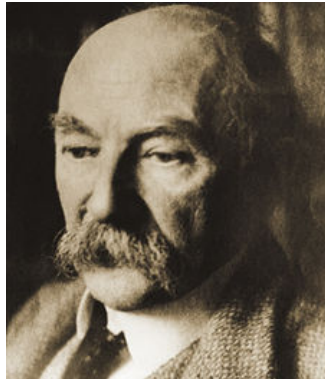


TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

by Thomas Hardy



THE AUTHOR

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) was born in southwestern England to parents who passed on to him a great love for art, music, and literature. He was given little formal education, but taught himself French, German, and Latin. He was later apprenticed to an architect, for whom he went to work in London from 1862-1867. While in London, he began to write poetry - his first literary venture.

After leaving London, he took a job in Dorchester as a church restorer, and continued his writing career, publishing anonymously at first, but then affixing his own name to his novels as they gained public acceptance. Like Charles Dickens, many of his novels were published in serial form in magazines. His first novel, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, was published in 1872, followed by *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). The success of his second novel allowed him to marry and pursue writing full-time, but the public found his later works too shocking for their tastes, and the criticism of his last two novels was so great that he gave up novel-writing and turned his attention to poetry, and ultimately wrote over 800 poems prior to his death in 1928. He is buried in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

PLOT SUMMARY

The book begins with a poor peddler, John Durbeyfield, learning to his surprise that he is related to the ancient aristocratic house of d'Urberville. He and his wife convince their eldest daughter, Tess, to seek work at the d'Urberville mansion, where she might be able to ingratiate herself with their wealthy relatives and thus make their fortune (ironically, the d'Urberville clan had died out long before, and the family with whom Tess seeks employment is simply a clan of wealthy merchants who had taken the name because they thought it sounded aristocratic). Tess is given a job tending chickens on the estate, and is immediately subject to the unwanted attentions of the son of the family, Alec d'Urberville.

After several months, Alec manages to seduce and impregnate Tess, taking advantage of her while she is asleep in the woods after a visit to the fair. Despite Alec's pleas, Tess doesn't love him, and returns home to give birth to the child, whom she christens Sorrow. The baby dies

soon after birth. Tess then seeks employment at Talbothays Dairy, where she becomes a milkmaid. She is happy at the dairy, makes close friends among the other milkmaids, and falls in love with Angel Clare. When he proposes, she accepts, but feels guilty for not telling him about her past. When she tries to write him a note, it slips under the carpet and he never sees it.

On their honeymoon, both Angel and Tess confess past indiscretions. Angel once had an affair with a woman in London, and Tess tells him about her experience with Alec. While she forgives him, he cannot forgive her. He gives her some money, sends her away, and boards a ship for Brazil with the intention of establishing a farm there. Tess, meanwhile, finds a job at a bleak and unpleasant farm. She tries to contact Angel's family, but is scared away when she overhears them discussing Angel's foolish marriage. On the way back to the farm, she hears a traveling preacher, and is astonished to discover that it is Alec d'Urberville, who had been converted by Angel's father. The encounter is too much for Alec to handle; he at first begs Tess to stay away from him, but soon turns his back on religion and proposes marriage to her. Tess refuses, and soon is called home because her mother is ill. Her mother recovers under Tess' care, but her father dies soon after, and the family is evicted from their home. Alec offers his assistance, and Tess finally gives in, convinced that her cooperation with Alec is necessary for her family's survival, and equally sure that she will never see Angel again.

Meanwhile, Angel's venture in Brazil has failed, and he returns home, a sickly shell of what he had been. He decides to forgive Tess, but upon finding her discovers that she has given in to Alec's seductions and is living with him. Angel sadly goes away, and Tess, in a grief-induced daze, returns to the inn where she and Alec were living and stabs him to death in his bed. In a panic, she then flees to find Angel. He agrees to help her, and they hide out for a few days of bliss, but are finally discovered on Salisbury Plain, sleeping at the foot of the Stonehenge monoliths. Tess is arrested, and shortly thereafter hanged for the murder of Alec d'Urberville.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Tess Durbeyfield - A lovely, responsible young woman from a poor family who is devoted to her parents and younger siblings and determined to do all she can to help them out. When her father discovers he is descended from the noble d'Urberville line, her parents encourage her to establish contact with their wealthy relations, and she is sent to work at the d'Urberville mansion. While there, she is raped by Alec d'Urberville and bears his child, who dies soon after birth. She marries Angel Clare but is rejected by him, and ultimately hangs for killing Alec d'Urberville.
- John Durbeyfield - Tess' father, a lazy peddler who, upon discovering his link with the aristocratic d'Urberville family, seeks to make a profit from the connection.
- Joan Durbeyfield - A kindly and simple-minded woman, she loves her daughter Tess but is continually disappointed with the way her life is turning out.
- Eliza Louisa Durbeyfield (Liza-Lu) - Tess' younger sister, whom Tess believes possesses all of her good qualities and none of her bad ones. Tess even encourages Angel to marry Liza-Lu after her own death.

- Angel Clare - A young man who falls in love with Tess while she is working at Talbothays Dairy, he overcomes the opposition of his parents and marries her, but rejects her when she tells him of her earlier pregnancy while on their honeymoon.
- Reverend Clare - Angel's father, a stern and principled man, who is disappointed by Angel's failure to follow him into the ministry. He disapproves of Angel's marriage, and ironically is instrumental in the "conversion" of Alec d'Urberville.
- Alec d'Urberville - The handsome, immoral son of a wealthy merchant named Simon Stokes who took the name d'Urberville because he thought it sounded aristocratic, so that Tess and her family mistakenly think them to be kinsmen. He takes advantage of Tess one night while she is sleeping in the woods, impregnates her, but is unable to make her love him. For a time he repents of his wicked ways and becomes a fanatical preacher, but leaves the ministry when he again encounters Tess. When he tries to possess her once again, she kills him.
- Marian - A milkmaid who befriends Tess at Talbothays Dairy, she loves Angel, and in disappointment over his choice of Tess instead of her turns to drink. She later helps Tess to get a job at Flintcomb-Ash.
- Izz Huett - A milkmaid who befriends Tess at Talbothays Dairy, she loves Angel, and after he rejects Tess, she almost runs away with him to Brazil. She later writes Angel a letter encouraging him to give Tess another chance.
- Retty Priddle - A milkmaid who befriends Tess at Talbothays Dairy, she loves Angel, and attempts suicide when he rejects her in favor of Tess.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

"All of them, except, perhaps, one. This white figure stood apart by the hedge alone, From her position he knew it to be the pretty maiden with whom he had not danced. Trifling as the matter was, he yet instinctively knew that she was hurt by his oversight. He wished that he had asked her; he wished that he had inquired her name. She was so modest, so expressive, she had looked so soft in her thin white gown that he felt he had acted stupidly. However, it could not be helped, and turning, and bending himself to a rapid walk, he dismissed the subject from his mind." (II)

"She philosophically noted dates as they came past in the revolution of the year; the disastrous night of her undoing at Tantridge, with its dark background of The Chase; also the dates of the baby's birth and death; also her own birthday; and every other day individualized by incidents in which she had taken some share. She suddenly thought one afternoon, when looking in the glass at her fairness, that there was yet another date, of greater importance to her than those: that of her own death, when all these charms would have disappeared; a day which lay sly and unseen among all the other days of the year, giving no sign or sound when she annually passed over it; but not the less surely there. When was it? Why did she not feel the chill of each yearly

encounter with such a cold relation? ... Of that day, doomed to be her terminus in time through all ages, she did not know the place in month, week, season, or year.” (XV)

“‘It is as it should be,’ she murmured. ‘Angel, I am almost glad - yes, glad! This happiness could not have lasted. It was too much. I have had enough, and now I shall not live for you to despise me!’” (Tess, LVIII)

“‘Justice’ was done, and the President of the Immortals (in Aeschylean phrase) had ended his sport with Tess. And the D’Urberville knights and dames slept on in their tombs unknowing. The two speechless gazers bent themselves down to the earth, as if in prayer, and remained thus a long time, absolutely motionless; the flag continued to wave silently. As soon as they had enough strength they arose, joined hands again, and went on.” (LIX)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Thomas Hardy has often been described as a fatalist - one who believed that man was trapped in the cycle of nature from which there was no escape except death. What evidence to support that thesis can you find in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*?
2. Both George Bernard Shaw and Thomas Hardy deplored “middle-class morality,” but their approaches to condemning it were very different. Compare and contrast the critiques of “middle-class morality” found in *Pygmalion* and in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*.
3. Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* was published with the subtitle *A Pure Woman*. It was this subtitle more than anything else that enraged Victorian audiences. Why would they have found the subtitle offensive, and how does their reaction serve to underscore one of the central themes of the novel?
4. In Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, the author pictures social convention as the enemy of the natural cycles of life in which all are inevitably caught up. He compares society’s standards with the geocentric theory of the solar system - a way of looking at things that simply does not correspond with nature. In George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, Alfred P. Doolittle, when he is on the way to the church to marry his long-time companion, complains that marriage “ain’t the natural way.” Do you agree with their assessment? Use material from the two works to assess the validity of the authors’ contrast between nature and moral standards.
5. Both Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* decry the sexual double standard, yet they are very different novels. To what extent can the different ways they approach their subject be explained by the fact that one author is reflecting on the British experience, while the other is American? How do the differences in the two cultures account for the different tones and styles of the novels?

6. Both Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* decry the sexual double standard, yet they are very different novels. Which of the two female protagonists creates greater sympathy for the injustice of the double standard in your mind as you read? What accounts for the greater effectiveness of one story over the other?
7. Compare and contrast Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* with regard to their views of the relationship between love and sex. In the light of this analysis, which one would you consider the more "modern" novel? Why?
8. Both Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* scandalized the public when they appeared. Chopin's novel practically ended the author's writing career as soon as it began, while the public reaction to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and its successor, *Jude the Obscure*, convinced Hardy that he should no longer spend his time writing novels. Do you consider the two novels scandalous? If not, what changes in society account for the ways in which they are viewed a century after their publication? If so, is it because you have something in common with readers at the end of the nineteenth century? What is it?
9. In Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, would you consider Angel Clare to be a good man? Why or why not? To what extent is he or is he not a mouthpiece for the views of the author?
10. Discuss the conversion and recantation of Alec d'Urberville in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Was his conversion genuine? On the basis of what evidence do you draw your conclusion? What does the whole incident demonstrate about Hardy's view of Victorian Christianity?
11. Discuss the portrayals of clergymen in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. What do these portrayals indicate about the author's perception of Christianity in late Victorian England? To what extent was his criticism legitimate? Include Hardy's descriptions of Parson Tringham at the beginning of the novel, Reverend Clare and his two sons, Cuthbert and Felix, and (briefly) Alec d'Urberville.
12. Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* ends with the protagonist being hanged for the murder of Alec d'Urberville. Was her punishment just? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specific details from the novel.
13. In Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the author equates greatness with the rejection of social convention. In the light of this definition, is Tess a great woman? Is Angel a great man? Why or why not? Support your conclusions with specific evidence from the novel.

14. From the beginning to the end of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the circle is a prominent metaphor. For example, Angel first encounters Tess while she and a group of girls are dancing a circle dance, and the two of them have their final flight arrested by the search party at the ancient circle of stones called Stonehenge. What is the circle intended to represent in the play? How does this imagery relate to the play's central themes?
15. Why is it appropriate that the climax of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* should occur at Stonehenge? Discuss both the image of the circle and the underlying paganism of the novel.
16. Many critics have remarked that the novels of Thomas Hardy show a great attraction on the part of the author for the pre-Christian paganism of ancient Britain. How is this illustrated in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*? Use specific examples to support your argument.
17. Compare and contrast the roles played by the world view of pre-Christian Britain in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and William Shakespeare's *King Lear*. In which story is pre-Christian paganism more central to the point of the author? Support your conclusion with specifics from both works.
18. Compare and contrast the extent to which man is nothing more than a victim of blind fate in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and William Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Which story do you believe is more fatalistic? Does either leave room for human dignity or self-determination? Why do you think so?
19. Analyze how setting is used to intensify plot, theme and characterization in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. How do the places in which different events occur shed light on the events themselves and relate them to the themes of the novel and the development of its central characters? Choose three specific incidents from the novel to illustrate your ideas.
20. The darkness of the settings in the English countryside often is used to enhance theme and character development in both Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. Compare and contrast the use of setting in the two works. In which is setting more closely bound to theme and character? Why do you think so?
21. In the climactic scene at Stonehenge at the end of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Tess throws herself on the altar to rest. Hardy is thus picturing her as a sacrificial victim. Is she really a victim? If so, to what is she being sacrificed?
22. Thomas Hardy was trained originally as an architect, and worked for several years as a professional restorer of old church buildings. How does his appreciation for the ancient and suspicion concerning the modern appear in the events of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*? Be specific.

23. Thomas Hardy was raised by devout Christian parents, but turned away from Christianity after being influenced by Darwin's *Origin of Species*. He eventually affiliated himself with the Oxford Group, also known as Moral Rearmament or Buchmanism, a humanistic quasi-religious group that emphasized moral living in distinction from doctrinal affirmation or church involvement. How are these personal aspects of his spiritual pilgrimage reflected in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*? What specific incidents, characters, or themes from the novel illustrate Hardy's own religious commitments, or lack thereof?
24. Which of the main characters in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Tess or Angel, experiences the greatest growth in the course of the narrative? Support your conclusion with specifics from the story.
25. Discuss the symbolism of colors in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Cite three specific incidents in the novel in which color plays a symbolic role, and discuss the relationship between the imagery of the scene and the major themes of the novel.
26. Discuss the role played by coincidences in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. How do these plot contrivances serve to underscore the author's views of fate and the illusory nature of human freedom?
27. Analyze the character development skills displayed in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Are the characters in the novel three-dimensional, or are they merely representatives of stock character types? Choose one character and answer the question with specific references to the way the character is handled by Hardy in the novel.
28. Discuss the connection of social class to the relationship between Tess and Alec in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Who is the aristocrat and who is the commoner? Why do you think so?
29. To what extent does the theme of fate undermine the social criticism of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*? How can something that was foreordained by powers beyond the control of man be remedied by adopting more advanced social mores?
30. The plot of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* contains a great deal of foreshadowing. Choose three examples of this, indicate what they foreshadow, and show how they fit into the major themes of the novel.