

# Tess of the D'Urbervilles (Thomas Hardy)

## → Introduction:

A pure woman faithfully presented is a novel by Thomas Hardy. It initially appeared in a censored & sexualised version, published by the British illustrated newspaper The Graphic in 1891, then in book form in three volumes in 1891, and as a single volume in 1892.

## Characters

### → Tess Durbeyfield:

The novel's protagonist. Tess is a beautiful, loyal young woman living with her impoverished family in the village of Marlott. Tess has a keen sense of responsibility & is committed to the best she can for her family, although her inexperience & lack of wise parenting leave her extremely vulnerable. Her life is complicated when her father a link to the noble line of d'Urbervilles. Although Tess is dutiful & obedient as the novel begins, she gains

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great strength & fortitude through her suffering, but remains un-wavering in her love for Angel Clare, & is prepared to do anything that Angel might wish.

→ Angel Clare:

The son of a parson and the youngest of three brothers, Angel did not enter college as his siblings, despite his superior intellect, but rather diverged from the career path his father intended for him, the ministry, to study agriculture so that he might become a farmer. Despite holding more liberal opinions than his father & brothers, Angel Clare is nevertheless equally dogmatic & obstinate. He has a deeply theoretical mindset; it is this quality that causes him to reject Tess when he learns information about her past that contradicts his idealistic view of her.

→ Alec D'urberville

The sophisticated, urbane son of the elderly, blind Mrs. Stoke-D'urberville, Alec is rapacious & possessive, believing that his status in society & his financial situation gives him power to possess & control Tess. After he gives her a job caring for his mother's chickens. After seducing Tess, Alec reforms his hedonistic ways to become a fundamentalist preacher, but soon deviates from his newfound spirituality once he sees Tess again.

→ Mrs. Brooks:

She is housekeeper at the manor, the boarding establishment at Sandbourne where Alec & Tess stay together. She discovers Alec after Tess stabs him in the heart.



→ John Durbeyfield is Tess' father. He is a higgler, a middleman who buys vegetables & poultry from wholesalers to sell to retailers. Un-educated and poor, he is shiftless, drinks to excess & is not a good provider for his family, leaving them destitute when he dies.

→ Joan Durbeyfield is Tess' mother who does her best to raise her seven children. It is Joan's plan to send Tess to "claim kin" with the D'Urbervilles. Joan fails to warn Tess of the desires of men and meaning of love.

→ Eliza Louise (Liza Lu) is the second Durbeyfield child; she is 12 years old when the novel begins & appears in only a few chapters. In the end, Liza Lu & Angel are united, as Tess had asked, when Tess dies.

→ Sorrow Durbeyfield / D'Urbervilles: Tess' child with Alec D'Urberville, who dies in infancy.

→ Parson & Mrs. Clare: Angel's parents.

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## Themes

### → Fate & Pre-will

The cruel hand of fate hangs over all the characters & actions of the novel, as Tess Durbeyfield's story is basically defined by the bad things that happen to her. Hardy presents a world in which circumstances beyond the control of Tess determine her destiny. Luck, chance, coincidence and environmental forces continually work against Tess to entangle her in one casualty after another. Her social status, her accident with the horse, her row with Mr. Darch, the forest encounter with Alec & resulting pregnancy, the death of her father, the eviction of her family & so on all weave her into a web from which there is no escape. The narrator calls attention to this theme in chapter 11 after Alec rapes — or seduces — Tess.

### → Male Pre-Dominance and Sexual Harassment

In 19th Century, males dominated society and expected females to do their order. Tess's resistance to the advances of Alec succeed for a time, but he eventually entraps her father continually harassing her. Although Angel loves Tess and marries her, he abandons her shortly after their wedding when she discovers what



between her and Alec. It does not matter to him that he himself had an affair before he was married. Men may stray with impunity, he believes woman may not. After Tess's father dies, his wife & children are evicted. It was he who was privileged to hold the lease to their property, not his wife.

→ Modernism &

Shortly after Tess becomes a mother she leaves her home to labor in the fields as part of the villager community that must bring in the communal grain for the winter. In the middle of this golden bucolic scene, Hardy places a bright red reaping-machine. These mechanic intruders enable the field workers to get more work done in a shorter period of time. The work is done quickly, the workers must travel about from farm to farm trying to eke out a living, and onward then in time to cities like London and Manchester to work in factories as cogs in the machines of the industrial revolution. Hardy called this the "ache of modernism", which separated man from nature.

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→ Prejudices :

This Theme manifests in Chapter 2 when Angel Clare asks his brothers to attend the country with him. Felix replies, "Dancing in public with a troop of country hoydens - suppose we should be seen". In Chapter 40, Mercy Chant exhibits an anti-Catholic bias after she hears that Angel is going abroad.

→ The Luxe of Money :

In the novel, Alec D'Arbeville uses money to attempt to win Tess. He succeeds. Here is the scenario: After John Durbeyfield dies & his family is evicted, Alec offers to house the Durbeyfields if Tess will yield to him. Tess ever concerned about the welfare of her family accepts his proposition.

By : Areesha



# Summary

The poor peddler John Durbeyfield is stunned to learn that he is descendant of an ancient noble family, the D'urbervilles. Meanwhile, Tess, his eldest daughter, joins the other village girls in the May Day dances, where Tess briefly exchanges glances with a young man. Mr. Durbeyfield & his wife decide to send Tess to the D'urberville mansion, where they hope Mrs. D'urberville will make Tess's fortune. In reality, Mrs. D'urberville is no relation to Tess at all. Her husband, the merchant Simon stokes, simply changed his name to D'urberville after he retired. But Tess does not know this fact, and when the lascivious Alec D'urberville, Mrs. D'urberville's son, procures Tess a job tending fowls on the D'urberville estate, Tess has no choice but to accept, since she blames herself for an accident involving the family's horse, its only means of income.

Time spends several months at this job, resisting Alec's attempts to seduce her. Finally, Alec takes advantages of her in the woods one night after a fair. Tess knows she does not love Alec. She returns home to her family to give birth to Alec's child, whom she christens Sorrow. Sorrow dies soon after he is born & Tess spends a miserable year at home before deciding to seek work elsewhere. She finally

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accepts a job as a milkmaid at the Talbothays Dairy. At Talbothays, Tess enjoys a period of contentment & happiness. She befriends three of her fellow & meets a man named Angel Clare, who turns out to be man from the May Day dance at the beginning of the novel. Tess & Angel slowly fall in love. They grow closer throughout Tess's time at Talbothays, & she eventually accepts his proposal of marriage. Still, she is troubled by pangs of conscience & feels she should tell Angel about her past. She writes him a ~~to~~ confessional note & slips it ~~under~~ under his door, but it slides under the carpet & Angel never sees it.

After their wedding, Angel & Tess both confess indiscretion: Angel tells Tess about an affair he had with an older woman in London, and Tess tells Angel about his history with Alec. Tess forgives Angel, but Angel cannot forgive Tess. He gives her some money and boards a ship bound for Brazil, where he thinks he might establish a farm. He tells he will try to accept her past but warns her not to try to join him until he comes for her.

Tess struggles, she has a difficult time finding work & is forced to take a job at an unpleasant and unprosperous farm. She tries to visit Angel's family but overhears his brother discussing Angel's poor marriage, so she leaves. She hears a wandering preacher speak and is stunned to discover that he is Alec D'Urberville, who has been converted to Christianity by Angel's father, the Reverend Clare. Alec and Tess



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are each shaken by their encounter, and Alec appallingly begs Tess never to attempt him again. Soon after, however, he again begs Tess to marry him, having turned his back on his religious ways.

Tess learns from her sister Liza Lu that her mother is near death, & Tess is forced to return home to take care of her. Her mother recovers, but her father unexpectedly dies soon after. When the family is evicted from their home, Alec offers help. But Tess refuses to accept, knowing he only wants to obligate her to him again.

At last, Angel decides to forgive his wife. He leaves Brazil, desperate to find her. Instead, he finds her mother, who tells him Tess has gone to a village called Sandbourne. There, he finds Tess in an expensive boarding house called The Homestead, where he tells her he has forgiven her and begs her to take him back. Tess tells him he has come too late. She was unable to resist & went back to Alec D'Urberville. Angel leaves in a daze and heartbroken to the point of

Madness. Tess goes upstairs and stabs her lover to death. When the landlady finds Alec's body, she raises an alarm, but Tess has already fled to find Angel.

Angel agrees to help Tess, though he cannot quite believe that she has actually murdered Alec. They hide out in an empty mansion for a few days, then travel farther. When they come to Stonehenge, Tess goes to sleep, but when morning breaks shortly thereafter, a search party discovers them. Tess is arrested and sent to jail. Angel managed to dig a hole. & they both watch a black flag is raised over the prison, signaling Tess's execution.

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