**Food in the Novels of Thomas Hardy: Eating as Narrative**

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**Preface**

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**Abbreviations**

*CL* The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy

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**1.**

**Introduction**

While sumptuous descriptions of food from ‘the smell of cinders and gravy’ and the ‘brilliant fry’ of eggs in *The Trumpet-Major* to the ‘British Queen’ strawberry that Alec d’Urberville places in Tess’s reluctant mouth, are a feature of Hardy’s fiction, the author has been described as a ‘small eater, a small man… indifferent to what he ate’ (Millgate 2006, p.244). Contrary to this charge of indifference, Hardy’s awareness of food and his childhood culinary repertoire impacted on his later literary life. Hardy’s mother, Jemima, cared very much about food and as a young unmarried woman had ‘resolved to be a cook in a London club-house’ (Hardy F. E. 1928, p.9). Her ‘developed culinary skills’ formed the life-long tastes of her son whose appetite ‘tend[ed] always towards such basics as kettle-broth and grilled bacon that were associated with, and capable of reviving the memories of his childhood’, memories that are recast as backdrops to his novels.

Hardy’s life-long preference for the ‘countrified cuisine’ of his childhood, (Millgate 2006, p.244) is echoed in a letter to Eduard Bertz in which George Gissing described Hardy’s simplicity as the ‘peasant’s view of life’.[[1]](#footnote-1) Hardy’s childhood home was lower middle-class. Jemima kept hens, selling the eggs that were ‘surplus to her own family’s needs’ (Millgate 2006, p.31). Hardy’s father kept a pig which was fattened and slaughtered every year while the making of the black pudding was a family affair with Hardy’s sister Katie helping her mother out in the process. Hardy senior also kept ‘a hive or two of bees’ managing to provide well for his family during the ‘Hungry Forties’ in which economic depression brought unemployment and starvation to many rural communities. In a letter of 11 March 1912 to William Rothenstein, thanking him for a copy of J. L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond’s *The Village Labourer, 1760-1832*, Hardy reveals, ‘As a child I personally knew a boy who starved to death in ‘the hungry forties’. (*CL*4 p.206). The inspiration Hardy derived from his mother’s cooking manifested itself early on in his literary career. While writing *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874), the novel which thrust Hardy into the literary spotlight, he was staying at Higher Bockhampton ‘under the stimulus and sympathy of his mother’s companionship’[[2]](#footnote-2) flourishing artistically under the ‘not inconsiderable benefit of his mother’s care and cooking’ which enabled him to ‘indulge in the luxury of working at his manuscript until she called him to a meal’ (Millgate 2006, p.141).

Even on his death-bed, Hardy attempted to maintain an appetite. Just days before he died, the author managed to consume a lunch of ‘pheasant and champagne’ which seemed, remembers Florence, Hardy’s widow, ‘an encouraging sign’ (530). During the same period Florence recalled that Hardy was particularly pleased to receive some grapes from Newman Flower of Cassels publishing house: ‘As a rule he disliked receiving gifts, but on this occasion he showed an almost childlike pleasure, and insisted upon the grapes being held up for the inspection of the doctor, and whoever came in the room. He ate some, and said quite gaily, “I’m going on with these”. Everything he had that day in the way of food or drink he seemed to appreciate keenly, though naturally he took but little’ (Hardy, F. E. 1928, p.265).

Food defined Hardy’s ‘death-day’ during which he asked his parlour maid Nellie, for ‘kettle-broth’ of which she says, he was ‘very fond. He always asked for it when out of sorts’.[[3]](#footnote-3) Kettle-broth was made from ‘finely chopped parsley, onions and bread cooked in hot water’. Nellie claims that on this day he had specifically asked for her to prepare it while also requesting a rasher of bacon cooked ‘in front of him in the flame of his bedroom coal-fire.’ In a moving account, Nellie remembers, ‘While I cooked the bacon he quietly watched from his bed. He drank the broth, but could not eat the rasher. He only picked at that’. J Stevens Cox interprets Hardy’s request as ‘an evocative re-enactment of a common domestic ritual of his early childhood at Bockhampton’. Cox goes on to suggest that as such, ‘it is a clue that shortly before his death he was imaginatively reliving early experiences’ (15-16).

**II**

Thomas Hardy famously drew upon the facts of his own life to shape and source the fictional world of his novels. Hardy, a countryman in the great century of agricultural change, recast his home county of Dorset, together with its neighbours Wiltshire, Devon, Hampshire, Somerset and Berkshire, as the fictional region of Wessex. More than this, Hardy actively contributed to contemporary debates. In ‘The Dorsetshire Labourer’ (1883),[[4]](#footnote-4) for instance, Hardy comments on dying rural traditions, increased migration of farm labourers, the changing attire of the rural poor and the erosion of copyhold agreements that once provided stability to agricultural labourers ‒ all concerns that also inform and resonate in his fictional works.

But Hardy was not averse to blurring the lines between autobiography and fiction, penning his own ‘official biography’ which was to be published under Florence’s name after his death and entitled: *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy* and *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy*. Primarily, however, Hardy, along with other authors such as Joseph Conrad, oversaw the development of the nineteenth-century novel into its Modern incarnation, achieving the aim to record human experience but also avoid ‘explicitness’ while retaining ‘all suggestiveness’ through the representation of food. This entirely new way of interpreting the fiction of Thomas Hardy reveals his ‘darker truth’ (Guerard 1949, p.4) and is achieved by providing an historical contextualisation of food, and thus combining a literary, social and historical perspective to show how Hardy’s fiction became an artistic – but realistic – record of the nineteenth century. Where food itself has, until now, remained the critically ‘unseen’ in Hardy’s novels, the following book shows that it represents the ‘forms’ that persuade and enlighten. Hardy’s novels, being grounded in verisimilitude, offer an authentic insight into key political and sociological aspects of the nineteenth century and it is through the exploration of references to food that these can be charted.

Having said this, Hardy’s form of realism has been interrogated by critics. He has been accused of romanticizing his characters (Page 2001, p.356), despite clearly writing against romance fiction in which realism was disregarded in favour of fantasy and science fiction. While Robert Louis Stevenson was producing *Treasure Island* and *Strange Case* *of* *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Hardy was creating novels such as *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) in which nature and character delineate the social and moral concerns of the age. In *Tess* Hardy deals with food production, female sexuality and rape while in *Jude the Obscure* (1895), Hardy questions methods of animal slaughter and the validity of marriage. Despite this, critics debated whether Hardy’s novels can be classified as ‘realist’ texts. To William J. Hyde, Hardy’s fiction offers the ‘reconciliation of the real and the fictitious … for the rustics are both real and unreal by the author’s design’ (1958, p. 46). In ‘A Study of Mr. Thomas Hardy’ which appeared in the *Westminster Review*, February 1892, J. Newton-Robinson wrote that Hardy had created ‘an idealised Old England, peopled by an idyllic race of joyous peasants [around whom he has thrown] an imaginative glamour, a poetical atmosphere, strangely precious in these days of realism’. The charge against Hardy was that he made his peasantry too clever and witty, and that in reality they would be, as Richard Jefferies described them, ‘human animal[s]’ (49). Hardy’s realism, together with a hint of its creative potential in his works, can be ascertained from his treatment of ‘Hodge’ in ‘The Dorsetshire Labourer’, in which he claims that behind this generic term for the rustic peasantry lie individuals who are ‘infinite in difference’ being sometimes stupid, sad, depressed, genius, clever, happy or serene. The point is that Hardy’s ‘peculiar style of realism’ (Page 2001, p.359) is a combination of his imagination and his own experiences of the world.

The realism in Hardy’s novels is embedded in references to food as well as in the characteristics with which their characters are endowed and which places them geographically and temporally. The authenticity of this ‘idyllic race of joyous peasants’ in *The Trumpet-Major* (1880), is scrutinised by the underlying fear of hunger brought about by Napoleon’s attempts to ‘starve England by withholding Continental supplies’ of corn (Fay 1932, p.113). Similarly, in *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872),sinister undertones of contemporary poaching laws of the time, pervade the rural jocularity of Fancy Day’s and Dick Dewey’s romance. As Michael Millgate has shown, Hardy kept a note book, begun in late 1882, entitled ‘Facts, from Newspapers, Histories, Biographies, & Other Chronicles – (mainly Local)’ which was used to record details from the *Dorset County Chronicle* of 1826 which, Millgate argues, was drawn upon to provide realistic detail in the writing of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (Millgate 2006, p.231).

In his 1890 essay, ‘Candour in English Fiction’ Hardy expressed his dismay that in order to meet the prescriptive demands of the serial market and the lending library, a novelist was forced to betray his ‘best imaginative instincts’ and provide instead ‘a dénouement which he knows to be indescribably unreal and meretricious, but dear to the Grundyist and subscriber’.[[5]](#footnote-5) Hardy argued that ‘an undue proportion’ of ‘English fiction’ at this time was the ‘literature of quackery’, suggesting that if Shakespeare or Sophocles had been writing in the form of the novel, they too would have been heavily censored. To Hardy, fiction should express ‘truly the views of life prevalent in its time’ and that ‘conscientious fiction alone’ provides ‘representations of the world’. His position changed little over the period of his life and writing in 1911 for the Preface to a new collection of the novels and poems, Hardy defends his fiction by claiming that his ‘imaginative writings’ which extend ‘over more than forty years’ do not attempt to ‘exhibit a coherent scientific theory of the universe’ but instead simply ‘the mere impressions of the moment’ (Hynes 1984, p.499).

The modern realism of Hardy creates an aesthetic form and an impression of the world. In Hardy’s novels, food brings verisimilitude to storylines that rely on implausible coincidences by providing historically accurate backdrops to events. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) corn forms the basis of the fictional plot – being the main ingredient in the furmity and the produce upon which Henchard has made and lost his fortune – while serving as a link to historical events: the Repeal of the Corn Laws. In *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, food production serves as a site for the anxieties that dominated Victorian middle-class attitudes towards women. Food in the realist novel not only brings verisimilitude to the environment in which it is set, but enables the author to go beyond the primary character and setting to create signposts to sub-narratives that demand an active engagement from the reader.

**II**

On 19 March 1892, Henry James wrote to Robert Louis Stevenson, a fan of Hardy’s fiction: ‘The good little Thomas Hardy has scored a great success with *Tess of the d’Urbervilles,* which is chock-full of faults and falsity and yet has a singular beauty and charm’.[[6]](#footnote-6) The following year, in response to Stevenson’s reply chastising his view of the novel, James replied: ‘I bowed my head and let “Tess of the Ds” pass. But oh yes, dear Louis, she is vile’.[[7]](#footnote-7) James was not Hardy’s only critic: after the publication of *Jude the Obscure*, Max Beerbohm told Virginia Stephens (later Woolf) that he ‘couldn’t bear’ the novel and ‘thought it falsified life, for there is really more happiness than sorrow in life, and Hardy tries to prove the opposite’ (Ferguson 2013, p.16). Hardy was clearly not without his critics and was frequently maligned for his ‘gloomy fatalism’ (74) while being famously snubbed in F. R. Leavis’ seminal publication, *The Great Tradition*. Terry Eagleton claims that Hardy never resolved the conflicts ‘between pastoral, melodrama, social realism, naturalism, myth, fable [and] classical tragedy’ (1976, p.131) summing up the most common cause of complaint against Hardy.

However, not all Hardy criticism has been negative: after the publication of his essay, ‘The Dorsetshire Labourer’ (1883), Hardy secured his position as ‘a novelist familiar with rural working-class life’ and ‘an expert whose views on a subject of current socio-political interest should be consulted’ (Gatrell 2013, p.34). Havelock Ellis, responding to the essay, applauded Hardy’s peasants ‘for the like of whom, in strong and living individuality, in wealth of quaint humour, we must go back to Shakspere’ (*Westminster Review*, 1883). Six years later, James Barrie’s article in the *Contemporary Review,* ‘Thomas Hardy: the Historian of Wessex’, applauded his ‘historical and cultural authority’.[[8]](#footnote-8) Conversely, Snell dismissed the idea that Hardy had an ‘intimate knowledge of the Dorsetshire labourer’ claiming that his upbringing – the son of a Master builder – and his literary connections removed him from the classes about whom he was writing and that his essays and novels could only offer ‘incidental observations of the labourer’s conditions’ (Reid 2013, p.178). Between these two contrasting views of Hardy is Patrick Parrinder’s consideration of Hardy’s Wessex as an ‘imagined community on the borders between fact and fiction’ (395).

What is certain is that Hardy’s focus was always the rural population of England even if, Hardy was ‘aware that his meditations had virtually global significance’ and that the ‘lifeholders who were being forced from Dorset villages to the towns had their counterparts throughout Europe’ (184-185). In his novels, Hardy rarely strays outside of Wessex. Jude ventures to Christminster (Oxford) and Clym, in *The Return of the Native* (1878) heads for the ‘centre and vortex of the fashionable world’ (Paris). The majority inhabit the coast of Southern England: the ‘Maritime district which faces towards the Atlantic and Europe’ (Parrinder 2014, p.401) and it was this region of England that was fixed as the representative of ‘national ideology’ (Howkins 1987, p.74).

England and Englishness remained for Hardy the focus of his fiction and despite his intent to show rural reality, he valued the traditions and history of Englishness: in a letter of 1920 to the *Royal Society of St George* (published in its journal *The English Race*), Hardy wrote congratulating the members ‘upon their wise insistence on the word “English” as the name of this country’s people, and in not giving way to a few short-sighted clamourers for the vague, unhistoric, and pinchbeck title of “British”, by which they would fain see it supplanted’ (Millgate 2001, p.407).

Despite his loyalty to an ‘English’ identity, Hardy was intent on subtly disrupting the ideological and bucolic view of rural life. In her essay of 1928, ‘The Novels of Thomas Hardy’, Virginia Woolf wrote that *Under the Greenwood Tree* was a novel both ‘charming’ and ‘idyllic’, while acknowledging the ‘strange and ominous echo’ which sounded in the text. Woolf called Hardy both ‘poet and realist’, insinuating that his early novels were pastoral idylls disrupted by the harsh reality of rural life (2003, p.246-247). In contrast, Keith Snell argues that writing for a middle-class audience – the readers of *Longman’s:* *Blackwood’s* and *Cornhill* – Hardy had to keep the sensibilities of his audience in mind and therefore ‘eschew realistic’ portrayals of rural life and present instead a rural idyll (395). More recently, Terry Eagleton has asserted that *Under the Greenwood Tree* ‘produces a “pastoral” ideology and in doing so displays its limits, dramatizing forms of social mobility, disruption and dissolution which such an ideology cannot encompass’ (1976, p.94). Eagleton maintains that Hardy wrote with his ‘metropolitan audience’ always in mind, employing ‘pastoral and mythological forms’ in a ‘pact with that readership’s flat patronage of the “bucolic”’ (131). Eight years after writing *Under the Greenwood Tree,* Hardy produced *The Trumpet-Major* which first appeared in January 1880 as a serial in *Good Words.* It was acclaimed in *The Hampshire Advertiser* as ‘fresh and quaint in style’ and, later that year, described in the same newspaper as a ‘picturesque story’[[9]](#footnote-9) while the *Pall Mall Gazette* heralded ‘Mr Hardy’s tales’ as ‘genuine pastorals’ in the same vein as Theocritus.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Eagleton has argued that Hardy was limited in his ability to convey realism through his popular pastorals only finally giving up any attempt at reconciliation between the pastoral and the real when he published *Jude the Obscure*, a literary act that was ‘less an offering to its audience than a calculated assault on them’ (1976, p.131). Eagleton’s argument focuses on the dramatized disruption of the pastoral in Hardy’s novels while Woolf draws attention to the insidious disruptions that exist in the subtleties of the narrative. She argues that Hardy was able to produce the pastoral in his early novels while at the same time subverting this ‘idyll’ by creating the ‘echo’ of harsh reality. Taking Woolf’s observation one step further, this ‘echo’ can be heard in the representation of food in Hardy’s novels.

**III**

The following book offers a sustained investigation of how food contributes to a deeper and wider understanding of the novels of Thomas Hardy by demonstrating how food references facilitate a discussion about the historical, sociological, anthropological and political changes of the nineteenth century in England. Hardy’s novels will provide the backdrop for the modernization of the rural countryside and the movement of the population from the rural to the urban. This in turn, provokes a discussion about the changing methods of food production and the increasing need to look to the British colonies for foodstuffs, substantiating the claim that the integral but hitherto largely neglected place of food in late-Victorian fiction offers a new way of reading this period through the prism of its literature.

In order to do this, Chapter Two will provide an historical contextualisation of the nineteenth century through foodstuffs, food related laws and the role of women within food production. This in turn demands the historical placing of Hardy’s novels within an estimated time frame. Snell attempted to ‘contribute an historical and social interpretation of Hardy’s novels’ (1987, p.374). Within this he examined the ‘extent and limitations’ of Hardy’s ‘realism’ (387), criticising his inability to engage with the ‘peasant’ having himself been brought up in relatively comfortable surroundings. Snell accused Hardy of failing to by-pass ‘the stereotype of “Hodge”’ and ignoring the ‘disagreeable conditions of Dorset’ which government and newspaper reports ‘romanticised or remained silent’ about (388). His condemnation of Hardy’s historical accuracy is countered in this study by close analysis of the text which produces a far deeper and realistic vision of the nineteenth century than that with which Snell credits Hardy. The first of Snell’s mistakes is to attempt to restrict Hardy’s literature to exact timings, suggesting his interpretation of key moments as ‘suspiciously narrow’ (380). Of all Hardy’s novels, *The Trumpet-Major* is the most specific to date. Hardy took great pains to contextualise the novel historically, researching in the British Museum Library and referring to Hutchins’s *History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset* (Harvey 2003, p. 28). But Hardy did not claim to produce an historical account of England but instead to create an image or vision of what life was like, drawing upon major historical and social changes which were anchored to the production of food.

Critics such as Carl J. Weber analysed date references in Hardy’s novels with the aim of positioning them within exact time periods. He claims that Hardy ‘surveyed the entire nineteenth century with a view to making his historical study as accurate as his topographical observations ... Hardy not only determined on the exact birth (or the ages) of his characters, but decided on the year, the season, or even the day, sometimes even the exact hour, for his curtain raising’ (1938, p.320). As if to emphasize the problems of trying to accurately date the action in his novels, Hardy states himself that history, ‘is rather a stream than a tree’ (F. E. Hardy 1928, p.225) while complaining that the ‘quasi-scientific system of writing history mere charlatanism’ (219). In the Prefatory note to *Jude the Obscure*, (1895) Hardy claimed that he endeavoured ‘to give shape and coherence to a series of seemings, or personal impressions, the question of their consistency or their discordance, of their permanence or their transitoriness, being regarded as not of the first moment’ (2002, p.xliii). More recently, critics such as Michael Purdy and Richard Millgate have disputed Weber’s dating of Hardy’s novels, while Ronald Blythe in his introduction to *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) suggests the setting is ‘timeless’(1978, p.462). Hardy clearly had historical events in mind, contextualizing a period of history in one county while taking into account progress in another. One such example can be seen in the plight of the labourers of Dorsetshire who were of specific interest to Hardy. Compared to labourers in other parts of the country – especially Northern England – their wages were pitifully low due to lack of trade unions and the refusal of landowners to pay their workers a ‘scale of relief’ equivalent to the price of bread which varied between 8d to 1 shilling in 1833. The poor conditions of agricultural labourers in Dorset resulted in the formation of a ‘Friendly Society’ by the men of Tolpuddle who were consequently transported to Botany Bay for seven years for forming a trade union.[[11]](#footnote-11) Farfrae’s introduction of the seed drill into Casterbridge illustrates variations in stages of modernity between counties. The machine is, within the context of Casterbridge, a modern implement, although it had in fact been an established piece of farming equipment in other counties since 1800, a point reinforced by Farfrae himself: ‘the machines are already very common in the east and north of England’ (2008, p.158). By historically contextualising Hardy’s novels against the changing methods of food production through the nineteenth century, previously overlooked aspects of his novels – such as the representation of field-women through references to food in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and issues surrounding humane animal slaughter in *Jude the Obscure* – come to light. The progression through the century, marked by this selection of novels, provides a unique vision of how modernity changed the lives of labourers, the food that they ate and the means by which they obtained it. The changed attitude to the soil is most remarkable when comparing John Loveday’s childhood days spent chasing the birds in *The Trumpet-Major* – ‘I used to make trumpets of paper, eldersticks, eltrot stems, and even stinging-nettle stalks, you know. Then father set me to keep the birds off that little barley-ground of his, and gave me an old horn to frighten ‘em for miles and miles’ (1987, p.120) – with that of Jude in *Jude the Obscure* who ‘sounded the clacker till his arm ached, and at length his heart grew sympathetic with the birds’ thwarted desires’ (1985, p.53). Land and the process of food production is no longer considered as a setting for ‘energy, gaiety, horse-play, bickering, weariness’ (*TM,* 8), but a place which is now ‘deprived of all history beyond that of a few recent months’ (*Jude,* 221).

*The Trumpet-Major* (1880) is the first novel to be examined. Its setting is between 1800 and 1808. *Under the Greenwood Tree*, (1872) although published eight years previously has its context in the late 1820s and early 1830s. Both are the subject of Chapter Three as they are set in small rural communities in which the idyllic notion of the rural is disrupted by external events. In *The Trumpet-Major* the characters live in fear of a possible invasion by Napoleon while *Under the Greenwood Tree* highlights the effects of enclosure and the subsequent poaching laws which criminalized the poor and questioned the position of food as a moral and spiritual right.

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) – the subject of the fourth chapter – this moral right to affordable food manifests itself in the way that corn is traded on the marketplace. The horizon from the small hamlet of Overcome to the local shops of Mellstock in *Under the Greenwood Tree* is expanded by shifting the focus to the market town of Casterbridge and the middle-men who trade in corn providing a study of the battle between the traditional moral economy and the encroaching profit-based market economy. The scope of the novel is 1822 to 1847, a period of time which encompasses the Repeal of the Corn Laws, a series of rainy summers which increased the market price of corn, and the migration of Scottish highlanders to England and America following a potato blight.

The following novel in this study – *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) – which comprises the fifth chapter – focusses on women and their relationship to food within the market economy and shows how the modern capitalist food exchange system of profit and loss, maximised by agricultural technology, paved the way for the Victorian idyll of the ‘Angel in the House’. From the middle of the eighteenth century through the nineteenth century, the image of femininity was reinvented and there was a conscious determination to remove women from the agricultural workforce motivated by the belief in a conceptual link between the moral economy and the irrationality of women. By making women redundant from the labour market and confining their role to that of wife and mother, the rational and far more profitable system of the market economy, dominated and managed by men, could flourish.

*Tess of the d’Urbervilles* is set within the ‘Golden Age’ of farming (1840 to 1880) and considers the role of the woman in the new market economy. Tess symbolises the position of many agricultural women who were trapped within the paradox of fulfilling the Victorian ‘idyll’ of what a woman should be while having to earn money. Hardy’s other important novel on the role of women in food production is *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) which is also set within the ‘Golden Age’ of farming with Weber stating that the curtain raises in 1869 (1938, p.314). Although this novel offers an opportunity to consider the role of women farmers during this period of the nineteenth century, it does not move this study on chronologically. Furthermore, *Tess* offers a wider consideration of agricultural work available to women during this period of the century. However, Chapter Two will historically contextualise the role of the woman farmer and the significance of the Harvest Festival in order to show that Bathsheba Everdene was a rarity in a male dominated industry. Ultimately, however, both Bathsheba and Tess fail in their attempt to break free of their idealised status as women: Tess becomes a victim of patriarchy while Bathsheba succumbs to the male view of women as incapable and reliant on men.

The sixth and final chapter, *Jude the Obscure* (1895) – the last novel published by Hardy – will conclude the analysis of food in Hardy’s fiction by considering the fate of characters that have removed themselves from the land. The novel is of its time, mapping the psychological and physical anxieties of the fin de siècle during a period when the distancing of humanity from the production of food through urbanization, produces a loss of identity, purpose and an ignorance about the process by which food is produced. Although Weber dated *Jude* between 1850 and 1870, the novel remains the most ‘modern’ that Hardy wrote in that Jude’s ‘highly modern and transitional work’ and Sue’s psychological battle between ‘liberation and oppression’, reflect the ‘shifting consciousness of the Victorian fin de siècle’ (Avery 2008, p.76).

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**Historical Context**

The representation of food in literature changed throughout the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries in response to modern advancements in food production, population migration, export and import laws and the evolving culture of dining both in the domestic sphere and in public places. This historical context will chart the progress of modernity through food providing factual information about these events while showing how they correspond with the fiction of Thomas Hardy. Particular attention will be paid to food production in England and where possible, in the South West where Hardy’s novels are situated.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, laws protecting the price of wheat and bread were challenged and the ‘moral economy’ of food in which a fair price was asked for staples such as bread was forgotten in the new market economy of profit and loss. Mechanisation, such as threshing machines, trains and steam ships changed the way that food was produced and transported. The population of the countryside increased and then decreased as people migrated to the towns looking for work in factories and thus shifting the demographic profile of Britain. Gender roles became defined by food production with women losing control of cottage industries that produced butter and cheese. In their place, dairies expanded and men took charge, confining women to the house, out of the fields and public spaces. Small local mills were replaced by larger, industrial businesses, sweeping away the traditions of the cottage industries in which foods such as home produced butter could be swapped or traded for flour or grinding wheat. With the advent of the trains, food products could be supplied quickly and cheaply to the towns and cities and as the Empire expanded, food was imported from colonies, diversifying local diets and creating an international food market.

**Bread, Enclosure and the end of the ‘Moral Economy’**

Hardy’s novels examine the changing relationship between mankind and the food it produces and consumes. Their context is primarily the changing face of agriculture and the decline of the ‘moral economy’[[12]](#footnote-12) during the nineteenth century. Through his characters and their relationship to food, Hardy creates a landscape where the systems of food production no longer establish the basis of the rural economy but instead support the impersonal free capitalist market. In this process, food production no longer provides the foundation for popular culture and festivities, instead it comes to represent the ‘ache of modernism’ (*Tess,* 124). In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the collision between Henchard’s free festivities focussed around competitions involving locally produced food such as ‘smoked hams and local cheeses’, erected at the top of ‘greasy-poles’ and Farfrae’s ‘entertainment’ of dancing charged ‘at the rate of so much a head’ epitomizes this shift (2008, p.96-97). In this novel Hardy presents a vision of English country life which begins in the early 1820s and extends to the end of the 1840s, a period which included the Repeal of the Corn Laws when the tariffs on foreign grain imports were lifted and as a result, the price of bread dropped.[[13]](#footnote-13) Agriculture during this period was still the country’s biggest employer, with over a million farm labourers. By 1851, the number of agricultural workers had shrunk to twenty one per cent and by 1871, it had fallen further with only fourteen per cent of the population engaged in agriculture (Mitchell 1996, p.42). *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is thus strategically positioned to mark this transition to modernity, juxtaposing the old – Henchard – with the new – Farfrae.

The change in attitudes towards food can be linked to key nineteenth-century historical events such as the repeal of the corn-laws that controlled the amount of foreign wheat entering the country and ensured the consistent price of home-grown corn. The repeal of these laws led to the market being flooded with cheap corn from America,[[14]](#footnote-14) ‘the great wheat growing districts of the West’ (*M of C,* 44). In addition to this, enclosure also developed England as a market economy by creating larger, more profitable farms. Hardy’s characters in *Under the Greenwood Tree* suffer the consequences of enclosure in which wild animals were no longer sources of food but instead the property of land owners, protected by poaching brutal laws.

Enclosure was a process that had been happening since the twelfth century and during the Revolutionary Wars (1649 to 1660) and the Napoleonic Wars (1803 to 1815), the enclosure process reached the peak of its momentum, although enclosure acts were still being passed up until 1860. Creating larger farms that could produce more wheat was necessary in a time of war but it had an adverse effect on the poor. Writing in 1772, ‘an author’ compiled a study of *The Advantages and Disadvantages of Inclosing Waste Lands and Open Fields*[[15]](#footnote-15) in which he summed up the attitude of those it affected: ‘the village is alarmed; the great farmer dreads an increase in rent, and being constrained to a system of agriculture which neither his inclination or experience would tempt to; the small farmer, that his farm will be taken from him to be consolidated with the larger; the cottager not only expects to lose his commons, but the inheritable consequence of the diminution of labour, the being obliged to quit his native place in search of work; the inhabitants of larger towns, a scarcity of provisions; and the kingdom in general the loss of people’ (8). From a retrospective point of view, John E. Archer confirms many of the fears expressed in this eighteenth-century statement. He suggests that enclosure had a direct impact on ‘the decline of living-in farm service prior to the 1820s, had a cumulative effect of raising poor rates, increasing poverty and under/unemployment which, in turn, contributed to rising social tensions expressed through crimes of protest and petty theft’ (1997, p.23).

*The Trumpet-Major* is set against the backdrop of these social tensions. Wheat and bread were the main dietary staples of the rural poor with the average labourer’s weekly consumption five pounds weight. It is thus hardly surprising that Hardy makes wheat and bread the predominant subjects of this novel and his later one, *The Mayor of Casterbridge.*[[16]](#footnote-16) Overcombe Mill, in the first novel, is only ‘six miles’ from Casterbridge, the ‘pole, focus, or nerve-knot of the surrounding country life’ (59). The two localities represent different stages of the food process with the mill making the wheat into flour and the corn factors, such as Henchard and Farfrae trading it at Casterbridge Market. Overcombe Mill buys its wheat from local farmers or from corn-factors. The wheat is milled and the flour sold on to bakers. From medieval times, right up until the end of the nineteenth century, millers and bakers were seen as public servants working for the good of the community.[[17]](#footnote-17) Although they were not supposed to be profiteering businessmen there was an irresistible opportunity to make money from the ‘staff of life’. Bread was a basic human necessity and its size, weight and quality had been guaranteed by laws dating back to medieval times. These laws, known as the ‘Assize of Bread’[[18]](#footnote-18) were abolished in 1822 in London (1836 in the rest of the country). Bread became part of the ‘market economy’[[19]](#footnote-19) because although it could be made from barley or other cereals, by 1790, two thirds of the population were eating wheat-based bread (Thompson 1971, p.81). The ‘fair’ system of corn pricing came under threat from farmers, millers and bakers and the profiteering of middle-men – or corn factors – who took the opportunity to create a desirable market by fixing wheat prices. This was in opposition to a ‘moral economy’ and a strictly regulated marketplace. Between 1780 and 1820 controversial Corn Laws protecting the high price of grain were passed causing social unrest amongst the urban population and the rural labourers who objected to spending nearly half their weekly budget on bread.[[20]](#footnote-20) Writing in 1878 James Caird[[21]](#footnote-21) suggested that the ‘general condition of the agricultural labourer was probably never better than it is now’, insinuating that since the Repeal of the Corn Laws, wages had improved and the price of wheat – and hence bread – had reduced. ‘[T]he labourer’s earning power in procuring the staff of life cost him five days work to pay for a bushel of wheat in 1770, four days in 1840, and two and a half days in 1880’ (1967, p.65). In a Parliamentary Review Commission on ‘The Present State of Agriculture’ in 1837, Charles Lefevre came to the conclusion that ‘corn laws are a benefit to the landed interests, no doubt, but why are they passed? ... not to keep up high prices and high rents for their emolument, but because it is for the *public good* that so large and important a class should be preserved from ruin; because it is for the *public good* that a supply of food should be secured at home, and that this community should not be at the mercy of foreigners for their subsistence’ (52).[[22]](#footnote-22)

During the first three decades of the nineteenth century which included the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, a series of bad harvests due to wet summers and cold winters severely affected crops and the price of bread. There was a wave of food riots in which wheat and dairy products were forcibly taken from farmers and millers who were deemed to be charging too much or suspected of hoarding wheat to create an artificial shortage. Outright battle broke out in the town of Ely in Cambridgeshire and five of 24 rioters sentenced to death were executed. ‘Bread I want and bread I shall have’ was the cry of one of the rioters (Mingay 1990, p.160). However, even when prices did fall, this produced a new set of problems because labourers’ wages were tied to wheat prices. As a consequence in some districts, wages fell to below 8s a week (Archer 1997, pp.23-24).

During the 1830s, labourers were also revolting against working conditions and the loss of common land through enclosure which saw cottagers – labourers with land – turned into labourers without land, unable to keep a pig, collect firewood or kill wild animals from common ground which had now been fenced off. Hobsbawm & Rudé sum up the plight of the rural labourer: ‘Enclosure dissipated the haze which surrounded rural poverty and left it nakedly visible as propertyless (sic) labour’ (2001, p.35). Mechanisation of farming then put these unskilled labourers out of work. The riots of the 1830s were mainly directed at horse-drawn threshing machines which could be shared among farms and made the process of threshing wheat a much faster one, completing in a few days what it would traditionally have taken months to do by hand. As a result of getting grain to market in a more efficient and speedy manner, its price dropped and in its wake, bread prices were also cut. Larger farms that could afford the threshing machines benefited while the smaller farms, slower to get grain to market, suffered (Burnett 1994, p.36). ‘The conflict between the countryside and the town was mediated by the price of bread. The conflict between traditionalism and the new political economy turned upon the corn laws’ (Thompson 1971, p.79). This conflict acts as the backdrop to *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and as the site of changing societal values in which the ‘moral economy’ declined and the ethos of profiteering in a market economy flourished. Bread as the ‘staff of life’ was the mainstay of most agricultural diets. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the diet of a labouring man included sixteen pounds of bread (Mingay 1990, p.117) and was considered not just a nutritional necessity but a human right.

Women played a key role in the enforcement of the moral economy and were often the prime antagonists in disputes about the price of food. In *The Village Labourer* (1911), the Hammonds state that 1795 was the ‘year of what may be called the revolt of the housewives’ and that the food riots that had swept through England at the end of the century and continued into the 1830s, were ‘conspicuously’ dominated by women (1948, pp.116-117).[[23]](#footnote-23) Granted, the main action of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* occurs in the 1840s but the economic and moral issues that dictate the price of corn still hold firm. The right to a decent sized, nutritious and fairly priced loaf is violated by the ‘unprincipled bread’ (30) that threatens the fabric of Casterbridge society because food – specifically wheat – pervades every aspect of life in the town:

Casterbridge lived by agriculture at one remove from the fountain-head than the adjoining villages – no more. The townsfolk understood every fluctuation in the rustic’s condition, for it affected their receipts as much as the labourer’s; they entered into the troubles and joys which moved the aristocratic families ten miles round – for the same reason. And even at the dinner parties of the professional families the subjects of discussion were corn, cattle disease, sowing and reaping, fencing and planting; while politics were viewed by them less from their own standpoint of burgesses with rights and privileges than from the standpoint of their county neighbours (59).

The character of Nance Mockridge as a working woman provides the continuity between the food riots of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries while the market economy – personified by Farfrae – comes to threaten the ‘reasonable[ness]’ of the town. It is Nance Mockridge who Elizabeth Jane and Susan first meet on their arrival in Casterbridge and crucially it is she who instigates the skimmington ride which exposes Henchard’s and Lucetta’s sexual immorality. This isn’t the first time that the corn trade has been juxtaposed against sexual morality: when Adam Smith called for ‘the unlimited, unrestrained freedom of the corn trade’, he was accused of denouncing the Christian religion and espousing lurid sexual remarks (Thompson 1971, p.89).

Hardy’s concern with the advancement of the market economy continues in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* with the presentation of other, equally devastating changes that had their origins in enclosure. These changes were most obviously seen in east Kent [Captain Swing territory] westwards towards Hampshire, Dorset, southern Wiltshire and parts of Devon, an area where labourers depended on poor relief and ‘were firmly anchored in their parishes by the operation of the settlement law and even more effectively, perhaps, by their own poverty and ignorance’ (Mingay 1990, pp.6-7).[[24]](#footnote-24) The settlement law may have held back economic migration by discouraging parishioners from leaving their villages but the disadvantages of a nomadic lifestyle of labourers forced to travel from place to place to find employment meant that the poor suffered ‘a sense of incertitude and precariousness of their position’ (Hardy 1883).[[25]](#footnote-25)

Enclosure and the expansion of farms had fractured and dispersed the rural population as labourers who had once lived on and cultivated their own land were forced to become nomadic. Tess’s ‘dispersed village’ is made up of a ‘crooked lane or street made for hasty progress; a street laid out before inches of land had value’ (*Tess,* 25). Writing in 1907, Gilbert Slater articulated this sentiment: ‘Perhaps the greatest evil of Acts for enclosure of waste in the past was that they prevented such gradual reclamation and enclosure by peasant cultivators. At the present day the vital objection applies to enclosure of waste by any method that the area of such free open spaces is already sufficiently curtailed, that every remaining acre is becoming continually more precious’ (2005, p.261). In Hardy’s short story, ‘The Withered Arm’ (1888), the threatening effects of enclosure are imminent. Speaking retrospectively, the narrator gives an account of the nature of Egdon Heath: ‘Though the date was comparatively recent, Egdon was much less fragmentary in character than now. The attempts – successful and otherwise – at cultivation on the lower slopes, which intrude and break up the original heath into small detached heaths, had not been carried far; Enclosure Acts had not taken effect, and the banks and fences which now exclude the cattle of those villagers who formerly enjoyed rights of commonage thereon, and the carts of those who had turbary privileges which kept them in firing all year round, were not erected’ (1979, p.156). The implication of words such as ‘intrude’, ‘fragmentary’ and ‘detached’ suggest that Enclosure Acts divide not just the countryside but the community as well. Rights to graze cattle and collect firewood are lost in the process while ancient ‘turbary privileges’ which allowed cottagers to cut turf are swiftly removed by the erection of fences, preventing families from keeping warm during the winter.

The old suffered more than the young as their employment prospects diminished and became less and less certain with each year. Despite this, Hardy in his essay, ‘The Dorsetshire Labourer’ is keen to point out the advantages of an itinerant lifestyle: ‘this increasing nomadic habit of the labourer is naturally a less intimate and kindly relation with the land he tills than existed before enlightenment enabled him to rise above the condition of a serf who lived and died on a particular plot, like a tree’. As the natural simile that concludes this quotation intimates, the system of employment forced upon the labourer by enclosure acts meant that the relationship between man and the means of food production was changing significantly.

**Poaching Laws**

During the 1820s and 1830s, the period in which *Under the Greenwood Tree* is set, newspapers were filled with reports of ‘Poaching Affrays’ which exposed the plight of landless labourers who could not feed themselves or their families. The punishment for poaching was severe. George Godwin of Wiltshire was condemned to ‘transportation for life’ for stealing a pig[[26]](#footnote-26) while the two Lilley brothers were held in custody after ‘firing at and wounding a keeper, who endeavoured to apprehend them whilst poaching’. When asked why one of the brothers could ‘lend himself to such a course of life, the poor fellow replied: “Sir, I had a pregnant wife, with an infant on her knee, and another at her breast”.’ The brother was offered poor relief[[27]](#footnote-27) of ‘seven shillings to work on the roads light to dark to pay three Guineas for “the hovel that sheltered us”.’ Despite their pleas, both brothers were hanged.[[28]](#footnote-28)

At the end of the Napoleonic Wars, in 1815, the return of hundreds of thousands of soldiers resulted in mass unemployment which yielded, inevitably, poverty and crime (Clapham 1926, p.9). The belief in the ‘rural idyll’ was no longer needed to promote the patriotism which defeated Napoleon but to counter the growing concerns of social commentators such as William Cobbett,[[29]](#footnote-29) the ‘ploughboy journalist’, who in his weekly *Political Register* – renamed by Cobbett’s critics as the ‘two penny trash’ – expressed in vociferous terms his anxiety about the desperate plight of the landless labourer, described as a ‘casualty in a rural war that was unacknowledged and largely unchronicled, intermittent, yet persistent and very real’ (Hopkins 2008, p.4).

Cobbett lamented a lost rural paradise which he believed had been destroyed by enclosure, game laws and tariffs on the import of corn. Britain had a substantial national debt as a result of having ‘twice conquered France.’[[30]](#footnote-30) In 1815 – the year of the final defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo – a Corn Bill was introduced which imposed a tariff on grain that ‘would prevent the fall in prices’ and contribute to the repayment of the national debt (Osborne 1966, p.159).[[31]](#footnote-31) But it was the tenant farmer and the labourer who suffered from these laws (156). The tariff curtailed the importation of foreign corn and this kept the price of home corn high forcing ‘the majority of people to eat dear bread’ (158). Cobbett’s outrage about expensive food was expressed in the *Political Register* during discussions about the implementation of the new Corn Law: ‘There is something so monstrous in the idea of compelling people to purchase their food dear, when they can purchase it cheap, that human nature revolts at it’.[[32]](#footnote-32) The Corn Laws had a lasting impact.[[33]](#footnote-33) In an article of 1830 in *The Morning Chronicle,* an anonymous writer expresses the sorry state of the nation:

Mr Cobbett, alluding to the recommendations at the Preston Quarter Session, to make soups in all their districts to relieve and comfort the poor, exclaims in the spirit of *The Quarterly Review* ‘To this art thou come at last, bragging JOHN BULL! This is the result of having “twice conquered France”’.[[34]](#footnote-34)

To make the situation worse, while educational reform was considered a priority for the moral welfare of the labouring poor, the cost of this also had to be paid for from taxes on food and drink. In his ‘Open Letter’ to Robert Peel, William Cobbett criticized this form of taxation:

You tell us that William Allen has ‘devoted his days and nights to the education of the British peasant’ … but this Allen, who is so ready to feed the labourers with books, did he ever, in his whole lifetime, make one single effort to enable the labourers to see how their earnings were taken away from them by the tax-eaters?[[35]](#footnote-35)

The use of the word ‘tax-eaters’, widespread in newspapers of the decade, highlights the connection between the gluttony of those who benefitted from the taxes – the landowners – and those who could not afford to buy food – the labouring classes.

As the nineteenth century progressed, the vision of rustic ‘stability and tranquillity’ was ‘emphasised to compensate for the terrors of urbanisation and recurrent concerns about the effects of the industrial economy’ (Emsley 1996, p.93). In the 1830s rustic tranquillity was an illusion concealing social tensions bound up in food-related events. The years of war had seen the stripping of much of England’s native woodland to build ships (Clapham 1926, p. 9). As a consequence, wood for cooking fires was in short supply, a situation made worse by enclosure which criminalized the collection of wood on enclosed lands. In the years since the end of the war popular protest took the form of ‘rick-burnings’ in which labourers burned the hay ricks of their employers causing great financial loss. Notable protests took place in August 1830 in Kent, Sussex, Hampshire and Wiltshire. During one incident, villagers revolted by burning the ricks of unpopular farmers or landowners and demanding a reduction in rents and higher wages (Cole 1927, p.109-110). In addition social commentators such as Cobbett were politicizing food by objecting to the press’s focus upon the abolition of slavery in the West Indies (1834) when ‘the Negroes are better fed than the working people in England’.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Despite violent protests, forced entry into enclosures to steal food and fuel wood, and a thriving black market in game, law enforcement – including invoking the newly-founded Metropolitan Police (1828) – was considered unnecessary in the countryside, not least because the ‘leisure class … will see that the laws are carried out and generally keep life going’ (Emsley 1996, p.93). This vision of a benign, patrician countryside is summed up by the Reverend Charles Brereton who claimed:

In cities, the majority of thieves exist in gangs, practice fraud by profession, and live by a constant series of degradations … criminals in the country only occasionally once or twice a year steal a sheep, pig, hay, corn, wood, turnips, poultry as the case may be.[[37]](#footnote-37)

The truth of the situation was that violence was predominantly a rural issue, not an urban one (Hopkins 2008, p.6). Brereton’s view of the countryside and its inhabitants reflects – at first sight – that of Hardy’s in *Under the Greenwood Tree*,in which Mellstock serves as a rural retreat, its inhabitants kept in check by the Earl of Wessex’s gamekeeper, Geoffrey Day, father to the main protagonist, Fancy, who runs the local school. But it is the detail in the picture painted by Hardy that reveals the underlying turmoil of real rural life and is made evident through seemingly arbitrary remarks about food and acts involving food, such as poaching. The fact that Hardy locates his story in Mellstock is significant: this is Hardy’s fictional name for the real village of Stinsford, which, in 1830, was the site of one of the arson attacks: ‘two ricks belonging to Mr. Harding of Stinsford, were set on fire; the inhabitants, however, rendered much assistance, and the flames were prevented from spreading’.[[38]](#footnote-38)

**Milk Production and Transportation**

During the 1870s and 1880s milk production ‘was the largest single sector of English agriculture and the fastest growing of the major sectors’ (Howkins 1991, p.142). English farmers concentrated primarily on liquid milk (as opposed to milk products such as butter and cheese) which could be transported overnight to the towns and cities via the railways. The transportation of milk from the countryside began in 1845, previous to this, it was produced in urban dairies and carried into central London – mainly by Irish and Welsh women – in pails hung from a wooden beam (Ball & Sunderland 2001, p.125). In 1865 an outbreak of Rinderpest wiped out the entire urban cow population, leaving those in towns and cities unable to produce their own milk. This spawned a surge in milk imported from the countryside and by 1866 there were over 200 railway stations in the South-East of England, transporting more than four thousand gallons of milk into the city. They came on the Great Western Railway by the aptly-named ‘milk trains’ (Bouquet 1985, p.3). The decision of farmers to concentrate on dairy produce was also due, in part, to the increase in imports of grain from overseas as a consequence of which many farms were converted from arable to pasture land. Compounding this, bad harvests in 1870-1875 impacted on the production of wheat with more landowners turning their fields over to grazing, despite the increase in imported meat. This helped to maintain meat and dairy products as home-grown commodities and combat the influx of foreign corn which had by 1880 reached fifty per cent (Caird 1967, p.40).

**Women and Food Production**

Between 1850 and 1880 women’s role in food production changed dramatically. Families had traditionally ploughed and sowed the land, with women and children taking an active role, but, as the nineteenth century progressed, there was a concerted effort by the state to intervene in the health of the population, both physically and morally.[[39]](#footnote-39) This, along with the growing trend for agricultural gangs in which women and children were employed by a gang master and paid by the piece, raised questions about the destructive and immoral influence that field-work had on women. This paternalism sought to begin a ‘moral reformation’. Many went into service or worked in the dairies; an acceptable form of employment (Howkins 1991, p.73). Alfred Lord Tennyson’s 1847 poem, ‘The Princess’ encapsulates the segregation of the sexes.

Man for the field and woman for the hearth;  
Man for the sword, and for the needle she;  
Man with the head, and woman with the heart;  
Man to command, and woman to obey;  
All else confusion.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Opinion differs about how the agricultural and industrial revolutions affected women. The ‘optimistic’ view held by critics such as Ivy Pinchbeck (1981, p.313) and R. M. Hartwell (1971, p.343), is that women were afforded more opportunities in the new economic market while critics such as Joanna Bourke suggest that increased mechanisation saved women from hard labouring, giving them the opportunity to become housewives and mothers, occupations preferable to physical labouring (1998, p.333). Similarly, E. L. Jones claimed that in the 1870s, ‘the labour of wives and children was spontaneously withdrawn from the rougher field work as male earnings rose’ (1968, p.335). Anecdotal evidence is provided in the opinion of a ‘Mr Hardy’ an innkeeper in Northumberland who claimed that ‘Nine out of ten women prefer field work to domestic service, and as regards their morals they are as good as any other women’ (Sayer 1995, p.92). The ‘pessimistic’ view, held by critics such as Alice Clark (1919) who studied the changing role of women through the rise of capitalism since the seventeenth century, suggests that the opportunities for work narrowed until the only avenue for earning a wage was through exploitative and low-skilled tasks, such as that to which Tess in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* is reduced at the ‘Starve Acre’ farm. This in turn reinforced women’s dependency on men, a fate that Tess attempts but, to her peril, eventually fails to resist (Verdon 2002, p.10).

Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, the Christian Socialist, Charles Kingsley published novels, papers and articles which used the 1843 report on women and children in agriculture to imply that agricultural labour and the conditions of the labouring poor in the South West of England produced a level of immorality, shattering the vision of the rural idyll upon which Englishness was embedded. In his novel, *Yeast* (1851), Kingsley portrayed field-women as on a par with prostitutes, making the suggestion that, ‘It wears them out in body, sir, that fieldwork and makes them brutes in soul and manners’ (240). Indeed, ‘all rural women became metaphors, not just for the land, but also for the race. Motherhood, idealised as cottage motherhood, became vital to the maintenance of empire, and this shaped the representation of all rural women at this time’ (153). Ironically, the rural idyll had already been shattered by enclosure and ‘the growth of capitalist agriculture’ (49). In 1863 the government commissioned the ‘Sixth Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council.’[[41]](#footnote-41) The report suggested that infant deaths were linked to female labouring and more specifically, agricultural labour. The report went on to claim that it was the nature of the work rather than the ‘soil, climate or malarious influences’ that led to illegitimate pregnancies and neglect (67-70). Although the report was aimed at labouring gangs, the death of Tess’s baby ‘Sorrow’ is suggestive of this view, compounded by Sorrow’s death after Tess returns to work on the harvest.

Traditionally, women would have been responsible for taking advantage of ‘grazing rights’ which included gleaning, collecting berries and mushrooms and sometimes in coastal areas, shrimps, prawns, winkles and even the odd lobster (Verdon 2002, p.170). This non-wage means of subsistence, provided primarily by women, formed a large part of the household income. However, with enclosure, grazing rights were lost and women were forced to become wage-earners. As the Victorian idyll of the ‘Angel in the House’ took hold in the second half of the nineteenth century, the type of work open to women became increasingly restricted and controlled by patriarchal codes of female morality. Even dairy work, traditionally a matriarchy, was gradually taken over by male managers and technology. Throughout the eighteenth century, the production of butter and cheese had been the responsibility of the woman. Before enclosure, families had grazing ground to keep a cow. Dairy produce not only contributed significantly to the food of the household but it also formed the ‘informal economy’ of the community. Often it was traded with the miller in return for grinding wheat and other grains that had been gleaned during harvest. After enclosure, however, it became impossible for most families to keep a cow and therefore produce dairy products.

Cheese and butter making were traditionally steeped in secrecy and superstition. Techniques were passed down from mother to daughter. But throughout the nineteenth century, dairying came to be seen as more of a science than as part of ‘nature and art’ (Valenze 1995, p.61). *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* captures the moment of transition between embedded superstition and rational scientific reasoning when the inhabitants of the farm gather to consider why the butter will not ‘turn’. Dairyman Crick explores the possibility of going to see the local conjuror’s son, Trendle: ‘“Tis years since I went to Conjuror Trendle's son in Egdon—years!” said the dairyman bitterly. “And he was nothing to what his father had been. I have said fifty times, if I have said once, that I *don't* believe in en; though ‘a do cast folks’ waters very true. But I shall have to go to ‘n if he’s alive. O yes, I shall have to go to ‘n, if this sort of thing continnys!” (133). The advent of large scale dairies using labour-saving technology removed women – and with them many of the superstitions – from the workplace. ‘The dairymaid became part of the Proletariat of the agricultural workforce, though considered more respectable than the average labourer owing to the fact that she did not mix with men on the farm’ (Valenze 1995, p.65). By the 1870s American factory-made cheese was entering the food supply of Britain and, in response, the Midland Agricultural Society organised a project to build similar factories in England in which managerial roles – traditionally held by the farmer’s wife – were transferred to men. Women were being squeezed out of the dairy industry and having their roles confined to that of wife and mother. The moral economy of small-scale production embedded in communities was lost to the market economy of large scale production. This form of ‘modern economics’ was a move towards ‘rationalised work tailored specifically to suit men. Traditional women’s work was seen as irrational and thus, by definition, less valuable’ (66-67). Tess, as a representative of the old, superstitious and ‘irrational’ nature of food production within a moral economy is doomed to be overpowered by the dominant male political economy embodied in the figure of Alec d’Urberville – whose father made his money in banking – and the masculine fantasizing of Angel Clare that sought to remove women from the public space.

**Female Farmers**

In 1851 there were 226,515 male farmers and 22,916 female farmers. Over the following sixty years, the numbers of female farmers would decline by about two thousand. Women farmers such as Bathsheba Everdene in *Far From the Madding Crowd* may have been in a different social class to labouring women like Tess, but the prejudice they suffered from a male dominated society and their expectation to fit into an ideology, were the same. Unmarried female farmers were a rarity. Indeed, in the majority of cases they were widows of farmers who found themselves inheriting their husband’s tenancy agreement. Landowners were not keen to allow women to run farms. Apart from the view that farming work was inappropriate, women were also considered incapable of running a business or giving orders. More importantly, however, women were excluded from parliamentary franchise: they could not vote and landowners were reluctant to let their land to farmers who had no influence as an electorate on agricultural policy. As the *Daily News*[[42]](#footnote-42) put it: ‘Landlords are not willing to let their farms to persons who cannot defend agricultural interests by their votes at elections. Of the farms now held by women, comparatively few are large enough to bestow a vote upon the occupier’. The *Daily News* contended that those women who did hold farms would be allowed to keep them but in future, widows would not be allowed to succeed ‘and the smaller holdings almost as a matter of course, will in future be abolished’. The general agreement was that farm tenancies lasted for three generations.

Women were considered inexperienced in the handling of administration and in buying and selling corn and livestock. or a woman to enter a Corn Exchange would have been deemed shocking and inappropriate, a sentiment demonstrated in *Far From the Madding Crowd* when Bathsheba takes the ‘decision to be a farmer in her own person and by proxy no more was her appearance the following market-day in the cornmarket at Casterbridge’ (2003, p.79). In addition to this, women were considered physically incapable of dealing with the day to day labours of a farmer such as holding sheep for shearing and attending in the calving of cattle, demonstrated in Bathsheba’s concession when helping her aunt’s cow to calve: ‘I wish we were rich enough to pay a man to do these things’ (13). Prejudice against female farmers was reinforced by the fact that girls were not taught how to apply science to agriculture and ‘their sex also debarred them from participating in the deliberations of the growing numbers of agricultural societies and farmers’ clubs which were being established.’ (Horn 1991, p.127). Women who ran their own farms were considered freaks of nature and because of their deficiency in strength and knowledge would be forced to employ male bailiffs, a necessity that proves detrimental to Bathsheba who has to sack her first bailiff for thieving.

It wasn’t until 1899 when the ‘Women’s Agricultural and Horticultural International Union’ was founded that women were able to take part in agricultural training, but even this Society did not approve entirely of women doing hard farm work. Instead the emphasis was on dairy and poultry farming. It would not be until the First World War that women were able to prove themselves as competent farmers.

*Far From the Madding Crowd* deals specifically with sheep farming. Writing in 1898 Henry Evershed in his book, *Practical Sheep Farming*, equated the ‘head of sheep in the country’ to ‘its agricultural condition’ (7). In other words the economic health of agriculture was commensurate against the number of sheep on the land. In England in 1868 this number was nearly twenty one million and farming was considered ‘comparatively prosperous’ (8). William Brown, writing two years later in his publication, *British Sheep Farming* bemoaned the fact that ‘the majority of our farmers yet require to know the principles upon which their flocks are managed’ (Preface B). In Hardy’s novel, Gabriel Oak appears to be the only person who has a detailed knowledge of Bathsheba’s or Boldwood’s flock. More specifically, in Devon and Dorset, the number of sheep in 1867 and 1868 stood at 1,430,000 (16) with the Dorset Horn Sheep being the most successful breed in the area. Lambing in December or January, it is likely that this is the type bred by Oak; although Hardy has rather humorously described them as ‘Wessex horned breeds’ (295).

Dunbabin says of this era: ‘Cooperation between farmers and labourers was now exceedingly rare ... progressively the farm workers ceased to live in the farmhouse’ (1963: 74). By the second half of this novel, the ‘sinister aspect’ of the times becomes evident in the Harvest Festival supper with ‘thunder imminent ... Before twelve hours had passed, a harvest atmosphere would be a bygone thing’ (209-210). The ‘Harvest Home’ is no longer a celebration for labourers but an organised event by the farmer who, traditionally, would not have been invited. The fact that Troy hosts the supper brings an irony to the idea of responsible paternalism. In an attempt to control social celebrations, the church adopted – or ‘hijacked’ – celebrations based on food production (Howkins 1991, p.70). Harvest Festival originated in the sixteenth century as a secular celebration of drunkenness and sexual freedom for the labourers but in an attempt to reinstate paternalism into the community – the idea of ‘living for your parish’ – the church endeavoured to create ‘a reconstituted community of worshippers, in which all villagers, labourers as well as squires, should take part’ (73). The paternalism of ‘Man and Master’ was embedded in this approach. As such Harvest Festival was reinvented with a religious connection[[43]](#footnote-43) reinforcing the ‘natural order’ of social hierarchy. However, this paternalism in *Far From the Madding Crowd* undermines the production of food with the labourers drinking too much to work effectively. Eventually most labouring celebrations such as ‘Country-town fairs and village feasts were frowned upon by the clergy and magistrates and gradually faded away’. Even the harvest supper was finally abandoned in many parishes with cash paid in lieu of the holiday (Mingay 1990, p.82). Food production was becoming less and less about man’s connection with what he produced and more about the achievement of maximum profits for the farmer, relinquishing any attempt at maintaining even a superficial sense of the moral economy.

**Population and the Changing Food Market**

The first official census taken in England and Wales, in 1801, recorded the population as nine million, with 84 per cent of people classed as rural. By 1901, when the population stood at thirty three million, 75 per cent of people lived in the towns. This demographic shift was reflected in the ‘size and structure of the food industries, and on the dietary habits of the nation generally’ (Burnett 1966, p.64). By 1880 labourers were purchasing most of their produce from markets and shops in the nearby towns. Condensed milk was a relatively new product which was cheap and tasty but was often consumed in the place of fresh milk and fed to very young children. The cheaper brands were made with skimmed milk and added sugar and instead of improving the diet, worsened it (Tannahill 1973, p.333). Fruit preserves such as Keelwell’s marmalade[[44]](#footnote-44) – the empty jar is used by Tess as a flower vase for baby Sorrow’s grave – were also popular and cheap as were foodstuffs such as treacle. In *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, Car Darch buys her ‘purchases for the week’ from the Chaseborough market. Included is treacle for her grandmother: ‘Car’s poor old grandmother had a weakness for the sweet stuff. Honey she had in plenty out of her own hives, but treacle was what her soul desired’ (66). Produced from refined sugar, it lacked any nutritional value but was a popular way of sweetening foods. Dairy produce, meat, eggs, even bread were now all purchased commodities. In the final few pages of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, Clare leaves his sleeping wife to find breakfast: ‘There was no food on the premises, but there was water, and he took advantage of the fog to emerge from the mansion, and fetch tea, bread and butter, from a shop in the little town two miles beyond’ (389). Butter bought in the towns in the late nineteenth century was of poor quality, made with too much salt and added water. Even English farm supplies were of ‘variable quality’ because of lack of refrigeration (Oddy 2003, p.25). In the valley of the Great Dairies, Dairyman Crick struggles in the summer heat to keep his business going: ‘The flies in the kitchen were lazy, teasing, and familiar crawling about in unwonted places, on the floors, into drawers, and over the backs of the milkmaids’ hands. Conversations were concerning sunstroke; while butter-making, and still more butter-keeping, was a despair’ (*Tess,* 149). Margarine was a less expensive option to butter but it wasn’t until the 1887 ‘Margarine Act’ that it was legally distinguished from butter and its ingredients regulated: ‘substances, whether compounds or otherwise, prepared in imitation of butter, and whether mixed with butter or not’ (Oddy 2003, p.26). The only food labourers produced themselves were vegetables. Tess’s family have an allotment ‘a couple of hundred yards out of the village’, but her father has been ill and they have eaten all the seed potatoes, leaving nothing to be cultivated. In 1885 Chamberlain instructed local councils to rent out allotments to the villagers, giving birth to the slogan ‘Three Acres and a Cow’, although the actual size of the plot was often much less and it was economically unviable to graze and feed a cow. His ‘Unauthorised Programme’, 1885, was both a fierce attack on landlords and a manifesto for change aimed at newly-enfranchised voters in the upcoming election. Allotments had already existed for many years and had been an important way of feeding a family after enclosure acts restricted rights to graze cattle. The 1843 Select Committee decreed that allotments should be a piece of ground between one eighth and half an acre in size and should be kept for growing potatoes, turnips, cabbages and such vegetables. Larger allotments could facilitate a pig. The allocation of allotments by the parish or the farmer was often based on those who were deemed ‘deserving’, with strict rules about abstinence and church attendance.[[45]](#footnote-45) The incompetence of Tess’s father becomes poignantly clear when the season for planting arrives and Durbeyfield can only think up schemes of making money based on his ancestry – ‘I’m thinking of sending round to all the old antiquarians in this part of England’ – instead of sowing the new crop in his allotment: ‘It was now the season for planting and sowing; many gardens and allotments of the villagers had already received their spring tillage; but the garden and the allotment of the Durbeyfields were behindhand. [Tess] found to her dismay, that this was owing to their having eaten all the seed-potatoes, – that last lapse of the improvident’ (*Tess,* 346). Not only does John Durbeyfield own an allotment but he also has a garden and despite these significant advantages, he still cannot feed his family.

**Food at the ‘Fin de Siècle’**

*Jude the Obscure* (1895), the last novel Hardy wrote is set against the backdrop of the exodus of the rural population into the towns and cities. It was at this point in the century (1880-1890) that the shift from a predominantly rural population moved to an emphasis on an urban population that needed to be fed, a phenomena which the narrator in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* likens to ‘the tendency of water to flow uphill when forced by machinery’ (2003, p.352),[[46]](#footnote-46) suggesting that there has been an unnatural shift in the balance between the number of people who produce the food and the number who consume it. As agriculture declined, the 1880s experienced a ‘retailing revolution’ with local manufacturing and village shops – such as Drusilla Fawley’s bakery – losing their custom to ‘regular shops’ in nearby country towns. In 1861, only one per cent of the rural Dorset population worked as shopkeepers, by 1881, that figure had increased to 4.5%.[[47]](#footnote-47) After 1870 the norm became to ‘trade through shops, even of food-stuffs, especially imported ones.’ Markets and shops became separate entities. Farmers would go to market and wives would go shopping (Howkins 1991, p.216). Jude’s aunt, Drusilla Fawley, owns a bakery in one of the ‘few old houses left’ in the village of Marygreen. The decline in its trade is made clear by the sad display of wares through the shop window: ‘Within the lead panes of the window ... were five bottles of sweets, and three buns on a plate of the willow pattern’ (*Jude,* 51). This is a far cry from the country town greengrocer of the 1880s which could boast ‘a fine show of game, poultry, vegetables, fruit (both foreign and English) etc., etc’ (Howkins 1991, p.217). By the end of *Jude the Obscure*, Arabella, having returned to England, has gone into business with her father opening up a pork butcher’s shop in the town, urbanising the pig business which they had run at Marygreen and significantly raising their status; shopkeepers being considered ‘a distinct and superior class’ to labourers (Dunbabin 1963, p.70).

Directly related to food production in *Jude the Obscure* is the ‘Malthusian Complex’ as articulated by Old Father Time in his suicide note: ‘Done because we are too menny’ (1985, p.410). Anxiety about the growing population[[48]](#footnote-48) led to criticism of labourers who insisted on marrying early and having an abundance of children that added to the surplus labour force. The 1834 Poor Law raised suspicions that the landowning classes were trying to prevent the peasantry from marrying and having children and that they were ‘preparing to “shovel out” the paupers into the colonial wilderness’ (Rotberg & Rabb 1980, p.281).[[49]](#footnote-49) The opening up of the world market enabled England to trade minerals and manufactured products for food, in particular corn. To relieve the problem of a growing population, many were encouraged to emigrate to the industrial north of England and further afield to Australia and New Zealand. Emigration Societies set up by the government offered huge incentives to workers who wanted to try their luck abroad. During the nineteenth century, 750,000 people emigrated to Australia (Richards 1993, p.251). James Caird claimed, ‘in one-fourth of the registration districts there has been a diminution of the agricultural population in the ten years ending 1871, amounting altogether to 108,000.’ As a result of this, Caird believed that labourers were more in demand and could demand better salaries. In 1830 one fifth of the working population of England ‘was engaged in agriculture’. Fifty years later that figure was less than one tenth (1967, p.51). Dunbabin’s research goes some way to support Caird’s theory about wage rises stating that in 1874 ‘there was, for instance, a very happy meeting at Whitechurch (Dorset), where one such rise of 25% was accepted’ (1963, p.86). James Caird dispassionately describes the ache of modernism suffered by the disconnection between man and the land: ‘In this process many ancient ties are loosened, and among them that adhesiveness to the soil which for generations has more bound the English labourer than the owner of the land to the parish of his birth; the man of most ancient known descent being in very many cases the labourer’ (1967, p.47).

Arabella suffers no such anxiety, glad to be ridding herself of ‘this stupid country’ (*Jude,* 118), she and her family can be included in the 600,000 emigrés (one sixth of this number were agricultural workers) that decided to go to Australia and New Zealand during the late 1800s (Armstrong 1988, p.115). Arabella’s family are survivors of the modern process, pre-empting and embracing the modern world.

By 1914, 80 per cent of wheat was imported. In place of local mills such as that in Overcombe, large professional ‘roller’ bakeries were set up to deal with the vast quantities of bread they were required to produce. The decline in agriculture and the diminishing numbers of people living in the countryside who produced food, led to an increasing need to import food from abroad. From the 1870s onwards Britain was importing canned meat from Australia, Uruguay and Argentina and with the advent of the steamship, railways and more efficient means of preserving food, it was proving economically viable to import food from the colonies to feed the urban masses.

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**3.**

**Undermining the ‘Pastoral Idyll’: *The Trumpet-Major* and *Under the Greenwood Tree***

‘The defence and salvation of the body by daily

bread is still a study, a religion, and a desire.’[[50]](#footnote-50)

Set between the years 1800-1808, *The Trumpet-Major* is at first glance a pastoral novel celebrating a rural community in which the benevolent and patriarchal miller provides the villagers with the ‘blessed staff of life’ (*TM*, 60) against the patriotic backdrop of the successes of the British Navy and the defeat of Napoleon by Admiral Nelson just two years earlier in 1798.[[51]](#footnote-51) Despite Hardy’s historically accurate portrayal of a period ‘when everybody was living in a state of daily and nightly expectation of seeing a French army land at his own door’,[[52]](#footnote-52) an up-beat and sometimes comic tone is maintained, not least through the ‘cheerful clicking’ of the mill itself. However this same mill produces an ‘insidious dry fog’ of flour which creeps through every ‘crevice’ to suggest the insidious undermining of the rural idyll which will follow in the narrative (60).

*The Trumpet-Major* is concerned with the role of ‘idealism’ both promoted and disrupted through its references to food that serve as a micro analogy for wider ideological concepts: national identity and patriotism. These were factors intrinsic to politically defending the wars with France ‘in an ideologically acceptable way’ (Jenks 2006, p.11). *The Trumpet-Major* provides a perfect example of Hardy’s interrogation of the construction of the rural idyll exposing it as a way of diverting attention away from the social, economic and political effects of an emerging modernity which resulted in displacement, food shortages and social unrest.

**The Pastoral Idyll**

In order to understand how Hardy disrupts the ‘pastoral idyll’ in his novels, it is necessary to first consider how it originated as a concept. In doing so, it becomes clear that Hardy’s method is to present ideological foods – such as those which represent the pastoral including bread, fruit, the ‘sucking pig’, high tea and celebratory feasts – and then disrupt their ideological content to expose the pastoral idyll as an illusion and a diversion.

Writing in 1904, Martha Hale Shackford traced the notion of a ‘pastoral idyll’ back to the Sicilian poet Theocritus (c. 300-260BC), specifically located in his ‘insistence of detail, the same scrupulous rendering of the most trifling matter, the same reality; there is the vivid presence of the purple grape, the green olive, the scent of grass and thyme, the cheese and honey, the touch of a cool breeze, and the sound of doves and of running water’ (591). This attention to the detail of the ‘natural’ forms the basis of Theocritus’s ‘pastoral idyll’ and is a feature of *The Trumpet-Major*, most clearly observed in the scene where Miller Loveday passes cherries to the dragoons:

It was just the time of year when cherries are ripe, and hang in clusters under their dark leaves … the miller gathered bunches of the fruit, and held them up over the garden hedge for the acceptance of anybody who would have them; whereupon the soldiers rode into the water to where it had washed holes in the garden bank, and, reining their horses there, caught cherries in their forage-caps, or received bunches of them on the end of their switches, with the dignified laugh that became marshal men when stooping to slightly boyish amusement. It was a cheerful, careless, unpremeditated half-hour, which returned like the scent of a flower to the memories of some of those who enjoyed it, even at a distance of many years after, when they lay wounded and weak in foreign lands (76).

The pastoral elements of Hardy’s novel are clearly expressed in the ripeness of the fruit, the shading of the leaves, the shape of the cherries as they hang from the tree, their offering across a garden hedge which acts as a natural table and the conjuring of the sound of the water as the horses splash with their hooves to reach the fruit that is offered to them. The ‘forage caps’ in which the soldiers catch the fruit – an item of clothing originally designed for the purpose of cavalrymen foraging for food for their horses[[53]](#footnote-53) – and the swords that are put to a culinary rather than military purpose, adds to the pastoral idealism of the passage. The final line chimes with the carefree atmosphere of Theocritus’s ‘sweet life’ in which the picture is immortalized in the memory of the dragoons. Hardy’s disruption lies in the binary oppositions of the soldiers who are at once ‘martial men’ but displaying ‘boyish amusement’ and whose dignity is crushed in the humiliation of defeat. These oppositions create a tension between the innocence of youth and the experience of age which lends itself to Hardy’s dual vision of escapism and reality. The extract at once informs the bucolic refuge by breaching chronology and looking into the future while at the same time refusing the reader the ‘escapism’ of the idyll with the dry-eyed reality of the soldiers’ deaths in a land far removed from the pastoral idyll of Hardy’s Wessex.

The Romantic movement of the late eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries had accentuated the sense of Nature as an idyllic contrast to modern, urban life and the realities of war. In 1806 William Wordsworth[[54]](#footnote-54) published his poem ‘Composed by the Side of Grasmere Lake’ in which the following lines appear:

A vivid repetition of the stars;

Jove, Venus, and the ruddy crest of Mars

Amid his fellows beauteously revealed

At happy distance from earth’s groaning field,

Where ruthless mortals wage incessant wars.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Paul de Man suggests that the ‘field’ transforms the ‘pastoral earth into the one huge battlefield of the Napoleonic wars’. The ‘happy distance’ is that which is placed between the turmoil on Earth and the ‘order of the heavens’ (1984, p.128). In *The Trumpet-Major*, this same ‘distance’ is reduced by the memory of the pastoral scene. Just a few years previously, in 1798, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge published *Lyrical Ballads* which included ‘Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798’ and in which Wordsworth depicted the ‘Natural’ and the rural as a sanctuary against the increasing bustle and industrialization of contemporary life:

Though absent long,

These forms of beauty have not been to me,

As is a landscape to a blind man’s eye:

But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din

Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,

In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,

Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,

And passing even into my purer mind

With tranquil restoration.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Wordsworth’s poem invokes the imagination to recall the memory of the Wye Valley as an idyll to counter the loneliness and ‘din’ of urban life. The rural becomes a ‘restorative’ to the self-imposed exile of the narrator. This evocation of memory echoes that of the soldiers in *The Trumpet-Major* who transcend chronological and geographical ‘distance’ and the reality of the battle-field by re-living the scene with the cherries. Both Wordsworth and Hardy interrogate the rural idyll. Wordsworth by removing humanity from the landscape and making the ‘idyll’ a place away from Earth and Hardy by evoking the ‘tranquillity’ of Wordsworthian romanticism to ‘emotion recollected’ in the moment when the cherries are shared.

Unlike Wordsworth’s idyll, Hardy grounds the pastoral of *The Trumpet-Major* in the rural activities of the countryside. Wordsworth’s account of the Wye Valley contrasts with the river in *The Trumpet-Major* which powers the wheel and turns the mill-stone for grinding the flour and producing the bread for the community of Overcombe. Matilda Johnson, arriving from the city of Southampton ironically counters this rural idyll. She is shocked to encounter the brute reality of the rural landscape. The narrator playfully traces her ignorance of the countryside to the early stages of Romanticism: ‘As Nature was hardly invented at this early point of the century, Bob’s Matilda could not say much about the glamour of the hills, or the shimmering of the foliage, or the wealth of glory in the distant sea’ (180), while for her part Matilda expresses her surprise at discovering ‘A real stream of water, a real mill-wheel, and real fowls, and everything’ (182), as though the pastoral world could only be unreal. Matilda’s words reveal an interesting phenomena that suggests city dwellers, even ‘at this early point in the century’, were dislocated from the means of food production. The growing population was also putting pressure on gardens and allotments and by the beginning of the nineteenth century, ‘between fifty and sixty per cent of the rural population, and up to one hundred percent of urban inhabitants were dependent on the market’ for at least some of their food (Wells 1988, p.23). When Matilda sets eyes on the cow, she exclaims, ‘O la! What dreadful thing is it?’ and ‘O, what a horrid bull! – it did frighten me so … O I shall be gored to death’ (*TM*, 182). Miller Loveday’s reaction is to affirm what the reader already knows: ‘The lady is not used to country life; are you, ma’am’ to which she responds, ‘I am not … all is so strange about here’ (183). Matilda’s inability to differentiate between a bull and a cow and her use of the word ‘strange’ supports the notion of the countryside as a ‘pastoral idyll’ and not a working environment where food is produced.

Matilda’s misguided impression of the countryside serves the stereotypical view of the rural: ‘The “rural idyll” remains one of the most widespread and abiding myths … a romantic idea and ideal of the proper, the healthy, the original’. This myth grew out of the nineteenth-century fear of expanding towns as the site of ‘unhealthy sources of social discontent and political disorder’ while the country ‘remained a secure repository of ideal traditional values’ (Rapport & Overing 2000, p.316).

Misprision and misperception between the urban and the rural is mutual, as exemplified in the miller’s discussions about what food Matilda would prefer at the wedding feast. The household of Overcombe Mill decide to kill ‘the little curly-tailed barrow pig in preference to the sow’ because it will be ‘excellent small meat, and therefore more delicate and likely to suit a town-bred lady’s taste than the large one, which, having reached the weight of fourteen score, might have been a little gross to a cultured palate’ (174). The decision reverses the town-dweller’s idealisation of the countryside, as the residents of Overcombe see themselves as coarse while believing town-dwellers to be more refined with delicate tastes. This attitude is expressed through their behaviour towards Matilda who is regarded ‘as if she were a tender exotic which their crude country manners might seriously injure’ and whose ‘habit of partly dying whenever she heard any unusual bark or bellow added to her piquancy in their eyes’ (183). The juxtaposition of ‘exotic’ and ‘piquancy’ suggests that Matilda remains as ‘other’ and beyond the definition of the country folk. Applying the culinary meaning to the word ‘piquancy’ and hence considering her as spicy or sharp in taste not only positions Matilda as foreign to the country dwellers but renders her as an ideal which she can never live up to, not least because the word ‘tender’ subconsciously places her on the level of an expensive piece of meat to be savoured.

The clash of rural and urban registers are consistently informed by food, as accentuated by the small talk between Mrs Garland, Anne and Matilda. Matilda asks the ladies, ‘Do you like windy weather?’ to which they reply ‘Yes, though not now, for it blows down the young apples’. Matilda tries again with: ‘I hear the King is still staying in town. I hope he’ll stay till I’ve seen him’. Again the reply is linked to food: ‘He’ll wait till the corn turns yellow; he always does’. The food concerns of Anne and Mrs Garland are then met with the aesthetic concerns of Matilda, who develops the mention of the colour of the corn into a sartorial reference: ‘How very fashionable yellow is getting for gloves just now’ (184-185). The conversation neatly subverts the pastoral idealism of the town dweller, casting it in terms of purely aesthetic sensibility, in the face of the practical concerns of those who live in the countryside. The sentiment is given a further inflection in the reference to the ‘bucolic tastes of the King’ which earn him the colloquial – and ironic – soubriquet, ‘Farmer George’ (73). The reflexivity of the narrative’s underlying sentiments cancel out Terry Eagleton’s summary of the ‘flat patronage of the bucolic’ readers of Hardy’s novels.

**The Patriotic Idyll**

As well using the ‘pastoral idyll’ to investigate the growing disparity between rural and urban realities, Hardy also disrupts the ‘patriotic idyll’, a chronotope[[57]](#footnote-57) that Coleridge describes as ‘a national unanimity unexampled in our history since the reign of Elizabeth’ (Gillman 1838, p.85). Patriotic idealism allowed for the ‘active repression and even persecution of political dissent and the enforcement of order’ that were the exigencies necessary to win the wars against Napoleon (Lee 2004, p.76). In *The Trumpet-Major* Hardy shows how the ‘patriotic idyll’ corresponded with – and subverted – the ‘rural idyll’ in that the latter offered a form of escapism from the realities of modernity and industrialisation through its idealized view of the Natural, while the construction of the former diverted attention away from the social and economic consequences such as food shortages and mutinies on board Royal Navy ships.

Mutinies in the merchant and Royal Navies had occurred since Tudor times with the main cause of complaint being food rations. (Lloyd 1974, p.5). In 1797 there were two notable mutinies, the first known as the ‘Spithead’ by the Channel Fleet near Portsmouth and the second, the ‘Nore Mutiny’ on the Thames Estuary. The motivation in both cases was fair pay and better food.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Food shortages between 1780 and 1820, the years incorporating the Napoleonic Wars were, J. E. Archer suggests, the likely cause of social unrest which manifested itself in food riots ‘directed against a variety of people, from farmers to middlemen and millers to shopkeepers and grocers’. In 1795 the king was mobbed by an angry crowd shouting ‘bread’. The aim of the riots, however, was always to secure a ‘greater supply of food for the community’ (2000, p.28-29). Poor harvests in 1794-6, 1800-1, 1810-13 and 1816-18 resulted in high wheat prices and an interruption of trade because of the wars. In 1801 wheat prices peaked at 156 shillings a quarter[[59]](#footnote-59) sparking a series of disturbances based on the suspicion that farmers and millers were involved in underhand dealings. The throw-away remark in *The Trumpet-Major*’s narration about ‘the miller having important wheat transactions with the Derrimans’ (243) conceals a more serious point about the profits the pair were making. This is supported by the unwelcome presence of Festus Derriman at the miller’s entertainments in Chapter V, at which nobody confronts him about his behaviour ostensibly because he was ‘not such a bad young man if you took him right and humoured him’ but, more likely, because he was ‘to come into a deal of money at his uncle’s death’ and possibly run the farm (93). The relationship between the farmer, the corn-factor and the miller was economically mutually beneficial. Trading in wheat was complex and often conducted in morally reprehensible ways that included fixing the wholesale price of wheat by sample before it reached the marketplace. The law at the time dictated that the farmer must take all his corn to market and allow the poor to buy their own reserves before the price was fixed. The practice of selling samples before taking them to market resulted in the poor being unable to afford to buy even a small amount with which to make their own bread. E. P. Thompson cites a letter of 1772 from a Dorchester resident (whose status is unknown) to Lord Shelburne[[60]](#footnote-60) which exemplifies the mutually beneficial relationship between farmer and miller and which is concealed in Hardy’s novel behind the seemingly patriarchal benevolence of Miller Loveday: ‘Many of these men won’t sell less than forty bushels, which the poor can’t purchase. Therefore the miller, who is no enemy to the farmer, gives the price he asks and the poor must come to his terms’ (1971, p.86). Food riots were an attempt to maintain a ‘just’ price rather than a ‘market’ price not only for bread but for meat too. Although most riots were peaceful, in Plymouth in 1800 a group of armed burglars made up of seamen carried out a ‘ferocious attack’ on ‘Honey’s Farmhouse’ (Wells 1988, p.179). It is no wonder then that the occupants of the mill are concerned about thieves and petty theft, ‘we are frightened’ says Mrs Garland, ‘at something we hear at the back-door. It seems like robbers muttering’ (166).

Maintaining the loyalty of the population under these social conditions was achieved by the promotion of patriotism. By 1815, 500,000 civilian men ‘may have been serving in regular forces in Europe and the empire’ (Colley 1992, p.312). Such a move suggested that the ‘shared vision of a “protesting people” had been transformed into one of patriotic citizens’ (Randall 2006, p.322). There was also a widespread belief that ‘Simple, traditional and picturesque folk living in the depths of the countryside, pursuing their lives in time-hallowed fashion, undisturbed by any hint of modernity, were assumed to be more deferential *and therefore more loyal*.’ Ironically, according to the ‘Defence of the Realm Act of April 1798’ in which each county was obliged to state how many able men were willing to fight, the inhabitants of the agricultural parishes of North Hampshire – along with the majority of other rural counties – remained ‘stubbornly deaf’ to the ‘siren calls of the nation state’ (Colley 1992, p.297).[[61]](#footnote-61) In reality, it was the urban ‘artisan’ who ‘because he was more easily reached through propaganda and recruiting parties’ proved to be a ‘more useful citizen in time of war than the solitary ploughman’ (300).

One device used for the promotion of patriotism was through the celebration of military victories coined in the phrase, ‘Britannia Triumphant’ and expressed through literature and feasting. William King who described himself as a ‘Devon Peasant’ of ‘indigent parents’ and ‘slender education’ wrote a thirty-four page poem entitled ‘Britannia Triumphant over the French Fleet, occasioned by the Victory of Admiral Nelson at the Mouth of the Nile; a poem (Salisbury, 1799)’ his aim being to ‘inspire the Peasant’s Soul with a Heroic love for his Country’ (Jenks 2006, p.154). Similarly the contrivance of patriotism through ‘Britannia Triumphant’ was reflected in the tradition of ‘patriotic feasting’ in which lavish meals illuminated by hundreds of candles ‘equated military victory with culinary indulgence’ (131). Hardy makes specific reference to this form of celebration in *The Dynasts* (1903-8) through the description of ‘illuminations’ celebrating the battle of ‘Vitoria’ in 1813. Although this battle occurs historically after the events described in *The Trumpet-Major*, it does, nevertheless, show Hardy’s knowledge and use of the festivities in his fiction:

It is the Vitoria festival at Vauxhall. The orchestra of the renowned gardens exhibits a blaze of lamps and candles arranged in the shape of a temple, a great artificial sun glowing at the top, and under it in illuminated characters the Words “Vitoria” and “Wellington.” The band is playing the new air “The Plains of Vitoria.” (Part 3, Act 2, Scene 4).[[62]](#footnote-62)

In a similar scene in *The Dynasts*, the Prince Regent holds a magnificent dinner at Carlton House[[63]](#footnote-63) after a victory in Spain. The occasion of a grand dinner makes the associations between feasting and illuminations: ‘(A central hall is disclosed, radiant with constellations of candles, lamps, and lanterns)’ (1920, p.391). These feasts were mainly confined to the urban elite but Hardy recreates them on a lesser scale in Overcombe. The grand illuminations of the urban celebration are reduced to the ‘leetle homely supper’ that Miller Loveday gives to celebrate John’s return after an absence of five years with the dragoons. This reduction satirizes the ‘feast’ which David is charged with ‘getting up’ while the abundance of the candles creates a rural version of ‘illumination entertainments’ and military patriotism. The ‘feast’ is attended by a number of dragoons, a local dairyman and some ‘inferior villagers’ to whom the miller gives ‘a meal in the kitchen’ as they are ‘learning to be brave defenders of their home and country’ (83). The ‘homely supper’ to celebrate the return of John, is illuminated by ‘the dozen candles, scattered about regardless of expense, and kept well snuffed by the miller’. The candles light up the ‘red and blue coats and white breeches of the soldiers – nearly twenty of them in all’ (92). Hardy clearly places the candles next to the soldiers to show the connection between feasting, illumination and patriotic celebrations while the reference to the miller’s disregard for the ‘expense’ of the candles and his benevolence to the ‘inferior villagers’ echoes the urban patriarchal civil dinners. Candles were expensive items and used sparingly, even by the wealthy. Until the middle of the nineteenth century when the manufacture of candles was mechanised and hence became cheaper, ‘only the minimum number of candles were used in a room at any one time’.[[64]](#footnote-64) For centuries only two guilds of chandlers existed, one for tallow and one for wax. Until 1832, when the law was repealed, tallow candles were subject to an excise duty of one penny per pound.[[65]](#footnote-65) On top of this, the cost of burning one tallow candle was 31/2d per hour. [[66]](#footnote-66)

The second occasion in *The Trumpet-Major* whenilluminations, patriotism and feasting are brought into correspondence is through the homecoming breakfast which Bob cooks for himself upon his return after eighteen months in the merchant navy. The breakfast becomes an ironic imitation of the illuminated feasting of military victories as Bob is a sailor in the merchant navy, not the Royal Navy and far from enjoying a feast prepared in his honour, Bob prepares a feast for himself. Bob ignores the practicalities of food as a necessary and economic consideration: ‘fresh eggs of the elongated shape that produces cockerels when hatched, and had been set aside on account for putting under the next broody hen’ and indulges in the ‘reckless cracking of eggs … from eggs he proceeded to ham, and from ham to kidneys, the result being a brilliant fry’. Hardy’s use of the word ‘brilliant’ metaphorically reinforces the juxtaposition of Bob’s homecoming breakfast with the extravagant ‘illuminations’ of the civic and patriotic feasts of the elite (Jenks 2006, p.147). The hypocrisy of Bob – which becomes apparent through the novel – is suggestive of the hypocrisy of these extravagant ‘illuminations’ in which the privileged celebrated the military might of Britain with food and light, while the lower classes were being told that it was their patriotic duty to ‘save their candle ends’ in support of wartime austerity (147). Miller Loveday freely admits his own hypocrisy: ‘We had taken the matter lightly enough, eating and drinking as in the days of Noe’ (246)[[67]](#footnote-67) while the hungry of the village must rely on his benevolent nature. At the wedding feast, ‘in addition to the poor and needy, every cottager’s daughter known to the miller was invited’ (209). Hardy’s point is that extravagant celebrations which were the privilege of the rich had no bearing or impression on the presumed loyalty of the rural population. In 1804, a writer in the *Edinburgh Review* ‘complained that rural labourers had been so idealized by conservatives that the civic potential of the urban artisan had been badly ignored.’ In other words, rural labourers were considered strong and dexterous, perfect for fighting. The truth was that rural men were too ‘inward looking’ and it was the ‘urban artisan’ who was a more ‘useful citizen’ because he had no tie to the land (Colley 1992, p.300). Using the rural as an identity for patriotic mobilisation was far from effective.

**The Collapse of the Idyll**

The imagined community of patriotism is analogized in the meal of ‘high-tea’ in which Bob’s fantasising of Matilda who he believes to be ‘a lovely and virtuous young maiden’ (159) is exposed as an illusion when John declares to his brother that she is little more than a prostitute: ‘“She was not a woman who could possibly be your wife” … And then he tells a tale of Miss Johnson and the –th Dragoons’ (199). John recognizes Matilda as a woman who has kept the company of soldiers while Matilda recognizes John as being one of those men. There follows ‘a regular collapse of the tea-party’ (186).[[68]](#footnote-68)

Hardy uses the tea-party as an analogy for the tenuous nature of the English national identity and its role in inspiring feelings of patriotism. Writing in 1839, G. G. Sigmond in his book, *Tea; its effects, medicinal and moral*, examined the role of tea drinking in the construction of English identity stating that ‘Man … scarcely knows how materially it influences his moral, his physical, and his social condition: - individually and nationally we are deeply indebted to the tea-plant.’[[69]](#footnote-69) In a critical analysis of Sigmond, Julie E. Fromer suggests that ‘the domestic drink of tea soon gained the title of the “national beverage”. According to nineteenth century tea histories and advertisements, tea helped define English identity, character and class values. Tea united English people, temporarily erasing the boundaries between groups to unify the nation into a coherent whole’ (2008, p.531). However, tea at the beginning of the nineteenth century was imported from China, an empire that remained resistant to Western imperialism: ‘Using Asian tea to foster a sense of English national identity threatened to collapse the distinctions upon which national identity was formulated’ (532). In the same way that the East was considered ‘other’, so too is Matilda and it is her presence and the revelation of her true identity that causes the ‘collapse’ of the tea-party. The failed attempts by the Lovedays to welcome Matilda into the community of Overdale is represented by their misperception of the food they think she will like and her attitude to the source of the food she eats (the cow). Similarly, her inability to integrate over a meal – high-tea – exposes the urban, rural and class divisions that undermine the idea of a collective national identity and hence the manufacture of an authentic patriotism.

Patriotism was not only important in securing support for the Napoleonic Wars but also as a way of safeguarding against the possibility of revolution. There was, however, ‘public disillusion with Pitt’s apparently unshakeable and unsatisfiable lust for exacting unconditional surrender from France’ (Wells 1988, p.5). This, along with escalating taxes, hunger and rioting over bread ‘automatically evoked the spectre of the ostensibly humble origins of the French Revolution’ (135). Lord Liverpool who had witnessed the occupation of the Bastille, ‘constantly fretted lest hunger … should spark off a French-style revolution’ (Randall 2006, p.76). There were not just food shortages in England during the period 1795-1801 but a series of famines which ‘dramatically revealed the fragile equilibrium underpinning national subsistence, and its propensity to collapse’ (Wells 1988, p.2). During the agricultural year 1800-1801, food prices increased while wages fell. The result was a famine in which, although people did not die from starvation, they were suffering hunger-related diseases (3). In addition to this, although the development of patriotic pride was necessary to maintain the support of the people for the wars and motivate army recruitment, patriotism had nothing to do with it. Instead, since the recruitment drive starting in 1795, the hungry and poor signed up to the army because they were paid a fixed subsistence for bread and meat. The army was primarily made up of volunteers who ‘were motivated by poverty, not patriotism’ (Wells 1988, p.100). However, the situation was not uniform across the country and neither was it so straightforward. The ‘fixed subsistence’ meant that the ‘quality of their rations depended on market prices’ (102) which resulted in poor rations as pay was not in keeping with rising food prices. Army recruitment was intended to combat crowd disturbances and food riots but the poor conditions and bad rations the soldiers suffered led, in 1795, to a ‘collapse of military discipline’ (107). Instead of punishment, ‘additional rations’ were handed out to soldiers in an attempt to ‘encourage patriotism’ (108).[[70]](#footnote-70)

This argument is reinforced by Farmer Derriman’s disparaging remark to Anne Garland about the soldiers who are billeted by Overcombe: ‘Soldiers, yes – rot the soldiers! And how hedges will be broke, and hens’ nests robbed, and sucking-pigs stole, and I don’t know what all. Who’s to pay for’t, sure?’ (97). Derriman also displays some ambivalence to the patriotic article, ‘Defence of the Country’, which Anne offers to read him from the newspaper: ‘Ye may read that if ye will. I hope there will be no billeting in this parish, or any wild work of that sort; for what would a poor old lamiger like myself do with soldiers in his house, and nothing to feed ’em with?’ (98). Farmer Derriman’s comments are, of course, disingenuous considering his wealth and position as the owner of his own farm but he raises a serious concern of the time: how was the nation to feed the 500,000 volunteer soldiers that had joined up in response to the threat of an attack from Napoleon? In order for the government to pay for the war and pay the military a subsistence, it needed income and this was garnered primarily from agricultural produce. Enclosure acts created larger, more profitable farms and these in turn generated an income for the government. Between 1750 and 1850, over six million acres (a quarter of the country’s cultivated area) was enclosed, with the majority of enclosure acts occurring between 1793 and 1815 (Archer 2000, p.10). Indeed, a rural population that lived on a small holding and only grew enough food to feed itself was useless to the nation as a whole: ‘the amount of food grown ... to feed urban consumers’ that became ‘the taxable sources [upon which] the country depended’ (Slater 2005, p.263). But enclosure caused widespread disharmony as it criminalized wood collecting, small game hunting and gleaning (Archer 2000, p.10-13). In addition to this, social unrest could be traced to prevailing farm practices: locally grown wheat being exported to the towns while farmers were suspected of ‘hoarding grain in order to create artificial shortages’ (28). Therefore with grain being the focus of social unrest, protests were mainly directed at farmers, middlemen and millers (28).

During the first few decades of the nineteenth century, social unrest spread through communications such as newspapers and pamphlets which ‘provided a link with the wider world and formulated ideas and programmes’ (Hobsbawm & Rudé 2001, p.18). In this respect, although she may not know it, Mrs Garland is acting as an agitator by conveying facts about national and international events, food prices and social disharmony. The irony of Mrs Garland reading out the newspaper articles is furthered by the fact that the food riots of 1790 to 1810 were predominantly led by women (1988)[[71]](#footnote-71) who protested about adulterated food by ‘hoisting loaves of bread or beef steaks on sticks and periodically lowering them to signify demands for a fall in price and sometimes parading a mourning loaf draped in black crepe’ (Rogers 1998, p.232). Thus, in Mrs Garland’s ‘twilight rank’, a description that lends itself both to her age and her slightly covert behaviour, ‘It was not without satisfaction that she stood at her door of an evening, newspaper in hand, with three or four cottagers standing round, and poured down their open throats any paragraph that she might choose to select from the stirring ones of the period’ (*TM*, 94). Mrs Garland’s selection of ‘stirring’ news articles grants her authority amongst the illiterate villagers in that she has it in her power to promote or censor whatever piece of information she chooses, be it the account of a victory feast at Carlton House or a food riot in Portsmouth.

That Hardy uses food to undermine the rural and the patriotic idyll is evident in the journey that the newspaper, as an arbiter of both concepts, takes: ‘When she had done with the sheet Mrs. Garland passed it on to the miller, the miller to the grinder, and the grinder to the grinder’s boy, in whose hands it became subdivided into half pages, quarter pages, and irregular triangles, and ended its career as a paper cap, a flagon bung, or a wrapper for his bread and cheese’ (94). The idealism which inhabits the pages of the newspaper is undermined by the person lowest on the hierarchical scale and who de-politicizes food returning it to its essential material worth.

**Under the Greenwood Tree: Food Wars and the Rural Idyll**

Where *The Trumpet-Major* is set within the context of the international Napoleonic Wars, *Under the Greenwood Tree* is set within the context of a national war that was being fought over ownership of the rural countryside (Hopkins 2008, p.200). Hardy’s ‘Rural Painting of the Dutch School’, as he sub-titled his novel, suggests verisimilitude. Indeed Ruth Bernard Yeazell in ‘Hardy’s Rural Painting of the Dutch School’ compares David Teniers’ work, *A Man Holding a Glass and an Old Woman Lighting a Pipe* with the daily activities of the characters in *Under the Greenwood* Tree: ‘smoking, sleeping, and possibly (in the case of the man touching the woman) preliminary love-making that make up the ongoing conduct of daily life’ (2008, p.138). These paintings suggest a disappearing rustic life held in animated suspension. But the ‘Dutch School’ also included painters such as Pieter Bruegel the elder and Peter Paul Rubens with whom Hardy would have been familiar. Both produced depictions of peasant rural life that were concerned with the harsh reality of work and the vulgarities of merrymaking. Bruegel’s painting, ‘The Corn Harvest’ 1565, portrays a seemingly rural idyll with food production at its centre and green blocks of land stretching out into the distance while groups of people shelter under a tree and eat. But these peasants are exhausted fieldworkers who are ‘lying or sitting, eating or sleeping’ trapped in a never ending cycle of work and rest (Hagen 2000, p.65). Similarly Rubens’s ‘The Kermis’ (c. 1685) which translates as ‘peasant festival’ shows a scene in which men, women and children, crowded beneath the trees, celebrate with abandon. John Ruskin, observing the painting in the Louvre in 1849, saw it as ‘vulgar’ with the peasants ‘fighting for pots of beer’. He complained it was a work of ‘unmitigated brutality’ (Alpers 1995, p.10) and offered a disruptive sense of the countryside.

This disruption is captured by the presence of Geoffrey Day as the game-keeper to the Earl of Wessex with his ‘nose’ that ‘had been thrown backwards by a blow in a poaching fray’ (*UGT,* 95) and invites the reader to look beyond rustic traditions to consider instead the social unrest of the 1830s that was bound up in food taxes, poaching, game laws, educational reform and the abolition of slavery (1834), events that although seemingly disconnected share a thread that leads back to the politics of food.

**Rural Crime: Mellstock Quire or Poaching Gang?**

Between 1760 and 1801 the population increased from 6.6 million to 9.1 million and continued to grow.[[72]](#footnote-72) This growing population could not depend on foreign imports of food and hence the victories in the Napoleonic Wars were partly down to the ability of Britain to feed itself: ‘Had England, despite generally poor harvests, not been able to feed her vast army of industrial workers, the Napoleonic Wars could not have been won’ (Osborne 1966, p.150). However, in order to produce enough food for the population, small subsistence farms were swept away by enclosure acts and large, more efficient farms took their place: these changes had to be accomplished even if ‘large numbers of people’ paid a ‘terrible cost.’ The general consensus was that the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people had to be achieved (149). William Cobbett, however, saw enclosure as a ‘violation of Private Property’ and harmful to the small farmer. By the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the ‘waste area’ and common land on which many rural people lived and fed themselves, had been reduced to only one fifth of the land in England and Wales (Clapham 1926, p.15). This was land that Cobbett believed was essential for the health of the nation, where animals belonging to landless labourers could be put out to pasture and where children could play and grow up ‘vigorous and strong’ (Osborne 1966, p.158).

In *Under the Greenwood Tree* the tension between inherited tradition and radical disruptive new forces in the countryside finds its expression in the fate of the Mellstock Quire. Michael Mail’s belief that there exists ‘a friendly tie of some sort between music and eating’ (59) extends the relationship between the break-up of the choir and the loss of traditions related to food. Put another way, the threat to the traditional local choir encapsulates the threat to the food supply in rural communities through the erosion of traditional customs linked to the use of common land, such as growing vegetables, grazing livestock and gleaning. In the Prefaceto the novel, written in 1912, Hardy insists that the ‘story of the Mellstock Quire’ is ‘intended to be a true picture, at first hand, of the personages, ways, and customs which were common among such orchestral bodies in the villages of fifty or sixty years ago.’ His emphasis being that this is a harmonious union that represents the collectiveness of a society which acts in the interests of the common good; the choir inspire in each other the ‘zest’ to go ‘on foot every Sunday after a toilsome week through all weathers to the church’ (3). The cohesion of the choir reflects that of a society which blends spirituality with materiality through ‘the gratuities received yearly by the musicians at Christmas’ which include: ‘From the manor-house ten shillings and a supper’ (4). The ‘supper’ is not only reminiscent of the benevolent patriarchy of the local land-owner that is representative of a pre-industrial age, but positions communal activities as a legitimate way of subsidising the diet. That ‘Times have changed from the times they used to be’ is emphasized by the lack of supper the choir receive during their final Christmas round with ‘nobody being at home at the Manor’ (30).

The break-up of the choir represents the end of rural traditions linked to the availability of food. Brereton’s vision of a countryside where the theft of a few animals barely constituted a crime, is revealed as woefully idealistic. Suggestive parallels link the gathering of the choir with that of the poaching gangs of the 1820s and 1830s. Harry Hopkins describes one such gang of men who gathered to avenge the murder of a young labourer, Tom Till, who had been shot while attempting to poach on the estate of Colonel Berkeley in 1815:

The raiders met at dusk at Allen’s farmhouse … they then blacked their faces – a symbolic, as well as practical, ritual in the poaching war – and, like soldiers putting on uniform, chalked their hats with a white star. After fortifying themselves with a ‘quantity of spirits’, they marched off into the night (2008, p.9).

This description when compared with that of the ‘village labourers’ of Mellstock suggests that if they were not part of a ‘quire’, they could be part of something more criminal:

Covering their faces, they wear ‘coloured handkerchiefs wound round and round and round the neck till the end came to hand, over all which they just showed their ears and noses, like people looking over a wall. The remainder – stalwart ruddy men and boys – were dressed mainly in snow-white smockfrocks, embroidered upon the shoulders and breasts in ornamental forms of hearts, diamonds and zigzags. The cider-mug was emptied for the ninth time – the music books were arranged (28).

The men fortify themselves with drink between donning what amounts to a uniform before they go out in the dead of night, the ‘occasional bark of foxes in the direction of Yalbury Wood, or the brush of a rabbit among the grass now’ (29) reminding the reader that this is a rural setting near a wood that is being guarded by the game-keeper, Geoffrey Day.

Writing in the middle of the nineteenth century, Angus Reach, a commentator on the *Morning Chronicle* noted that rural crime was:

of startling magnitude to the many who naturally connect rustic beauties with rural innocence, and take but little account of the fact that the agricultural labourer endures more habitual and more pinched hunger and cold amid his fair fields and woods than the factory operative.[[73]](#footnote-73)

Reach resists the ‘rural idyll’ by equating crime with hunger and this connection is intrinsic to the part that poaching played in the criminalisation of labourers. In *Gentlemen and Poachers: The English Game Laws 1671 to 1831*, P. B. Munsche cites the following caution from 1815 against poaching:[[74]](#footnote-74)

The habit of nightly plunder by depriving the poor man of the conscious integrity of his conduct, deprives him of more than half [of] his motives to abstain from crime. He acquires the feelings, the fears, the suspicions of the thief: he considers himself as in a state of warfare with all the honest part of the community … Failing his success in the wood, the field, and the forest, he resorts to the hen-roost or the sheep-fold … What principle of restraint can … prevent him from … the extremes of burglary and murder? The whole process is as simple and natural as it is in most cases inevitable (1981, p.54).

The act of poaching is deemed morally damaging. Once engaged in poaching, the ‘poor man’ begins to see himself as a criminal and other crimes against society quickly follow. The crime may begin as one against the state – the theft of the Crown’s property – but quickly descends into a crime against one’s own community. Hunting was considered a sport and an activity exclusive to the leisure class who believed that if labourers or apprentices were allowed to hunt game they would neglect their trades and soon after ‘all sense of morality.’ The belief held that the only thing preventing the working classes from falling into debauchery was ‘constant labour’ (54).

The Mellstock Choir keeps the men busy, not just through their trip to the church every Sunday but through, as Hardy describes it in his Preface, ‘an important union of interests’ which is interspersed with opportunities to eat. That they need managing by Fancy Day to ‘see we don’t make pigs of ourselves’ (25) at the Christmas supper suggests, however, their susceptibility to fall into disreputable behaviour. This is reinforced later in the novel when trapper Enoch is dismissed by Geoffrey Day for drinking ‘too much cider’ and being placed in ‘Weatherbury stocks for it’ (191). Feeling sorry for Enoch, Dick invites him to the wedding feast but is met with a refusal: ‘Ca-a-a-a-a-an’t … Don’t work for the family no-o-o-o-o-o-o-ow!” (192). Enoch’s sacking and hence his isolation from the community and communal acts of eating, leave him vulnerable to committing crime. Clive Emsley points out that the majority of people who committed crimes such as arson or poaching were those who had been ‘discharged from their employments, or punished for offences’ (1996, p.95). The instability of Enoch’s position creates a feeling of irresolution in a moment when Dick and Fancy’s marriage should create an air of certainty and continuity.

**Moral Education, Sugar and Slavery**

Emsley notes the belief that crime in the 1830s could be attributed to ‘a lack of moral training’ (1966, p.66), while William Cobbett’s ‘Open Letter’ to Robert Peel condemns the ‘tax’ which would be placed on food to pay for the ‘moral’ education of the working classes:

Pretty hypocrisy, indeed. Pretty charity, to take from a labouring man fourpence halfpenny, for every sixpenny pot of beer that he drinks, fourpence halfpenny for a pound of sevenpenny sugar, and, then give him a religious tract to fill his belly, and those of his hungry wife and children.[[75]](#footnote-75)

Cobbett claims it is the government taxes that ‘produce crimes’ and argues ‘there are always more than a thousand men in prison, in England, for poaching alone’. Cobbett’s concerns articulate the abolition of slavery, the ‘moral’ education of the poor, poaching crimes and food which is not only taxed by the government, but produced by the slaves who are being emancipated. He finishes his letter by stating: ‘The Methodist parsons are the most efficient tools in this way. They flatly assert, that when a man’s dinner is taken away by the tax-gatherer, it is for his good and that he ought to bless God for it.’[[76]](#footnote-76)

There are two points to be made here with regard to *Under the Greenwood Tree.* First, the analogy made between music and eating places the choir as a metaphor for the ‘dinner’ that is taken away. The numerous occasions for eating as the choir do their rounds secures this metaphor. Secondly, sugar, still predominantly sourced from the West Indies,[[77]](#footnote-77) produced by slaves and a taxable food product is, in Hardy’s novel, indirectly associated with Parson Maybold, the Methodist representative of religious morality. Returning to the school house after a week away, Fancy and Dick are unpacking. Offering Dick a cup of tea, Fancy is alarmed to see Parson Maybold approaching the house:

No, no! Don’t let him come down here, whatever you do, whilst I am in such disarrangement. Parsons look so miserable and awkward when one’s house is in a muddle; walking about, and making impossible suggestions in quaint academic phrases till your flesh creeps and you wish them dead. Do you take sugar? (105).

Fancy’s concern that her untidiness will be construed as slovenliness and reflect upon her moral character, is humorously undermined by her desire to see the Parson dead, while the proximity of the words ‘academic’ and ‘sugar’ make the association between learning and food taxes, not least because Parson Maybold has a ‘single-minded’ purpose in ‘teaching the children’ moral instruction. Parson Maybold, as the object of Fancy’s subconscious association with the sugar underlines Cobbett’s concerns that the tax which is placed on the food eaten by the working class people of England is paying for their own ‘moral’ education. The irony of this is furthered by the growing public awareness that eating a food which is produced by slaves is immoral. Between 1833 and 1840 there were British boycotts of slave-produced West-Indian sugar.[[78]](#footnote-78) In 1849 the anti-slavery advocate, Alexander Crummell, praised the 300,000 ‘Englishmen’ who had resolved to ‘abstain from the use of slave-grown sugar.’[[79]](#footnote-79) Fancy’s stand-alone question about the sugar, thrusts it into the narrative, giving it a position of prominence despite its appearance as a throw-away remark in a moment of panic. That Parson Maybold’s presence brings sugar to the mind of Fancy Day is indicative of Hardy’s subtle acknowledgement of the social issues of the time that he smuggles in behind a seemingly innocent love triangle.

**Game Laws**

Overseeing this love triangle is Geoffrey Day, who, in the absence of a rural police-force, is ‘head gamekeeper, timber-steward, and general overlooker for this district’ (92). Passed in 1803, ‘Ellensborough’s Act’ gave gamekeepers the power of arrest (Hopkins 2008, p.78) and bestows Day with the legal right to protect the Earl of Wessex’s land from poachers. In the first edition of Hardy’s novel published in 1872, Dick Dewy, upon marrying Fancy considers himself ‘the tranter’s son, at a party of the keeper’s.’ In the 1895 edition, Dewy becomes ‘the tranter’s son, at a party given by Lord Wessex’s head man-in-charge, on the outlying Yalbury Estate’ (Plietzsche 2003, p.228). The emphasis on Day’s position and the naming of Lord Wessex reflects the status endowed upon gamekeepers in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. As Hopkins confirms, ‘the game-keeper stood out as a solitary figure of unbending professionalism, a lonely symbol of the realities of rural power’ (2008, p.40). But that status is brought into cynical focus by the revision to the first edition. Similarly, in the manuscript, Reuben considers the match between Dick Dewy and Fancy: ‘her father being better in the world than we.’ Upon publication, the line was changed to: ‘her father being better in the pocket than we’ (Gatrell 1985, p.xvii). The insertion of ‘pocket’ in place of ‘world’ suggests Day’s position does not earn him respect neither does it afford him moral or social status but it does lend him an aspect of wealth. Head game-keepers could be paid as much as £70 a year plus be entitled to a rent-free cottage and had permission to sell rabbits. Despite this, it was common knowledge that they were corrupt and that keepers would ‘kill one brace[[80]](#footnote-80) for their employers, and two for themselves’ (Hopkins 2008, pp.42, 46).

Day as the enforcer of the 1800 Game Law[[81]](#footnote-81) has the authority to ‘arrest on the spot without a warrant, search labourers’ cottages’ and he had the power to turn labourers out of their homes and their jobs (45). These are the same laws that Cobbett condemns as more barbarous than slavery. In his letter, he accuses William Wilberforce[[82]](#footnote-82) of contributing towards the tightening of these laws, as a result of which, Cobbett claims, there is ‘more bodily suffering experienced at this moment, by English poachers, their wives, and children, than by all the negro slaves in the whole world put together.’[[83]](#footnote-83)

The Game Laws, ‘severe when George III came to the throne, were still having rigour added to them when he died’ (Macaulay Trevelyan 1922, p.151). If a man was caught carrying anything that could be connected to poaching, even something as simple as a net, he could be transported to Australia. Before they were banned in 1827, man traps were used to catch poachers. Between 1827 and 1831, there were some 8,500 convictions in England for poaching (151-153). In 1831, around the time that *Under the Greenwood Tree* is set, laws that banned the trade of game were reformed. Game became the property of the landowner and the public sale of pheasants, grouse and venison through authorized traders reduced their value on the black market (Hopkins 2008, pp.305-307).

Geoffrey Day’s position in Mellstock is not that of a benevolent guardian of morals, but rather as the defender of the Earl of Wessex’s game. The location of his cottage in an ‘isolated’ spot on the edge of Yalbury Wood places him geographically distant from the other parishioners of Mellstock while the description of him ‒ ‘Although not an extraordinarily taciturn man among friends slightly richer than himself, he never wasted words upon outsiders’ – positions him as above the community who his wife considers as ‘the laziest, gossipest, poachest, jailest set of any ever I came among’ (100). Mrs Day has a point. Dick Dewy and his father are tranters who own waggons. They peddle or hawk goods; and it was by the road that ‘waggoners, who employ poachers … are able to smuggle to London both your game and your poultry, not only better concealed than if sent by coach, but in much greater quantities’ (Hopkins 2008, p.89). This revelation puts a new perspective on the relationship between Dick Dewy and his prospective father-in-law not least because Geoffrey Day’s cottage runs alongside the highway to London, a geographical detail which is emphasized by Hardy’s revision of the 1872 and 1895 editions of the novel. Plietzsche identifies a significant change in the text with the original as follows:

The game-keeper, Geoffrey Day, lived in the depths of Yalbury Wood; but the wood was intersected by a lane at a place not far from the house, and some trees had of late years been felled to give the solitary cottager a glimpse of the occasional passers-by (1998, p.72).

While in the revised edition of 1895, Geoffrey Day’s character is developed:

Geoffrey Day lived in the depths of Yalbury Wood, which formed a portion of one of the outlying estates of the Earl of Wessex, to whom Day was head game-keeper, timber-steward and general over-looker for this district. The wood was intersected by the highway from Casterbridge to London at a place not far from the house and, some trees had of late years been felled between its windows and the ascent of Yalbury Hill, to give the cottager a glimpse of the passers-by (1985, p.92).

Geoffrey Day is promoted from gamekeeper for one estate to head gamekeeper of a number of estates. He is also now ‘general over-looker’ for the whole district, giving him a legal right to police the area. Significantly, his cottage is no longer situated by a mere ‘lane’ but the main highway to London through which poached game is transported. Plietzsch suggests the revision allows Hardy to compare both the real and the fictional settings with the idealised version of Wessex. I would add that Day’s elevated status emphasizes the importance and authority that gamekeepers enjoyed while the insertion of the highway metaphorically cuts through the idealized vision of the countryside. The benign country lane upon which there was the occasional passer-by is now a main thoroughfare connecting the rural with the urban.

Geoffrey Day’s heightened presence in the novel stimulates the ‘strange and ominous echo’ of poaching. In the scene where Dick sets out on a midnight walk to Yalbury Woods, the tone of the narrative takes on sinister connotations:

The evening advanced from sunset to dusk long before Dick’s arrival, and his progress during the latter portion of his walk through the trees was indicated by the flutter of terrified birds that had been roosting over the path (145).

Dick’s purpose may be to meet with Fancy, but the 1800 game law in which night time poaching could be punished with transportation repositions Dewy’s walk into a more sinister past time. This is reinforced by the terrified birds – presumably pheasants – and reminds the reader that poaching is a real and present part of rural life and that the working classes were not permitted leisurely activities upon land protected exclusively for the rights of the owner.

**The Self-reflective Pastoral**

‘Under the Greenwood Tree’ is Amien’s song in the Forest of Arden from Shakespeare’s *As You Like it* (Act II, Scene 5) in which he sings of a life ‘live[d] i’ the sun/Seeking the food he eats/And pleased with what he gets.’ That the characters in the play find themselves unable to find food in the forest – ‘I faint almost to death with lack of food’ and ‘I die for food’ and ‘I almost die for food’ – suggests, as Hardy does in his novel, that the notion of seeking food within the natural environment is little more than an idyllic fantasy.

By 1086, however, ‘four fifths of British forests had gone and what remained was nothing more than patches of woodland among fields’ (Daley 1983, p.172). [[84]](#footnote-84) The Forest of Arden therefore is an ‘anachronistic romantic invention’ in the same way that Hardy’s ‘Wessex’ is a pastoral idyll. In addition to this the woods of Shakespeare’s time were ‘designated territory managed by the Crown for the propagation, preservation, and hunting of game’ (174). With this in mind, the festivities of Melstock are tainted by the echo of poaching and game laws and all that they entailed and this is confirmed by the mention of the ‘many hundreds of birds’ and the ‘rabbits and hares’ and the ‘young chickens and pheasants’ who make up the ‘game’ which Geoffrey Day protects from poachers, most likely the very parishioners who are enjoying the wedding celebrations of Fancy and Dick.

Hardy’s reflectiveness in ending his novel with a Shakespearean pastoral scene in which he recreates the ‘golden’ world of alfresco meals suggests an intention to appeal to his ‘bucolic’ audience. However, not only do Dick and Fancy have to move their wedding supper indoors because of the dampness of the evening, but if *As You Like It* is not a reliving of the ‘Golden Age’ but instead the ‘miserable world’ of the Elizabethan Age, then Hardy’s intention was to disrupt the pastoral. The last food metaphor in *As You Like It* ‘condemns the Fool’s marriage: “for thy loving voyage/Is but for two months victuall’d”’ (Daley 1985, p.305). The manner in which Fancy directs her husband and father in their eating and drinking – ‘that they were never to be seen drawing the back of the hand across the mouth after drinking – a local English custom of extraordinary antiquity, but stated by Fancy to be decidedly dying out among the better classes of society’ – challenges Eagleton’s assertion that ‘pastoral ideology’ cannot ‘encompass’ ‘social mobility’, ‘disruption’ and ‘dissolution’. Fancy’s modern and materialistic aspirations sound the death knoll for the rural and pastoral traditions of the mythological idyll and look instead to a world in which the natural and the simple play no part. The move of the wedding supper which is ‘spread indoors’ on ‘account of the dampness of the grass’ separates food from the music and dancing outside and this separation of the two collapses the ‘friendly tie of some sort between music and eating’ (59). Echoed in this action is the death of the choir and its relationship with communal and shared food.

The final ‘strange and ominous echo’ of reality summed up by Virginia Woolf can be juxtaposed against the ‘pastoral and mythological forms’ which Terry Eagleton accused Hardy of creating in order to keep his audience happy. This is symbolized by the ‘ancient tree’ which ‘abutted on the end of Geoffrey Day’s premises’ (193). The tree, like that in the Forest of Arden, should return the community to the natural realm and play into the bucolic. But beneath this tree ‘spread a carefully-tended grass-plot, its purpose being to supply a healthy exercise-ground for young chickens and pheasants; the hens, their mothers, being enclosed in coops upon the same green flooring.’ This patch of grass-plot symbolizes the use of land to cultivate the leisure activities of the landed gentry rather than providing food for the community. The final line of the paragraph in which ‘All these encumbrances were now removed’ suggests a proactive move on the part of the labouring classes to undermine the restrictions placed upon their access to the land and to reclaim it for their own leisure purposes. But in doing so, they vie ‘grudgingly’ and with ‘greed’ for ‘pirouetting room’, with the older generation of ‘gaffers and gammers.’[[85]](#footnote-85) This old generation tell ‘stories of great impressiveness’, while observing the ‘advancing and retiring couples’ as they would ‘a naval engagement in the bay beyond’ (194). The move of the supper indoors separates the oral tradition from eating. This oral tradition, like the choir, brings coherence to a community that relies on a collective culture and a unified memory. But this collective memory is lost in gestures that the ‘young ones’ who are dancing see but do not understand: ‘(denoted by an emphatic sweep of the hand, snapping of the fingers, close of the lips, and fixed look into the centre of the listener’s eye for the space of a minute)’ (194). In addition, the echo of the past is embodied in the movement of the dancers that remind the old people of the Napoleonic Wars, suggesting a battle between the old generation and the new. That Hardy ends his novel with this reference also reminds the reader that the rural idyll of wedding feasts and celebration is little more than a diversion from the realities of national debt and increased food tariffs. Finally, Thomas Leaf’s moment in the spotlight as he recounts his ‘story’ ends as he ‘gradually sank into nothingness again’ (197). The expectations of his listeners are dashed and as his narrative fades, so too does that of the novel, reflecting the undermining of the rural idyll.

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**4.**

**The Decline and Fall of the Corn King: *The Mayor of Casterbridge***

*‘More rigorous argumentation and nuanced questioning of the primary texts in places. For instance, when identifying Hardy’s debt to mythology and folklore in his representations of the feminine pastoral and the corn king, the author fails to comment on what is at stake in the use of such archaic imagery to explore nineteenth century food crises: is there a tacit acknowledgement, here, that idealised representations of the bucolic plenty cannot exist outside of a mythicized past? Is s/he suggesting that in the Introduction to this chapter, I question whether ‘idyllism’ is only dealt with by Hardy in through folklore? Link this to Eagleton’s and FR Leavis’s criticism of Hardy which is the Introduction of the book. Eagleton claimed that Hardy never resolved the conflicts between pastrol, mythological etc.*

*Need to read Annette Cozzi ‘Corn Kings’ in ‘The Discourse of Food in Nineteenth-century British Fiction (2010) from BL.*

~~This chapter will consider~~ the introduction needs to draw on the ‘bucolic’ of the above novels. In Under the Greenwood Tree, the reference to Arden takes us back to an idealised past. What does Hardy do in M of C? He takes us back even further. Interrogate why Hardy uses folklore to do this. He was a member of the folklore society. Why is the ideal always in the past? WHAT IS AT STAKE BY USING THIS? SHOULD I QUESTION WHETHER HARDY ALIENATES HIS AUDIENCE/DRAWS ON HIS AUDIENCE’S ROMANTICISM? BY LOOKING AT THE ARCHAIC, IS IT POSSIBLE TO QUESTION IT AS TRUTH? THE OLD MORAL ORDER EMBEDDED IN PATRIARCHY ETC, BUT THIS OLD MORAL ORDER HAD ITS FLAWS. ARE THESE CLEARLY INTERROGATED IN HARDY’S NOVELS?

to Hardy’s use of food and the occasion of eating as a means of delineating and exploring ‘character’ and ‘environment’ in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* at a moment in the nineteenth century when calls for the Repeal of the Corn Laws (1846) threatened the foundations of a society steeped in superstition and rural folklore. Mythological and metaphorical contextualisation of food in the novel will show how historical and ancestral traditions are displaced by modernity. Corn,[[86]](#footnote-86) furmity and Wide-Oh’s stew will occupy the main discussion while occasions of eating such as the Mayor’s dinner at the King’s Arms will support the argument that food co-ordinates thematic strands in the novel as well as linking varying critical approaches.

**Corn Laws and Protectionism**

Corn Laws had existed since the seventeenth century; their purpose: ‘to prevent grain from being at any time, either so dear that the poor cannot subsist, or so cheap that the farmer cannot live by growing it’ (Schonhardt-Bailey 2006, p.9). During the Wars, Napoleon planned to destroy Britain by ‘depriving her of trade’ through a ‘so-called “Continental Blockade” ’ in which a European trading area – excluding Britain – would be created (Nye 2007: 29). As a result the price of grain increased from 52 shillings a quarter in 1789 to 126 shillings a quarter in 1812. When the Wars ended in 1814, the threat of this ‘Continental Blockade’ was lifted and trade with France resumed. With a greater supply, the price of grain fell. This reduction impacted upon tenant farmers who could no longer cover the cost of producing corn. There were two options considered by the government: either persuade landowners to lower the rents that the farmers paid to them or place a ‘protective tariff’ on corn prices. It was the latter that won out and, in 1815, the first Corn Laws were passed by parliament preventing the import of wheat into Britain if the price remained under 80 shillings a quarter. Between 1815 and 1822 the corn price never exceeded 80 shillings, upholding the ban. In 1822, a ‘sliding scale’ of import duties was suggested and in 1828 they were implemented. The sliding scale did away with the ‘rigidity’ of the fixed tariff. As the price of wheat rose, the tariff on imported grain fell (Schonhardt-Bailey 2006, p.10).

The theory upon which corn tariffs worked was that if the price of corn remained high, the landowners would charge lower rents and the tenant farmers would pay higher wages to their labourers. Those who argued against this theory claimed that by repealing the Corn Laws and allowing free trade, the availability of more grain would push the price down and although wages would also fall, so too would the price of food, specifically bread. In addition to this, the rise in the population of Britain from 12.6 million in 1811 to 18 million in 1841 severely tested the ability of the home corn market to produce enough grain to meet the public demand.[[87]](#footnote-87)

Corn tariffs came to represent and reflect the old patriarchal system whereby the landowner, tenant farmer and labourer worked in a ‘moral economy’ in which the price of bread was balanced against wages. The Repeal of the Corn Laws, however, represented the ‘market economy’ in which the laws of supply and demand dominated.[[88]](#footnote-88) Stephen Bates in *Penny Loaves and Butter Cheap* (2014) argues that the ‘protectionists’ who were against repeal believed they would be put out of business by free trade, that agriculture would collapse and the aristocracy would be powerless to relieve the sufferings of the poor.

While the population of England was expanding, the opposite was true of Scotland. Between 1841 and 1861 a third of the population either left for the ‘New World’ or for the Lowlands where wheat was produced (Griffiths & Morton 2010, p.38). Much of this exodus was a result of the potato blight which hit in 1846 and was perpetuated by unseasonably wet weather in 1845. The potato blight devastated many parts of the Highlands with 200,000 affected by poverty and hunger.[[89]](#footnote-89) The Highlands is where Donald Farfrae comes from – ‘straight from the mountains of Scotland’ (*M of C* 49) – but his claim that he is in the ‘corren trade’ (44), suggests he would have spent time in the corn-growing areas of the Lowlands before heading for the West of England.[[90]](#footnote-90)

The weather was a significant factor in fixing the price of corn. Without attempting to transpose actual weather events on to Hardy’s fiction, the impact of the weather on the fortunes of Henchard are key to his downfall and are therefore worth noting. The main events of the novel occur during the 1840s. That the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846 and that Hardy, in his Preface of 1912, explicitly places the action around the ‘uncertain harvests which immediately preceded the repeal of the Corn Laws’ (3), fixes the key moments in the first half of the 1840s. The summer of 1839 was particularly wet and this would support Henchard’s defence against the accusation that he wilfully sold ‘growed wheat’ to the bakers and millers: ‘You must bear in mind that the weather just at the harvest of that corn was worse than we have known it for years’ (35). ‘That corn’ implies it was not necessarily the corn of the year in which Henchard first meets Farfrae but the corn of the year before. This would suggest that Farfrae arrives in Casterbridge in 1840. 1841 was also a very wet summer which would coincide with Henchard’s disastrous decision to ignore Wide-Oh’s premonition of ‘rain and tempest’ (175). 1842 and 1843 had two dry summers and a good harvest. In 1845, however, the summer was two degrees below the average temperature and unusually wet. As well as a poor grain harvest the potato blight took hold of the crops not only in Ireland but in England and Scotland. As a result, 1845 saw a significant rise in the need to import grain. These factors spurred on the Anti-Corn Law League and helped the Prime Minister, Robert Peel, push through the Repeal of the Corn Laws which resulted in the ending of tariffs and the free trade of wheat.

The Repeal of the Corn Laws would have diminished the power of merchants such as Michael Henchard. As the mayor he would have ‘considerable power over social and economic matters, and before the Repeal of the Corn Laws the prosperity of the community depended very much on local merchants like Michael Henchard’ Casterbridge enjoys ‘autonomy’ because, like its predecessor, ‘Roman Casterbridge’, it remains remote from the ‘Imperial capital’ (Bownas 2012, pp.32-33).

The relationship between nineteenth-century Casterbridge and its Roman ancestry is a theme that runs throughout Hardy’s novel. Henchard establishes himself – like an emperor – as the ruler of his own personal kingdom. That the railway had not yet reached this part of the world – ‘the railways had stretched out an arm towards Casterbridge at this time but had not reached it by several miles as yet’ (245) – is evidence that Henchard possesses a powerful monopoly over the trading of corn produced in the area. The townsfolk’s anger at Henchard for the bad bread is more clearly understood when bearing in mind the position of the mayor in mid-nineteenth century rural towns implied through the reference to Casterbridge as a ‘chess-board’ with Henchard positioned as the king (86). Although Hardy does not refer in the novel to the political events that would result in the end of protectionism, the comparison between the end of the Roman Empire and the collapse of Henchard’s home corn monopoly is implicit: ‘The time was in the years immediately before foreign competition had revolutionized the trade in grain; when still, as from the earliest ages, the wheat quotations from month to month depended entirely upon the home harvest’ (172). But while it is implicit, it is also ironic. Henchard’s empire is compared with the size of a chess-board placed on a ‘table-cloth’, an image that reduces Casterbridge to a game in which the pieces have no control over their own fate. There are also comparisons between the British Empire and the Roman Empire, with the emphasis on the ‘realisation’ that the latter ‘now lay in ruins’ (Bownas 2012, p.33). This analogy emphasises the insignificance of Henchard’s corn empire which will also end up in ruins. What connects the beliefs and events through time, however, is not just bones and architectural remains but food. As an avid reader of Edward Clodd – President of the Folk-lore Society – Hardy would have been influenced by Clodd’s belief in ‘progressive enlightenment and … historical advance as logically natural, universal and inevitable’ (Mallett 2013, p.216). Furmity challenges this perception questioning ancient traditions and comparing Greek and Roman mythology to show how history is progressive, regressive and repetitive.

The main action of the novel takes place over a period of seven years as Henchard takes a drink two years after the dinner in the King’s Arms and twenty one years after his oath. We know that Henchard dies just before the Christmas equinox on 11th December, ‘five and twenty years’ after the day he walked into Weydon Priors fair and a month after the wedding of Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane[[91]](#footnote-91) which would be four years after his pledge ends. It can be deduced, therefore, that this is just over a year after the Repeal of the Corn Laws.[[92]](#footnote-92) Although the dates are uncertain, it is important to locate the timings when arguing that although Hardy does not explicitly bring the politics of repeal into the discussion, he uses the occasions of food and their metaphorical and mythological meanings as a way to pass comment on the significant focus placed on wheat during this period. Henchard’s downfall follows the same trajectory as the decline and eventual extinction of protectionism over the home corn market. Henchard becomes the personification of home corn, marking its rise in value after the end of the Napoleonic Wars and its eventual decline and fall as repeal became increasingly likely.

**Folklore and Furmity**

Henchard’s attempt to excuse the grown wheat which he has bought and then sold to the millers and bakers through the ‘accidents of a large business’ (35) and by blaming the weather, is a significant indication of not just bad business decisions but also the downturn in his luck. Between the time when Henchard makes his oath in 1822 and when Susan and Elizabeth-Jane reappear in 1840/41,[[93]](#footnote-93) there had been three unusually wet summers – in 1824, 1831 and 1839 – yet within this period Henchard’s business had managed to prosper. Critics have suggested that something beyond the uncontrollable meteorological elements is dictating Henchard’s fortunes and asserts that Hardy ‘assumes the literature of tragedy’ through ‘the existence of a moral order, an ethical substance, a standard of justice and rectitude’ in the world (Paterson 1959, p.153). Henchard’s downfall mirrors that of Lear, Faust and Oedipus, not least in his rediscovery of ‘moral power’ through ‘suffering and sorrow’ (153). Henchard’s downfall, however, is more closely embedded in the narrative of corn which dominates the text and more specifically in the eating of the furmity as a representative of Henchard’s sin against the natural order of the world, and his propensity to believe in luck and magic. The furmity represents Christian and Pagan ritual as well as the supernatural. It also bridges time in that its origins can be traced back to Roman and Greek times.[[94]](#footnote-94)

The curse under which Thebes laboured due to the actions of Oedipus came in the shape of disease, infertility and crop failure:

The fruitful blossoms of the land are barren,

The herds upon our pastures, and our wives

In childbirth, barren.[[95]](#footnote-95)

Although Henchard’s bad business decisions render his grain stores worthless and he is left childless after the real Elizabeth-Jane dies, his misfortune manifests itself in the ‘growed wheat’ which has produced ‘unprincipled bread’ with the loaves ‘as flat as toads, and like suet pudden inside’ (30). The analogy of the toadstools is suggestive of witchcraft rather than curse.[[96]](#footnote-96) Oedipus’ crime was to unwittingly kill his father and marry his mother. Henchard’s crime – the sale of his wife and daughter while under the influence of rum-laced furmity – is carried out not in ignorance but in a momentary lapse of judgement as if Henchard had been placed under a charm or spell. After auctioning his wife and child, Henchard falls into a deep rum-induced sleep from which the furmity woman is unable to rouse him: ‘She shook him; but could not wake him’ (15). In ‘The Unmanned Fertility Figure’, Andrew Radford sees the rum-laced furmity as a concoction produced from a ‘witch’s cauldron … whose echoes of ancient practice and suspension of moral standards commemorate a more heretical, “underworld” fertility’ (2003, p.123). The overall impression lends itself to pagan ritual and Mephistophelian devilry. The arrangement of the furmity-booth is suggestive of a pagan church with its ‘narrow tables that ran down the tent on each side’ mimicking the pews of a Christian church while the ‘white-clothed table of boards and tressles’ on which the furmity woman rests her ‘vessels’ of ingredients, mimics that of an altar. More specifically the word ‘vessel’ – as in artery or vein – conjures images of blood and associations with the rituals of Greco-Roman cults and pagan belief. Furthermore, the sailor Newson is a Mephistophelian character from whom Henchard accepts ‘five crisp pieces of paper’ by way of pact. As he does so, the ‘jovial frivolity of the scene departed’ and the furmity tent took on a ‘lurid colour’ (Bailey 1946, p.13) suggestive of a dramatized crime against the forces of nature. In other words, the description of the moment invites interpretation of a Faustian pact.

As well as the supernatural, themes of rebirth and death dominate the narrative and are encoded in the symbolism of wheat. When Henchard wakes in the morning it is to a new world filled with a ‘warm glow’ but undermined by ‘the buzz of a fly’ (*M of C*, 16). Henchard’s rebirth is not a fertile one but rather a sinister reincarnation with the ‘shed grains of wheat’ – as Radford suggests – symbolizing wasted seed and infertility. In the opening lines of the novel the ‘hoar of dust’ from the harvested wheat inverts the symbolic meaning of the corn associating it not with new life but with death. The vegetation alongside the road presupposes the ‘lurid’ colours of the tent in its ‘blackened-green stage of colour that the doomed leaves pass through on their way to dingy, and yellow, and red’ while the ‘grassy margin of the bank’ is also ‘powdered by dust’ the same dust from the harvest that ‘lay on the road deadening their footfalls’ (6). Later, when Henchard meets Susan in the ‘Ring’ at Casterbridge – a name that suggests a repetitive cycle of birth and death – the narrative focuses on ‘some tall soldier … found lying on his side, in an oval scoop in the chalk, like a chicken in its shell’ (67). The image reinforces the sinister possibilities of reincarnation, mixing animal and human imagery and subverting fertile possibilities.

On waking from his sleep, Henchard is ‘inspired’ and ‘braced’ by the ‘freshness of the September morning’. He beholds the ‘little place’ as a ‘new thing’ (16). But these new things are interspersed with the dead: ‘barrows’ and the ‘remains of prehistoric forts’ laying under the ‘rays of a newly-risen sun’ (17). Death and rebirth are connected, blended together and analogised in the furmity.[[97]](#footnote-97) Furmity has Greek origins, translated as Kykeon, a ‘mixture, related to the verb Kykao, meaning to mix together, throw into a confusion.’ The dish ‘is impure, or adulterated, it is not one thing but elements in a mixture’ (Doody 1996, p.437). Furmity’s modern Greek name is Koliva and is still served at the Mnimosino, the memorial service for a dead person (436). Significantly, it is also served on ‘Saturday of Souls’, a celebration marking the raising of Lazarus from the dead.[[98]](#footnote-98) Henchard too rises, Lazarus like, from his sleep, a ‘confused picture of events’ slowly coming back to him (16). Hardy’s reference to the ‘Seven Sleepers’ is also a biblical one, signalling themes of resurrection in the Christian youths who, hiding in a cave during the persecution of Decius (AD 250) fell asleep and woke again two hundred years later (*M of C* 313, n. 17). These examples show how the furmity represents rebirth and a recycling of magical and pagan folklore into religious belief.

Furmity was eaten at secular feasts, such as Harvest festival and in Victorian times it was served in workhouses.[[99]](#footnote-99) James Henry-Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, writing in 1809 stated that ‘The Gauls lived, as did all savage tribes, on pap, or furmenty. The Romans themselves were for 300 hundred years ignorant of the use of bread; according to Pliny boiled grain or frumenty constituted a great part of their aliment.’[[100]](#footnote-100) In contrast to these humble beginnings, the Greek playwright Aristophanes mentions ‘frumenty’ twice in his play *Wealth* of 408BC, portraying it as a much desired dish.[[101]](#footnote-101)

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge,* the furmity connects the past with the present, collapsing the distance between events in the novel and Roman times. Mallett, exploring the ‘vestigial relics of ancient practice’, suggests that ‘Hardy utilizes these moments of anthropological import to probe, with a searching and sophisticated scepticism, the utility of those folklore fragments which literally and materially connect the strata of the unrecorded and forgotten past to the modern moment’ (2013, p.217). This connection can be observed in the quality of the furmity sold to Henchard on his first visit to Weydon Priors and the furmity sold to Susan when she returns eighteen years later and finds the furmity woman in a much changed situation. The ‘furmity-booth’ of the earlier years is a tent full with tables and a stove, a charcoal fire and a ‘large three-legged crock’ which has been ‘sufficiently polished around the rim to show it was made of bell-metal’, a mixture of three and a half parts of copper to one part of tin (313 n. 8). Although the furmity woman is a ‘haggish creature’ she has a ‘white apron’ which serves the purpose of adding an ‘air of respectability’ to her business. On a nearby table are ‘vessels’ that hold the ‘separate ingredients’ of the mixture (8). When Susan meets the furmity woman again, the charcoal stove and the tent are gone and in their place is a wood fire. The old woman is now in ‘rags’ and although she still has a ‘three-legged crock’, there is no polished rim to boast its metal qualities. Alchemy has worked in reverse on this woman, reducing her ‘rich concoction’ into ‘thin poor slop’ (22). The furmity defies the vision of a progressive world, symbolising instead ‘the dreary repetition of error’ (Mallett 2013, p.216) that Henchard will demonstrate throughout the novel and which is encapsulated in the cry of the dissatisfied and hungry townsfolk of Casterbridge: ‘But what are you going to do to repay us for the past?’ (36). In this sense, corn, the basis of both the furmity and the bread, connects Henchard’s present ‘unprincipled’ business dealings with his ‘unprincipled’ personal past.

Furmity also allows for a transposition of the past on to the present and this is witnessed in the connection between the rum which is served in the furmity tent and that which is drunk at the Mayor’s dinner in the King’s Arms: ‘Three drinks seemed to be sacred to the company – port, sherry and rum; outside which old-established trinity few or no palates ranged’ (33). The insinuation is that the dinner guests only have a taste for the Christian faith noted by the position of the rum in the ‘trinity’ as the Holy Spirit. But the ‘sacred’ nature of the rum reminds the reader of the arrangement of the furmity tent and its pagan set up. The connection between the rum at the King’s Arms and the rum-laced furmity suggests that paganism has undergone a transformation into a religious context. Other transformations also take place. The ‘vessels’ containing the ingredients for the furmity are replaced with ‘crystal vessels’ awaiting the ‘grog’, a ‘mixture of liquor (such as rum and water). Often served hot, sometimes with lemon juice and sugar added’ (316 n. 33). The similarities between the grog and the furmity are clear, although where the furmity woman has undergone a regression, Henchard, after consuming her furmity – the ingredients of which contain an ambiguous and sinister ‘what not’ (8) – has been magically transformed – or reborn – from an unemployed hay-trusser in a ‘short jacket of brown corduroy’ (5) into a mayor with a ‘rich complexion’ dressed in ‘an expanse of frilled shirt showing on his broad breast; jewelled studs, and a heavy gold chain’ (32). Henchard, like the furmity of the older days is ‘rich’ not just in consistency and colour but in material wealth. His transformation is made keener by Susan’s observation: ‘When last she had seen him he was sitting in a corduroy jacket, fustian waistcoat and breeches, and tanned leather leggings, with a basin of hot furmity before him. Time the magician had wrought much here’ (32). At the same time, the deterioration of the furmity and its declining status in society, from a dish served on special occasions and at royal banquets to workhouse slop, follows the trajectory of Henchard’s cyclical downfall.

**Henchard the King**

Henchard represents the decline of the old moral order grown out of medieval feudalism. The dinner at the King’s Arms comes at the pinnacle of his success: ‘That dinner at the King’s Arms with his friends had been Henchard’s Austerlitz’ and after this ‘his course had not been upward’ (126). This turn in his fortunes associates him directly with Napoleon’s victory at Austerlitz over the Russo-Austrian army in 1805, his last military success. The association brings into correspondence the end of the Holy Roman Empire – brought about by Napoleon’s victory – and the decline of Henchard’s status as ‘the powerfullest member of the Town Council’ (34). After Napoleon’s demise, free trade in Central Europe was introduced. Similarly, Henchard’s decline represents the setting aside of protectionism and irrationality embedded in Pagan, Greek and Roman mythology in order to make way for the new scientifically inclined modern world. When Farfrae offers Henchard a technique for turning growed wheat into good wheat again, he overturns and makes obsolete the perceived knowledge of thousands of years. Growed wheat is that which has been harvested late due to wet weather and is therefore matured to the point that it has ‘sprouted in the ear’.[[102]](#footnote-102) With his scientific knowledge, Farfrae offers to reverse the principles of nature in which something that is mature can be made young again. Henchard momentarily hails the remedy as a miracle: ‘It’s complete! – quite restored, or – well – nearly.’ Farfrae’s reply, ‘To fetch it back is impossible; Nature won’t stand so much as that, but heere you go a great way towards it’ (45), suggests a rational approach to the powers of civilization over Nature. As a personification of the wheat, Henchard too becomes something that Farfrae can return to a previous state, one in which he has no power to produce ‘unprincipled’ results. That the etymological root of the name Donald means ‘ruler of the world’ is a sign that Farfrae’s knowledge of scientific methods gives him the power to usurp not only Henchard but also ‘the powers above us’ (225).[[103]](#footnote-103)

Clodd’s progressive view of the world chimes with James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1890) which proposes that man progresses from a belief in magic to religious belief and finally to a scientific view of the world. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, corn measures this progression. Henchard’s drunken sleep at the beginning of the novel is associated with witchcraft and magic through the symbolism of the furmity and makes him synonymous with the corn king, a pagan symbol of death and rebirth. Frazer asserts that in European folklore, the ‘corn-spirit’ or corn king can be ‘a passing stranger or the reaper, binder, or thresher of the last corn.’ Henchard as a stranger and a hay-trusser fits neatly into these categories. Tradition states that at the end of the harvest the corn king must be killed and in the spring a new corn king will be born. Frazer explains that the corn-spirit lives in the corn and when the last of the field is threshed, the corn-spirit enters a body, usually a human one. That body must then be slain in order for the new corn spirit to be born.[[104]](#footnote-104) Henchard must also be killed off in order to make way for a younger man. Hardy’s character Buzzford relates this cycle in his comment: ‘’Tis recorded in history that we rebelled against the king one or two hundred years ago, in the time of the Romans’ (50) a prophetic analogy of the rebellion of the Casterbridge townsfolk against Henchard.

In contrast to sinister Mephistophelian reincarnations, the killing and rebirth of the corn king symbolises the reaping of the harvest in September[[105]](#footnote-105) and the growing of the new crop in the spring. In Hardy’s novel, Henchard is closely associated with harvest time. His arrival at Weydon Priors is in September as is the dinner he hosts at the King’s Arms. Similarly, he departs from Casterbridge a broken man at the harvest time, finding himself a job as a hay-trusser cutting the ‘sweet-smelling grassy stems’ (297). His demise in winter, the season of death, ends his reign as Corn King.

Writing in 1908 about Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, Edward Westermarck in his paper, ‘The Killing of the Divine King’ reiterates the belief that divine beings or spirits take on a human form. ‘Primitive people’, he asserts, believe that their safety and that of the world is ‘bound up with the life of one of these god-men or human incarnations of the divinity’ (22). Henchard is metaphorically situated as a divine god or a corn king through the drinking of the furmity which sees him reborn and transformed from a poor labouring man, still in the prime of his life, into a mayor and a rich merchant. But as Westermarck continues, as soon as the divine king begins to show signs of weakness, ‘he is killed off’ (22). Henchard’s weakness is marked by his inability to provide his people with good food. The ‘bad bread’ is a representation of Henchard’s body and physical deterioration and an inverted symbol of the Eucharist in that he provides no spiritual or physical sustenance to the townsfolk of Casterbridge. This is reiterated in the comment of Nance Mockridge who, holding a loaf of bread under her arm, laments the lack of divine intervention: ‘Ye may as well look for manna-food’ (29). In *The Golden Bough* Frazer substantiates the corporeal symbolism of the bread in which the last sheaf of wheat – which is believed to contain the corn spirit – is baked into a loaf and sacramentally eaten. Indeed, in France, it was the role of the mayor at the close of harvest to break into pieces a dough-man which he fed to the people (1994, p.498). Frazer asserts that ‘the doctrine of transubstantiation, or the magical conversion of bread into flesh’ was recognised long before the ‘spread or even rise of Christianity’ (507) which echoes Clodd’s assertion that religion was a progression from magic and superstition.

In Greek, Roman and Pagan mythology, the corn king takes on many guises. Frazer claims that in European folk-custom he is ‘Attis’, the god of vegetation, a ‘reaped ear of corn’. He is also known as ‘Osiris’, a ‘stranger whose red hair made him a suitable representative of the ripe corn’ (450-451). Following the tradition of the death and rebirth of the corn king, Farfrae becomes the modern day reincarnation of Henchard. This is supported by Elizabeth-Jane’s observation of the men as ‘two grains of corn’ (56). Henchard represents the dying corn king and Farfrae the emerging usurper who must kill off his predecessor in order for the harvest to succeed. The ‘fair competition’ as Henchard refers to his battle with his young rival, will only be won when Farfrae has been ‘cut out’ in the manner of a sheaf of bad wheat (171). As Frazer asserts, ‘one reason for thus killing the corn spirit in the person of his representative … to guard him or her from the enfeeblement of old age by transferring the spirit, while still hale and hearty, to the person of youthful and vigorous successor’ (1994, p.511).

The evolution of the corn king into a Christian motif is evident in the Eucharist in which bread is transformed into the body of Christ. It is also evident in John 12:24: ‘I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels – a plentiful harvest of new lives’. Frazer contends that magic came before religion in that ‘man essayed to bend nature to his wishes by the sheer force of spells’ long before he tried to coax a ‘capricious or irascible deity’ through ‘prayer and sacrifice’ (52). But Casterbridge remains entrenched in magic and superstition and the following passage connects the old ways with home corn protectionism:

The farmer’s income was ruled by the wheat-crop within his own horizon, and the wheat-crop by the weather … The local atmosphere was everything to him; the atmosphere of other countries a matter of indifference. The people too, who were not farmers, the rural multitude, saw in the god of the weather a more important personage than they do now … Their impulse was well-nigh to prostate themselves in lamentation before untimely rains and tempests, which came as the Alastor of those households whose crime it was to be poor (172).

The importance of the harvest in an atmosphere where a bad crop would signal high prices, compels the ‘rural multitude’ to resort to magic and superstition. The ‘god of the weather’ was more important than the Prime Minister in controlling the availability of food. The mention of the ‘Alastor’ – an avenger of evil deeds – secures the importance of Henchard’s removal. From an Oedipal perspective, the people cannot be made to pay for his past sins; and from a pagan perspective, Henchard as the corn king must die to ensure a new, successful harvest.

Henchard’s resistance to progression is demonstrated in his wilful desire to continue as the ‘biggest corn and hay dealer in those parts’ (171). Repeal of the Corn Laws will see the natural passing of old ways and the importation of foreign wheat that would diminish the monopoly held by British corn merchants. But Henchard’s insistence upon remaining faithful to superstition and looking to Wide-Oh to assist in his business matters can be metaphorically considered as a crime against the natural order. Henchard the Corn King – a representation of protectionism – must die to make way for the new harvest, in other words, a new way of dealing through free trade.

Henchard’s visit to Wide-Oh’s mud cottage is a journey back to a primeval past: ‘The turnpike-road became a lane, the lane a cart-track; the cart-track a bridle-path, the bridle-path a footway, the footway overgrown’ (173). This journey into a pre-civilized time anticipates that of Joseph Conrad’s ‘Heart of Darkness’, in which the narrator, Marlow, imagines the thoughts of the Romans as they first sailed up the Thames: ‘I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago – the other day … Sandbanks, marshes, forests, savages, – precious little to eat for a civilized man’ (1967, p.49). Although Marlow is on the Thames, the same sense of journeying backwards into the past holds true for both scenarios with Henchard, like Conrad’s Roman, considering the origins of the path on which he travels: ‘the original track laid out by the legions of the Empire’ (288). The regression from ‘road’ to ‘lane’ to ‘track’ to ‘path’ to ‘footway’ and finally an ‘overgrown footway’ marks Henchard’s journey as one which takes him away from civilization, into the pre-civilized times of superstition and magic and which traces his own decline as he finds himself moving away from rational decision making to relying on magical prophesy. This sense of moving into a pre-civilized age is also marked by the references to food. Marlow imagines the lack of proper food suitable for a civilized Roman, ‘precious little to eat fit for a civilised man’ (6) while Henchard’s refusal of Wide-Oh’s stew suggests that the Mayor considers himself more advanced than the weathercaster in the progress of civilization: ‘sitting down to hob-and-nob there would have seemed to mark him too implicitly as the weathercaster’s apostle’ (175) and will thus, firmly ground Henchard in a past that he distrusts but cannot fully reject.

Ironically Henchard’s desire to see into the future is contained in the paradox of stepping into the past. Irony abounds further when the stew is considered from a figurative perspective: Wide-Oh knows – because he can see into the future – that Henchard will ignore his advice about the weather and will be left – as the saying goes – to ‘stew in his own juices’ over his lack of trust in either rational business sense or in superstition. The meaning is further inscribed by the eighteenth century etymology of the verb ‘stew’ which is ‘to be drunk’ as in inebriated.[[106]](#footnote-106) Indeed, just a short while after his visit to Wide-Oh’s cottage, Henchard’s oath comes to an end and all of Casterbidge knows that, ‘Michael Henchard have busted out drinking after taking nothing for twenty-one years’ (212). Henchard’s decline is somewhat predetermined by Wide-Oh’s real name, ‘Mr Fall’.

Henchard’s visit to Wide-Oh marks the end of what could be termed his productive cycle. His lack of faith in the weathercaster’s advice renders him bankrupt and a corn factor no longer. In pagan ritual, the stew that Wide-Oh cooks is part of the pagan festival of Mabon in which the produce of the harvest – in this case ‘the meat, the onions, the pepper, and the herbs’ (175) – are gathered and a meal is prepared in readiness for a guest or a spirit (Day 2013, p.43). Wide-Oh admits to knowing that Henchard would be coming to visit him: ‘Feeling you’d come, I’ve waited for ’ee; and thinking you might be leery from your walk I laid two supper-plates; look ye here’ (174). This dialogue chimes with the biblical story of Jacob and Esau in which Esau, as the oldest brother, sells the privilege of the first born’s blessing, to his younger brother Jacob in return for a meal of stew: ‘Hardy reminds his readers and he pointedly observes that Farfrae prospers like Jacob in Padan-Aram as he blamelessly pursues his “praiseworthy course”’ (Paterson 1959, p.252). The bible story recounts how Esau, returning famished from the fields, agrees to sell his birth right to Jacob in return for the stew or ‘pottage’[[107]](#footnote-107) that his brother has made for him. The moral of the story is that Jacob should have trusted in God to bestow either fortune or fate upon him instead of coercing Esau into giving his birth right to him. Although Farfrae is equated with Jacob, Henchard too, can be seen as a Jacob figure in that he cannot leave the future to fate, instead he actively attempts to manipulate it, both in the furmity tent when he sells his wife, believing that if he ‘were a free man again I’d be worth a thousand pound before I’d done o’t’ (10) and in his fatal lack of trust in Wide-Oh’s weather prophesy when he decides to ‘sell off corn that he had bought only a few weeks before at figures higher by many shillings a quarter’ (175). However, Esau’s impetuous nature can be compared with Henchard’s in that he forfeited his birth right because he wanted to satiate his hunger in the same way that Henchard forfeited his birth right – his wife and daughter – for a bowl of furmity laced with rum.

That food has been the crux of Henchard’s decline and fall, explains why his death must be brought about by lack of appetite. As Whittle tells Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane, ‘he couldn’t eat – no, no appetite at all – and he got weaker; and to-day he died’ (308). The simplicity of his death contrasts with the complexity of the foodstuffs that have dominated Henchard’s life. Both the furmity and the stew, made up of numerous ingredients and stirred together in a pot, signify the confusion of events that have led to Henchard’s downfall. But the furmity and the stew also represent how magic, superstition and religion are mixed together to produce a concoction of beliefs, their elements barely distinguishable from each other. In keeping with the circuitous nature of the events in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* – set against the backdrop of themes concerning death and rebirth – a suitable way to end this discussion is to revisit the beginning of the novel in which the furmity woman cooks her wares:

She slowly stirred the contents of the pot. The dull scrape of her large spoon was audible throughout the tent as she thus kept from burning the mixture of corn in the grain, flour, milk, raisins, currants, and what not, that composed the antiquated slop in which she dealt. (8)

The stirring motion of Mrs Goodenough’s spoon, predicts the cycle of events that will raise Henchard up and then bring him back to where he started, while the spoon itself is suggestive of the furmity woman’s involvement in stirring up the gossip – that ‘concocted story’ (187) that will reveal the truth of Henchard’s misdeeds. Finally, the ‘flour’ in the mixture echoes the final request of Henchard that ‘no flours be planted upon my grave’ (309), and creates a pun that demands his final break with corn and symbolizes the end of an era in which the home corn trade, symbolized by magic and superstition, dominated the food market.

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**5.**

**Food Production and the Feminine Pastoral: *Tess of the d’Urbervilles***

*’Man for the field and woman for the hearth.’*

‘The Princess’, Alfred Lord Tennyson, 1847 (make into end note).

The discourse upon which the myth of the feminine pastoral was historically propagated is disrupted by *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* in which Hardy engages with the reality of agricultural work and the role of women in food production during the middle years of the nineteenth century. The sub-title of Hardy’s novel, ‘A Pure Woman’, challenges the myth of the feminine by placing Tess outside the boundaries of the nineteenth-century idealistic visions of womanhood and into the reality of the agricultural revolution. Historically, the processes of feminine narrative discourse which concretize the construction of a feminine identity are based on four processes: ‘Stereotyping’, creating an image of how the pastoral feminine should look and act; ‘Compensating’ in which feminine values and femininity are elevated; ‘Collusion’ in which women are manipulated into consenting to their ‘subordination and objectification’; and, ‘Recuperation’ in which challenges to the historical meaning of gender are diffused (Sayer 1995, p.2-3). Each of these processes are implied through Tess’s relationship with food, specifically the strawberry which Alec feeds her, the wheat she harvests and the milk, butter and honey with which she is associated at Talbothays dairy. However, Tess also undermines these feminine values while working on the turnip fields at Flintcombe Ash, where her own desolation is reflected in the landscape, and at the end, during the breakfast in the hotel where she subverts the middle class ideal of womanhood by killing Alec.

**Women and Food Production**

From the middle of the eighteenth century and across the nineteenth century, as the industrial and agricultural revolutions took hold, the image of womanhood was reinvented to fit a ‘unified middle-class ideology of correct feminine behaviour’ based on the four processes of femininity (Sayer 1995, p.4). There was a conscious determination to remove women from the agricultural labour market and confine them to the role of wife and mother, excluding them from the market economy which was dominated and managed by men. In Britain during the 1840s, the concept of the working woman challenged patriarchal power and threatened the boundaries of social morality (Honeyman & Goodman 1991, p.621). Rural womanhood was embodied in ‘the wives and mothers who lived in the countryside and inhabited that most perfect of all homes, the cottage by the village green, who were supposed to epitomise the true ideal of femininity in their purity, innocence and sense of community’ (Sayer 1995, p.5). Living up to this ideal meant women were dissuaded from working. Within labouring families familial cottage industries were replaced by a capitalist model in which women moved away from the home into a waged and unsupervised workplace. This meant it was particularly difficult for families to control the sexual behaviour of their daughters. Thrown together in a working environment, men and women were likely to become less reserved and enter into ‘thoughtless’ marriages, ‘illegal liaisons’ or even produce illegitimate children (Humphries 1987, p.937). That the rural was intrinsically linked to ‘Englishness, Nation and Empire’, meant the wholesome figure of the country maid became a ‘metaphor for the state of the nation’ (Sayer 1995, p.164). When Angel Clare describes Tess as tasting of ‘the butter and eggs and milk and honey on which she mainly lived’ (242), he is describing the growing mass consumerism of nineteenth-century Britain through his ‘language of consumption’ (Sayer 1995, p.15), and reasserting the pastoral as a feminine space.

*Tess of the d’Urberville*s is set within the ‘Golden Age’ of farming – 1840 to 1880 – during which time technological developments such as the reaping and threshing machines, ploughs and seed drills increased agricultural productivity. In addition to this, the growing urban population (50 per cent of the population lived in cities by 1851)[[108]](#footnote-108) created a new market for foodstuffs supplied by the growing railway network which revolutionized the supply of food to the towns. Fish from the coast could be delivered to urban areas on the same day and foods such as vegetables, eggs, and milk were still fresh when they reached urban markets. In 1844, Manchester was the first city to receive its milk via the railway and London came shortly afterwards. Prices varied but the cost of a gallon of milk in the capital at this time was about 1s (Burnett 1989, p.8).

The importance of the railway in the supply of milk is reflected in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* through its analogy to a ‘terrestrial star’ which is ‘in one sense of more importance to Talbothays Dairy and mankind than the celestial ones to which it stood in such humiliating contrast’ (186). In other words, the size of the ‘little railway station’ does not reflect the significance of the railway system in the agricultural revolution. This new age of steam in which machine ploughs and steam engines were used for threshing was named by James Caird as the era of ‘High Farming’. It was also the height of capitalist agriculture. This point in the history of agriculture was a time of ‘high yields, low costs and improved profits for large-scale farmers’ (1967, p.85). The unstoppable hunger for consuming cheap labour and making big profits is embodied in the nature of the steam threshing machine at Flintcombe Ash as ‘enormous numbers’ of sheaves are ‘gulped down by the insatiable swallower, fed by the man and Tess’ (333), a metaphor which reinforces the countryside as a consuming and consumable object. The feminine purity of the rural is undermined by the ‘dark motionless being, a sooty and grimy embodiment of tallness … it was the engine man’ (345) whose job to feed the steam machine with coal brings an industrial and tarnished quality to the supposed purity of the landscape. The relentlessness of the threshing machine disrupts the traditions of agricultural life. Lunch becomes a ‘hasty’ affair ‘eaten as they stood’ (346), a departure from the lunch that Tess enjoys at the harvest. Even the description of the threshing machine as a ‘red tyrant that women had come to serve’ genders the dominant forces of agriculture. Within this environment, Tess is physically exhausted. Her body and her ‘consciousness’ become ‘independent’ of each other and ‘the freshest among them began to grow cadaverous and saucer-eyed’ (354). Food production has become a male dominated, aggressive and relentless operation in which women are defeminised.

The agricultural revolution saw the sexual division of the rural labour-force become more restrictive than it had been in pre-capitalist England and consequently there was a narrowing of opportunities for women to be involved in food production. Although at first this was primarily because it was too difficult for women to combine ‘domestic and productive tasks’, the ‘social conventions’ of the Victorian era added issues of ‘morality’ to the anxieties that came with women working away from home. Increasingly women moved out of waged labour and were left with ‘few opportunities for contributing to the family income’ (Humphries 1987, pp.935-947).

Sexual division of labour in the increasingly mechanized agricultural industry further removed women from the workforce. As the Reverend James Fraser stated, ‘the more extensive introduction of machinery is likely to supersede much female, and indeed much juvenile, labour’ (1896-7, p.79).[[109]](#footnote-109) Hardy’s novel offers an opportunity to consider the role of women through their relationship to food and show how they were imprisoned within an unattainable idea of femininity and increasingly excluded from the agricultural workforce. In the minds of the Victorian middle class, there was a direct correlation between the health of the nation and the view of the rural as a symbol of purity and healthiness. The middle class ‘used the condition of rural women and children as a metaphor for … what was respectable and what was not’ (Sayer 1995, p.49). Tess represents the impossible position this metaphor created for rural women. She embodies a vision of rural purity within an environment which only exists as an idea. This tension is imprinted on the food-producing landscape on which she works, from the lush green fertile valleys of the dairies to the desolate grey turnip fields of Flintcomb-Ash. Tess’s drinking of the milk at Talbothays is in stark contrast to her hacking of the turnips for cattle feed on the ‘Starve-Acre’ farm. Similarly, her personal relationship with the cows at the dairy compares harshly with the automated work of the steam threshing machine at Flintcomb-Ash. These contrasts reflect both rural idealism and the reality of the ‘moral and social decay’ which was ‘projected on to the countryside’ (Sayer 1995, p.41).

Although Tess becomes a victim of the agricultural revolution which has increasingly forced women out of the food-producing labour force and into the privacy of domestic life, she also resists this victimization, instead being portrayed in the outdoors – often nomadic – defying the Victorian idyll of the woman in the home. She also resists the Victorian ethic of motherhood in her condemnation of her mother’s decision to have so many children: ‘As Tess grew older, and began to see how matters stood, she felt quite a Malthusian towards her mother for thoughtlessly giving her so many little sisters and brothers, when it was such a trouble to nurse and provide for them’ (37). Tess resorts to agricultural labour at Flintcombe Ash rather than ask her husband’s father for money, ‘the more Tess thought of the step, the more reluctant she was to take it’ (274). She also refuses Alec’s attempt to help free her from the physical harshness of Flintcombe Ash: ‘If I cannot legitimize our former relations at least I can assist you’ (335), only giving in after her father’s death and the eviction of her family: ‘Father’s was the last life on the property, and when that dropped we had no further right to stay’ (355).

Economically, marriage was the most viable solution for a woman in the mid- to late-nineteenth century because female agricultural wages were just a third of men’s (Sharpe 1998, p.140). Reduced opportunities limited women to menial and exploitative tasks such as harvesting, milking, turnip picking and threshing. As Hardy suggests in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles:* ‘Female field-labour was seldom offered now, and its cheapness made it profitable for tasks which women could perform as readily as men’ (284). In 1851, 71,000 women (seven per cent of the population) worked as agricultural labourers in England and Wales. By 1891 that figure had dropped to 24,000 (one per cent).[[110]](#footnote-110) According to Arthur Wilson Fox, by the 1880s, female labour had ‘entirely ceased in many districts’ (1903, p.298). Arguments in favour of this reduction contended that patriarchy saved women from the hard work of food production, allowing them to spend more time in the home looking after their children. A more pessimistic view would suggest that the effects of the agricultural revolution on women reduced their work opportunities to ‘low-paid and low-skilled’ jobs which ‘reinforced their dependency on men’ (Verdon 2002, p.9). This attitude was supported by the Poor Law Commission’s 1843 report on the countryside, which looked specifically at gender issues.[[111]](#footnote-111) Alfred Austin, later to be Poet Laureate was charged with inspecting Wiltshire, Devon, Dorset and Somerset and includes a statement from a Mrs Britton: ‘Haymaking is hardwork, very fatiguing, but it never hurts me. I am always better when I can get out to work in the fields’ (in Verdon 2002, p.72). Such a testimony chimes with Tess’s own experience at the harvest in which ‘after a long seclusion she had come to a resolve to undertake outdoor work … nothing she could do in the house being so remunerative for the time as harvesting in the fields’ (89). Besides the financial benefits of working in the fields, at the end of the day Tess is left feeling ‘almost gay’ (92). Although the Report concluded that women’s outdoor work was both healthy and economically beneficial to the family, by the 1860s in Dorset female labour had been reduced to ‘gloving’, ‘turnip work’ and the ‘threshing machines’ (Verdon 2002, p.66). In Somerset it was observed by one writer that ‘the labouring class’ were beginning to understand that ‘the woman’s place is by her own fireside’ (71). As far as the government was concerned, farming was now ‘another branch of science and capitalist production’ that was more suited to men than to women (Sayer 1995, p. 69).

**Feminine Food**

Middle-class attitudes to rural femininity were inspired by the fashion for the Georgic pastoral which emerged in the late eighteenth century and replaced a historical narrative of women. The Georgic pastoral informed public and social opinion with its biblical and mythological visions of womanhood that became enshrined in works of literature, art and poetry (Sayer 1995, p.1-2).

The strawberry scene in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* represents the clash between the real and the idealized version of the countryside in which the eponymous heroine is rendered a ‘passive victim[s] of capital’, to adapt Karen Sayer’s helpful phrase.[[112]](#footnote-112) The act of placing the strawberry in Tess’s mouth represents the exploitation of women with Alec cast as the provider of the food and Tess the passive recipient. Within this exchange is the suggestion of sexual exploitation and harm: a common belief at the time was that fruit was bad for the health (Torode 1966, p.115). The strawberry is grown in a greenhouse in which it has been ripened earlier than the season would allow. Tess likes strawberries, but only ‘when they come’ (42); ‘early June’ (44) being too soon for both roses and strawberries. But the green-house forces a premature ripening of the fruit analogous with Tess’s own forced sexual maturing. [[113]](#footnote-113)

In true Biblical style, Alec assumes the role of the serpent who tempts Eve into eating the forbidden fruit. The serpent analogy is alluded to later in the novel when Tess looks back to a time ‘before she had eaten of the tree of knowledge’ (103) and again when she and Clare are described as ‘Adam and Eve’ at the dairy (130). The moment in which Tess ‘parted her lips and took it in’ (42) anticipates the loss of innocence she will suffer as she unconsciously takes in the sleeping draft from the ‘druggist’s bottle’ that Alec feeds her in the forest: ‘After some trouble in opening it held it to her mouth unawares. Tess sputtered and coughed’ (72). In the manuscript, Alec takes ‘a large wicker-cased jar’ which contains ‘spirits’ requested by Alec’s mother and forces Tess to drink from it. As detailed by Tim Dolin in the notes of the Penguin 2003 reprint, the source of this was a mock marriage detailed in *Graphic* of 29 July 1881 and recorded in Hardy’s notebook as follows: ‘Husband to induce wife to marry without settlement insists on her drinking some liquid – ceremony of marriage gone through – she does not know what she is doing’. Dolin goes on to say that ‘gothic melodrama’ that is created by the presence of the druggist’s bottle, which first appeared in the 1891 edition, is removed in 1892 and replaced by the offer of Alec’s coat for Tess to lie on. ‘The effect is to make the assault in the Chase look less like rape’ (Davis 2003, p.82). The bottle could have contained Laudanum, a derivative of opium which was widely used by labourers in the nineteenth century to reduce aches and pains. It was also used by working women to keep their children quiet while they were working (Sayer 1995, p.70-71). Hardy was not a stranger to referring to opiates in his texts. In *The Trumpet-Major*, Bob Loveday picks ‘poppy head seeds’ which he ‘munched up’ for a headache and subsequently ‘dropped off quite nicely’ (1987, p.303).

In the same way that Hardy uses historical, mythological and biblical references in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, so too does he employ them in this novel to demonstrate how women are trapped within male constructed narratives. Tess in a ‘half-hypnotised state’ accepts Alec’s roses which she, ‘obey[ing] still like one in a dream,’ places in her bosom while ‘he himself tucked a bud or two into her hat’ (42). Tess’s hypnotic state anticipates the drug-induced sleep during which Alec will assault her, while the placing of the flowers objectifies and sexualizes Tess. In her study of Botticelli’s *The Primavera* Stevie Davies considers the ‘feminine pastoral’ in which Zephyrus (the Spring God) rapes Chloris. As she looks back at her ‘fat-faced and swarthy rapist’ out of her mouth ‘springs a surprising cascade of flowers where words should have come.’ Chloris’s metamorphosis into Flora represents Nature with ‘her gown elaborately woven with spring flowers, swollen gracefully with pregnancy’ (1986, p.14). The parallel between Botticelli’s painting and the image of Alec as the ‘swarthy’ rapist with ‘full lips’ suggests that Tess’s own metamorphosis from an innocent maid to a mature pregnant woman is represented by the fruit and the flowers (40). Indeed, at the harvest, after her assumed rape and the birth of Sorrow, Tess is described as having a ‘flower-like mouth’ (90). As Chloris and Flora, Tess is confined to a fertility role. In a biblical context, the feminine role as Eve demonises Tess, marking her fertility as her downfall. The juxtaposition between fertility and death which Tess negotiates throughout the novel is again mythologised in the harvest scene in which she holds ‘the corn in an embrace like that of a lover’ (88). As stated in the previous chapter, the Corn God was a symbol of death and rebirth. At the end of the harvest, the corn spirit leaves the last sheaf entering into the thresher of the last corn. In this instance, Tess. Usually, a representative of the corn spirit, such as an animal, will be sacrificed. In *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, however the implication is that Sorrow, Tess’s baby, becomes representative of the corn spirit, dying the night of the harvest. This unnatural and premature death inverts the mythology of the corn spirit because the sacrifice is supposed to bring new life.

This interpretation would fit in with Tess being configured as Persephone or ‘Kore’ (the maiden): Persephone, ‘the Queen of Death’, who in the ‘Orphic Hymns’ is a ‘maiden rich in fruits’ not only represents new life but also the old, fruit being the ‘fullness of the old year’ (Davies 1986, p.19). Paradoxically, Tess is also Demeter,[[114]](#footnote-114) Persephone’s mother and the Goddess of the Harvest and fertility, who kneels at Persephone’s grave willing her back to life. Angel calls Tess ‘Artemis, Demeter and other fanciful names’ (130) and when she kneels at the grave of her baby Sorrow – the fruit she has borne – she places flowers in a ‘little jar of water to keep them alive’. On the outside of this jar is the label, ‘Keelwell’s Marmalade’, a popular brand of foodstuff made from processed fruit and symbolic of a new system of capital in which the products of the countryside become commercially branded commodities. Ironically, Sorrow is a victim of this new market economy. But Tess does not see this branding. Instead with the ‘eye of maternal affection’, the flowers become a symbolic marker for her dead baby. The flowers are also a reminder of Tess’s first meeting with Alec when he adorned her with flowers, thus securing the association between fertility and death. Finally, in the 1895 edition of the novel, Hardy replaced Alec’s reference to Tess as a ‘charming girl’ (2008, p.49) with the adjective ‘crumby’, meaning delectable. This change implies a reversal of Tess’s status as a provider of food to that of a piece of food herself, a woman destined to be consumed by men in the same way that the countryside is consumed both metaphorically and literally.

**Food and Immorality**

To understand how Tess’s role as an agricultural labourer offended the sensibilities of Victorian morality, it is necessary to understand how these attitudes took hold. For nineteenth-century moralists, a woman’s association with agricultural food production aligned her with immorality. Traditional ways of earning money, such as gleaning and producing dairy products on a small home-based scale, termed as the ‘informal economy’, became increasingly rare as the agricultural revolution progressed. This shift in the designation of female labour emerged in the middle of the eighteenth century. Prior to this, a woman would be employed in a number of agricultural activities such as ‘reaping, loading and spreading dung, ploughing, threshing, thatching, following the harrow, sheep shearing, and even working as shepherdesses’ (Verdon 2002, p.27). As Keith Snell points out, there was ‘a traditionally fuller and more sexually equal participation in agriculture’ than in the ‘following one hundred and fifty years’ (1987, p.52-56).[[115]](#footnote-115) In other words, the equality of the sexes, originally grounded in agricultural labouring was lost in the segregation of a gendered workforce.

Gleaning had also been an important part of a woman’s work and after each harvest, labourers would be permitted to collect enough wheat to keep them in bread for the winter. After 1850 there were still a few opportunities for gleaning but more efficient farm technology such as horse rakes, reaping machines and reaper binders cleaned the fields leaving small pickings. Traditionally women would also have been responsible for collecting acorns for feeding pigs and would have used them as an exchange currency with the miller. One bushel of acorns could fetch one shilling or act as payment for enough wheat to be milled into flour to last the winter months. By 1871 the opportunity of field work was reduced to weeding, hoeing, haymaking and harvesting. This accounted for just one tenth of the total labour days worked in a year (Verdon 2002, pp. 115, 184, 170).

By the 1860s it was deemed demoralizing for women to work out of doors. In his 1867-68 Report on Norfolk, Essex, Sussex and Gloucester, the Reverend James Fraser condemned female field-workers, claiming that it is ‘universally admitted that such employment … is to a great extent demoralising.’ He went further claiming that field work ‘unsex[ed]’ a woman in ‘dress, gait, manners, character, making it rough coarse, clumsy, masculine’ and contended that this in turn generated ‘further pregnant social mischief’ and made women unfit for her ‘proper duties at home’ (1917, p.18).

Working-class women’s clothes, ‘colourful, dirty, damaged and sweaty’ became ‘signs of their unfemininity and sexuality’ (Sayer 1995, p.91). Hardy’s description of field-women at the harvest challenges this stereotype while simultaneously exploiting and extending the feminisation of the countryside by insisting upon such sartorial elegance as ‘bonnets’ and ‘a petticoat as red as the arms of the reaping-machine.’ However the male narrating voice objectifies the women as they become part of nature or ‘a portion of the field’ losing their ‘own margin’ as they ‘imbibed the essence’ of their ‘surrounding’ and become ‘assimilated’ into the landscape. Unlike the men who are a ‘personality afield’, the field-women have no such distinction. However, ‘the young ones’ are abandoning the ‘appropriate dress of the field-woman’ while they also ‘wore drawn cotton bonnets with great flapping curtains to keep off the sun’ (88) which, in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* takes on a masculine persona: ‘his rays’ are ‘ungenial and peering’ (79). This male gaze is resisted by Tess who in the harvest field has ‘pulled her bonnet so far over her brow that none of her face is disclosed’ (88) and thus protecting her from the gaze of the sun. The male narrating voice, contained in Tess’s ‘pink cotton jacket’ as she stoops to gather the corn, is later undermined when she makes her way to Flintcomb-Ash Farm, having cut off her eyebrows and made herself unattractive. In an attempt to define herself, she ‘walks on; a figure which is part of the landscape; a field-woman pure and simple’ (280). Tess’s facial disfigurement brings her back to nature with the landscape of the ‘Starve-Acre’ farm reflecting her own physical and mental degradation: ‘There were few trees, or none, those that would have grown in the hedges being mercilessly plashed down with the quickset by the tenant-farmers, the natural enemies of tree, bush, and brake’ (281). Furthermore, Tess’s desire to deflect the public gaze emphasizes the reluctance of the middle class public to look upon the ugly reality of this type of agricultural farming. That Tess, while in this guise, remains – as the subtitle of the novel also insists – a ‘pure woman’, suggests Hardy’s intention to dismiss the equations that were made between pastoral femininity and purity and the disfigurement of the countryside through agricultural practices and degradation; metaphors that were ultimately attributed to women.

The image of femininity that Hardy depicts in the harvest scene is also undercut by the efficiency and aggression of the new reaping machines that are controlled by the men. This new invention attacks the field with its ‘revolving Maltese cross’, its four arms symbolizing the Cardinal Virtues of Prudence, Temperance, Justice and Fortitude (Castillo 2006, p.80). The image of death is scattered across the field with the animals – ‘rabbits, hares, snakes, rats, mice’ – all retreating inwards to a ‘smaller area’ until they are ‘huddled together, friends and foes, till the last few yards of upright wheat fell also under the teeth of the unerring reaper’. The Maltese Cross as a symbol of British values, is undermined by its association with death while the ‘fallen corn’ which is heaped behind and sheaved by the female workers acts as a commentary on the morality of field women, who, in contrast to the aggressiveness of the reaping machine, draw together ‘like dancers’, while during lunch Tess suckles her baby. In 1863 the magazine *Punch* published a drawing by John Tenniel entitled ‘Thanksgiving’ depicting a woman kneeling in a harvest field praying. Beside her is the helmet of Boudicca and a three pronged pitching fork. Placed side by side, the association is made between British might and the success of the harvest. Behind the praying woman are a group of land workers with one woman looking down in sorrow at the baby she cradles in her arms. The image creates two versions of the female: the strong and patriotic; and the nurturing maternal figure (110). However, this male depiction ignores the more realistic picture of ‘energetic, loud, boisterous women’ of the field who liked to swear and ‘tucked their skirts up’, actions that disrupted the attempt by the Victorian middle-classes to impose a pastoral narrative upon them (Sayer 1995, pp.92, 93).

In contrast, dairy work had always been considered acceptable employment for a woman, mainly because traditionally small dairies were attached to the home, with dairying part of the domestic duties of a woman. The country milkmaid became the representation of a pure form of female sexuality dictated by ‘chastity, modesty and clean, but hard country-living’ (Valenze 1995, p.65). Dairymaids were also ‘equated with the edible, natural products that they worked with’ (Sayer 1995, p.30). After disclosing her past to Angel, Tess laments how he used to say that ‘her mouth and breath tasted of the butter and eggs and milk and honey on which she mainly lived’ (242). Traditional dairies run by women were an important part of the household income and the money made from the dairy often covered the annual rent of a small farm with money to spare. (Valenze 1995, p.50). As the nineteenth century progressed, larger-scale farms run by men circumscribed the authority of women in the dairy industry (65). Women’s relationship with the dairy industry became one of ‘customary ways of working associated with the agrarian world’ while men’s relationship to dairying was dedicated to ‘a newer rational notion of production informed by commerce and capitalism’ (49). Talbothays, set within the ‘valley of the Great Dairies’, is far removed from this traditional matriarchal set-up. Instead, it caters to the new market-driven economy where the ‘milk and butter grew to rankness, and were produced more profusely’ in enclosures numbering ‘fifty acres’ (102). Talbothays represents ‘the growing business of selling butter and cheese’ that has replaced the old methods which were the ‘bastion of womanly arts’. These ‘secrets’ of dairying which were the preserve of the female became instead templates for a more organized and productive business run by men. This gender shift is demonstrated by Tess’s arrival at Talbothays where she is met with the call of a man, ‘Waow! waow! waow! ... It was not the expression of the valley’s consciousness that beautiful Tess had arrived, but the ordinary announcement of milking-time – half past four o’clock, when the dairymen set about getting in the cows’ (105). The opposition in the sentence between the ‘valley’s consciousness’ and the ‘ordinary announcement’ by a man disrupts the feminine environment with a masculine presence fixated on imposing time and order on the pastoral world. On entering the yard Tess is confronted by ‘a sturdy middle-aged man … the master-dairyman, of whom she was in quest, his double character as a working milker and butter-maker’ (106). Tess is reduced to being nothing more than a ‘new hand’ (107): ‘Machinery gradually performed much of the maids’ actual work … At the bottom of the hierarchy, the ordinary milkmaid became part of the proletariat of the agricultural workforce’ (Valenze 1995, p.65).

The agricultural revolution also transformed products of the dairying industry from foodstuffs to ‘staple commodities’ (65). When Tess ‘drank a little of the milk as a temporary refreshment’, Dairyman Crick feels ‘surprise’ and ‘contempt.’ Crick sees milk as a business commodity, not a nourishing ‘beverage’ (107). With ‘more than a hundred milchers’ under his ‘management’ milk is to him a product for profit (108).

The distinction between male and female attitudes towards food is summed up by Tess’s musing about the ‘strange people’ who will drink the milk that she and Angel have delivered to the railway station and which is transported overnight to London. Where Tess is concerned with the metaphorical distance between the milk and the consumer indicated by the word ‘strange’, Angel focuses on the milk as a consumable product noting that its strength must be ‘lowered’ to make it suitable for London palates.[[116]](#footnote-116) Envisaging the drinkers of the milk she has produced, Tess not only ‘others’ the city dwellers but also mythologises them. She imagines them to be ‘Noble men and noble women, ambassadors and centurions, ladies and tradeswomen’ (187). Tess’s image of those who live in the capital confirms the rural/urban divide and suggests that she has internalized her own (lowly) status.[[117]](#footnote-117)

Women suffered further isolation from the male dominated world of agriculture as they were deemed incapable of accepting or utilising new scientific improvements. Where men were identified with ‘scientific practice’, women embodied both ‘positive and negative qualities associated with irrationality’ (Davidoff & Hall 2013, p.27). True to type, Crick strives to remain professional – although he is susceptible to the irrational suggestions of the dairy maids. When the milk will not churn into butter, the recourse is to superstition and folklore: the dairymaids suggest consulting ‘Conjuror Trendle’s son in Egdon’ but Dairyman Crick considers the option ‘bitterly’, stressing, ‘I have said fifty times, if I have said once, that I don’t believe in him’; an act of rationality that looks less convincing when he later concedes, ‘But I shall have to go to him if he’s alive’ (133). When Mrs Crick regales the superstitious story of the milk that would not turn to butter, Crick reasserts his rationality, emphatically stating, ‘It had nothing to do with the-love-making. I remember all about it – ‘twas the damage to the churn’ (134). This rationality is then undermined when Tess, becoming distraught by the familiarity of the story, leaves the dairy: ‘Fortunately for her the milk in the revolving churn at that moment changed its squashing for a decided flick-flack’ (135). Imprinting irrationality upon the female supported the view that women were not suited to modern technology. Instead they were confined to the rural stereotype of ‘bearers of traditional culture’ with their ‘Old wives tales’ and ‘old style cures and nostrums’ (Davidoff & Hall 2013, p.27).

The expendability of Tess as a female worker – signalled by the term ‘help’ – compliments Angel’s desire for her not to work at the dairy and confirms the ‘pessimistic’ view of historians with regard to women being forced out of the food producing labour market. This is supported by Tess’s remark, ‘’tis always mournful not to be wanted, even if at the same time ’tis convenient’ (201). But Tess also considers the ‘optimistic’ view that in marrying Clare she does not have to look for field-work in the winter and go to a place ‘where no divine being like Angel Clare was’ (202). Tess’s relationship with Angel fulfils the processes of femininity laid out by Sayer. In the same way that Angel stereotypes Tess as a respectable, feminine and ultimately consumable figure of purity, so too does Tess stereotype Angel as a ‘divine being’.

As the two share their ‘first common meal alone’, they consummate their marriage not by sex but through food. Tess’s collusion in this act is, however, ambiguous with the suggestion that Angel coerces Tess into sharing the food: ‘Such was their childishness, or rather his, that he found it interesting’ to use ‘the same bread-and-butter plate.’ There is a further emphasis on Angel taking the lead when he brushes the ‘crumbs from her lips with his own’ (217). Tess’s passivity echoes that of her acceptance of the strawberry into her mouth as a prelude to Alec’s rape of her. However, this time, she challenges the discourse of femininity placed upon her and provides Angel with her own ‘narrative’ (227). When faced with the reality of who Tess is, Angel can no longer commune with her. Instead of sharing, they have two separate glasses of wine – ‘one for her, one for him’ – which remain on the table, ‘untasted’. Where Tess had believed the sharing of the food to be a symbol of their ‘Agape’, Angel’s immediate distaste for Tess is of an entirely sexual nature. Where only hours before they had ‘drunk from one cup’, now he avoids intimacy (230). Angel then attempts a degree of ‘recuperation’ by dismissing Tess’s discourse of her own femininity by claiming that ‘the woman I have been loving is not you’ (229). Indeed, the reality of Tess does not match the mythical version of the milkmaid that Angel constructed through stereotyping, compensating and manipulative collusion.

The path of Tess’s degradation is intrinsically linked to her association with food, not as a goddess of fertility but, as a degraded ‘hacker’ of swedes bound not for human consumption but for livestock. Just as Tess’s insignificance was emphasized by her comparison to a ‘fly’ as she stood on the ‘flatness’ of the Blackmoor Vale, so too now are she and her companions reduced to ‘crawling over the surface’ of the field ‘like flies’, stripped of their humanity (285). Tess’s existence as a lone, insignificant being is reflected in the piece work she is required to carry out at Flintcombe Ash. In this type of ‘task work’, the women are only paid for what they do. Tess’s personal decline is directly connected to the value of what she can produce. The two ‘Amazonian sisters’, Dark Car, the so-called ‘Queen of Spades’, and her sister, the ‘Queen of Diamonds’, who had ‘tried to fight with her at the midnight quarrel at Trantridge’ are divested of their feminine traits through their drunkenness and ability to engage in ‘all kinds of men’s work by preference, including well-sinking, hedging, ditching and excavating, without any sense of fatigue’ (290). In Charles Kingsley’s novel *Yeast* (1851) the field-women are described as ‘brutes in soul and manners’ (240) who become ‘accustomed’ to field work and begin to enjoy it, thus degrading them as wives and mothers and contributing to the perceived corruption of the rural population. The truth, however, is expressed in the lines following this pronouncement: ‘They must go a-field, or go hungered’ (177). In the 1870s, the National Agricultural Labourers’ Union organiser, George Mitchell put forward the case for a ‘male bread-winning wage’ which would rule out the necessity of women having to work in the fields. Mitchell’s main complaint was that strong women, those that ‘be an amazon’ provide a farmer with ‘as good as two men’s labour for 2s. a day’ (Sayer 1995, p.121). These ‘amazons’ were seen as undercutting men’s wages and taking their jobs. The narrator qualifies: ‘For some probably economic reason it was usually a woman who was chosen for this particular duty [threshing]’ (327). Hardy highlights the belief that strong women such as Dark Car and her friend – and, in many respects, Tess – undermine male employment opportunities because they can work just as effectively as men but for less money. Alec’s protestation, ‘I have told the farmer that he has no right to employ women at steam-threshing. It is not proper work for them’ (335) upholds the moral objection to women doing field work while disguising the economic reasons for insisting that Tess, and women like her, are confined to domesticity.

The concept that field work corrupted and demoralised women is, at the end of Hardy’s novel, undermined by the murder of Alec by Tess. The fine clothes and the ‘substantial repast of coffee, eggs and a cold ham’ (382) attend Tess’s final fall, which comes not in the turnip fields or working the threshing machine but rather in the genteel setting of a ‘stylish lodging-house’ which epitomises idleness and fine furniture in this most ‘popular watering-place’ (383).

Hardy’s point is that it is not the work of food production and agricultural labour that corrupts or demoralises women but the middle class ideology of womanhood. By demonising and disempowering women the agricultural capitalist infrastructure, dominated by science, rationality and men, could flourish producing profits that were confined to the domain of the man, making him rich and powerful and demeaning the status of women in society to caged birds or dependents. The references in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* to the food that sustains and identifies the nation is also, perversely, presented as inimical to life, if not unambiguously death: in the embrace in which Tess holds the ‘fallen’ corn; at Talbothays where Dairyman Crick holds his knife and fork ‘planted erect on the table, like the beginning of a gallows’ (120); in the scene in which Tess chokes on the bread and butter while the other dairymaids talk of deceiving their husbands (180); the Keelwell’s marmalade jar which holds the flowers that Tess places on Sorrow’s grave; and, finally in the carving knife used to cut the fine ham at the breakfast in Heron’s Lodging House which is then also used to murder Alec.

The problematic relationship that patriarchy created between women and food production condemned rural working women as a ‘savage race’ (Sayer 1995, p.76). Tess’s illegitimate child and her position as a field-woman harmed the ideological view of England which had its foundations in the rural and the pastoral. The urban setting with its disease and high infant mortality looked for purity in the countryside and, in an attempt to maintain this through a Victorian patrician morality, sought to eradicate the roughness, drunkenness and perceived immorality of the female field-worker. Tess’s execution symbolizes this intention and highlights Hardy’s deconstruction of the ideological view of Englishness that was embodied in feminine rural purity.

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**6.**

**Pig Killing and Surviving Modernity: *Jude the Obscure***

In the Preface to *The Mayor Casterbridge* (1886), Hardy asks his readers to consider the importance of the ‘home corn trade’, an importance that ‘can hardly be realized by those accustomed to the sixpenny loaf’ (2008, p.3). At the opening of *Jude the Obscure* there is a reference to the ‘Penny loaf’ (1985, p.56) indicating that after years of free trade, the effects of cheap imported grain were beginning to take hold, pushing down the price of bread and eroding small concerns such as Drusilla Fawley’s bakery. In *The Trumpet-Major*, Miller Loveday enjoys status and wealth. Drusilla, however, is the owner of a run-down ‘“shop”’ – the inverted commas highlighting the irony of the description – selling its ‘poor penny articles’ (62) of ‘five bottles of sweets, and three buns on a plate’ (51). The emphasis of this first chapter of *Jude the Obscure* is on leaving the old ways of the countryside and physically and psychologically looking to the town, represented by Christminster. This emphasis on urbanity is notable in the names of the chapters. In *Under the Greenwood Tree*, which depicts the early part of the century, the four parts of the novel are divided up into the four seasons of the year and with chapter titles that focus on occasions connected with food, such as: ‘Christmas Morning’, ‘Going Nutting’ and ‘Honey-Taking, and Afterwards’. In *Jude the Obscure*, however, the parts follow a geographical path: ‘At Melchester’, ‘At Marygreen’, ‘At Christminster’, reflecting a lack of stability, transience and the loss of a connection with the natural world and food.

By 1880, England’s agricultural industry was on the brink of a farming depression that lasted until the beginning of the twentieth century. This depression accelerated the movement of rural dwellers into the towns and cities, as did the ambition of young men and women who wanted more than a wage that barely sustained them. Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, William E. Bear called for careers for ‘able and intelligent young men’ who ‘will not stop in the rural districts if their only prospect remains one of labouring during their prime for a bare subsistence, and ending their days in the workhouse’ (1888, p.17). Bear’s insinuation is that food production is no longer a trade for the ambitious and the intelligent, and is unlikely to bring a good living. But when Jude in *Jude the Obscure* suffers the ‘modern vice of unrest’ and relinquishes his rural roots, looking for a better life in the town, he becomes an exile, alienated from the traditions in which he grew up and rejected by the institutions he wishes to enter. Although Sue is described as ‘at bottom’ a ‘country girl’ she has spent some years in London and has had ‘all rawness’ taken out of her (136). The implication is that the urban is civilized while the rural is the domain of ‘Hodge’. When Jude and Sue go back to the countryside they go as tourists enjoying the simplicity of traditional foods such as ‘boiled bacon and greens’, a food that for them holds a rustic sentimentality but for the shepherd and his mother, is eaten out of necessity. The meal, for Sue, represents a break from the laws of convention. Her remark that in this environment they are ‘outside all laws except gravitation and germination’ (191), suggests that Nature is a benign force, less complicated or vindictive than the laws of civilization. This simplistic view of Nature comes back to haunt Sue after her children are murdered: ‘I said it was Nature’s intention, Nature’s law and *raison d’être* that we should be joyful in what instincts she afforded us – instincts which civilization had taken upon itself to thwart. What dreadful things I said’ (413). Ironically, Sue’s lack of sexual instinct, paralleled by her lack of appetite for food, is not so much thwarted by civilization but by her own natural tendencies and coquettish behaviour. Sue’s thwarted desire to be with Jude, however, can be paralleled with the ‘thwarted desires’ of the birds that Jude is paid to scare away from Farmer Troutham’s field: ‘He sounded the clacker till his arm ached, and at length his heart grew sympathetic with the birds’ thwarted desires’ (53). His call for them to ‘Eat, then, my dear little birdies, and make a good meal’ (54) might stand as his philosophy for life: to invoke a better world through an ‘imaginative ideal’ (Hassett 1971, p.432); his sensitivities battling against the reality of the agricultural revolution. Jude’s Romanticism does not fit into the modern era. As Hardy wrote in April 1899: ‘A woeful fact – that the human race is too extremely developed for its corporeal conditions, the nerves being exposed to an activity abnormal in such an environment’ (*Life and Works* 1985, p.227). Despite their belief that they are modern – ‘our ideas were fifty years too soon to be any good to us’ (482) – Jude and Sue are exposed to a version of the modern world that does not suit them and which eventually destroys them. This inability to adapt to a changing environment will be demonstrated in this chapter by examining the description of Farmer Troutham’s field, the ‘Christminster Cakes’, Arabella’s association with pigs and food and the diet of urban dwellers at the end of the nineteenth century.

**Farmer Troutham’s Utilitarian Field**

The land on which food is produced in this novel takes on a functional modernity: it is the antithesis of the timelessness of Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native* (1880); the surface of which ‘never had been stirred to a finger’s depth, save by the scratching of rabbits, since brushed by the feet of the earliest tribes’ (1985, p.56). In contrast, Farmer Troutham’s field is in a ‘wide and lonely depression’ and has a ‘meanly utilitarian air’ suggesting that a sentimental moral economy has been replaced by a desire for profits that cannot even tolerate the birds taking seeds for their dinner. Hardy’s use of the word ‘utilitarian’ has various implications. First it disrupts the rural ideal of the countryside as a place of beauty and purity by taking away its aesthetic value in favour of its usefulness in producing food. Secondly, Jeremy Bentham believed that animals also had a right to happiness and that the ‘pleasures of the imagination’ were produced in association with ‘The idea of the innocence and happiness of the birds, sheep, cattle, dogs and other gentle or domestic animals’ (1948, p.163). The use of the field for the production of food for humans strips it of its Utilitarian value and its old associations with the ‘echoes of songs from ancient harvest-days, of spoken words, and of study deeds … gaiety, horse-play, bickerings and weariness’ which have been replaced by the economical ‘fresh harrow lines’. The land is no longer a place of ‘love matches’ but a ‘lonely place’ which has no more character than that of ‘a work-ground’ (53). The field has ironically lost its worth in the Utilitarian sense that it does not contribute to the happiness of humans or indeed of animals. Bentham’s philosophy of ‘the greatest happiness for the greatest number’ (1948, p.3) has been replaced by the greatest profit for the farmer. The harrow lines also represent both the conformity and the entrapment of society. Jude’s own leanings towards Utilitarian philosophy can be observed on his arrival in Christminster when he is more concerned with the ‘phantasmal’ than with the ‘mean bread-and-cheese question’ (130): his happiness being found in the intellectual nourishment that the Utilitarians considered as more fulfilling than the needs of the body (Scarry 1996, p.4-7). Jude’s disregard – until the morning after his arrival in Casterbridge – for the material sustenance of the body is playfully attended to through the nourishment of political thought. The ‘voice’ of the ‘Corn Law Convert’ (Sir Robert Peel) whose ‘phantom’ Jude had seen in the ‘quadrangle’ comes back to him while ‘he drew towards sleep’ (128). Peel’s words proclaim the Utilitarian philosophy through the right of ‘free access to the food of man.’ Unlike Farmer Troughtam, Peel acts with no ‘interested motives … no desire to gratify ambition, for no personal gain’ (128). When Jude wakes in the morning, the ‘phantasmal’ is replaced with the need to eat and compels ‘Jude to smother high thinkings under immediate needs’ (130). Both this scene and the one on Troughtam’s field bring into correspondence the tension between imaginative idealism and harsh reality.

The description of Farmer Troutham’s field with its ‘fresh harrow-lines’ that stretched ‘like the channellings in a new piece of corduroy’ (53) can also be interpreted as ‘something like writing’ (Wike 1993, p.458) or in other words, a textual narrative. Just as the field remains ‘bare of colour and produce’ (323) throughout the novel, so Jude never sees the fruits of his educational endeavours. Corn is grown in the field, providing the narrative of food and bread but this purpose is rendered obsolete as the reader never sees the fruits of the corn seed. Neither does Jude see his children or his relationship with Sue grow to maturity. Similarly, the seed is planted in a ‘hollow field’, the hollowness and vastness emphasising the need for mass production in order to feed a growing population, a problem later given a macabre inflection by Little Father Time when he kills himself and the other children ‘because we are too menny’ (410).

Barry N. Schwartz wrote that Hardy depicted Nature ‘not as an abstraction, but as a vast, impressive organism living her own immense life and careless of that of man’ (1970, p.797). Comparing the field with corduroy, therefore, suggests an attempt to impose man-made criteria to a natural force. Later in the novel, Sue remarks of ‘the social moulds civilization fits us into’ that they have ‘no more relation to our actual shape than the conventional shapes of the constellations have to the real star-patterns’ (266). The furrows in the field represent the imposition of man’s shapes upon the natural. Sue and Jude’s earlier conception of the countryside as ‘outside all laws except gravitation and germination’ is subsequently undermined by the furrows that come to represent a forced order and conformity. The industrial and modern age tries to control and tame Nature and man but the result is isolation and frigidity.

**Of Cakes and Colleges**

The field, its geometric shape defined by enclosure, becomes not just a physical barrier imposed by hedges and lines but a psychological barrier between the rural and the urban and between Nature and Civilization. The farmer’s decree that Jude was ‘never to be seen in that field again’ acts as a further obstacle to the fulfilment of his dreams as ‘Christminster lay across it’ (58). Jude becomes an exile from his rural roots while finding himself unable to define himself through an urban identity. This predicament is articulated in the letter Jude receives from the Master of Biblioll College in which he advises: ‘remaining in your own sphere’ and ‘sticking to your trade’ rather than ‘adopting any other course’ will give Jude a ‘better chance of success in life’ (167). Jude’s inherited trade is that of a baker but when he considers his options for making a living in order to pay for his studies, he takes into account the necessities of life: ‘Food, clothing and shelter’. Jude dismisses food: ‘an income from any work preparing the first would be too meagre’ and prefers the work of stone masonry because ‘they built in a city; therefore he would learn to build’ (76). Jude, however, is mistaken in the suggestion that working in the food industry would be uneconomical and it is only later, when desperate to earn some money to feed his family, that – with some success – he returns to his first trade: ‘I ought to take to bread-baking. I grew up in the baking business with aunt, you know. But even a baker must be conventional, to get customers’ (376). Bakers were a ‘permanent temptation’ to those in the city who no longer had the necessary equipment or time to bake their own bread or cakes (Burnett 1989, p.5). Jude, however, uses his trade to bring his own version of modernity to a society which is clinging on to its crumbling traditions. When he first arrives in Christminster he tours the ancient city at night, admiring the ‘porticoes, oriels, doorways of enriched and florid middle-age design’ (125). The imperfections that are hidden by the night are, however, brought into sharp focus by daylight: ‘He examined the mouldings, stroked them as one who knew their beginning …What at night had been perfect and ideal was by day the more or less defective real’ (130). As a stonemason, Jude sees the opportunity to regenerate the city. The reproductions of the original that he sees in the yard of the stonemasons he considers as ‘ideas in modern prose which the lichened colleges presented in old poetry’ (131). But it is not as a stonemason that Jude transforms the old colleges but as a baker. His ‘Christminster cakes’ are a ‘great success.’ Admired by Arabella – ‘I never saw any like ’em. Why, they are windows and towers, and pinnacles! And upon my word they are very nice’ (382) – they represent Jude’s own interpretation and rejuvenation of a city and its institutions that have refused to accept him. Jude once sought to improve the ‘jagged curves disdain of precision’ with the ‘mathematical straightness, smoothness and exactitude’ (131) of the new and through the cakes he achieves this. The walls of the colleges, once acting like Farmer Troutham’s field, as a barrier to Jude’s ambition, are now reinvented in pastry, a material which Jude knows how to manipulate: ‘Yes they are reminiscences of the Christminster Colleges. Traceried windows, and cloisters, you see. It was a whim of his to do them in pastry’, Sue tells Arabella. And when the latter ‘unceremoniously’ (383) munches one of them, she metaphorically demonstrates the democracy of the modern world in which the city – and the learning institutions within it – is commodified and consumed. As cakes, Christminster’s walls can be accessed not just by ‘millionaires’ sons’ (205) but by anyone. Later in the novel this is expressed by Jude when he tells the disinterested Arabella: ‘I hear that there is going to be a better chance for such helpless students as I was. There are schemes afoot for making the University less exclusive’ (387).

In the same way that the harrowed fields have a text transcribed upon them, so too do the cakes. The ‘old poetry’ of the ‘lichened colleges’ becomes ‘modern prose’ (131) in the shape of the cakes. The romanticism of the old, gives way to the instability of the new. The perishable nature of the cakes symbolizes this instability and suggests a world in which physical sensation and the satisfaction of bodily needs supplants the slow, steady progress of education and spirituality. When Jude arrives in Christminster he reflects upon his distance from the scholars inside the colleges: ‘Only a wall divided him from those happy contemporaries of his with whom he shared a common mental life; men who had nothing to do from morning till night but to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest. Only a wall – but what a wall!’ (132). Jude ineffectually inscribes his anger on those walls in chalk, words that will inevitably fade away. Arabella, however, in an act that demonstrates a more profound disregard – which she has shown throughout the novel – for social, spiritual or legal institutions, ‘unceremoniously’ consumes the cake and in doing so symbolically breaks down that wall, replacing the act of pedagogic digestion with fleeting sensory taste and immediate gratification.

**Arabella and Piggishness**

Arabella’s unceremonious association with food begins with the pig’s ‘pizzle’ or penisthat she throws at Jude. In a letter to Lady Jeune dated 17 November 1895, Hardy explained that ‘A. throwing the offal was, of course, intended to symbolize the conflict of animalism with spiritualism’ (*CL*2 1980, p.97) notably because the penis hits Jude in the head interrupting his high-minded thoughts: ‘Then I must master other things: the Fathers thoroughly; Bede and ecclesiastical history generally; a smattering of Hebrew … Yes, Christminster shall be my Alma Mater; and I’ll be her beloved son, in whom she shall be well pleased … On a sudden something smacked him sharply in the ear’ (80). Jude’s words ironically place Christminster as the nourishing mother[[118]](#footnote-118) but Jude finds little physical or spiritual sustenance in the city. Additionally, the inferred baptism Jude receives from the pig’s pizzle does not induce a spiritual awakening as the religious ceremony would do, but a physical one. The description of Arabella as ‘a complete and substantial female animal’ (81) not only links her with the pig but also places her as the ‘antithesis of [Jude’s] Romantic dream.’ She is the embodiment of the ‘insensitivity of nature’ (Hassett 1971, p.436). In a review of the novel published in *Blackwood’s Magazine* in 1896, Margaret Oliphant describes Arabella as ‘a human pig, like the beast whom in a horrible scene she and her husband kill’ (139).[[119]](#footnote-119) The association of Arabella with the pig has various connotations. Andrew Radford argues that Arabella’s ‘piggishness links her with the “unclean animal” of Mosaic Law.’ This uncleanliness is most apparent in the scene where she dirties Jude’s books with the pig’s grease: ‘“Leave my books alone!’ he said. “You might have thrown them aside if you had liked, but as to soiling them like that, it is disgusting”’ (2003, p.114). But Arabella is also an emblem of fertility and this association is not only insinuated through the pig’s pizzle but also through the description of her as having a ‘round prominent bosom, full lips, perfect teeth, and the rich complexion of a Cochin’s egg’ (81). Radford cites Frazer’s assertion that the pig was ‘once considered a chthonic animal, the “uterine animal of the earth”’ which in turn links it to the corn-goddess Demeter: ‘remembering that in European folk-lore the pig is a common embodiment of the corn-spirit’ (2003: 196). The construction of Arabella through her bodily parts from her bosom to her lips and her teeth atomises her in terms of ‘the male gaze’ to which, within the text, even the narrator contributes and which ultimately renders her a ‘complete and substantial female animal’ (81). This is reinforced by her comparison with a Cochin’s egg and reasserts her association with fertility through the unhatched egg which she keeps in her bosom. When Jude asks Arabella why she does such a thing, she replies, ‘I suppose it is natural for a woman to want to bring live things into the world’ (100). The remark encapsulates Arabella’s self-awareness of the instinctual and natural desire to live and give life and paradoxically, this instinctiveness based on animalism makes her more suited to the modern world.

In Pagan rituals animals were sacrificed as sacred beings but in Christianity they are slaughtered as an inferior species for purposes of food. Jude considers Arabella in much the same way: ‘He knew well, too well, in the secret centre of his brain, that Arabella was not worth a great deal as a specimen of woman-kind’ (102). Jude’s reluctance, however, to treat her unkindly chimes with the sentiments he displays during the pig-killing scene in which he refuses to let the pig die slowly and where Arabella accuses him of being a ‘tender-hearted fool’ (109). But her strength of character and self-awareness only emphasises Jude’s weakness.

Arabella’s association with the pig also deems her uncivilized. In Robert Southey’s 1799 poem, ‘The Pig’, he describes the animal as ‘ugly, and the filthiest beast / That banquets upon offal.’ The image of the pig portrayed everything that was to be avoided. Malcomson and Mastoris describe the symbolism of the swine as serving ‘in part to define in consciousness a boundary between the civilized and the uncivilized’ (2001, p.2). In *Jude the Obscure,* rural life, as represented by the pig-killing scene, is no longer an ‘idyll’ but a place of barbarism, driven by and responding to economic forces. Arabella is the embodiment of this brutal realism in her attitude to the way the pig must be killed: ‘The meat must be well bled, and to do that he must die slowly. We shall lose a shilling a score if the meat is red and bloody.’ However, Arabella is also pragmatic: ‘Pigs must be killed’ as ‘Poor folks must live’ (110-111). Her realism collides with Jude’s Romanticism. He perceives the business as a ‘dismal, sordid, ugly spectacle’ rather than ‘the ordinary obtaining of meat’ (111) and this view colours his opinion of Arabella who he accuses of ‘soiling’ his books as if she too were unclean.

Arabella’s pragmatism, however, sits better in the world of modern economics than Jude’s Romanticism. After having remarried Jude, she finds herself ‘saddled’ with ‘an invalid husband’ and forced to ‘make black-pot and sausages’ and ‘hawk ’em about the street’ (464). Similarly, when she goes to work in her father’s pork shop, she sells pre-prepared sausages, catering to an urban market which preferred to be spared the ‘spectacle’ of pig-killing. By the middle of the nineteenth century attitudes towards pigs were beginning to change. Where they had previously been considered dirty and gluttonous creatures, people were beginning to realise they were intelligent and rather good company. But pig-keeping in towns and cities was unhygienic. Indeed, ‘urban pigs testified to slum conditions’ (Malcolmson & Mastoris: 2001: 43). Since the middle of the nineteenth century, pork had been imported from the countryside and sold in butcher’s shops (Burnett 1989, p.11). As a result, town dwellers were losing contact with the origins of their food and the process it had been through in order to arrive in shop windows as bacon and ham. Roy Porter suggests that ‘as urbanisation and industrialisation progressed, being hard-bitten about animals ceased – for some – to be essential. Urban intellectuals and the genteel … could afford the luxury of fulminating against the cruel sports … and waxed nostalgic about the countryside which they did not inhabit’ (1985, p.227). Arabella, as the intermediary between the horror of the pig-killing and the respectability of the pork shop, clearly makes this point.

By the end of the eighteenth century, cruelty to animals was coming under close critical scrutiny. Up until 1800, pigs were routinely whipped to death to make their meat tender while calves would be slowly bled over a number of days to ensure the whiteness of their meat. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the method by which a pig was killed included a poleaxe which was driven into the pig’s head by a mallet, killing it – if properly done – instantly. A quick gash to the throat would ensure the swift drainage of the blood. The killing of the pig would have been a communal event, done in public. In light of this, it is not surprising that Arabella is keen for the neighbours not to hear because she is not using the humane method and her intention to drain the blood slowly would inflict two or three minutes pain on the animal (Malcolmson & Mastoris 2001, p.98). In 1823 Charles Lamb published his *Essays of Elia* which included ‘Dissertation Upon Roast Pig’, a satire on killing and cooking pigs in which he writes: ‘We read of pigs whipt to death with something of a shock, as we hear of any obsolete custom’ (1935, p.112). The discussion turns to the justification of killing a pig in this manner in order to obtain the most exquisite taste: ‘Supposing that the flavour of a pig who obtained his death by whipping (*per flagellationem extremam*) superadded a pleasure upon the palate of a man more intense than any possible suffering we can conceive in the animal, is man justified in using that method of putting the animal to death?’ (112). The same question is to put to the late nineteenth-century readers of Hardy’s novel when Arabella complains that killing the pig too quickly means less profit at the market.

There are other similarities between Lamb’s essay and Hardy’s novel. What is most appealing to Lamb’s Bo-bo, is the discovery of the taste sensation created by eating crackling, achieved by singeing the skin, a process which Arabella also prefers: ‘I like singeing best’ (108). The most succulent pig to eat, according to Elia, is a young one, ‘his voice as yet unbroken’ (1935, p.110). In Hardy’s novel, Jude’s concern over the starving pig ‘whose voice could be continually heard from a corner of the garden’ (108), betrays the Romantic attitude that he has to animals. Jude ascribes tothe pig human emotions such as ‘crying’, ‘surprise’, ‘rage’ and ‘despair’ (109) while considering the suffering animal as a ‘fellow-mortal’ (112). When he feels ‘dissatisfied with himself as a man at what he had done’ (112), his dissatisfaction is not with his incompetence but with the killing of an animal that was made to suffer. As Jude prepares the pig for killing, ‘A robin peered down at the preparations from the nearest tree, and, not liking the sinister look of the scene, flew away, though hungry’ (109), the action providing a moment in which the narrative bestows a deeper moral authority on animals than humans. The comparison between the restraint of a bird against hunger and the desire of Arabella for slowly bled meat which will fetch more money at market, inverts the roles of animals and humans within the scheme of civilization.

Arabella is equipped for the modern world because she is adaptable. She has worked in the liquor business and knows a trade, that of pig-keeping, and later butchery, which she uses to entrap Jude for a second time. First she gets him drunk and then she keeps him at her father’s ‘small and precarious pork-shop’ for ‘three or four days’ creating the circumstances under which Jude must marry her for reputation’s sake (460). She even instructs her father to arrange a ‘quiet convivial party’ to keep Jude in a drunken state, a suggestion that would not only help her to catch him but also ‘advertise the shop’ (458), thus revealing once again, Arabella’s pragmatic attitude towards modern life. The entrapment of Jude is once again achieved through the employment of pigs, leaving him wishing for the merciful and quick death that he gave the pig that ended his relationship with Arabella initially: ‘I feel now that the greatest mercy that could be vouchsafed to me would be that something should serve me as I served that animal’ (464). The moment in which Jude nearly kills his wife associates her directly with the pig as she remonstrates, ‘You couldn’t kill the pig, but you could kill me!’ (466), reducing her status to that of below the animal.

If Arabella is the embodiment of animalism, instinct and lack of sensitivity, Sue Bridehead is the opposite. She is ‘hardly flesh at all’ (309) and this ‘disembodied’ status is represented by her lack of connections with food throughout the novel. On her last morning with Phillotson before leaving him she is described in ethereal terms as a ‘slim, flexible figure’ who ‘glide[s]’ into the parlour for a tea which she is unable to eat (296). Sue’s lack of appetite for food chimes with her lack of appetite for sex, accentuating her ephemeral character and distancing her from animalism. Radford describes Sue and Arabella as ‘two poles of one dismantled sexuality’ (2003, p.186). Jude even goes so far as to call Sue a ‘sensitive plant’ (420) and a woman with ‘so little animal passion in you’ (324). In sharp contrast to Arabella’s fecund association with eggs which she nestles in her bosom – inside a pig’s bladder ‘in case of accidents’ – for hatching, Sue’s frigidity is symbolized by the unfertilized eggs she produces for her children’s breakfast and which she drops into a boiling kettle. Jude stands with his ‘watch in his hand, timing the eggs’ as Sue enters the bedroom to find that Little Father Time has murdered her children and hung himself (409). Where Arabella’s egg gave the promise of new life, Sue’s symbolize a macabre event compacted by the untimely death of her children and her ‘prematurely born’ new baby.

**Food and the City**

By the 1880s, fifty per cent of wheat consumed in England was imported from overseas while the movement of the population from the countryside to the towns was causing major concern amongst farming societies and agriculturalists. As the century moved to its close, the countryside no longer ‘had the capacity to feed the towns’ (Oddy 2003, p.11). H. Rider Haggard speaking at ‘The Garden City and Agriculture Conference’ on 13th July 1905, called for the use of the land for ‘its original purpose, viz., the production of food and the maintenance of the people.’[[120]](#footnote-120) Thomas Adams, the organizer of the conference and the author of *Garden City and Agriculture: How to Solve the Problem of Rural Depopulation*,was concerned with the ‘degeneration’ of city dwellers believing that a ‘New race of sturdy English Yeomen’ was needed to ‘form the bulwarks of our Empire’ (1905, p.7). Jude’s poor physical health – he suffers repeatedly from coughs, although provoked primarily by his work as a stone mason – is not improved by urban living. Certainly his lack of food – he breaks a ‘fast’ with a ‘cup of tea’ (379) – suggests he is malnourished, a problem that was rife in the city. ‘The disadvantages of town life from a dietary point of view were considerable’ (Burnett 1989, p.164) because the poor did not own utensils with which to cook, fuel was expensive and there was a shortage of available water. In addition to this, many urban women had under-developed culinary skills (165).

Jude and Sue are of a generation that reject an agricultural and food-producing lifestyle for an urban way of life. Arabella, in contrast, seeks out a new life utilizing the skills of her rural upbringing to ensure success in the urban. The butcher’s shop that her father opens reflects the boom in retailing and the reliance of an expanding urban population on food stuffs they could buy rather than grow or rear for themselves. This ‘burgeoning retail food market demanded ever-increasing quantities of sugar, coffee, cocoa beans, oranges, lemons, bananas and countless other minor tropical products’ (Havinden & Meredith 1993, p.50) that were imported from Britain’s colonies. Between 1860 and 1911, Britain invested heavily in its colonies, particularly in the tropics (49) because ‘much of the nation’s food lay overseas’ (10).

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**Conclusion**

Historically, food has been overlooked in literary studies. This book has shown, however, that seemingly irrelevant details about what characters eat and how they eat must be newly considered as essential components of a novel. Food secures and defines cultural context and adjusts and determines the political tone of a piece of writing. Character is built, maintained and collapsed through personal and professional associations with food, while metaphorical and symbolic representations of food offer accessible insights and new interpretations of historical

Hardy’s Wessex accommodates the agricultural revolution in the nineteenth century while his characters, identified by their association with the food they produce and eat, take a journey that starts in the small village of Overcombe in *The Trumpet-Major,* moving to the borders of Casterbridge, out to the boundaries of Wessex which are walked by the nomadic Tess. Finally, Jude exhibits the particularly modern state of deracination, living partly in the rural and partly in the urban space. If the characters in Hardy’s earlier novels are defined by their association with food, Jude’s identity is complicated by his decision to abandon a profession in food production and seek an education. As his and Sue’s relationship with food is eroded so too is their sense of identity. Rejecting the traditions embedded in food production, believing themselves to be ‘modern’, they find they are isolated and exiled from a society whose values have not kept pace with modern developments.

Henchard in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* loses his innate will to live and this is demonstrated by his lack of appetite and inability to eat. The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer ‘rejected suicide as a denial of the will to live’ but ‘did allow one species of suicide as being a genuine demonstration of the vanquishing of the will to live – voluntary starvation’ (Tanner 1979, p.22). That the denial of the will is demonstrated through the denial of food, supports the central argument of this book; that food is key when considering the political and philosophical fundamentals of Hardy’s fiction.

In *The Trumpet-Major* Hardy sought to undermine a rural idealism which promoted Englishness and inspired patriotism. His references to food subtly expose the disingenuous nature of nationalism in promoting war. Similarly, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, demonstrates how the relationship between women and food changed as the nineteenth century progressed and society moved from a moral economy to a market economy. Food production in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* exposes the ideological view of rural England that was embedded in feminine purity and propagated by the rise of patriarchy during the agricultural revolution. Tasting of milk and butter and honey, Tess becomes the embodiment of the idyllic rural landscape, her moral corruption signifying the moral decay of society. In the novels of Hardy women are linked in one way or another to food: whether it be Fancy’s Day’s consideration of sugar in *Under the Greenwood Tree*; the vital information about her husband that Susan receives from the furmity woman in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*; or the moment when Arabella drains the pig’s blood in *Jude the Obscure*.

Food marks the beginning and the end of historical eras: the Corn Laws secured the rise of a capitalist economy based on profit and loss; while humane methods of animal slaughter signposted the shift in the way that animals were perceived: not just as food but as sentient beings. The sucking pig of *The Trumpet-Major* is no longer the ingredient of wedding feasts but a sausage shaped product that can be bought ready-made from a shop window.

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2. Michael Millgate, p. 141, note 45. H. C. Minchin, letter (citing FEH), *Times Literary Supplement* (9 Feb 1928), 96; RLP/FEH, 1929; FEH to SCC, 22 Apr 1918 (Yale), cf. V. Meynell (ed.), *Friends of a Lifetime* London, 1940, p.298 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. J Stevens Cox, ‘The Domestic Life of Thomas Hardy ((1921-1928) by Miss E.E.T. Hardy’s

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4. ‘The Dorsetshire Labourer’ in Longman’s Magazine (July 1883) reprinted in *The Portable Thomas Hardy*, edited by J. Moynahan (1977, p.731) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://people.stfx.ca/rnemesva/hardy/candour.html [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Lawrence, Dan H. ‘Henry James and Stevenson Discuss “Vile” Tess’. *Colby Quarterly*, 3/10 (May 1953): Article 4 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid, 3-4 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. J. M. Barrie ‘Thomas Hardy: The Historian of Wessex’. *Contemporary Review,* 58 (1889), 33 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *The Hampshire Advertiser* 14 February 1880, p. 7; 12 June 1880, p.7 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 23 November 1880, p.11 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For a more detailed account see Howard (1887). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. E. P. Thompson’s 1971 essay, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’ defines the relationship between the responsibility of the community to the poor and the price of food: ‘It is of course true that riots were triggered by soaring prices by malpractices among dealers, or by hunger. But these grievances operated within a popular consensus as to what were legitimate and illegitimate practices in marketing, milling, baking etc. This in its turn was grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of proper economic functions of several parties within the community, which, taken together, can be said to constitute the moral economy of the poor’ (p.78). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. ‘The standard quartern loaf of bread (a large, dense loaf that weighed just over 4 ¼ lb.) cost 8 ½d. in the 1840s, 7d. in 1875, 6d. in 1887, 5d. in 1895’ (Mitchell 1996, pp.32). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. In 1830, before the repeal of the Corn Laws (1846), imported grain amounted to 2%. In 1860, after the repeal of the Corn Laws, imported grain stood at 24%. In the 1880s it was 45%. The 1881 census showed a decline of 92,250 agricultural labourers in a space of ten years with a 53,496 increase in urban labour (Ensor 1936, pp.115-116). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. By ‘A Country Gentleman’. London, MDCCLXXII. London: Gale, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Wheat in England is generally referred to as ‘corn’. In America ‘corn’ refers to maize. In more general terms, corn can be the generic term for all grains (Fay 1932, p.1). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Millers were supposed to work for the good of the community, but there is a long history of bakers being punished for giving short weight and millers trying to steal corn. Chaucer’s Miller has a golden thumb (ie; he cheats by tilting the scales). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Rosenberg and Birdzell suggest that the ‘trade in grain was political as well as economic’ in that bread, made primarily from wheat flour, formed the basis of the European diet. This made the price of bread significant: ‘The usual way the political authorities resolved the issue was to fix the price per loaf, but, to accommodate the fact that there was often not enough grain to supply the market for bread at the fixed price, the size of the loaf was allowed to vary. Still, the very stability of governments depended on finding enough grain to keep the size of the loaf within reason’ (1986, p.92). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For a more detailed explanation of the term ‘political economy’ see Valenze (1995, p.129). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For more on this see, Davies (1795) and Eden (1797). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. James Caird (1816-1892) was a Scottish farmer-journalist who advocated ‘high farming’ using intensive farming methods to yield high quantities of produce (Mingay 1989, p.14). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. ‘Review of Charles Shaw Lefevre, ESQ.’s. Letter to his Constituents, As Chairman of the Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into *The Present State of Agriculture* by William Blacker, ESQ’ London: R. Groombridge, 1837. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Bohstedt disputes these claims, suggesting there is no evidence that women took a greater part in the riots (1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The Poor Relief Act of 1662 provided certificates of residence to individual parishes. This meant that if someone became ill or infirm, the parish in which they were officially domiciled would be responsible for them. However this prevented labourers from internal migration because they would lose their parish benefits. In 1834, the law was reformed through the Poor Law Amendment Act which abolished ‘outdoor relief’ and put in its place the Union Workhouses. These became the only refuge for those who could not earn enough to live on (Mingay 1990, pp. 6-7). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Thomas Hardy. ‘The Dorsetshire Labourer’ in *Longman’s Magazine*, 1883. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *Hampshire Advertiser and Royal Yacht Club Gazette*, Saturday 13 March 1830, p.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. From 1795 until 1834, Poor Law relief was given on the ‘Speenhamland’ system in which inadequate wages were made up to a living standard. This motivated employers to pay their workers less than a living wage (Cole 1927, p.36). This ‘county allowance’, however, did secure some independence. The new poor laws of 1834 swept away this local system in favour of a centrally organised one which severely penalised poverty (Hopkins 2008, p.224). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *Hampshire Telegraph & Sussex Chronicle* 12 May 1830, p.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. William Cobbett, 1763-1835. Cobbett was the son a relatively prosperous tavern owner. Although he had no formal education, his father gave him a good education. Cobbett was a ‘Yeoman’ farmer in that he owned the freehold of his farm. He loved the countryside and had a deep suspicion of towns and cities. Cobbett looked to America as the example of the ‘prosperous, well-fed society which he wanted in England.’ Most importantly, he objected to the system of enclosure arguing that large farms were not efficient and because they were often owned by businessmen in cities, they destroyed the important and patriarchal relationship between land owner, tenant farmer and labourer (Osborne 1966, pp.11 & 153-155). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *The Morning Chronicle* 25 January 1830, p.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. The national debt was owed to ‘fundholders’ made up of business men who had made their money through trade and were now investing in land. For a more detailed explanation of Cobbett’s belief in the repudiation of this debt by landowners (Osborne 1966, pp.153-158). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Political Register* 22 October 1814, Col 513 & Col 519. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. During the 1920s Cobbett relented on his objection to the Corn Laws when he realised the national debt would not be ‘repudiated’ and that the government had every intention of repaying the fundholders (Osborne 1966, p.160). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. *The Morning Chronicle* 25 Jan 1830, p.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. ‘Open Letter to Robert Peel’ in *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register* 29 May 1830, p.696. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. ‘Open letter to Robert Peel’ in *Cobbett’s weekly* *Political Register* 29 May 1830, p.696 ([www.Britishnewspaperlibrary.co.uk](http://www.Britishnewspaperlibrary.co.uk)). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Cited in Emsley (1996, p.93). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. ‘State of the Country’ in *Royal Cornwall Gazette* 4 December 1830. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. ‘Reports of Special Assistant Poor Law Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture’ (Sayer 1993, p.34). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. http://www.theotherpages.org/poems/tenny12.html [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. ‘Sixth Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council’, Parliamentary Papers, 1863, pp.454-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. *The Daily News* (London England) September 26, 1866. Issue 6363, pg.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. The term was appropriated by Rev George Anthony Denison of East Brent in Somerset in 1859. It was given a religious seal of approval in 1862 (Howkins 1991, p.71). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Keelwell’s marmalade could be named after Keiller’s Marmalade which originated in Dundee in the 1700s and was the first commercial brand of the preserve. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. For a more detailed analysis of the political implications of allotment distribution see, Mozelle (1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Hardy uses the same phrase in ‘The Dorsetshire Labourer’. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. [www.booty.org.uk/westmoorsrailway](http://www.booty.org.uk/westmoorsrailway). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. ‘Between 1701 and 1751 it is estimated that the purely agricultural counties of England ... remained virtually stable at 1.5 million inhabitants; between 1751 and 1801 they rose to about 2 millions, by 1831 to the remarkable figure of 2.9 million (i.e. by 50 per cent in 30 years)’ (Hobsbawm & Rudé 2001, p.42). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. In 1843, Member of Parliament Charles Buller claimed the emigration policy was one of ‘shovelling out paupers’ (<http://www.workhouses.org.uk/emigration/>). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. *Far From the Madding Crowd* 2003, p. 126 [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Nelson defeated Bonaparte on August 1st 1798 at the Mouth of the Nile (Jenks 2006, p.153). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. *The Graphic* 27 November 1880. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. [www.etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com) [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. ‘Hardy was thoroughly immersed in Wordsworth and the Wordsworthian tradition. Peter Casagrande has listed over 60 explicit allusions to Wordsworth in Hardy’s novel and prose writing’ (Taylor 1986, p.441). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. In *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Volume II. Seventh Edition.* New York, London: Norton, 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. In *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Volume II. Seventh Edition.* New York, London: Norton, 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. A term first used by Bakhtin to express the discourse of time, space and value (Holquist 2002, p.155). [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. For a more detailed account of the Spithead and Nore mutinies see, Coats & MacDougall (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. A quarter being equivalent to eight bushels, or 480lbs (217kg) (Bates 2014, p.13). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. William Petty, 1st Marquess of Lansdown (1737-1805), known as The Earl of Shelburne, was an Irish-born British Whig statesman who was Prime Minister 1782-1783. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. For a more detailed breakdown of the proportion of volunteer soldiers from the rural counties see, Colley (1992, p.298). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. (Hardy 1920, pp.65-70). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. In Chapter VI of *The Trumpet-Major* Anne offers to read Farmer Derriman the article, ‘Dinner at Carlton House’. The farmer refuses on the basis that ‘Tis nothing to I’ (98). [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. <https://janeaustensworld.wordpress.com/2007/04/29/lighting-the-darkness-in-the-regency-era/> [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. *The Penny Cyclopaedia of the Society for the Difussion [sic] of Useful Knowledge Vol VI.* London: Charles Knight, 1836. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. It is clear that Miller Loveday uses tallow candles as he repeatedly needs to snuff them <http://www.waxchandlers.org.uk/origins/chronology-of-the-companys-history.php> [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Noah. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. High tea was a meal taken late afternoon or early evening and consisted of mainly meat, bread, cakes and tea to drink. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. <https://archive.org/stream/teaitseffectsmed00sigmrich#page/n9/mode/2up> [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Although service in the army was supposedly voluntary, the navy was another matter: coast-dwelling men lived in fear of press-gangs – and that fear features in Hardy’s novel in the character of Bob. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Archer disagrees with Bohstedt’s claims arguing that it would be impossible to gather gender statistics in fluid and changing crowds. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. William Cobbett mistakenly believed that ‘not a single soul has been added to our population since the time of Queen Elizabeth’ (Osborne 1966, p.158). [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. *The Morning Chronicle* 21 December 1849, p.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Poaching is, Munsche explains, the act of hunting game at night with the intention of selling it. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. ‘Open Letter to Robert Peel’ in *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register* 29 May 1830, p.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. In 1831 Britain imported 76% of its sugar from the British West Indies (Knight 1997, p.333). [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. ‘The Remarks of Alexander Cummell Delivered at the Hall of Commerce, London, England 21 May 1849’ (Ripley 1985, p.149, n 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Ibid, p.148. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. A ‘brace’ consists of one male and one female pheasant. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. For a detailed breakdown of the Game Laws see Hopkins (2008, pp.305-306). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. William Wilberforce (1759-1833). Elected to parliament at the age of 21. In 1787 he became the parliamentary leader for the abolition of slavery. Although the Abolition Act became law in 1807, it only prevented the trade of slaves on British Ships. Slavery in British Colonies continued until 29 July 1833 when it was finally abolished, just three days before Wilberforce died [www.brycchancarey.com/abolition/wilberforce.htm](http://www.brycchancarey.com/abolition/wilberforce.htm). [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Cobbett, William: ‘Open Letter to Robert Peel’ in *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register* 29 May 1830, p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol 34/2 (Summer 1983): 172-180. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. A ‘gaffer’ is an ‘elderly rustic’ man and a ‘gammer’ is an old woman ([www.etymonline.co.uk](http://www.etymonline.co.uk)). [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Corn in this context is used as a generic name for all grains and with regard to *The Mayor of Casterbridge,* primarily wheat. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. <http://www.mcg-j.org/english/e-theory/economics/ag-prot.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. For a detailed historical and literary discussion about the moral and market economy see Thompson, E.P. ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’ in *Past & Present*. No. 50 (Feb, 1971), pp. 76-136. Although Thompson does not deal specifically with *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, his argument that ‘the conflict between traditionalism and the new political economy turned upon the Corn Laws’ is relevant to the argument in this chapter. See also Michael J. Franklin ‘Market Forces and Market Faces: Corn Factors in the Moral Economy of Casterbridge’, *The Review of English Studies*, 59/240 (June 2008): 426-448. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. [www.historytoday.com](http://www.historytoday.com) [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Farfrae may have chosen to travel to America via Bristol because this is where Samuel Cunard’s ‘Britannia’ crossed the Atlantic in 11 days and 4 hours ([www.bbc.history/victorians](http://www.bbc.history/victorians)) as opposed to 35 days from Liverpool to New York ([www.liverpoolmuseums.org](http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org)). [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. They are married on St Martin’s Day, 11th November: ‘Surely they said a wedding was coming off soon – on Martin’s Day’ (298). [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Calendar of events: 1822: Weydon Priors Fair and the selling of Susan and Elizabeth Jane

    1824: Unusually wet summer

    1831: Unusually wet summer

    1839: Unusually wet summer

    1840/41: Susan and Elizabeth Jane arrive in Casterbridge

    1843: Henchard’s oath ends.

    1846: The Repeal of the Corn Laws

    1847: Henchard’s death. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Susan asks the furmity woman if she remembers the ‘sale of a wife by her husband in your tent eighteen years ago to-day’ (23) but Henchard tells Farfrae, ‘I have kept my oath for nineteen years’ (74). This lends an ambiguity to the dating. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. The Latin, ‘Frumentaria, frumentarium, frumentarius’ can be translated into ‘grain producing; of/concerning grain; grain supply’ ([www.latin-dictionary.net](http://www.latin-dictionary.net)). [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. (Sophocles 2008, p.49). [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. The Welsh call toadstools ‘bwyd y llyffant’ (toad’s bread) and ‘people used to associate both toads and mushrooms not only with poison, but also with witchcraft’. Morgan, Adrian. ‘Who Put the Toad in Toadstool’ in *New Scientist* (25 Dec, 1 Jan 1987): 44 [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. [www.foodtimeline.org](http://www.foodtimeline.org) [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. <http://greatlentgourmet.blogspot.co.uk/2013/03/day-14-greek-orthodox-memorial-lunch.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. See Davidson (1999, p.323) for a detailed explanation of furmity in which it is noted that ‘At the present day it is usually boiled with new milk and sugar, to which spices, currants, yolks of eggs, etc. are sometimes added, and is occasionally eaten as a dinner sweet at various times of the – at mid-Lent, Easter, and Christmas. In the north of England, however, it is always exclusively a part of the Christmas fare, and is eaten hot … There are many regional variations. In Somerset, it is known as furmenty or furminty’. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. *Studies of Nature* (1809) Vol IV, Fifth Edition, p. 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. ‘And yet I couldn’t sleep because I was distracted by a pot of frumenty which an old woman had beside her head. And I’d marvellous wish to ambush it’ (MacDowell 1995, p.336-337). [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. ‘That has sprouted in the ear after reaching maturity … The condition is ordinarily caused by dampness necessitating a late harvest’ (316, n. 30). [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. [www.etymonline.co.uk](http://www.etymonline.co.uk) [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Sir James George Frazer, 1 Jan 1854 - 7 May 1941. Frazer’s publication *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion* (1890) was an important contribution to the study of ‘myths, religions, social taboos, and customs of a broad array of cultures.’ The key themes of *The Golden Bough* are birth, growth, death and rebirth. Frazer had a ‘tremendous impact on the fields of literature, psychology, and anthropology’ and provided information and research on the commonalities and disparities between religion, mythology, Pagan beliefs and early Christianity. <http://www.nndb.com/people/600/000099303>. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Harvest is celebrated on the Sunday nearest to the autumn equinox, around 23rd September. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. [www.etymonline.co.uk](http://www.etymonline.co.uk) [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Pottage ‘that which is put in a pot’ (www.etymonline.co.uk). [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. There was no attempt in the census information to distinguish between urban and rural populations between 1801 and 1841. The first accurate data showing the divide between the urban and rural population was provided in the 1851 census (Law 1967, p.125). [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. http://www.forgottenbooks.com/readbook\_text/With\_v1\_1000312197/79 [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Census Reports of Great Britain, 1841-1901 (Verdon 2002, p.74). [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. The Poor Law Report sent questionnaires to Parishes in England and Wales. Only 10 per cent were completed and returned. The regions covered were: Wiltshire, Devon, Dorset and Somerset; Kent, Surrey and Sussex; Suffolk, Norfolk and Lincolnshire; and Yorkshire and Northumberland. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Karen Sayer uses the term ‘passive victims of capital’ when discussing the portrayal of women by Charles Kingsley in his novel *Yeast – A Problem* which was serialised in *Fraser’s Magazine* 1847-48 and published as a novel in 1851. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Hardy added the detail about ‘green-houses’ in the 1895 reprint of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (2003, p.410, n.17). Green-houses also represent the advancement in food technology developed by men and beyond the knowledge of Tess as a symbol of the female workforce. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. For a more detailed discussion of Tess as Demeter see Wickens (1983, p.85-106). [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Pamela Sharpe points out that Snell’s summary of agricultural work available to women differed from county to county, offering evidence to show that in Scotland women retained positions as reapers well into the nineteenth century (1998, p.74). [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. In the middle of the nineteenth century, ‘Milk was generally bought wholesale at 3d a quart and retailed at 4d, but the addition of only 10 per cent of water increased the profit by 40 per cent: such an adulteration was very difficult to detect’ and this is what is meant by the lowering of the strength of the milk being transported to London (Burnett 1989, p.98). [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. At an average price of 2d per quart, milk was a cheap and healthy foodstuff. But poor labouring families in the last two decades of the nineteenth century were far more likely to reject fresh milk and opt instead for cans of inferior sweetened condensed skimmed milk which if fed to young children had a detrimental effect on their health (Barker 1966, p.18). [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Alma Mater is Latin for nourishing mother. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-anti-marriage-league-from-blackwoods-edinburgh-magazine [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. ‘Garden City Association. Great Scheme Prospering. Mr Rider Haggard’s Views’ in *West Gippsland Gazette* 1905, p. 4. (http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/68715916). [↑](#footnote-ref-120)