

Historical Context

Abstract The representation of food in Hardy's literature responds to the modern advancements in food production, population migration, export and import laws and the advancing culture of dining both in the domestic sphere and the public space. 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. This chapter will provide an historical breakdown of the key factors which influenced food regulation and production from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the fin de siècle.

Keywords Enclosure • Moral economy • Casterbridge • Women and food production • Field women • *Fin de siècle*

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 information about these events while showing how they correspond with the fiction of Thomas Hardy. 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 steamships changed the way that food was produced and transported. The population of the countryside this increased, but then decreased as people migrated to the towns looking for work in factories and thus changing the demographic profile of Britain. Gender roles became defined by food production as women lost control of the 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 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 economy¹ 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*, p. 124). In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the collision between Henchard's free festivities focused 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, pp. 96–97). In this novel Hardy presents a vision of English country life that 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.² Agriculture during this period was still the country's biggest employer, with over a million farm labourers. In 1851, the number of agricultural workers stood at 21% of the population. By 1871, just 14% of the population was 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,³ 'the great wheat growing districts of the West' (*M of C*, p. 44). In addition to this, the Enclosure Acts 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 brutal poaching laws.

Enclosure was a process that had been happening since the twelfth century and during the Revolutionary Wars (1649–1660) and the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815), 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* (A Country Gentleman 2010) 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 of 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*.⁴ 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 considered public servants working for the good of the community.⁵ 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 was guaranteed by laws dating back to medieval times. These laws, known as the Assize of Bread⁶ were abolished in 1822 in London (1836 in the rest of the country). Bread became part of the market economy 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.⁷ Writing in 1878, James Caird⁸ 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: 'the 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 concluded 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).

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, hence 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 that had now been fenced off. Hobsbawm and 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. Getting grain to market was done in a more efficient and speedy manner, hence 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). 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). 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).

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 the 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, in 'The Dorsetshire Labourer' Hardy 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 (*Hampshire Advertiser and Royal Yacht Gazette*, Saturday 13 March, 1830, p. 1) 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 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 (*Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* 12 May 1830, p. 1).

At the end of the Napoleonic Wars, in 1815, the return of hundreds of thousands of soldiers resulted in mass unemployment that yielded, inevitably, poverty and crime (Clapham 1926, p. 9). The belief in the rural idyll was no longer needed to promote the patriotism that defeated Napoleon but to counter the growing concerns of social commentators such as William Cobbett,⁹ 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, the consequence of having ‘twice conquered France’ (*The Morning Chronicle*, 25 January 1830, p. 1). 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). 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’ (*Political Register* 22 October 1814, Col 513 & 519). The Corn Laws had a lasting impact: 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.”’ (25 January 1830, p. 1)

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? ('Open Letter to Robert Peel' in *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register* 29 May 1830, p. 696)

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). Consequentially, 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, pp. 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' ('Open Letter to Robert Peel' in *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register* 29 May 1830, p. 696).

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. (Cited in Emsley 1996, p. 93)

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 of 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' ('State of the Country' *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 4 December, 1830).

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. Prior 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 and Sutherland 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, resulting in the conversion of many farms from arable to pasture land. Compounding this, bad harvests from 1870 through 1875 impacted 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 50% (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 (Sayer 1993, p. 34). This effort, 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 women went into service or worked in the dairies, an acceptable form of employment (Howkins 1991, p. 101). 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

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 which were arguably preferable to physical labouring (1998, p. 333). Similarly, E.L. Jones claims 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 1993, 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 situation, 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, concluding: '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' (Verdon p. 153). Ironically, the rural idyll had already been shattered by enclosure and an increasing capitalist-based agricultural economy (49). In 1863 the government commissioned the Sixth Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council. 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 after she returns to work on the harvest is suggestive of this view.

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 regarded 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: “‘This 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 regarded 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, they were primarily 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* 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’ (26 September 1866, p. 2). 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. For 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 corn-market 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 sacks her first bailiff for thieving.

It wasn't until 1899 when the Women's Agricultural and Horticultural International Union was founded that women took 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 had the opportunity 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, six years before the publication of Hardy's novel, 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 *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Gabriel Oak is 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 around 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, p. 74). By the second half of the 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. That Troy hosts the supper lends irony to the idea of responsible paternalism. Attempting 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 reinstating 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. Harvest Festival was reinvented with a religious connection¹⁰ 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% of people classed as rural. By 1901, when the population stood at thirty-three million, 75% 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 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 Keiller's marmalade—an empty jar of Keelwell's marmalade 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*, 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*, 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* p.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 that labourers produced themselves were vegetables. Tess's family has 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 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 (Mozelle 1995). The incompetence of Tess’s father becomes 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* p. 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, 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 phenomenon 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),¹¹ 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 1% of the rural Dorset population worked as shopkeepers; by 1881, that figure had increased to 4.5%. 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* p. 51). This is a far cry from the country town green-grocer of the earlier decades 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 that 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' (410). Anxiety about the growing population 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 and Rabb 1980, p. 281). The expansion of the world market enabled England to trade minerals and manufactured products for food, notably 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.' Caird believed this made labourers more in demand and raised 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).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, wheat was primarily grown and milled locally; by 1914, 80% of wheat was imported. In place of local mills such as that owned by Miller Loveday in *The Trumpet-Major*, 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 worked the land led to an increasing need to import food from abroad. From the 1870s onwards, with the advent of the steamship and more efficient means of preserving food, Britain was importing meat from Australia, Uruguay and Argentina, to feed the urban masses. The moral economy that was bound up in the fair price of a loaf of bread and which engendered the notion of a pastoral idyll of a bygone era, was made obsolete by a market economy that relied on free trade and profit. The distance that food travelled geographically was analogous of the psychological gap between man and the food he consumed.

NOTES

1. 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).
2. 'The standard quartern loaf of bread (a large, dense loaf that weighed just over 4¼ lb.) cost 8½d. in the 1840s, 7d. in 1875, 6d. in 1887, 5d. in 1895' (Mitchell 1996, p. 32).
3. 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 1985, pp. 115–116).
4. 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).
 5. 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 (i.e.; he cheats by tilting the scales).
 6. For a more detailed account of the Assize of Bread, see Rosenberg and Birdzell (1986, p. 92).
 7. For more on this see, Davies (1795) and Eden (1797).
 8. 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).
 9. William Cobbett, 1763–1835. Cobbett was the son of a relatively prosperous tavern owner. He became 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, p. 11 and pp. 153–155).
 10. 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).
 11. Hardy uses the same phrase in ‘The Dorsetshire Labourer’.

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