



Angel and Tess in the garden

This passage is remarkable for the description of the luxuriant garden at the dairy farm at Talbothays and because it develops the main themes of the novel, especially individuality and self-definition.

Thomas Hardy
Tess of the D'Urbervilles
(1891)

Chapter 19

The outskirts of the garden in which Tess found herself had been left uncultivated for some years, and was now damp and rank with juicy grass¹ which sent up mists of pollen² at a touch; and with tall blooming weeds³ emitting offensive smells – weeds whose red and yellow and purple hues formed a polychrome as dazzling⁴ as that of cultivated flowers. She went stealthily⁵ as a cat through this profusion of growth, gathering cuckoo-spittle⁶ on her skirts, cracking snails⁷ that were underfoot, staining her hands with thistle-milk and slug-slime⁸, and rubbing off upon her naked arms sticky blights⁹ which, though snow-white on the apple-tree trunks, made madder stains¹⁰ on her skin; thus she drew quite near to Clare, still unobserved of him.

Tess was conscious of neither time nor space. The exaltation which she had described as being producible at will by gazing¹¹ at a star came now without any determination of hers; she undulated upon the thin notes of the second-hand harp, and their harmonies passed like breezes through her, bringing tears into her eyes. The floating pollen seemed to be his notes made visible, and the dampness of the garden the weeping¹² of the garden's sensibility. Though near nightfall, the rank-smelling weed-flowers glowed¹³ as if they would not close for intentness¹⁴, and the waves of colour mixed with the waves of sound.

The light which still shone was derived mainly from a large hole in the western bank of cloud; it was like a piece of day left behind by accident, dusk¹⁵ having closed in elsewhere. He concluded his plaintive melody, a very simple performance, demanding no great skill; and she waited, thinking another might be begun. But, tired of playing, he had desultorily come round the fence¹⁶, and was rambling up behind her¹⁷. Tess, her cheeks on fire, moved away furtively, as if hardly moving at all.

Angel, however, saw her light summer gown, and he spoke; his low tones reaching her, though he was some distance off.

'What makes you draw off¹⁸ in that way, Tess?' said he. 'Are you afraid?'

'Oh no, sir – not of outdoor things; especially just now when the apple-bloom¹⁹ is falling, and everything is so green.'

'But you have your indoor fears – eh?'

'Well – yes, sir.'

'What of?'

'I couldn't quite say.'

'The milk turning sour?'

'No.'

'Life in general?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Ah – so have I, very often. This hobble²⁰ of being alive is rather serious, don't you think so?'

'It is – now you put it that way.'

'All the same, I shouldn't have expected a young girl like you to see it so just yet. How is it you do?'

She maintained a hesitating silence.

'Come, Tess, tell me in confidence.'

She thought that he meant what were the aspects of things to her, and replied shyly –

'The trees have inquisitive eyes, haven't they? – that is, seem as if they had. And the river says, – "Why do ye trouble me with your looks?" And you seem to see numbers of to-morrows just all in a line, the first of them the biggest and clearest, the others getting smaller and smaller as they stand farther away; but they all seem very fierce and cruel

- 1 damp ... grass. Umido e lussureggiante di erba succosa.
- 2 mists of pollen. Pulviscolo di pollini.
- 3 blooming weeds. Erbacce rigogliose.
- 4 dazzling. Brillante.
- 5 gathering cuckoo-spittle. Raccogliendo secrezioni gommose.
- 6 cracking snails. Schiacciando le chioccioline.
- 7 staining ... slug-slime. Macchiandosi le mani con la linfa dei cardi e la bava delle lumache.
- 8 rubbing off ... sticky blights. Venendo a contatto sopra le braccia nude con la ruggine appiccaticcia delle piante.
- 9 madder stains. Macchie color carminio.
- 10 at will by gazing. A piacimento fissando.
- 11 the weeping. Il pianto.
- 12 glowed. Sfolgoravano.
- 13 for intentness. Di proposito.
- 14 dusk. Crepuscolo.
- 15 he had ... fence. Aveva girato a casaccio attorno al recinto.
- 16 was ... her. Prese a camminare alle spalle di lei.
- 17 makes ... off. Ti spinge a fuggire.
- 18 apple-bloom. Fioritura del melo.
- 19 hobble. Impaccio.



and as if they said, 'I'm coming! Beware of me!²⁰! Beware of me!'... But *you*, sir, can raise up dreams with your music, and drive all such horrid fancies away!

He was surprised to find this young woman – who though but a milkmaid had just that touch of rarity about her which might make her the envied of her housemates – shaping such sad imaginings²¹. She was expressing in her own native phrases – assisted a little by her Sixth Standard training²² – feelings which might almost have been called those of the age – the ache of modernism. The perception arrested him less when he reflected that what are called advanced ideas are really in great part but the latest fashion in definition – a more accurate expression, by words in *-logy* and *-ism*, of sensations which men and women have vaguely grasped²³ for centuries.

Still, it was strange that they should have come to her while yet so young; more than strange; it was impressive, interesting, pathetic. Not guessing the cause, there was nothing to remind him that experience is as to intensity, and not as to duration. Tess's passing corporeal blight had been her mental harvest²⁴.

Tess, on her part, could not understand why a man of clerical family and good education, and above physical want²⁵, should look upon it as a **mishap** to be alive. [...]

It was true that he was at present out of his class. But she knew that was only because, like Peter the Great in a shipwright's yard²⁶, he was studying what he wanted to know. He did not milk cows because he was obliged to milk cows, but because he was learning to be a rich and prosperous dairyman²⁷, landowner, agriculturist, and breeder of cattle²⁸. He would become an American or Australian Abraham²⁹, commanding like a monarch his flocks and his herds³⁰, his spotted and his ring-straked³¹, his men-servants and his maids. At times, nevertheless, it did seem **unaccountable** to her that a decidedly bookish, musical, thinking young man should have chosen deliberately to be a farmer, and not a clergyman, like his father and brothers.

Thus, neither having the clue to the other's secret, they were respectively **puzzled** at what each revealed, and awaited new knowledge of each other's character and mood without attempting to pry³² into each other's history.

Every day, every hour, brought to him one more little stroke³³ of her nature, and to her one more of his. Tess was trying to lead a repressed life, but she little divined the strength³⁴ of her own vitality.

At first Tess seemed to regard Angel Clare as an intelligence rather than as a man. As such she compared him with herself; and at every discovery of the abundance of his illuminations, of the distance between her own modest mental standpoint and the unmeasurable, Andean altitude of his, she became quite **dejected**, disheartened from all further effort³⁵ on her own part whatever.

He observed her dejection one day, when he had casually mentioned something to her about pastoral life in ancient Greece. She was gathering the buds³⁶ called 'lords and ladies' from the bank while he spoke.

'Why do you look so **woebegone** all of a sudden³⁷?' he asked.

'Oh, 'tis only - about my own self,' she said, with a **frail** laugh of sadness, fitfully³⁸ beginning to peel 'a lady' meanwhile. 'Just a sense of what might have been with me! My life looks as if it had been wasted for want³⁹ of chances! When I see what you know, what you have read, and seen, and thought, I feel what a nothing I am! I'm like the poor Queen of Sheba⁴⁰ who lived in the Bible. There is no more spirit in me.'

'Bless my soul, don't go troubling about that! Why,' he said with some enthusiasm, 'I should be only too glad, my dear Tess, to help you to anything in the way of history, or any line of reading you would like to take up⁴¹ -'

'It is a lady again,' interrupted she, holding out the bud she had peeled.

'What?'

'I meant that there are always more ladies than lords when you come to peel them.'

'Never mind about the lords and ladies. Would you like to take up any course of study – history, for example?'

'Sometimes I feel I don't want to know anything more about it than I know already.'

- 20 **Beware of me.** Attenta.
- 21 **shaping ... imaginings.** Dar forma a immagini così tristi.
- 22 **Sixth Standard training.** Istruzione elementare.
- 23 **vaguely grasped.** Compreso confusamente.
- 24 **Tess's ... harvest.** La ruggine fisica e passeggera di Tess era stata raccolta anche dalla sua mente.
- 25 **above physical want.** Al di sopra delle necessità materiali.
- 26 **like ... yard.** Come Pietro il Grande nel cantiere navale. Pietro il Grande, leggendario zar di Russia e abile comandante navale, da giovane scelse di imparare il mestiere di carpentiere navale.
- 27 **dairyman.** Lattaio, fattore.
- 28 **breeder of cattle.** Allevatore di bestiame.
- 29 **Abraham.** Nel capitolo 12 della Genesi, Abramo, seguendo le istruzioni di Dio, entra nella terra di Cana e diventa ricco grazie al bestiame.
- 30 **his flocks and his herds.** Le sue greggi e i suoi armenti.
- 31 **his spotted and his ring-straked.** Punteggiati e chiazziati.
- 32 **attempting to pry.** Tentare di indagare.
- 33 **stroke.** Tratto.
- 34 **she ... strength.** Aveva una vaga idea della forza.
- 35 **disheartened ... effort.** Senza il coraggio di tentare ulteriori sforzi.
- 36 **gathering the buds.** Cogliendo dei boccioli.
- 37 **all of a sudden.** All'improvviso.
- 38 **fitfully.** Capricciosamente.
- 39 **want.** Mancanza.
- 40 **Queen of Sheba.** Regina di Saba.
- 41 **to take up.** Intraprendere.



‘Why not?’

105 ‘Because what’s the use of learning that I am one of a long row⁴² only – finding out that there is set down in some old book somebody just like me, and to know that I shall only act her part; making me sad, that’s all. The best is not to remember that your nature and your past doings have been just like thousands’ and thousands’, and that your coming life and doings ’ll be like thousands’ and thousands.’

‘What, really, then, you don’t want to learn anything?’

110 ‘I shouldn’t mind learning why – why the sun do shine on the just and the unjust alike,’ she answered, with a slight quaver⁴³ in her voice. ‘But that’s what books will not tell me.’

42 row. Schiera.

43 slight quaver. Lieve tremolio.

LITERARY COMPETENCE

> VOCABULARY

1 READ the text and match the highlighted words with their meaning.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1 acid | 7 curious |
| 2 impossible to explain | 8 surprised |
| 3 fragile | 9 misfortune |
| 4 depressed | 10 colours |
| 5 sad | 11 furtively |
| 6 suffering | |

> COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

2 READ lines 1-58 again and make notes about

- 1 where Tess has to pass through to reach Angel;
- 2 how she feels listening to his music;
- 3 what kind of song he is playing;
- 4 whether Tess is afraid or not;
- 5 the subject of their conversation;
- 6 whether Tess received any education.

3 READ the rest of the text again and answer the following questions.

- 1 What does Tess fail to understand about Angel?
- 2 What attitude do they have towards each other?
- 3 How does Tess see herself in comparison with Angel?
- 4 Who does Tess compare herself to?
- 5 What does Angel offer to do?
- 6 Does Tess accept? Why?

> COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT

4 SAY who tells the story. Find the lines where the narrator becomes obtrusive.

5 FIND examples of Hardy’s descriptive technique, that is, letting the reader see the scene through the eyes of a character. What effect does he achieve?

6 EXPLAIN how the characters are presented.



7 FOCUS on Tess's character.

- 1 Describe Tess's relationship with her natural surroundings.
- 2 Find the lines which show Tess's lack of self-awareness or confidence.
- 3 What is her view of life like?
- 4 How does she view Angel?
- 5 What do Tess's words 'But that's what books will not tell me' (lines 111-112) indicate?

8 FIND words and phrases that convey Angel's perception of Tess. What is his opinion of her? How does Angel contrast with Alec?

9 ANALYSE Hardy's use of language in the first paragraph.

- 1 Underline the words conveying the conventional response of revulsion.
- 2 Find the words celebrating fertility.
- 3 Find the present participles referred to Tess. What do they emphasise?
- 4 Hardy's poetic skill can be seen in the use of poetic devices such as onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance. Point out some examples.
- 5 Analyse the use of contrast in these lines.

10 POINT out the themes presented in the passage.

➤ **COMPETENCE: PRODUCING A WRITTEN TEXT ON A GIVEN SUBJECT**

11 WRITE a 10/12-line paragraph to explain Hardy's use of nature in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.