



Tess's execution

Here are the last pages from Tess of the D'Urbervilles. Four years have passed since Tess and Angel met. Angel and Liza-Lu, Tess's sister, are walking away from the town of Wintoncester.

Thomas Hardy
Tess of the D'Urbervilles
(1891)

Chapter 59

The city of Wintoncester, that fine old city, aforetime capital of Wessex, lay amidst its convex and concave downlands in all the brightness and warmth of a July morning. The gabled brick, tile, and freestone¹ houses had almost dried off for the season their integument of lichen², the streams in the meadows were low, and in the sloping High Street from the West Gateway to the mediaeval cross and from the mediaeval cross to the bridge, that leisurely dusting and sweeping was in progress which usually ushers in³ an old-fashioned market-day.

From the western gate aforesaid the highway, as every Wintoncestrian knows, ascends a long and regular incline of the exact length of a measured mile, leaving the houses gradually behind. Up this road from the precincts⁴ of the city two persons were walking rapidly, as if unconscious of the trying ascent – unconscious through preoccupation and not through buoyancy⁵. They had emerged upon this road through a narrow barred wicket⁶ in a high wall a little lower down. They seemed anxious to get out of the sight of the houses and of their kind, and this road appeared to offer the quickest means of doing so. Though they were young they walked with bowed⁷ heads, which gait of grief⁸ the sun's rays smiled on pitilessly.

One of the pair was Angel Clare, the other a tall budding creature – half girl, half woman – a spiritualized image of Tess, slighter than she, but with the same beautiful eyes – Clare's sister-in-law, Liza-Lu. Their pale faces seemed to have shrunk to half their natural size. They moved on hand in hand, and never spoke a word, the drooping of their heads⁹ being that of Giotto's 'Two Apostles'.

When they nearly reached the top of the great West Hill the clocks in the town struck eight. Each gave a start at the notes, and, walking onward yet a few steps, they reached the first milestone, standing whitely on the green margin of the grass, and backed by the down, which here was open to the road. [...]

Against these far stretches of country rose, in front of the other city edifices, a large red-brick building, with level gray roofs, and rows of short barred windows bespeaking captivity, the whole contrasting greatly by its formalism with the quaint¹⁰ irregularities of the Gothic erections. It was somewhat disguised from the road in passing it by yews and evergreen oaks, but it was visible enough up here. The wicket from which the pair had lately emerged was in the wall of this structure. From the middle of the building an ugly flat-topped octagonal tower ascended against the east horizon, and viewed from this spot, on its shady side and against the light, it seemed the one blot¹¹ on the city's beauty. Yet it was with this blot, and not with the beauty, that the two gazers were concerned.

Upon the cornice of the tower a tall staff¹² was fixed. Their eyes were riveted¹³ on it. A few minutes after the hour had struck something moved slowly up the staff, and extended itself upon the breeze. It was a black flag.

'Justice' was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess. And the d'Urberville knights and dames slept on in their tombs unknowing. The two speechless¹⁴ gazers bent themselves down to the earth, as if in prayer, and remained thus a long time, absolutely motionless: the flag continued to wave silently. As soon as they had strength they arose, joined hands again, and went on.

1 gabled ... freestone. Munite di tetto a due spioventi in mattoni, tegole e pietra da taglio.

2 integument of lichen. Tegumento di lichene.

3 ushers in. Inaugura.

4 precincts. Dintorni.

5 buoyancy. Esuberanza, allegria.

6 wicket. Cancellotto.

7 bowed. Chine.

8 gait of grief. Andatura addolorata.

9 the drooping of their heads. Le loro teste chine.

10 quaint. Pittoresche.

11 blot. Macchia.

12 staff. Asta.

13 riveted. Fissi.

14 speechless. Silenziosi.



VISUAL ANALYSIS

1 READ the text. Then write a caption to describe the content of each section.

- Part 1 (lines 1-7):
- Part 2 (lines 8-25):
- Part 3 (lines 26-35):
- Part 4 (lines 36-43):

2 LOOK at the visual analysis of the text and write down what each highlight and colour represents.







the drooping

3 DISCUSS the following questions in pairs.

- 1 Is Tess shown in the final scene?
- 2 What is the milestone symbol of?
- 3 Focus on the description of Liza-Lu. How is she connected to Tess?
- 4 What does the black flag indicate?
- 5 How is God presented in the text?
- 6 Why does Hardy put the word 'justice' in quotation marks?
- 7 Considering the importance of seasons in the novel, why do you think Hardy chose July as time setting for this moment of Tess's life?
- 8 Why does Hardy compare Angel and Liza-Lu to 'Two Apostles', by the Renaissance painter Giotto?
- 9 What do you think Angel's fate will be?

> COMPETENCE: ESTABLISHING LINKS WITH THE CONTEXT OF THE AGE

4 DISCUSS. Explain how this text develops Hardy's view of man's place in the universe. What thinkers influenced his thought?