy, the intimate and the taboo would find new distortions through the medium of cinema and the visualization of desire.

The relationship between Tess and Alec remains a point of interest in Polanski’s film and is a dynamic that demands analysis. The body language shown by Tess (Natassja Kinski) is one of reluctance, and the character of Alec (Leigh Lawson) constantly violates her boundaries
within these physical spaces. He is invasive and used to getting his way, as seen when he begins to feed her strawberries from his hand. This imagery of Tess partaking of the fruit evokes a Biblical vision of temptation, an apropos visualization with the novel’s Alec pondering whether Tess perceives him as Satan. Additionally, the use of strawberries is inspired as a fruit tied to simultaneous notions of virginity, such as in Shakespeare’s *Othello*—recalling the strawberry spotted handkerchief which “is spotted as Desdemona in [Othello’s] eyes is now stained...appears to have lost the fruit of righteousness”—and the erotic (Ross 239). This sequence alone does well in foreshadowing Tess’s fall. It is a deeply uncomfortable experience as Tess tries to escape Alec’s many advances, using a ruse to leave his carriage on a country road under the pretense of dropping her hat, and going so far as to physically push him away in the forest. As a result of this latter incident, Alec falls off his horse and sustains a bloody head injury, for which Tess fiercely apologizes. Alec uses the opportunity to draw Tess close, as she allows herself to be vulnerable to his advances. Tess allows him to embrace her, give her a prolonged kiss, and make out with her in the field. However, Alec proceeds to force himself upon Tess, with her failing to push away her assailant. It is a violent depiction that is radically different from the details shared in the novel. The film shows Tess as someone who is active and allows for moments of consensual affection, yet Alec transgresses boundaries to the vehement objection of Tess. At this point consent is revoked, and rape is committed against Tess.

The film demonstrates a keen fidelity to the events of the novel, as Tess has a child who dies within a short timeframe, moves to Talbothays, marries Angel Clare who confesses to past impropriety before spurning Tess for revealing the truth of her assault, and leaves for Flintcomb-Ash to preserve the honor of her family under the supervision of a harsh employer who is privy to her past. However, readers of the novel will be surprised when Tess does not meet Alec in the
church as a man who preaches repentance while Tess, rightfully, sees a man still tethered to his predatory proclivities. Instead, Polanski presents a far more opportunistic Alec who abandons any pretense of morality or self-betterment and seeks Tess at her place of employment after receiving a letter from her mother concerning the dying Durbeyfield patriarch, John. Like a predatory lender, Alec pursues someone who is vulnerable with the offer of relief or salvation, all while belittling her, her principles, and her actions. Abandoned by her lawful husband, Tess eventually accepts his offer, surrendering herself and the D’Urberville name. The plot progresses as Hardy presented it, the notion of coincidence is abandoned through the forceful return of Alec.

The study of adaptation in film does not ask audiences to simply compare different media, as Dr. Lynda Hall notes, “evaluating a film adaptation of a novel is much more than considering ‘which is better,’ since a comparison must consider the unique attributes of both literary genres” (Hall). A valid study analyzes what is gained through changes made in committing a narrative to celluloid. In this instance, Polanski offers a thoroughly unrepentant sinner in Alec whose reintroduction into the story is accompanied by an ominous score, courtesy of Phillipe Sarde. There is no hope for salvation for this immoral antagonist and his victim as he continues his attempts to ensnare Tess and exert his power over her. The gothic imagery found in the first phase of the novel is traded for a figure who is imposing and true to life in his casual cruelty, a decidedly different approach to the more nuanced novel Alec who does not seem entirely bereft of earnestness. The actions Alec takes are sudden and are allowed to be presented in a villainous light while also presenting Tess with no recourse but to yield to his manipulations. Alec coolly exclaims, “that I may be a sham-D’Urberville, but my little finger can do more for you than your blue-blooded ancestors” (Polanski). This line is especially poignant as the delusions of grandeur shared by the Durbeyfield family has allowed their daughter to fall into the
hands of a predator and does nothing to alleviate them from ruination or destitution as they seek a home outside of Marlott. It clearly delineates who wields power and the fundamental powerlessness of Tess, whose compassion for her family is identified as a weakness resulting in the exploitation of a pure woman. While Tess ultimately escapes the thrall of Alec, she is sentenced to be executed as a result of murdering him, leaving her destruction in his hands. Possession and power are haunting themes that accentuate Hardy’s rogue, and Polanski maintains that spirit by presenting the full evil he is capable of bestowing upon his victim.

The 1979 film has been recognized by the Criterion Collection, and director Roman Polanski is largely celebrated for his contributions to film. Polanski even won an Oscar in 2003 for his feature, *The Pianist*. During that ceremony, the Academy accepted the award on his behalf while many adamantly cheered for his success, including Jack Nicholson, and several standing ovations from the likes of Martin Scorsese (“Roman Polanski…”). Roman Polanski is undeniably a monumental figure in the world of cinema, directing classics such as *Rosemary’s Baby* and *Chinatown*. Polanski also has lent his hand to another literary adaptation in an appeal to mainstream media through his versions of *Macbeth* and *Oliver Twist*. Studied and taught in the realm of film studies, Polanski has been referred to as one of the old masters of cinema and may be considered a living legend. However, his life and contributions have been overshadowed by a history of legal troubles. Polanski was unable to accept his Oscar in 2003 because of his outstanding charges for unlawful sex with a minor (Breznican).

Samantha Geimer, whose testimony in *The Girl – A Life in the Shadow of Roman Polanski*, informs us that she was 13 years old when Roman Polanski drugged and sexually assaulted her in 1977. Geimer rejected his advances, and furthermore could not possibly give consent as she was under the influence of alcohol and a portion of a quaalude. The age of
consent in California is 18 since 1913, making it clear that Geimer was a minor in the eyes of the law (Palmer). The incident occurred in a house belonging to actor Jack Nicholson, adding an ironic layer to the celebration of Polanski’s Academy accolade, with fellow actor Anjelica Huston serving as an indirect witness to Polanski’s assault. Polanski had furthermore targeted Geimer by earning the trust of her parents, which allowed him to ingratiate himself to Geimer and push boundaries, including taking topless photos of her and ultimately isolating her under the pretense of a modeling shoot that night. Polanski was 44 when he raped Geimer and had lived in the United States for nine years prior to this incident. The next year was fraught with Geimer retelling this story on behalf of all parties involved, while Polanski would seek asylum in Europe with his newfound French citizenship. The trial was not without its complications, with a shifting verdict from an inconsistent judge concerned with his image rather than justice, according to Geimer, yet this should not undermine the severity of Polanski’s crime as he would ultimately plead guilty to this offence, recognizing the crime that had been committed.

The relevance of this crime is that it serves as an example of a predatory man forcing himself upon a young woman, preying on the victim’s relative ignorance and crossing the line of consent. Predatory men operate under a pretense, whether that is claiming kin or offering exposure or fame. By comparing these facts with the works of fiction, I do not intend to discredit or devalue the lived experiences of these victims, but to analyze just how Hardy and even Polanski via the medium of film accurately depict the modus operandi of a sexual predator and why this story can even be considered as something connected to a tangible reality. There is a layer of truth and unease that can be found in the narrative, especially when one sees the parallels with Polanski’s true crime.
What makes the parallels all the more disconcerting is the visceral element to Alec’s assault of Tess seen in Polanski’s film, and while it is frowned upon in literary analysis to conflate autobiographical details with the work of any artist, it is difficult not to associate such a sequence with Polanski’s actions. It is easy to assume that Polanski is a director who recognizes the power he holds and flaunts it as surely as the rake he projects on the big screen. Any close reading of the film would remind audiences that Alec is a villain and is not cast in any sort of sympathetic light within the course of the movie. The narrative does not glorify the power wielded by Alec as he manipulates Tess to the point of retaliation. Yet, knowing the predatory influence behind the lens of the camera makes such a portrayal seem insincere rather than a vehement condemnation of Alec. Therein lies the problem of examining art to appreciate its merits on its own terms: art can never be created in a vacuum removed from the influence of others, and to do so is to demonstrate a willful ignorance that can conceal pressing issues.

Colin MacCabe wrote an essay for the Criterion Collection on the fidelity of Polanski’s *Tess*. Touching upon celebrated film theorists, MacCabe notes:

> When François Truffaut, in his famous 1954 manifesto, proclaimed the director to be the real author of a film, he was drawing on Bazin’s arguments about adaptation to make a case for what distinguished a genuine auteur from a cultural hack. True cinematic adaptation, true fidelity, according to Truffaut, came not from the slavish translation of material from page to screen but from a director’s using the resources of the cinema to intensify the themes and concerns of the source in ways that no literary text could accomplish. (MacCabe)

To this extent, MacCabe believes the medium of film overcomes the prudish nature of the Victorian era. The deficiency of writing as a medium is its inability to truly capture a moment in
the instantaneous manner of film. It is in this, that directors are able to bring a sudden crisis to
the sequence rather than a lengthy, detailed analysis that distorts the temporal progression that an
action may warrant. In film, action is quick, sudden, and graphic, creating an atmosphere of
suspend that enhances a story like *Tess*. The technical work is exceptional, and it is hard to
disagree with MacCabe on the proficiency of the artist. However, the scholars cited have
attributed the director as the author of the film, and the inherent hypocrisy of a creator producing
a film in exile for the crime of rape comes off as cynical revelry rather than sincere self-
reflection of his actions.

It is worth acknowledging that MacCabe offers a short critical evaluation based on
Polanski’s personal life, acknowledging his struggles during the Holocaust and the gruesome
murder of his wife, Sharon Tate, and their unborn child. These are tragic moments that influence
the darker undertones pervading his films, which I felt were notably displayed through the
impassioned depiction of the loss of Tess’s child, a baby she devotes herself to throughout his
short life. Hardy’s Tess seems apathetic to her child, so much so that she christens the baby as
Sorrow, whereas Polanski’s Tess seems to showcase joy in the life of her child and desperation
throughout his decline. A potential future with the child is extinguished, and it is here that a
connection to a grieving filmmaker can be made. Even the dreary air of Flintcomb-Ash,
demanding Tess to strain herself, may be viewed in tandem with the horrors Polanski saw when
growing up, coupled by silent obedience from a helpless crowd in the face of a sadistic overseer
in a cold, barren land. The tone of despair captured on film certainly warrants connections to
Polanski’s life and the personal tragedies he lived through, yet it seems baffling to omit Geimer
when the incident was the most contemporaneous event for the director in filming *Tess*. 
MacCabe goes on to note the innovation of Polanski to relocate the setting from Dorset to the French countryside, but the facts of this innovation stem from a fear of extradition and an evasion of justice. MacCabe does not acknowledge Geimer in this synopsis despite the case being the catalyst for this visionary change. Furthermore, at the time, *Tess* was feared to be box-office poison attached to Polanski’s name so soon after this high-profile dispute, which makes this omission all the more disconcerting as it would affect the reception of the film. There is a limit to what can be explored in a short essay, which may grant some leniency towards MacCabe’s analysis. However, Geimer’s case is heavily intertwined with the composition of Polanski’s *Tess*, and leaving it unaddressed is an irresponsible oversight that threatens to sanitize history, especially a history that famously showcased the abuses found within Hollywood.

The nuance of the case can lead biographers to portray Polanski as a champion of film in exile for what amounts to a misunderstanding between Geimer and himself, whether through victim blaming or citing miscarriage of justice, where apologist thinking can be found. Julia Ain-Krupa’s *Roman Polanski: A Life in Exile* contains such thinking as the narrative is largely guided by an appreciation for the director. The introduction of the book holds up poorly in light of his abuse of Geimer, as Ain-Krupa states, “Working as a director in the United States, Polanski has penetrated our concept of ourselves,” and cites an interview hosted by another sex offender, Charlie Rose, relaying “Polanski said that he often has dreams in which he finds himself waking up in the wrong place, an example of his strong connection to his own exile…As a result of Polanski’s exploration of fantasy and alienation, [audiences] have come to understand darkness, longing, and the great absurdity of life” (Ain-Krupa, xiv). The introduction of the *Tess* chapter reads more as a tragedy that befell a great visionary rather than the consequences of his own
actions. Words and the way people choose to tell stories matter, which makes it unfortunate that nuance remains largely unaddressed in this biography.

A curious insight that works to humanize the works of Polanski is that Ain-Krupa cites *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* as a novel beloved by his wife, Sharon Tate, and was proposed as a work fitting of the big screen. Polanski kept a copy of *Tess* in his London home, which adds depth to the opening of the film, which simply states, “For Sharon.” The film is dedicated to her, eight years after her murder at the hands of the Manson family in Polanski’s home in California. There is a certain poignance to this dedication in the aftermath of a senseless tragedy. Yet, in a similar vein, it is good to remember the victims of rape, and more importantly to listen to the survivors who can and often have told their stories. As Ain-Krupa avoids discussing Geimer, it is important to draw attention to the fact that many opinions float around, dehumanizing victims. Whether it was notions of a family’s mercenary ambitions to see their daughter rise to stardom or claims of a minor acting or dressing provocatively, these conceptions all actively discredit Geimer’s voice and silence the victim. Geimer recalls the paparazzi being the most traumatizing and invasive outcome of her rape, as the voyeuristic eyes of the public frequently returned to her with any new development on Polanski. In an interview, Geimer laments, “Sometimes I feel like we both got a life sentence” (Geimer, “Judge the Movie…”) The victim thus becomes a spectacle, an object of curiosity rather than a figure to be dignified or honored. Ain-Krupa does well to humanize Sharon Tate in the brief allusions to her life with Polanski, and yet such a courtesy is not afforded to a victim of Polanski’s actions.

Ain-Krupa addresses Geimer once throughout the entire book, in an afterword, and the conflicting nature of admiration for an artist’s work and life against a criminal history. It is worth reiterating that Polanski has led a tragic life, from his childhood in the ghettos of Krakow to the
loss of his wife. However, Polanski has imposed himself in a way that takes advantage of another person. In both France and Poland, the age of consent was no less than 14, making his actions predatory in any situation. This is a fact Ain-Krupa acknowledges and is left to ruminate upon, reaching no definitive answer as her admiration for the director and his struggles are weighed against this horrible action. While I am glad to see this acknowledged, the fact that the narrative was composed in a way that appears to blindly idolize Polanski without embracing nuance is disappointing. The objective may have been to recognize the art surrounding an artist, but can the author ever be fully divorced from the text?

Barthes offered “The Death of the Author” as a treatise to empower readers and their individual interpretations over privileging the composer, their history, their collected works, etc. The author’s metaphorical death allows for individual agency to command the narrative and conversation surrounding art by lending new readings to a given text. This theory has opened the pathway to provide multiple perspectives to a narrative, whether it is Said’s post-colonial examination of slavery in Austen’s Mansfield Park or Ian Smith’s racially charged “Othello’s Black Handkerchief.” Such scholars have brought a critical intervention through their scholarship by citing something that has been overlooked or underplayed for far too long. Yet the artist should still be considered as fundamental in creating an individual piece of work, and critical insight can be drawn as theory meets the histories of crime, production, and publication.

In the tradition of Barthes, there is a truism that art must be separated from the artist. This ideal is shared by Geimer as she noted in her op-ed on The Pianist: “…Mr. Polanski and his film should be honored according to the quality of the work. What he does for a living and how good he is at it have nothing to do with me or what he did to me. I don’t think it would be fair to take past events into consideration. I think that the academy members should vote for the movies they
feel deserve it. Not for people they feel are popular” (Geimer, “Judge the Movie…”). Lending further merit to this perspective is that, unlike literature, films cannot easily be attributed to a unitary vision or even a small collaboration. Film is the product of hundreds, if not thousands of collaborators, focused on committing something to screen, from sets, acting, cinematography, lighting, and so on. While it is common to focus on a director, the vision they present is a culmination of collaboration, and to discredit a director is to dismiss the hard work of others who impressed themselves upon the film.

To disclose my positionality with transparency, I have acknowledged poignant contributions from impactful collaborators from the films, but despite this, I circle back to the director. I confess that despite my love of the source material, I never wanted to watch the 1979 adaptation of Tess, and that the celebrated works of Polanski did not hold the slightest appeal to me as I continually found it difficult to separate art from the artist. There is an inherent irony in Polanski—who could be said to have groomed Geimer by using textbook tactics to isolate a victim while gaining their trust—directing a film that primarily hinges on the predatory influence of others and a society that chooses to ostracize the victims in the wake of his actions (“Grooming” NSPCC). I went into the film aware of Polanski’s criminal record, and despite riveting performances, shots, and musical scores, the foreknowledge presented a sullied and insincere vision that remains rife with hypocrisy in my viewing. While I offer my views as a critique of the artist rather than the art, the truth is that the distinction may often be blurred due to the insight of Polanski’s impropriety. Yet it is a positionality I feel is relevant in analyzing this artifact, as it is an important story that showcases the relevance of works that Hardy produced and the enduring parable to be found in Tess.
The boundaries between art and the artist remain a subject of contestation. Geimer touches upon the debate when the distinction between art and pornography was challenged in the decades following Polanski’s assault. One figure at the heart of this controversy was London-born photographer, David Hamilton—a figure who, incidentally, was relocated to Dorset, the home of Thomas Hardy, in the midst of World War II. Hamilton was known for photographing adolescent women in what he described as, “nudity and purity, sensuality and innocence, grace and spontaneity – we made contradictions of them. I try to harmonize them, and that’s my secret, and the reason for my success” (Hinton). The public was less receptive to this vision over time as conservative movements, primarily in the UK, sought to label his works as indecent throughout the nineties and aughties. Hamilton faced rape accusations in 2016 from Flavie Flament, one of the young women photographed. Hamilton maintained his innocence, and received the benefit of the statute of limitations, clearing him of all charges. Hamilton appeared to have committed suicide that same year, with Flament marking his passing by stating:

“I’ve just learned of the death of David Hamilton, the man who raped me when I was 13. The man who raped numerous young girls, some of whom have come forward with courage and emotion these last few weeks. I’m thinking of them, of the injustice that we were trying to fight together. By his cowardice, he has condemned us once more to silence and unable to see him condemned. The horror of this act will never wipe out the horror of our sleepless nights.” (Willsher)

With no clear ruling on Hamilton’s death or actions during his life, it is hard to draw any definitive conclusions. Yet it is hard to think of “nudity and purity” in earnest when an adult photographs a topless minor and proceeds to violate social boundaries under the pretense of art, an assertion I make in reference to Hamilton and Polanski. When researching Hamilton in May
2022, Wikipedia offered Roman Polanski under related articles, as a figure that is tangential to Hamilton even though the only connection that may be drawn between the two artists are the controversies attached to them.

Geimer insists that this story should remain in the past as society at large is too strict in judging human figures (Mozingo). Geimer was once the subject of social scorn, dubbed a drugged-up Lolita by the press at the time, and while media attention has been more forgiving of her, their ire has been directed towards Polanski. Geimer has empathy for this plight, reasserts that people should leave the past in the past for a case that is nearly half a century old. Geimer’s lived experiences demonstrate that there is much to be said about the thoughts of overzealous paparazzi, notions of victimhood and behavior, and where society allows for compassion and healing, yet these are conversations that would not be had if these stories were not available. In much the same way, so many of these factors were prevalent in the surveillance of women in Victorian England, a time whose conservative values would also open itself to compassion and even subsequent change, however gradual the process might have been. A dearth of knowledge or historical records can create a sense of isolation or diminish victims who share their truth. While I wish peace for Geimer, her story is important and has allowed other people to share their experiences in defiance of the people who abused them.

Moreover, Geimer provides a survivor’s account through her book, and a healthy mentality in overcoming trauma. Highlights of Geimer’s interview, coinciding with the release of her 2013 book, *The Girl: A Life in the Shadow of Roman Polanski*, include that she did not feel shame for something that was not her fault. “[Elizabeth Smart] was taught that if you’re raped, you’re devalued as a person, that it’s shameful and wrong…nobody ever taught me that. Everyone’s like, ‘Don’t you feel guilt or shame or used or dirty? I was like, ‘No, I don’t.’ I didn’t
do anything wrong. Why should I feel bad?” (Keegan). Geimer also acknowledges Polanski as a stranger, a man who did something horrible, but served his time according to the initial sentence of Judge Rittenband. Geimer feels empathy for a man who has a spouse and children of his own being hounded in a similar manner to what she has experienced. Geimer notes the opportunistic sensationalist journalists that relentlessly pursued her family and children in the wake of Roman Polanski’s 2009 arrest, allowing readers to understand the destructive power of this public obsession. Judgments are left to be made by readers of her account, but what matters here is that Geimer is allowed to tell her truth as she concludes the interview by sharing: “So now I’m saying my truth.... It’s interesting to be able to do it on my own terms. My whole life has been reacting to what’s happening to me. This is a different thing for me, to just be trying to tell the story” (Keegan). Additionally, Geimer appears to have remained in contact in some capacity with Polanski, noting minor personal correspondences in 2013 (Brockes) and even taking a photo with him in 2023 (Saad). This agency and platform is nothing short of empowering, and allows audiences to confront a case with nuance as well as understanding.

My final thoughts on the film Tess are that while Polanski seems to adapt Hardy, autobiographical details do not allow me to perceive this adaptation as anything more than a glorification of assault in direct contrast to the themes of the novel. Such an assertion defies art for art’s sake, but it is a mistake to totally isolate the circumstances of his life from his art as the accounts cited already have. Rather than ruminate further on glorifying sexual assault, I would like to dedicate the remainder of this chapter to dignifying voices. Geimer’s story is one that fosters a healthy mentality and offers hope for a life outside the shadow of her assailant while offering valid criticism against a society that continues to perceive her as a curiosity rather than a
human being. The importance is that these stories are heard in all their nuance for individuals to actively listen to and engage with in a responsible manner.

**British Media and the #MeToo Movement**

In the wake of the #MeToo era, stories of sexual assault in all their ugliness and inspiration have been accumulated, drawing from a multiplicity of people who have survived assault and found community in learning that they are not alone. Bonding through trauma, these connections offer healing, and the shared experience allows for vulnerability to be turned into strength. New stories offer opportunity for engagement and a critique on the status quo, including the ambiguities of sexuality and consent in the 21st century. I hope to explore some of these issues by mapping out the social-political climate that is dominating the Western world, citing influential works that have pushed my interest in exploring where stories and history mesh with the present, and showcasing some key ideas from television in relation to England.

To provide context, #MeToo was a movement founded by Tarina Burke following an encounter with an adolescent girl who relayed what had happened to her at the hands of her stepfather. Burke, a social worker who was sought in confidence, offered no consolation to the girl, despite having shared similar experiences. Her work had led her to many heartbreaking stories, yet this story would make her form a movement dedicated to providing pathways to healing through resources and advocacy. In 2017, the phrase became viral as survivors of rape or attempted sexual assault came forward with their stories. It became a movement in which victims have found solidarity in the most unexpected of people and places and could identify perpetrators who abused the trust of these people for selfish and sadistic reasons (Global Fund for Women).

During the height of #MeToo, high profile perpetrators were identified and met with consequences. In the realm of entertainment, figures such Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby, and
Louis C.K. became prominent figures as a result of sexual misconduct. At the time of this composition, Weinstein was convicted for criminal sexual assault in the first degree and rape in the third degree in February 2020 and remains incarcerated. Bill Cosby was incarcerated in 2018 and expelled from the Academy that year along with Roman Polanski, before his conviction was overturned in 2021, granting him his freedom. Louis C.K. won a Grammy in 2022 for best comedy album after a hiatus in 2017 when he confessed to sexual misconduct. These different stories showcase hope for removing predatory elements from society in tandem with despair as entertainment culture seems eager to forgive such transgressions, and even continues to reward these individuals. The stories attached to these figures will be subject to individual conceptions of scrutiny and judgments to all parties involved, yet the fact that these stories are discussed showcases a social desire to acknowledge the bleak realities of systemic issues that affect our lives.

In the late Victorian Era, it was clear that Hardy had to censor his views and his creative work in an act of self-bowdlerization. The conventions of the era where women were cast as either virgin or whore, to say nothing of their legal standing or lack thereof, meant that thought-provoking conversations were not held amidst this system of black and white moralism. Hardy may not have been as candid as he would like, as even his faithful presentation of Tess would see revisions throughout his life, but he injected nuance into a conversation that was self-evident for women and ambiguous for men. The presentation and form of the novel permitted a circulation of Hardy’s work and ideas. Flash forward to the 21st century, and similar prudish ideas exist in a culture of victim blaming and similar conceptions of moral objectivism. However, public sympathy in the Western world is leaning toward the side of the victims as a reactionary movement against powerful men uttering outrageous, misogynistic statements without the
slightest hint of self-awareness or shame. In much the same way, others feel emboldened to offer
disparaging viewpoints to spite such condemnations, leading to the immense polarization along
political lines that has been definitive of the 2020s so far. Thus, there is what is perceived as a
culture war, but one that constantly asks people to participate with uncomfortable ideas,
including notions of toxic masculinity, rape culture, and surveillance of women’s bodies, visions
that echo the past exhibited by Hardy.

I am not the first to draw connections between *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and the era of
#MeToo. Elissa Gurman has revisited *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* in conjunction with the trial of
convicted rapist Brock Turner. The trial took place in 2016 where Turner, a Stanford University
student, was declared guilty of sexually assaulting an unconscious Chanel Miller during a
fraternity party (Gersen). Gurman uses the occasion to consider the unconscious body,
acknowledging its continued appeal from the Victorian Era into the present day. This bizarre
fetishization lends a certain condemnation of Western society’s objectification of women, and
the normalization of rape culture. Gurman delineates that the unconscious woman can never give
consent, a fact that has been recognized by the law of Hardy’s time and has continued to hold
precedence into the contemporary moment. Yet a blind eye emerges as snide comments of
whether a victim had asked to be assaulted due to their dress or actions in a situation are as
commonplace as they are thoroughly deplorable. Gurman concludes with this observation:

Combined, the Turner trial and Hardy’s novel point to the longstanding and
complicated legacy of narratives that present women’s passive, and at times
nearly unconscious, bodies as capable of legitimate consent. The notion that a
female body that is simply “there” can be read as an expression of desire is one
that has deep roots in Western culture and literature. As scholars, it is important
that we consider how literary narratives, tropes, and criticism can be weaponized
to make incidents such as Tess’s and Doe’s defendable and repeatable. Although
Turner was convicted, he was supported by many and ultimately let off with
barely a slap on the wrist…[scholars] can choose to be complicit in the
existing discourses, or to use our knowledge of the stories and histories
of Victorian literature and culture to move forward in constructing a new
narrative of women’s sexual consent. (Gurman)

The final thoughts showcase the insistence that passivity can be likened to consent, which acts as
a direct contradiction to the law. Gurman’s call to action is one that lays responsibility on
scholars to avoid such idealization of the unconscious woman, and may be interpreted as a call to
society at large to be vigilant in perpetuating such harmful views that pervert the standards of
consent.

The relevance of this article has only increased over time, with Turner receiving his light
sentence in March of 2016, and being released from jail three months afterwards for good
behavior. Shortly thereafter, the presidential candidate of the Republican Party, Donald Trump,
was facing media backlash for a conversation with Billy Bush in 2005. In this private recording,
the presidential candidate admitted to groping women by their genitals, with the implication that
consent was not an issue because of his celebrity status (“US Election…”). Trump’s team feared
the leaked audio would be a death sentence to their political ambitions, and yet their concerns
were assuaged with the electoral college certifying Trump’s victory in November. During the
Trump administration, more egregious and troubling views towards women would emerge, most
notably during the hearing of Supreme Court nominee, Brett Kavanaugh. Kavanaugh faced
accusations from multiple women for sexual assault in his high school years, though at least two
were discredited and charged with obstruction of justice. After these proceedings, Kavanaugh would go on to become an Associate Justice without any repercussions after narrowly securing the votes of the Senate, with the credibility of the remaining victims being disputed along political lines (Desjardins). In both these instances, misogyny could be seen, and basic dignity was denied to the victims while alleged predators were elected to some of the highest offices in the United States.

Predating this social climate was a novel that inspired me to make the case for Tess in this contemporary moment. I felt a firm connection through Emma Pérez’s novel Forgetting the Alamo or Blood Memory and her vision of a survivor’s narrative in the wake of increasing prejudice against women and people of color within the United States of America. The story follows Micaela, a “vaquera baby-butch” who has been displaced on the frontier at the tail-end of the battle for Texas’s independence (Pérez, “Queering the Borderlands”). Tragedy befalls her as her father dies at the Alamo and her family is slaughtered by a band of marauders, setting her on the path of revenge. She finds the marauders but is victim to their advances, turning the narrative into a rape-revenge fantasy. Over the course of the novel, she meets indigenous groups, enslaved people, and a variety of consensual same-sex lovers, all of whom are bonded by oppression under a growing colonial influence and a desperate desire to survive. The novel ends on a bittersweet note as history continues to unfold by imposing white nationalism and exceptionalism on the dwindling frontier, a systemic evil that cannot be resolved by this simple notion of revenge. Yet, Micaela survives along with her lover and their child, ensuring the survival of their blood memory, continuing a strong heritage in the midst of oppression.

A historian, Pérez presents a historical intervention where queer voices are reinstated in a tale of revenge in the wake of sexual assault as a larger metaphor against Manifest Destiny as
well as the imperialist practices of the United States under the George W. Bush administration, during which she wrote the novel. The focus was on giving marginalized groups a voice that was lacking within historical accounts in a manner that went beyond self-insertion as Pérez notes, “arguing for a decolonial queer gaze that allows for different possibilities and interpretations of what exists in the gaps and silences but is often not seen or heard” (Pérez 129). The fundamental impetus is to lend an agency that would be difficult to trace through commonplace historical records, though not impossible as photos indicate the existence of Afro-Latina soldiers present throughout the period of US expansionism. Pérez’s ideas are rooted in a thorough knowledge of history, and the actions of the novel appear less of a fictionalization but a reinstatement of a lost history in accordance with Pérez’s conceit through the medium of historiographic metafiction.

There are several thematic connections to Hardy’s novel, including rape and revenge, but also love, compassion, and survival in the pursuit of personal retribution against perpetrators of violence. This novel, removed from Tess by both time and space, nevertheless introduces a key concept of producing more survivor stories in literature and opening up more conversations regarding social injustices, particularly those geared towards women. A similar observation is shared by another American novelist, Janet Beard, who reflects on the timeliness of Tess: “What scandalized Victorian readers about the book is of course what makes it seem so modern: the acknowledgement of how a woman is judged by society after being the victim of sexual assault or violence and the assertion that the awful effects of poverty are not moral failings but rather the cruel consequences of circumstance” (Beard). The transatlantic influence can be directly tied to her own work exploring Appalachian murder ballads in The Ballad of Laurel Springs, and showcases the all-too-prevalent themes that continue to make Tess relevant to the present. It is
in this vein that I would like to offer other survival narratives closer to the home of Hardy and share their insights in lending dignity to the oppressed.

In 2017, Chris Chibnall would address issues related to #MeToo and a new era questioning the moral and ethical use of sexuality in his television series *Broadchurch*. A fellow Dorset author, Chibnall draws inspiration from Hardy in the focus of the series on the countryside. The connections can be found in the eponymous name of the seaside town, a combination of Broadoak and Whitchurch, an amalgamation worthy of and canonically situated in Hardy’s fictionalized Wessex. A village Detective Sergeant, Ellie Miller (Olivia Colman) of the Wessex Police is partnered with the hardboiled, city Detective Inspector, Alec Hardy, a clear allusion to Dorset’s most distinguished author. Rather than a reimagining of Hardy’s work or a pastiche, Chibnall uses themes from Hardy’s novels to convey a gripping drama of how one event can deeply tear into a tightly knit society in what might be dubbed a pastoral noir. The initial two seasons focus on the death of a child in the small seaside town, that affects everyone in the village. Chibnall remains close to the ethos of Hardy, adding humanization to the countryside rather than crafting a series focusing on an urban investigation. Audiences are made keenly aware of this as the deceased child was raised alongside D.S. Miller’s own child, devastating a family she shares a close personal relationship with. Distrust begins to permeate throughout the town and secrets emerge as the outsider, D.I. Hardy unearths hidden truths in pursuit of the boy’s murder. The second season follows the trial of the murderer while exploring D.I. Hardy’s past and the fallout within the Miller and Latimer families.

The third season is the most relevant to Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* as it focuses on how rape affects this small town. The series opens with Trish Winterman uneasily reporting that she has been raped to the local authorities. Winterman remains silent as D.S. Miller goes through
the procedure of collecting evidence, including clothes and invasive swabs. D.S. Miller offers her a reassuring smile whenever she can, but Winterman is lost in a trance, trying to make sense of her trauma while also complying with these dehumanizing procedures. It is a harrowing opening that sets a new tone for a series that had largely dealt with one singular event. Chibnall clearly introduces a new crime and deftly addresses new ideas in the wake of #MeToo.

D.I. Hardy and D.S. Miller deal with questions concerning sexuality and consent within their home lives as their adolescent children face their own challenges growing up. D.S. Miller’s son, Tom, is suspended for sharing pornography in school, an offence that makes Ellie Miller livid in the wake of Winterman’s rape as well as the objectification of women coming from a mother who desperately yearns for her son to be better. Meanwhile, D.I. Hardy’s daughter, Daisy, had recently come to live in Broadchurch with her father before pictures start circulating around the school, making her desire to return to her mother in the town of Sandbrook. These pictures are nude photographs taken by herself, presumed to be shared in private before being spread, virtually, across the school. D.I. Hardy is initially repulsed and ashamed that his daughter would do such a thing, a knee-jerk reaction that seems to place blame upon the victim. D.I. Hardy recants and tries to rationalize things with his daughter by offering vapid platitudes, before taking his most remarkable action.

D.I. Hardy, while driving Daisy to Sandbrook, confronts the boys who violated Daisy’s privacy, stopping his car and letting the boys know that they’ll be subjected to constant surveillance under his watchful eye. Chibnall offers a power fantasy to combat and control the uncontrollable, which is the circulation of information. Chibnall isolates the children responsible for distributing Daisy’s nude photographs and allows D.I. Hardy to threaten them with castration, asserting he’s “a father” when one of the boys cites that the detective cannot act in such a way
since he is a police officer. Thoroughly frightened, the boys retreat as Hardy returns to the car with Daisy, with the father further asserting that his daughter will stay in Broadchurch. The influence of D.I. Hardy in the final episode is monumental, as the season concludes with his assertion that predatory men are an aberration. Chibnall’s show sees this flawed hero being offered as a standard for what men should aspire to be, protecting and serving their community with the ability to adapt, grow, and care for the people around them.

The final episode reveals the rapist to be an adolescent boy named Michael Lucas, under the coercion of a “slimeball” by the name of Leo Humphries, the young man who shared pornography with Tom earlier in the series. Lucas is depicted as reluctant, frightened, and horrified by what he had done, while Leo smugly demonstrates his psychopathy, admitting to raping women in the past and knocking Trish Winterman unconscious with a child’s cricket bat for Lucas to take advantage of the woman. Chibnall appears to be commenting on toxic masculinity and locker room expectations perverting a promising young man through the actions of a sociopathic narcissist who confesses to pride in watching his past exploits through videos taken of his previous acts of rape. Lucas’s father pleads for the officers to be arrested on his son’s behalf so Lucas wouldn’t have to face the consequences of his actions, breaking down in tears as D.S. Miller and D.I. Hardy offer sympathetic but unwavering stares.

It is worth noting that the focus of the season has been primarily on masculine figures. While characters such as Miller and Beth Latimer, mother of the deceased Danny who now works as a social worker who assists women who have been sexually assaulted, are prominent in the series, men dictate the larger narrative when it comes to addressing sexual assault. Whether it is the suspects, slowly revealing their secrets, guilt tangentially related to the case, or D.I. Hardy’s bold proclamation against the people who would harm his daughter, the lens seems
largely skewed towards the white male perspective. This is not to discredit the drama Chibnall portrays, but it is a positionality that must be considered, especially when the season finale three only features a handful of scenes with the victim, Trish Winterman, including a sequence where she asks D.S. Miller if her rape was simply “bad luck” as she was assaulted by a boy she didn’t even know.

There can be little in the way of sympathy for a boy who succumbs to peer pressure to do something so heinous as rape, making these moments that are meant to endear Lucas to audiences fall flat. The psychopathy attached to Humphries is well portrayed, but it is too easy to mitigate all the blame onto him for Winterman’s case, at least from how the narrative presents this villain. Humphries is charged for pre-meditated battery and additional counts of rape from the materials found on his personal devices, which is appropriate, yet the narrative paints him as the adder leading Lucas into temptation when both are equally complicit. Lastly, D.I. Hardy, while offered as a beacon of virtue and a rough sort of goodness, oversteps his boundaries as a parent and an officer of the law to an embarrassing degree. The narrative presents this as a moment showcasing the D.I. victorious, but removed from theatrics, it is clear that he is defying the will of his daughter to project his own ego.

It is remarkable that the series Broadchurch has generally escaped the attention of Hardy scholarship. The final season is an enjoyable, if flawed, presentation on how Hardy factors into the present moment, calling on men to be better. This may be an effective appeal from one man reaching out to fathers and sons to take heed of this message, yet it simply does not open the conversation to women or people of color, despite these groups being represented within the series cast. I believe there can be more moments where characters like D.S. Miller or Beth are allowed to offer stories of comfort and messages of affirmation. Even Winterman’s experience,
masterfully played by the expressive Julie Hesmondhalgh, might be more powerful if audiences were allowed to dig beneath that trauma, opening the door for vulnerability and connection beyond her identification as a survivor of rape. Perhaps this is most effectively spotlighted as Winterman rebukes the detectives, “You know how it feels to be tied up, to have your body violated, and to feel like it’s your fault? Because all I’m thinking of every second of every day right now is how did I cause this? What did I do to make this happen?” (Chibnall). It is a moment that shines due to its raw nature and the earnest line of questioning that a survivor may encounter, and it is unfortunate that Winterman does not have more of those moments throughout the series. Nevertheless, it offered something new and intelligently, if inelegantly, presented these topics in a way where others may contribute to the conversation surrounding #MeToo, accountability, and reflection.

Lastly, 2020’s *I May Destroy You*, written and created by Michaela Coel, was inspired by Coel’s lived experience and captured the attention of audiences and survivors of sexual assault. This BBC/HBO international co-production was described by Trevor Noah who said, “if *Seinfeld* was a show about nothing, this show is a show about everything” (“Michaela Coel – I May”). Coel concedes that this is not a show that is simply about sexual assault, but everything that emerges as the struggles and joys of life continue in the aftermath of this traumatizing event. The plot of the series follows Arabella, a promising young writer who is working on her second book between spending time in Italy and partying with friends. One night, Arabella blacks out and is raped, an incident Arabella only partially remembers. The series is driven by the mystery of Arabella’s assault, victims coping with the trauma of having their boundaries violated, and covering gray areas of sexuality and sexual misconduct, all offered through a lens that asks the audience to draw their own conclusions. Gone is the vision of the Hitchcock-fashioned voyeur
that exoticizes these grim realities, as visceral moments are presented as horrifying as ever, showing some of the darkest impulses of the people of London. The show contains graphic depictions of rape through the hazy memories of Arabella’s being assaulted in a bathroom stall, Kwame’s consensual sex with a stranger on Grindr that quickly turns into a sexual assault as the man forces Kwame back to the bed as he attempts to leave, and even consensual sex between Arabella and Zain takes an unlawful turn as the partners establish condoms are to be used before Zain slips it off during intercourse.

The latter case proves to be the most empowering, as Arabella calls out her assailant at a celebration of authors under the same publishing house. Arabella had covertly suggested Zain was a rapist to her boss and agents, slyly called out Zain to his face before redacting her statement, but subtly yields no results. After hearing a similar experience from a woman at the event, Arabella literally uses the platform of an award ceremony to call out Zain’s actions, including gaslighting her by blaming her for not being able tell the omission of the condom throughout the intercourse, and making her take birth control after the event as a result of his own actions. The event is amplified by another platform, social media, spreading Arabella’s #MeToo moment to a wider audience. In this scene Arabella discovers her power, a power which threatens to consume everything, “eat[ing] men like air,” to borrow a phrase from Sylvia Plath (Plath).

Consider the title sequence for each episode, beginning with the words “I May Destroy You” being typed on screen before the “You” is omitted, leaving the phrase “I May Destroy.” Coel, impressed by this sequence, notes how the phrase can have a plethora of meanings:

I may destroy you, I may destroy myself, I may be completely thoughtless and destroy any and everything around me. Who is saying I may destroy? Is it Arabella? Is it the man
who sexually assaulted her in episode one? Who may destroy? And that I like to leave, just like with everything else, I am leaving it for us to be curious about and to think about. (“Michaela Coel reacts…”)

The subjective nature of destruction is powerful. Arabella possesses the power to destroy others as she keenly demonstrates with Zain. She threatens to destroy her friends as she suddenly turns against her longtime friend Kwame, a victim of rape who had recently had his trauma reawakened as Arabella left him in a locked room with another man. This fallout is a result of Kwame, a gay man, sharing intimacy with Nilufer, a heterosexual woman who reveals herself to be homophobic before Kwame shares his true sexual orientation to a disgusted Nilufer. Arabella reprimands Kwame’s omission of the truth, appropriately donning devil horns and bat wings, as she condemns her friend as guilty of rape. Such is the destructive power Arabella possesses and one that is condemned through the all too fitting nature of her Halloween costume and an ironic episode title, “Social Media is a Great Way to Connect” as she becomes distant from her own support system to mark the nadir of her character arc.

To show the full spectrum of representation, rape is even used as a tool of power through mere suggestion, showcasing the way words and hearsay may be used to destroy a person. A peer of Arabella, Theodora, had consensual sex with a boy named Ryan in high school. Convinced she was partaking in sex work, Ryan proceeds to give her 20 pounds for the encounter, along with compromising pictures of the two. Emotionally wounded, Theodora, a Caucasian woman, tries to prey on racial preconceptions by lying and stating that Ryan, a black man, held her at knife point, going so far as to cut her own thigh in the bathroom to make it look convincing. The fickle nature of Arabella and Terry in their youth is seen as they believe Theodora’s story until the set of incriminating—but consensual—photos are shown, exonerating
Ryan. Theodora is removed from the school and is shown to have a history of lying about such a severe subject matter as a result of coaching by her mother in a custody battle in her early childhood. “The Alliance” episode offers a twisted gaze at the insincerity and lies fostered as a result of feeling spurned and adds the complexities of racial dynamics on top of gender inequalities. These concepts would be expanded as characters share their trauma and are often looked down upon as people’s bigotry and preconceptions cut them off from the justice they deserve as their thoughts and desires are unfairly marginalized.

The show ends on an ambiguous note, as fantasy after fantasy plays out after Arabella sees her assailant at the Ego Death Bar. Arabella considers how she will get revenge on her assailant. The first fantasy leaves the assailant drugged and vulnerable, with Arabella embracing the shift in the power dynamic by exposing his genitals on the street as he is being held down in a semi-conscious state before he is murdered, and his body shoved under the bed where Arabella left the evidence of her assault for a long period of time. The second fantasy sees the assailant confide in Arabella, tearfully sharing he doesn’t know what it’s like to have a relationship outside of rape before being escorted by the police. The final fantasy is a surreal vision as memories of the past flood in to occupy an otherwise conspicuously empty bar. Arabella and her assailant engage in a moment of consensual intimacy that features Arabella exerting her dominance by penetrating the man. The two wake up the morning after, where the assailant gently proclaims that he will stay until she asks him to go, a sentimental notion that is instantly brought down with her dismissing him. At that moment, three versions of the assailant exit through the door, including the bloodied victim under the bed, the man set to be arrested, and the lover who obliges her request. This vision is symbolic of Arabella’s letting go of the assailant as a figure who occupies her mind, an ego death that culminates in the rebirth of her career. The
multiple scenarios that play out in the narrative signify a stream of consciousness as revenge fantasies play out, each with a disturbing or uncomfortable truth engrained within. Yet, these thoughts are natural, validated, and help remove Arabella from her assailant and the trauma that had informed her throughout the series.

The series is a work of art inspired by the experiences of the artist. Michaela Coel plays the role of Arabella while also serving as director and executive producer among other roles, with the series serving as a passion project, a child of her creative imagination. It is fitting that a series that allows one to recognize modern-day London addresses different races and different experiences with sexuality and sexual assault. While these have been the primary points of focus for this section, there is also the matter of racism, transphobia, and continued discrepancies in gender dynamics, making the series a very relatable experience for many marginalized groups.

However, such a view may seem idealistic as Coel is just one voice who has managed to break through and share her experiences, including discrimination and assault. Coel shared in 2020 at the Edinburgh TV Festival that “being a misfit hurts...the lack of varied perspective among producers, the lack of misfits producing telly can have catastrophic consequences,” touching on the notion of alienation before concluding that the entertainment industry has been looked on as a microcosm of the world, including protecting people in power known for their misconduct while failing to serve outsiders in the industry without celebrity or power to snatch (“Michaela Coel on”). Not only is there a general lack of representation, but there are also predatory practices that make television a breeding ground for abuse and exploitation, including rape of those who are disenfranchised. The resolution to this is transparency in all practices, and Coel has made a series where transparency is presented and not something hidden away in the dark.
While something like *Broadchurch* may present a more homogenous view catering to a homogenous audience, *I May Destroy You* offers countless opportunities for intersectionality. Much like Pratt’s contact zones, these are points of frustration, tension, and negation which must be reconciled with difficulty and acknowledgment of differences. Where they fit in conversation with *Tess* is that they ultimately represent a cultural touchstone in modern media that fuels conversation in an age of streaming television as a major source of entertainment and topical discussion.

All these projects speak to the enduring timeliness of *Tess*, to borrow a phrase from Beard. Polanski’s film will always be acknowledged and revisited fondly as a product of a master director creating a straight adaptation of Hardy’s novel. Knowledge of Polanski’s history as a sexual predator adds a layer of relevancy that shows the dangers Hardy had tried to make apparent nearly a century before the film debuted, making this unfortunate legacy one that must be contested to have rounded discussion of a celebrated artist. Hardy will be revisited fondly by subsequent generations as a masterpiece writer and a proud product of Dorset, inspiring other writers to tell their own pastoral stories that lend empathy and empowerment, including through the genre of procedural dramas. Lastly, the conversation contained has largely focused on cisgender, heterosexual male perspectives, a constrictive point of view that must be opened up to examine queer, feminist, and increasingly diverse creations and interpretations of trauma, survival stories, and simply living. The legacy of *Tess* will always extend beyond a title so ill-fitting as that of a fallen woman, as the condemnation of women based on sexuality and sexual encounters will never ultimately define a person’s value, no matter how harshly assailants and society at large may try to make her feel otherwise. Tess is a survivor who continues living, for all the joys and heartaches to be found in her life, a resilient soul who continues to persevere for
those she most cares for, and a figure who is ready to face the consequences of her actions, but only the actions she has made of her own accord. Tess speaks to the disenfranchised and, despite her tragedy, offers a tale of hope and a vision of a brighter future for those around her to feel validated and secure, a nurturing catharsis that remains the gift of this pure woman.
Works Cited


Brockes, Emma. “Samantha Geimer on Roman Polanski: ‘We Email a Little Bit.’” The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 18 Sept. 2013,


Desjardins, Lisa. “How the Sexual Assault Accusation against Kavanaugh Unfolded, in One Timeline.” PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, 18 Sept. 2018,


“Michaela Coel - ‘I May Destroy You’ & Writing about Sexual Assault: The Daily Social Distancing Show.” YouTube, 11 Aug. 2020, youtu.be/YXDu90hbWbg?si=Y05w-8u28VQ7wGtO.

“Michaela Coel on Turning down a Million Dollar Deal with Netflix: Edinburgh TV Festival.” YouTube, 1 Aug. 2020, youtu.be/B6djGzYMjBk?si=RQWCW9tvp3GXr6kP.

“Michaela Coel Reacts to I May Destroy You Scene: GQ Action Replay: British GQ.” YouTube, 29 June 2020,youtu.be/GWNb6uGc748?si=LN8r4cSoBbE37B_G.


Norton, Caroline Sheridan. “A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cransworth’s Marriage and Divorce Bill.” A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cransworth’s Marriage and
Divorce Bill., London: Longman, Brown, Green And Longmans, 1855.,


Patmore, Coventry. The Angel in the House, by Coventry Patmore, Project Gutenberg,

Patmore, Coventry. “The Angel of the House.” The Norton Anthology of English Literature,


Plath, Sylvia. “Lady Lazarus by Sylvia Plath.” Poetry Foundation, Poetry Foundation,


Vita

Jesse Cristian Marin graduated summa cum laude from the University of Texas at El Paso with a B.A. in English and American Literature in 2016. Jesse had returned in 2020 to work on his M.A., continuing in the field of English and American Literature. During this time, Jesse served as a Master’s Assistant for the University Writing Center at UTEP, and a lecturer for the First Year Composition Program, under the guidance of Dr. Lou Herman and Dr. Lauren Rosenberg, respectively. Jesse was acknowledged as a Mellon HSI Crossing Latinidades Creative Writing Fellow in the summer of 2021, documenting El Paso’s past in “Uncovering History’s Voices.” Jesse has been the recipient of the following scholarships: UTEP Presidential Excellence Scholarship, LULAC National Scholarship Fund, STARS Scholarship Fund, Lucille T. Stevens Estate Fund, Dillard’s Scholarship, and the C. H. Leavell-Matkin Scholarship.

Jesse has served as an educator since working as a Peer Leader in his final year of undergraduate education in Fall 2015. Jesse has since worked as a substitute teacher in the city of El Paso before obtaining a full-time position in Fall 2022 as an English Supplemental Support Resource instructor at the high school level. Jesse’s ongoing career in special education allows him to directly impact the lives of students and ensure their success combined with accommodations that allow them equitable access to learning and offers unique opportunities within the El Paso community. Jesse is a member of the Texas State Teachers’ Association, and is a strong supporter of social justice, with regards to neurodiversity.

Contact Information : j.marin1994@yahoo.com