Angels versus Alec
*Tess of the d’Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy

**Teaching notes**

**Victorian ideas of masculinity:** There is more information on the John Ruskin essay in the ‘Characterisation of Tess’ resource (24225) on Teachit English.

**Hero or villain** can be used as it is, or to make it more challenging you could use the interactive version to get students to match up the statements with Angel and Alec. If you return to this activity for revision, remove chapter numbers for an even more challenging activity.

**Other teaching ideas**

**Quotation banks**

Students could develop their own quotation banks on the two male characters as well as Tess; knowing a few succinct quotes per character can impress in a closed book exam and save time searching the text in an open book exam, e.g.

(Referring to Alec) ‘Out of the frying-pan into the fire!’ - Car’s mother cries this as he ‘saves’ Tess from an argument with Car near the end of Chapter 10. Alec obviously has a bad reputation amongst the local women.

**Agony Uncle letters**

This activity is similar to one on the ‘Characterisation of Tess’ resource (24225) on Teachit English. Students could write a letter to an Agony Uncle in character as either Angel or Alec at a critical point in the narrative, e.g. Angel could write for advice on asking Izz to marry him and accompany him to Brazil; Alec could write for advice on pursuing Tess when he sees her at Flintcomb Ash, knowing Angel has left her.

**Essay questions**

Here are a couple of sample essay questions that might prove helpful as you prepare your students for their exam.

‘Compare how far you agree that the female characters in the texts you have studied are presented as exploited by the men they love or are dependent on.’ (Suitable for AQA A Love Through the Ages; and Edexcel Women and Society).

‘Explore how far the desire to be happy causes tragic circumstances in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (AS) / two texts you have studied (A level). ’ You should include in your answer relevant analysis of how a writer’s language choices shape meaning. (Suitable for AQA B Aspects of Tragedy).
Different interpretations (AO5)

You should encourage exploration of how texts can be interpreted in different ways by approaching them from different perspectives in student discussion or written work. Teachit English resource ‘Different interpretations of literary texts’ (22181) might help here.

- A feminist approach would explore the attitudes of Angel and Alec towards Tess and other female characters in the novel, and the power relations involved.
- A Marxist approach would explore the attitudes of the different social classes towards each other, and the power relations involved.
- A psychoanalytical approach would look at characters’ personal motivations, as well as the author’s point of view and reasons for writing the story (also AO3).

You can find some interesting reading material on different interpretations on the following websites. All information is correct at the time of publication.

**crossref-it.info**

This website would be suitable for students who are aiming for a high grade:

- go to ‘Detailed text guides’ and click on *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*
- use the search box top right to find ‘feminist interpretations’ and ‘social realism’
- research other interpretations on the site, e.g. Romantic perspectives
- go to ‘Successful study’ and click on ‘Text specific further reading and resources’
- click on *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* for a list of further reading suggestions.

**theliteraryindex.com**

This site has links to essays on a range of issues, which tend to be academic and more suitable for teachers than students, but nevertheless might be worth a look.

- Click on H for Hardy and scroll down to find *Tess* articles, including one on psychoanalytical readings.
An important focus of Thomas Hardy’s novel is the effect of these two male characters on Tess’s life. The actions of both characters strongly influence Tess’s experiences, and the attitudes of others towards her.

First meetings

Read closely the first meetings of both characters with Tess and make notes on the effect of:

- the omniscient third person narrative
- the context and tone of each meeting
- interactions and dialogue between the characters
- Hardy’s use of imagery and symbolism.

1. First meetings with Angel:
   a) Chapter 2 - ‘club-dance’ at Marlott. Read from ‘Among these on-lookers were three young men …’
   b) Chapter 17 - a second ‘first meeting’ at Talbothays dairy (Angel doesn’t remember Tess from their first). Read from ‘But the details of his aspect were temporarily…’ to ‘… she had realised in a moment from the time he had spent upon the milking of one cow.’ Then read Chapter 18 from ‘For several days after Tess’s arrival Clare…’ How old is Tess here, when he calls her ‘maidy’?

2. First meeting with Alec:
   Chapter 5 - Tess visits The Slopes to claim kin; read from ‘The d’Urbervilles - or Stoke-d’Urbervilles, as they at first called themselves …’. How does he make Tess feel uncomfortable? Consider the symbolism of the strawberry incident. How old is Tess here when Alec calls her ‘my Beauty’?

Victorian ideas of masculinity

Read the following extract from John Ruskin’s 1865 essay ‘Of Queen’s Gardens’ which presents Victorian ideas about men’s role in society (AO3):

The man’s power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary ...

The man, in his rough work in open world, must encounter all peril and trial: to him, therefore, must be the failure, the offence, the inevitable error; often he must be wounded, or subdued; often misled; and always hardened. But he guards the woman from all this ...

What image of a man does the first paragraph present to you?

How does the idea of a man differ in the second paragraph?

What is men’s ‘inevitable error’ that ‘he guards the woman from’? Discuss your ideas so far on Victorian double standards for men and women.
Angel and Alec as Victorian men

Consider how Angel and Alec fit Ruskin’s ideas about men. Explore their characters by answering the following questions.

1. Are their names - Angel Clare and Alec d’Urberville - symbolic, and/or ironic?

2. ‘there was an uncribbed, uncabined aspect in his eyes and attire...’ (Chapter 2, aged about 20)

   ‘his mobile face had grown more thoughtful, and had acquired a young man’s shapely moustache and beard - the latter of the palest straw colour where it began upon his cheeks’ (Chapter 17, aged 26)

Discuss how far:

Angel’s physical appearance fits the way he is presented in these chapters: a good man, intelligent, idealistic, brought up in a religious family but resisting his parents’ conventional plans for him, instead making his own way in life learning to be a farmer.

‘...a tall young man, smoking. He had an almost swarthy complexion, with full lips, badly moulded, though red and smooth, above which was a well-groomed black moustache with curled points, though his age could not be more than three-or four-and-twenty.’ (Chapter 5)

Discuss how far:

Alec’s physical description fits the stereotype of a Victorian melodrama villain. He is presented as an amoral, calculating predator who uses his inherited merchant father’s wealth to indulge his desires and exploit Tess’s naivety.
**Hero or villain?**

Find dictionary and/or literary definitions of:

**Hero:**

**Villain:**

Now look at the following incidents in the novel and decide in each case whether you think the character involved is a hero or a villain, giving your reasons, with supporting textual evidence.

**Angel:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 2 and Chapter 17/18: he doesn’t dance with Tess, then doesn’t remember her when they meet again at Talbothay’s dairy.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 23: carries Tess over a flood so that she can get to church.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 30: fails to understand and dismisses Tess’s misgivings about getting married.</td>
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### Angel versus Alec

**Tess of the d’Urbervilles** by Thomas Hardy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Summary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 33</td>
<td>hits a man who he thinks has insulted Tess’s good name.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 34</td>
<td>on their wedding night, confesses ‘eight-and-forty hours’ dissipation with a stranger’ but when Tess makes her confession, will not forgive her and abandons her.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 40</td>
<td>has decided to go to Brazil and asks Izz to accompany him, but goes alone when she says she cannot love him more than Tess does.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 53</td>
<td>receives a letter from Izz and Marian warning him of Tess’s predicament and he returns to England to find her.</td>
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### Alec

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
<td>he lies about being a relation and he exploits her innocence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 8:</td>
<td>has given Tess a job, but strives to dominate her sexually, e.g. with a ‘kiss of mastery’.</td>
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<td>Chapter 10:</td>
<td>under the cover of rescuing Tess from an argument, takes her to The Chase and rapes her there.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 45/46:</td>
<td>when he meets Tess again, he has reformed and become a ‘ranter’; he follows Tess, asks her to marry and go to Africa with him.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 47:</td>
<td>when he loses his new found faith, he blames Tess as a ‘temptress’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 51/52:</td>
<td>when Tess’s family have to leave their home, the self-confessed ‘sham d’Urberville’ offers to provide for them, even for them to live at The Slopes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 56:</td>
<td>has succeeded in making Tess live with him as his wife by convincing her that the other man will never return for her.</td>
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- Find other examples of how the two men behave towards Tess and her family, e.g. who pays the bill for her father’s headstone? (Chapter 54)
- Do you have any sympathy for Angel or for Alec? Might they be victims too? If so, of what?
Angel versus Alec

_Tess of the d'Urbervilles_ by Thomas Hardy

**Final moments**

Read closely the final moments of both characters with Tess.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Alec</th>
<th>Angel</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read Chapter 56, where the reader witnesses Alec and Tess arguing, from their landlady’s point of view, watching through the keyhole and listening at their drawing-room door. Later, she is alerted to what has happened by the ‘scarlet blot … ace of hearts’ growing on her own apartment ceiling.</td>
<td>Read Chapter 58: the reader witnesses Tess’s arrest from Angel’s point of view. While watching over Tess as she sleeps, he sees the police surrounding them. He ‘implores’ the police to let Tess finish her sleep and they do. Also, comment on Tess’s wishes regarding Liza-Lu.</td>
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Write a comparison of Tess’s final moments with them, considering:

- the omniscient third person narrative
- the context and tone of each meeting
- interactions and dialogue between the characters
- Hardy’s use of imagery and symbolism, especially mythological references:
  - What is Ixion’s myth? (Chapter 56)
  - Who are Antinous and Apollo? (Chapter 57)
  - What is significant about the setting being Stonehenge? (Chapter 58)
  - How are these relevant to Tess’s plight in these final chapters?

**Hold the front page!**

Choose one of these incidents to write up as a newspaper article:

- ‘Man found knifed in the heart at The Herons. Wife is prime suspect.’ for the Sandbourne Gazette (tabloid style)
- ‘Fugitive in dawn capture at Stonehenge sentenced to death’ for the Wintoncester Times (broadsheet style)

If you need to, remind yourself of the features of tabloids versus broadsheets. Identify which aspects apply to your chosen style of reporting. Write a one page article in an appropriate style, using details from the novel as your ‘facts’.