

## PREFACE

This 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, 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.

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 the following 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 food production 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, eltrots 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).

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