
Thomas Hardy

Tess of the D'Urbervilles



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PENGUIN CLASSICS

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Description

When Tess Durbeyfield is driven by family poverty to claim kinship with the wealthy D'Urbervilles and seek a portion of their family fortune, meeting her 'cousin' Alec proves to be her downfall. A very different man, Angel Clare, seems to offer her love and salvation, but Tess must choose whether to reveal her past or remain silent in the hope of a peaceful future.

Insightful reviews

Arah-Lynda: I am quite conflicted by this read.

On the one hand, Hardy's style is flawless, beautiful as he describes the country side, the dairy, drawing out the vivid landscapes of this story. His delicious bits delight the senses with heart stopping sensitivity. And then there is his Tess our protagonist....poor Tess

is so downtrodden, her journey so bleak, hello Holden Caulfield this is PUT UPON. Still Tess is strong and holds close, her own little sparks, nuggets of hope, she tucks them way back, protectively from the constant despair gnaw, gnaw, gnawing on those small blossoms of hope, feeding on all those delicious bits, always hungry, always there.

Sigh.....this story sits on my soul.

Melissa: This is mostly just a note for me-- I wrote it as I finished the book, and it definitely gives away the ending, but I wanted to post it here because I decided this would be a good place for me to keep track of my thoughts.

I just finished reading Tess of the D'urbervilles, and I have to say I'm a little disappointed. Maybe disappointed is not the right word... but it's more than just bummed about the sad parts of the plot. Of course, I am sad about the way the story ended, with Tess killing Alec (her rapist/sugardaddy/pseudo husband) and then her getting executed. It's a pretty depressing end...

But there was such a shift, and maybe that was the point. The beauty and love and excitement and novelty of the young lovers Tess and Angel at the dairy is so palpable, so real, but then the utter extinguishing of any hope, joy, optimism at the end... It's shocking, that much more troubling.

The story throughout has certain themes of fatalism and transcendentalism (I think-- with the talk of Tess at times experiencing things not as flesh but as a spirit), but what troubled me was the approach to God. So pessimistic. I think I should have seen where the story was going when Tess and Angel started to discuss the inexistence of God. To me, that moment seems as much a foreshadowing of the despair to come as the poor horse Prince getting run through. I'm trying to make sense of this haunting story in terms of my religious beliefs. I can see now, I can start to reconcile my adoration of this book with its resistance to the faith I hold so dear. I can learn from this book that when God is forgotten or ignored or denied, there is despair. I often

have wondered how people without hope in divinity face trouble, and I think Tess and Angel illustrate it well. There is little hope for the two on a grand scale, only in each other do they find grounds for optimism.

What a troubling, haunting tale. I hate that Tess ended up a murderer and died, but I really hate her deterioration. I hate how the beautiful young woman, fresh and full of love and hope becomes so... cold and hard to like. Certainly she is pitiable at the end of the novel, but hardly likable. The passion between her and Angel is real, and I like that, but ... I don't know. It's been marred, wasted. I hate the portrayal of Alec as the "reformed" born-again Christian who then turned back to his old ways.... Interesting though, how religion is respected, not in the sense that it is true, but in the ways that it can promote good morals or behavior. It bothers me.

I know that I always want a happy ending, and I guess part of the reason that I'm disappointed is because this book seemed to promise one. Usually dark books are dark throughout. This one was so cheery and full of the hope of youth and then slowly was drained of life, so that by the time I finished the book, I felt like I was burying it. I will say that I like it. It may even be one of my most favorite recent reads. But I am disappointed. It's much like *Romeo and Juliet*. Tragedy is so much more tragic when the potential for happiness was close and then missed.

Overall, a good book. A good read. Compelling, thought-provoking, tender. It makes me thankful for my faith. It makes me acknowledge the blessing that hope is.

Steve: **HEADLINE: A bad guy who is fabulously talented in bed and a good guy who fumbles sex can complicate life for a girl.**

I ought to have my head examined for undertaking a review of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the next to the last of Thomas Hardy's novels. My purpose in considering the idea was that I might perhaps persuade one other person to read this novel who might not otherwise. I am all about service to my fellow man. However, there are strange aspects of this novel that when discussed in remove from the novel itself can make it sound off-putting. I will mention a few of those without emphasizing them. They involve weird twists in the plot handed us through the vehicle of some strange scenes. On the other hand I do not wish simply to offer diamond-like passages from this novel, although that is tempting. But let us take a shot here.

Tess is the eldest daughter in a poor family in 19th century England. The novel follows events in her life from the time she is sixteen until she is approximately 21, let us say. There are a multitude of detailed plot outlines of this novel to be found elsewhere on line. The only valuable supplement to those that I can offer is to say bluntly what those plot outlines say in such a roundabout way that it loses impact or can be missed entirely. Tess is one hot looking sixteen-year-old female human being.

It is out of the fact that Tess is one hot looking sixteen-year-old that all the action of this novel arises. At the time of her first seduction, or rape, she is described as one who has a "coarse pattern" laid over her "beautiful feminine tissue." So in picturing her, we must picture her as something much more than simply a pretty young girl, although she is certainly that. She is a

pretty young girl with that look about her that drives men wild—that look about her being something rarely encountered in a girl so young.

Some part of that look about her derives from her unity with nature—or should we say “Nature” with a capital “N” since we are after all talking about a Thomas Hardy novel? I would rather put it this way. She is earthy. When Hardy writes about her when she is in relatively unspoiled natural surroundings, it is apparent that she herself is very much at home in and a natural part of those surroundings.

Hardy places our hot looking sixteen-year-old girl in an environment with some problems. It is an environment wherein the Victorian morals of society are so completely at odds with the nature of men and women generally, and particularly in the realm of sex.

Second, she inhabits a rural area of England where the quality of life is slowly deteriorating. Hardy does not impose upon us with some heavy-handed social commentary at all. Rather, this social commentary is *portrayed* seamlessly along with the characters and the action. As an example, there is a great contrast between the portrayal of Tess's life as a milkmaid early in the novel, which is idyllic and almost lyrically described, and her life later in hard labor on a farm, the slave of a threshing machine. You must notice stuff like this if you are going to do big time literature.

But let me get back to the sex because I know that is what probably piqued your interest. For women heterosexual sex requires men, as much as women may at times regret this. Hardy supplies the men here in the form of two male knotheads named Alec and Angel. She is raped by the wealthy Alec who drugged her with a delicious strawberry, and has his child, which immediately dies. She falls in love with the decent Angel who lacks wits but is under the mistaken impression that he has them in spades. She marries Angel, only to be abandoned by him when he finds out about her past. She becomes Alec's mistress--Alec now, ala Roman Polanski, regrets the strawberry drugging and the rape--partly for economic reasons. A girl's gotta eat. The other part of her reasons are addressed below. A repentant Angel flies back to her, a tad late to the dance as usual, only after she has just murdered Alec. The two of them end up at Stonehenge of all places, where she is apprehended after the police let her complete a nap. There are a lot of puzzling sleep episodes in this novel. Again, you must notice stuff like that if you are going to do big time literature.

I think that we can safely conclude that Alec, the "bad guy," is sexually skillful in the sack. He knows what he is doing with a woman and likes to do it a lot. The "good guy," Angel, fumbles in this area. I mean, the "good guy," Angel, chooses to sleep on the couch during his wedding night rather than have sex with one of the hottest young women in the country. Why? Because he finds out that she has had sex before. Whew! This is the kind of thing that can complicate life for a girl, I understand. And now, thanks to this novel, I *do* understand.

I wanted to kick both of those guys' asses at one point or another, but of course I was feeling a little paternal about this poor hot looking sixteen-year-old girl. I refer to them as knotheads, but both do evolve and develop during the course of the novel in what we could simplistically call a favorable direction. The problem—and it is this problem that gives us our story—is that neither of

them evolves and develops quickly enough to remedy the horrendous impact their earlier conduct has had on poor Tess and save her. Angel finally comes to the realization that it does not make any difference if she has previously had sex with both the football team *and* the marching band. She is nonetheless a quality human being whom that nitwit should feel undeservedly blessed to have as a wife.

I say "poor Tess," but. . . Tess is not passive. She is a girl of action and decision. She makes choices. She acts on those choices. We readers like Tess immensely. It is just that we as readers are continually frustrated with the choices she makes. She is not very old. So this is natural. However, part of the great entertainment afforded by this novel for the reader is contemplating what her alternative choices were and whether those might have resulted in any better an outcome for her.

After great thought, insofar as I *do* great thought, I have concluded that none of those other choices would have. My personal view is that she was doomed from the outset by the mere fact that she was one hot looking sixteen-year-old female human being in a society where that made for nothing but trouble. The tragedy is that in 21st Century America, this could have made her queen of the hop. I might be wrong. You will have fun coming to your own conclusions.

I had given a spoiler alert at the beginning, but the facts of the plot that I set out above are not really spoilers. It is not at all that unusual a 19th Century plot, other than the conclusion is more grim than usual and the sex is more prominently on display in that Alec and Tess actually do have a lot of sex, as in intercourse and all the accompanying accoutrements presumably. At least Alec was no Bill Clinton. The great pleasure in reading this story is Hardy's manner of telling it even if you know what is going to happen. Anyone who knows anything about Hardy will know that Tess is not going to come to a good end anyway.

There you go. That is the best I can do. I urge you not to miss out on this novel. And please do not respond by telling me that you saw the PBS production. Give me a break. This is a great *novel*, to be enjoyed as a *novel*.

Cori: From my blog: This publication was once fantastic. It used to be bleak and heartbreaking, yet fantastic. I am not certain I have ever been so unhappy for a primary personality before. Yet wow, Hardy can write. I will define the plot, together with the ending, so please word that there are SPOILERS AHEAD. Tess Durbeyfield, a negative girl, reveals out she's really the descendant of the once-mighty D'Urbervilles. She is going looking for paintings at her relatives' home, and meets Alec D'Urberville (no genuine relation -- he stole the name), who seduces her and rapes her within the forest. Bastard. Tess leaves the D'Urberville property to be along with her kinfolk again, and lands up pregnant. The child is born yet fast succumbs to death. Tess, who thinks her rape and loss of life of her baby are her personal fault, strikes away to paintings at a dairy. There, she meets Angel Clare (a sort guy from an exceptional family) and the 2 fall in love. Tess refuses his requests for an engagement, asserting she's no longer worthy him and her earlier might make him no longer love her. He pleads together with her and tells her it is not the case. Finally, she consents and the 2 are wed. That night, they inform one another their deepest, darkest secrets. Angel admits to 2 drunken nights of debauchery, which Tess forgives him for, and Tess tells him the tale approximately Alec and the child. Angel makes a decision

Tess's sins are too nice and leaves to Brazil to transparent his head. Bastard. Tess then embarks upon an extended trip of attempting to pay penance for her sins by way of doing tough guide labor. Her letters to Angel move unanswered, yet she nonetheless blames herself. whilst she ultimately hits rock bottom, she is going to entice Angel's kinfolk for money, even if her satisfaction by no means shall we her battle through together with her plan. On her approach home, she meets a highway preacher, who's none except a reformed Alec D'Urberville, even if it really is beautiful obvious that his religion is transparent. Bastard. Tess tells him that she had had a toddler and it died, and Alec proceeds to persist with her round and asks her to marry him repeatedly, announcing he is her precise husband simply because he raped her they'd consummated their love. Finally, she offers in simply because she hasn't heard from Angel (bastard) and her relatives is in dire straits and resides in a graveyard. Alec helps her and her family. Angel eventually realizes that Tess used to be now not answerable for her sins and comes to a decision back for her, in basic terms to profit she's dwelling with Alec. Tess is so distraught realizing that Angel eventually got here again for her (she by no means stopped loving him and blaming herself), that she kills Alec (go Tess!) and he or she and Angel move at the lam. Tess is ultimately apprehended at Stonehenge, and is quickly positioned to death. Yeah. Seriously. that is one miserable story. As a lady who lives in 2007, I had a troublesome time feeling for Tess while I simply desired to scream, "it's now not your fault he raped you! males (at least during this book) are bastards! you are worthy greater than them!" yet after all this did not ensue to Tess in 1891. It used to be all her fault and he or she used to be deciding to buy her sins. The booklet used to be so bleak whilst it used to be bleak, and so wonderful the few occasions it used to be lovely. Hardy's writing used to be very evocative, and the subject material used to be it sounds as if scandalous in his day. His descriptions of Britain have been amazing, too. I listened to the audio book, learn through Davina Porter, and it used to be wonderful. She's an exquisite reader -- the best so far. My Rating: nine out of 10 for being so tragically bleak but so beautifully written. Also, the mini-series starring Justine Waddell is uhma-zing, so in the event you do not feel like interpreting the publication (although I hugely suggest it) you could watch the motion picture instead.

Bonnie: Barbara urged Tess to me this summer. This is really a e-book for celebrating the great thing about our language. As I read, I had a good time that English is my local language! Do try and learn Tess as leisurely as possible. Hardy is masterful at weaving an elaborate plot. Tess is a resplendent character; she jumps from the pages of the booklet and emerges as a existence strength prior to our very eyes. Her good looks is palpable. The language caresses and jars. we're plunged into the lifetime of small hamlets within the English countryside. In particular, Hardy invitations us into the landscape. Nature dominates: The boring sky quickly started to inform its that means through sending down herald-drops of rain, and the stagnant air of the day turned into a fitful breeze which performed approximately their faces. The quick-silvery glaze at the rivers and swimming pools vanished; from extensive mirrors of sunshine they replaced to lusterless sheets of lead, with a floor like a rasp. yet that spectacle didn't impact her preoccupation. Her countenance, a ordinary carnation a bit embrowned via the season, had deepened its tinge with the thrashing of the rain-drops; and her hair, which the strain of the cows' flanks had, as usual, triggered to tumble down from its fastenings and stray past the curtain of her calico bonnet, was once made clammy by way of the moisture, until eventually it infrequently used to be larger than seaweed. (p. 156) In the history component to this variation (Norton serious version edited by means of Scott Elledge and released in 1965), there's a

strong quote from Hardy's Notebooks which helped body (for me) Hardy's angle towards religion. I learn this sooner than analyzing the unconventional and it clarified Clare's agnosticism (in Tess): Poetry. might be i will be able to show extra totally in verse principles and feelings which run counter to the inert crystallized opinion – not easy as a rock – which the huge physique of fellows have vested pursuits in supporting. To cry out in a passionate poem that (for instance) the ultimate Mover or Movers, the best strength or Forces, has to be both restricted in power, unknowing, or merciless – that is seen enough, and has been for hundreds of years – will reason them purely a shake of the head; yet to place it in argumentative prose will lead them to sneer, or foam, and set all of the literary contortionists leaping upon me, a innocuous agnostic, as though I have been a clamorous atheist, which of their crass illiteracy they appear to imagine is identical thing. . . .If Galileo had stated in verse that the realm moved, the Inquisition may have allow him alone. (p. 332 from The Later Years pp. 57-58)I simply LOVE that final sentence!! keep in mind that in highschool we learn The Mayor of Casterbridge. i will be able to basically think how tedious this used to be for us again then. The language was once wasted - totally and entirely wasted on me. it really is taken many years for me to arrive this point: i am able to luxuriate in and savour the richness of Hardy's language. The query in my brain is: whilst was once the turning point, anyway? i think it used to be no longer any discrete aspect in time, yet relatively many microsteps in the direction of this point. Anyway, i'm so grateful that i am here!

Elizabeth (Alaska): it's a season of firsts, and this is often my first Hardy. i ponder that I left him overlooked so long. As has been saw through extra astute readers than I, Hardy contains the flora and fauna into his writing. The grey half-tones of sunrise will not be the grey half-tones of the day's close, although the measure in their color could be the same. within the twilight of the morning, gentle turns out active, darkness passive; within the twilight of night it's the darkness that is lively and crescent, and the sunshine that is the drowsy reverse. This passage reached a chord with me, as within the winter, there are lots of days while I see either the dawn and the sunset. This passage comes early sufficient within the novel - and early adequate in my realizing of it - that I did not realize how Hardy has used this description of the flora and fauna to predict anything of Tess herself. terrible good, sincere Tess! terrible unworldly, long-suffering Tess! Hardy additionally drew upon his wisdom of the flora and fauna to explain a character. in the distant depths of his constitution, so light and affectionate as he used to be in general, there lay hidden a difficult logical deposit, like a vein of steel in a tender loam, which became the sting of every little thing that tried to traverse it. Being my first Hardy, i used to be might be unprepared. For a narrative to be worthwhile, and long-lasting, there has to be a conflict. clash got here quite early, and was once doubtless resolved. i used to be fooled into considering this can be only a quiet, attractive book. just like the personality above, there's a vein of steel in a gentle loam, which became the sting of everything.

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