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Document A

Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles. A Pure Woman* [1891], 2013 (1994) <http://www.gutenberg.org/>

5 It is the threshing of the last wheat-rick at Flintcomb-Ash farm. The dawn of the March morning is singularly inexpressive, and there is nothing to show where the eastern horizon lies. Against the twilight rises the trapezoidal top of the stack, which has stood forlornly here through the washing and bleaching of the wintry weather.

10 When Izz Huett and Tess arrived at the scene of operations only a rustling denoted that others had preceded them; to which, as the light increased, there were presently added the silhouettes of two men on the summit. They were busily "unhaling" the rick, that is, stripping off the thatch before beginning to throw down the sheaves; and while this was in progress Izz and Tess, with the other women-workers, in their whitey-brown pinders, stood waiting and shivering, Farmer Groby having insisted upon their being on the spot thus early to get the job over if possible by the end of the day. Close under the eaves of the stack, and as yet barely visible, was the red tyrant that the women had come to serve—a
15 timber-framed construction, with straps and wheels appertaining—the threshing-machine which, whilst it was going, kept up a despotic demand upon the endurance of their muscles and nerves.

20 A little way off there was another indistinct figure; this one black, with a sustained hiss that spoke of strength very much in reserve. The long chimney running up beside an ash-tree, and the warmth which radiated from the spot, explained without the necessity of much daylight that here was the engine which was to act as the *primum mobile* of this little world. By the engine stood a dark, motionless being, a sooty and grimy embodiment of tallness, in a sort of trance, with a heap of coals by his side: it was the engine-man. The isolation of his manner and colour
25 lent him the appearance of a creature from Tophet, who had strayed into the pellucid smokelessness of this region of yellow grain and pale soil, with which he had nothing in common, to amaze and to discompose its aborigines.

30 What he looked he felt. He was in the agricultural world, but not of it. He served fire and smoke; these denizens of the fields served vegetation, weather, frost, and sun. He travelled with his engine from farm to farm, from county to county, for as yet the steam threshing-machine was itinerant in this part of Wessex. He spoke in a strange northern accent; his thoughts being turned inwards upon himself, his eye on his iron charge, hardly perceiving the scenes around him, and caring for them not at all: holding only strictly necessary intercourse with the natives, as if
35 some ancient doom compelled him to wander here against his will in the service of his Plutonic master. The long strap which ran from the driving-wheel of his engine

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to the red thresher under the rick was the sole tie-line between agriculture and him.

40 While they uncovered the sheaves he stood apathetic beside his portable repository of force, round whose hot blackness the morning air quivered. He had nothing to do with preparatory labour. His fire was waiting incandescent, his steam was at high pressure, in a few seconds he could make the long strap move at an invisible velocity. Beyond its extent the environment might be corn, straw, or chaos; it was all the same to him. If any of the autochthonous idlers asked him
45 what he called himself, he replied shortly, "an engineer."

The rick was unhaled by full daylight; the men then took their places, the women mounted, and the work began. Farmer Groby—or, as they called him, "he"—had arrived ere this, and by his orders Tess was placed on the platform of the machine, close to the man who fed it, her business being to untie every sheaf of
50 corn handed on to her by Izz Huett, who stood next, but on the rick; so that the feeder could seize it and spread it over the revolving drum, which whisked out every grain in one moment.

They were soon in full progress, after a preparatory hitch or two, which rejoiced the hearts of those who hated machinery. The work sped on till breakfast time,
55 when the thresher was stopped for half an hour; and on starting again after the meal the whole supplementary strength of the farm was thrown into the labour of constructing the straw-rick, which began to grow beside the stack of corn. A hasty lunch was eaten as they stood, without leaving their positions, and then another couple of hours brought them near to dinner-time; the inexorable wheel
60 continuing to spin, and the penetrating hum of the thresher to thrill to the very marrow all who were near the revolving wire-cage.

The old men on the rising straw-rick talked of the past days when they had been accustomed to thresh with flails on the oaken barn-floor; when everything, even to winnowing, was effected by hand-labour, which, to their thinking, though slow,
65 produced better results. Those, too, on the corn-rick talked a little; but the perspiring ones at the machine, including Tess, could not lighten their duties by the exchange of many words. It was the ceaselessness of the work which tried her so severely, and began to make her wish that she had never come to Flintcomb-Ash. The women on the corn-rick—Marian, who was one of them, in particular—
70 could stop to drink ale or cold tea from the flagon now and then, or to exchange a few gossiping remarks while they wiped their faces or cleared the fragments of straw and husk from their clothing; but for Tess there was no respite; for, as the drum never stopped, the man who fed it could not stop, and she, who had to supply the man with untied sheaves, could not stop either, unless Marian changed
75 places with her, which she sometimes did for half an hour in spite of Groby's objections that she was too slow-handed for a feeder.

For some probably economical reason it was usually a woman who was chosen for this particular duty, and Groby gave as his motive in selecting Tess that she was
80 one of those who best combined strength with quickness in untying, and both with staying power, and this may have been true. The hum of the thresher, which prevented speech, increased to a raving whenever the supply of corn fell short of

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85 the regular quantity. As Tess and the man who fed could never turn their heads she did not know that just before the dinner-hour a person had come silently into the field by the gate, and had been standing under a second rick watching the scene and Tess in particular. He was dressed in a tweed suit of fashionable pattern, and he twirled a gay walking-cane.

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Document B

The Humble Petition of the Females Employed in the Earl of Elgin's Collieries, Fifeshire (1842),

Sheweth,

That your Petitioners have deeply to lament the passing of the Bill by your
5- honourable House, 5 & 6 Vict. Cap. 99, intituled "An Act to prohibit the
Employment of Women and Girls in Mines and Collieries," &c.

Whilst your Petitioners duly appreciate the motives which led your honourable
House to entertain the subject matter of this Bill, and latterly to pass it, they
cannot abstain from making known to you, that in providing a remedy for
10- probable, particular, and partial grievances, this measure will have the effect of
visiting the greater portion of those for whose benefit it was intended, with want,
destitution, and misery.

Seldom has it happened that your honourable House has been called upon to
legislate for females exclusively, and the gallant desire to free them from what
15- might be considered unfit employment, may have swayed the honourable House
to a decision, that upon a more complete understanding of the nature, cause,
and effect of their employment, both as regards themselves and those nearest
and dearest to them, it would not so unhesitatingly have been arrived at.

That nearly all of your Petitioners have been born and brought up within the
20- precincts of the Elgin collieries, and have wrought in the mines from periods
varying from one to twenty years, and none of them have had reason in any way
to find fault with, or complain of, such employment; on the contrary, your
Petitioners are healthy, happy, and well-contented, the quantum of work is in
their own power, custom makes what would appear irksome, difficult, and
25- dangerous to others, of no fear or apprehension on their part.

They often contrast, and some of them from experience, the healthy, cheerful,
and better paid labour of, the female collier, with the monotonous, exhausting,
and unhealthy employment of the factory female, and not one among them
would make the exchange from the murky mine to the stifled factory.

30- Your Petitioners, moreover, will vie with any female class of workers, for health
and virtuous conduct; to substantiate such, they take the liberty to subjoin
certificates hereto from the medical gentlemen and clergy of the district.

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To be deprived, therefore, of earnings from an employment which they really
relish, would have the effect of causing destitution of the heaviest description to
35 _ befall your Petitioners, in many cases also to their aged parents, and younger
fatherless children, who alone depend upon them for support; other labour is not
to be found, neither are your Petitioners qualified for undertaking it. Emigration
from their homes and dearest ties is not their wish; in fact, under the present
law, they are undeservedly doomed to misery and destitution, without the
40 _ slightest hope of parochial relief.

Under such circumstances, your Petitioners, with all humility, pray that your
honourable House would reconsider the subject matter of the Act referred to and
to grant such relief to your Petitioners, by repeal thereof, or modification of its
provisions, as to your honourable House may seem expedient.

45- And your Petitioners will ever pray.

Helen Weir.

Isabella Ramage.

Jean Allan. &c. &c. &c.

Transcribed from the Appendix to the Reports of the Select Committee of the
House of Commons on Public Petitions, Session 1843,
<http://www.scottishminning.co.uk/485.html>

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Document C

Photograph of a pit brow girl, Wigan, Lancashire, 1900 (COPY 1/447 f.145)

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/victorian-lives/pit-brow-girl/>

