

YORK NOTES

Thomas Hardy

TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES



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*General Editors: Professor A.N. Jeffares (University
of Stirling) & Professor Suheil Bushrui (American
University of Beirut)*

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Notes by David Lindley

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Part 1

Introduction

Hardy's life

Thomas Hardy was born on 2 June 1840 in the tiny hamlet of Upper Bockhampton in the county of Dorset. His mother came from a very poor family, and though his father, a master mason with men working for him, was better off than many in the area, the Hardy family were in the eyes of Victorian society little better than peasants.

Hardy owed a great deal to his parents. From his father, who had played for many years in the small band which accompanied services at the parish church, and who was often asked to play his violin for local festivities, Hardy gained a love of music. As a young boy he himself played at dances, experience which finds its way into the descriptions of country celebrations in *Tess* and elsewhere. Hardy's mother was an even greater influence. From his earliest years she encouraged her son to read widely; she saw to it that he went to the very best local schools, where he had a good basic education, even, unusually, learning Latin and French. Moreover Hardy learnt from her many of the country legends which colour all his work, and she helped to foster the strong sense of the past which forms one of the deepest strands in his imagination.

After leaving school at the age of sixteen, Hardy was apprenticed to a local architect, John Hicks, thus moving up the social scale from craft to profession. He worked conscientiously at the job, as at everything he ever did, while still finding time to carry on his private reading, extending his studies to include learning Greek. He moved to another architect's office in London from 1862-7, where, for the first time, he was able to visit theatres, concert halls and art galleries, all of which made a deep impression upon him. It was at this period that he began to write poetry, though none was published.

On returning to Dorset in 1867 he wrote a novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*. Though this work was not published (and does not survive) the kind opinions offered by those who read it, including the novelist George Meredith, encouraged Hardy to continue writing. In 1871 *Desperate Remedies* was published (though Hardy himself had to contribute towards the expenses of publication). Despite an unenthusiastic reception he persevered with a novel based, for the first time, on Dorset and its people; *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), though not a great commercial success, pleased the critics and led the distinguished

Cornhill magazine to commission a novel from him. He first had to finish *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, which was promised for another publisher, but in 1874 serial publication of his best novel to date, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, began in the *Cornhill* and Hardy met with his first real critical and popular success. Now, as a result, he was able finally to give up the profession of architect (though he had achieved some success, winning two architectural prizes). In the same year he married.

He was now a full-time writer, and produced a steady stream of novels, not all equally successful, but gradually increasing his reputation. *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1885), and *The Woodlanders* (1887) are the best of the novels before *Tess*.

The reaction of critics to Hardy's work was always mixed, but nothing prepared him for the storms which were to break out over his last two novels, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). Though some critics acknowledged their power, many were offended by the way they challenged many accepted Victorian assumptions about society, sexual morality, and religion. Though the scandal meant that sales were very good, Hardy was upset by the reaction, and declared that he was tired of 'being shot at'. From that time he gave up writing novels, and turned again to his first love, poetry.

He had written verse throughout his life, but the next thirty years saw an astonishing creativity. He produced a mass of poetry, as well as the long verse-drama about the Napoleonic wars, *The Dynasts*. Gradually he has come to be regarded as one of the finest poets of this century, and any student who wishes to get a full picture of Hardy's genius should at least sample his verse.

When Hardy died in 1928 he had become a rich man, regarded universally as one of the greatest literary figures of his age, honoured by degrees from several universities and by the award of the Order of Merit. His body was buried in Westminster Abbey alongside the remains of many of Britain's greatest writers, though his heart, appropriately, lies in the churchyard at Stinsford, in the parish where he was born.

This is only an outline of the story of the shy, diffident country boy who came to be received and honoured by the most important people in the land. If we are to understand him fully, and see what is useful for the understanding of his work, then we need to go beyond the external facts.

Dorset and social class

Hardy was the first English novelist to write about the countryside and its inhabitants in a serious fashion, and obviously he drew constantly on the inspiration offered him by the people of the county in which he was born and spent most of his life. At the time of Hardy's birth Dorset was

one of the poorest of English counties, but its isolation from the outside world meant that local customs and traditions were preserved unusually strongly there. In Hardy's youth things began to change. The coming of the railway in 1847 brought town and country closer together, and at the same time, for a number of different reasons, there was a growing tendency for people to leave the land for life in the cities, or else to give up the old settled way of life for a seasonal migration from job to job. Inevitably this meant that the conditions under which traditions, customs and stories passed from generation to generation no longer existed. Hardy writes about this with regret in *Tess*, Chapter 51.

Hardy's attitude to these changes was not a simple one. For while he deeply regretted the loss of the sense of belonging to a particular place, and (as we see in *Tess*) felt little sympathy for the replacement of men by machines, at the same time he was realistic enough to be genuinely glad that the conditions of great poverty which he knew in his youth were becoming rarer.

Hardy came from the peasant class himself, and it is often claimed that he writes as a spokesman for their values against those of the middle class. But though he remained a socialist throughout his life, and wrote his first, unpublished novel as a 'radical' work, this view is far too simple. He certainly does often seem to prefer the instinctive, natural values of the peasant class to the narrow-minded preoccupations of the middle classes. (Dairyman Crick's household in *Tess*, Chapter 20 is presented as an ideal.) But at the same time he was impatient with any over-romantic view of the class as a whole, and, as *Tess* shows, felt that the old way of life had lost its vigour and had to die. Moreover, in his own life he had made great efforts to educate himself precisely in order to escape from the class into which he was born. He could not be expected to deny the value of what he had spent his life achieving. But, sadly, he felt that all his learning had taught him was the truth that the universe was a hostile place, and sometimes seemed to wish that it were possible to return to a state of ignorance. So, though he could not deny absolutely that it was right to aspire to move away from peasant ignorance, he was bitterly aware of the disillusion which could result. In one way or another this dilemma is dramatised in most of his major novels. Hardy had a strong emotional attachment to a way of life and set of values from which he had moved away in his own intellectual life.

Religion

As a boy Hardy was firmly brought up as a Christian; he read the Bible and knew the words of the church services by heart. At various times he seriously considered the possibility of becoming a minister of the Church. But in his late twenties this faith disappeared. A belief that the

world was governed by the careless operation of chance is reflected in all his novels.

In the Victorian period this loss of faith was an experience shared by many people. The religious enthusiasm which characterised the earlier part of the century had often degenerated into a bigoted and unappealing closed-mindedness. The publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) which seemed to undermine the literal truth of the biblical account of the creation is often taken as one of the important events which helped to crystallise the crisis of faith. Certainly the consequence of the controversy which followed, together with many other factors, was that many people adopted a position of 'agnosticism' (a word which means literally 'not knowing').

Hardy was influenced by his reading of Darwin, of Huxley's *Essays*, which defended Darwin's work, as well as philosophy and theology of all sorts. He was also influenced strongly by two friends; Horace Moule, who introduced him to the London literary world, as well as to liberal theology, and then, after Moule's suicide (an event which profoundly disturbed Hardy), by Leslie Stephen, who first met Hardy when editing the *Cornhill*, and then became the strongest single influence on the formulation of his philosophy. More direct, though, than these influences was Hardy's own experience of human suffering and what he thought to be the world's unfairness, which he could not reconcile with Christian teaching.

Though Hardy rejected Christianity intellectually, he was nevertheless throughout his life influenced by, and attracted to, his childhood faith. He attended church sporadically, indeed used the adjective 'churchy' to describe himself; the amount of Christianity he absorbed in his youth is demonstrated by the large number of quotations from the Bible in his works. So, again, we have in Hardy a tension between what his intellect told him – that the Christian faith was untenable – and his emotional desire to believe in it.

Loves and marriage

Nearly all Hardy's novels are concerned with love and marriage. In them it seems as if he thought that the feelings of falling in love were to be celebrated, but held out little hope for the success of marriage, especially between people of different social classes. Critics have not been slow to find an explanation for this attitude in the fact that Hardy's own first marriage was not a success.

His first wife, Emma Gifford, whom he met while carrying out an architectural commission at St Juliot in Cornwall, was of the middle class, the daughter of a solicitor. Hardy was attracted by her lively personality, her interest in poetry, and by her confidence in him as a

writer. When *Under the Greenwood Tree* was rejected by one publisher and Hardy almost gave up writing, it was her encouragement which persuaded him to continue. Later, however, fundamental differences of temperament and religious belief spoilt their relationship.

When Emma died in 1912, Hardy immediately wrote a large number of his best poems, which looked back to the time when they had first met, married, and been happy. In the same way, we learn about his feelings for other girls he had loved, village girls, or the series of relationships with three cousins, Rebecca, Maria and Tryphena Sparks (he was engaged to the last of them), in poetry written long after the event. It seems as if, for Hardy, relationships with women lived most vividly in his mind when they were irrevocably over. He believed passionately in the spiritual power of love, but he also believed that such love could not survive the day-to-day nearness of marriage. The feeling which emerges again and again from his love poetry is a wondering about what might have been, the unfulfilled possibility.

Hardy's feelings for women and love, like his attitude to the Christian faith or the peasant community, are intricate, complex, even self-contradictory ones. When talking about Hardy's novels it is unwise to talk in general terms about 'Hardy's view of . . .' because he seldom held simple feelings, even if he did often express dogmatic views. Out of the unresolved contradictions in his personality much of the richness of his work comes. He does not present a neatly ordered view of the world, and that is his strength as a writer.

Literary background

When Hardy was a young man Dickens (1812–70) and Thackeray (1811–63) were the most eminent living novelists, but as their subject was town life, they had little direct influence on his best writing. George Eliot (1819–80) did take provincial life as her subject, and her ideas had much in common with Hardy's. Indeed, when *Far from the Madding Crowd* was first published anonymously, some critics thought it might be George Eliot's work. She was more interested in the middle class than the peasantry, and was perhaps a more consciously 'intellectual' writer than Hardy, but he had great respect for her, though he judged her, rather arrogantly, 'no story-teller'. If Hardy owed any direct debt to other novelists it was to the authors he read in his earliest years – to Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832), Alexandre Dumas (1802–70), some eighteenth-century novelists, and the writers of popular historical novels. Their influence often seems unfortunate, especially in his weakness for melodramatic plots and a rather laboured style.

Hardy seems to have been more influenced by poets and poetry. In his youth he was familiar with the traditional ballads of the countryside,

and their simple stories of misfortune in love, seduction and desertion, and the melancholy which is their characteristic mood often underlies his apparently complicated constructions. In his later reading he came to know Shakespeare (1564–1616) and Milton (1608–74) well, and was particularly close to the Romantic poets of the early nineteenth century. Wordsworth's (1770–1850) fidelity to nature and sense of the dignity of rural characters, and Shelley's (1792–1822) rhapsodic poetry and free-thinking ideas were a constant source of inspiration. He had a great admiration for Swinburne (1837–1909), among his contemporaries, partly at least because the poet, like Hardy, had shocked Victorian society with his anti-Christian ideas.

A note on the text

In the nineteenth century it was usual for novelists to publish their work first as a serial in one of the many magazines available, before bringing it out in book form. This obviously affected the way novelists designed their work, for if the serial was to be a success, every episode had to have something in it which would arouse and keep the interest of the readers, and so persuade them to buy the next issue. Another factor affecting novelists was that the editors of the magazines were very careful not to publish anything which they thought would offend their family readership. Hardy had problems with editorial censorship throughout his career, but these difficulties were especially marked in the case of *Tess*.

He began the novel in 1888 for Tillotson and Sons, but when he sent them the first half they rejected it as unsuitable for their family readership. Further refusals from *Murray's* and *Macmillan's* magazines followed. Hardy then decided to produce a version which would be acceptable, omitting, as he says in the 'Explanatory Note', two scenes, and making other smaller changes; this version the *Graphic* accepted. In between the rejections and the final acceptance many changes were made apart from those which the taste of editors and public seemed to force Hardy to make. During this period of revision and alteration Hardy stressed Tess's d'Urberville ancestry, and gave Alec the name d'Urberville. Even after the novel was published in book form in 1891, Hardy continued to revise small details for the editions of 1892, 1895 and 1912. It is possible to study these changes in detail, since Hardy's original manuscript survives, and it shows us that Hardy took immense trouble in preparing and revising his work. Whatever we may think of the finished product, it is the result of careful thought and painstaking attention to detail. (See Part 5, Suggestions for further reading.)

Part 2

Summaries

of *TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES*

A general summary

As the title implies, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is basically the story of a country girl, Tess Durbeyfield. It is divided into seven 'phases' all but one of which have titles directly to do with the various stages of her life. In Phase the First, 'The Maiden', we are introduced to the innocent sixteen-year-old girl, living in the village of Marlott, her home a small house crowded with six children, and ruled by a mother and father careless of their responsibilities. We learn at the beginning of the story that in past ages the Durbeyfield family, under the name d'Urberville, had been one of the most important in the area. Though this is a matter for pride and vain boasting on the part of her father, for Tess the knowledge is disastrous. The first misfortune it brings is to suggest to her parents that, when the family fortunes suffer after the death of their horse in an accident, Tess should seek out a lady named d'Urberville, and claim help from her on the grounds of their relationship. In fact there is no kinship, the name has only been assumed, and the consequence is that Tess is brought into contact with the lady's son, Alec, a lustful, unprincipled and cruel young man, who thrusts his attentions on her.

When Phase the Second, 'Maiden no more', opens, Tess is returning from Trantridge, Alec's home, expecting his child. Though, finally, Tess plucks up sufficient courage to face people, after the death of the child she decides it would be better for her to look for a job elsewhere.

Phase the Third, 'The Rally', presents us with the only really happy time in Tess's life. Working as a dairymaid at Talbothays she meets Angel Clare (who had briefly entered her life at the beginning of the book). He is a clergyman's son, a gentleman, who has taken the unlikely course of working on a farm because, denied a university education as he did not share the Christian faith of his family, he plans to learn about farming through practical experience. Gradually he falls in love with Tess, and she with him.

As this love develops further towards an apparently inevitable marriage in Phase the Fourth, 'The Consequence', Tess struggles with her conscience, feeling the pressure of society's view that what had happened to her was 'sinful', ashamed of deceiving Angel by not telling him, but fearful of the consequences if he knew. Chance prevents a letter

in which she tells the story being read by Angel, and so it is not until their wedding-night, after Angel has himself confessed youthful misbehaviour, that her secret emerges.

Then begins a new period of suffering for Tess. Phase the Fifth is aptly called 'The Woman Pays'. In it Angel leaves his wife, unable to bring himself to live with the real woman who has replaced the idealised picture he had of her in his mind. He decides to emigrate to Brazil, where one day Tess might join him. He leaves her money, but it gradually disappears, partly because Tess gives most of it to her family, from whom she conceals the truth of what has happened. She has, therefore, to work, and finally ends up toiling in the harsh winter weather at Flintcomb-Ash farm. Eventually, hearing nothing of Angel, she buries her pride and sets off to see his family; unfortunately she overhears harsh comments made about her by Angel's brothers, and never meets his parents. Making her despondent way back she encounters the unlikely sight of her former lover, Alec d'Urberville, preaching as a recent convert to Christianity.

In Phase the Sixth, 'The Convert', Alec's temporary faith wears off as he resumes his attentions to Tess. He presses his case insidiously by offering to take care of her family. Soon they have need of help, for after the death of Tess's father, the Durbeyfields (Tess has now returned home) are forced to leave their house, and can find no lodging. In Phase the Seventh Angel returns from Brazil having suffered physically and repented of his action in leaving his wife. He now finds Tess has, though unwillingly, gone back to Alec, who fulfilled his promise to provide for her family. In bitter anger Tess murders Alec, and for a brief week finds happiness with Angel, until the police surround her at Stonehenge and take her away to execution.

Detailed summaries

The glossary which follows the summary of each chapter is intended to give information about Hardy's quotations and other references, and to explain *some* of the less familiar words he uses. It cannot, obviously, be complete, and students are advised to consult a good dictionary (one of the Oxford dictionaries, for example) for individual words, and the notes to the New Wessex Edition for more extended information on other matters.

The comments which follow the annotations aim to bring various different kinds of points to the student's attention as he is reading through the book. Again, they make no claim to completeness of any kind, but are intended to be suggestive and helpful in close reading of the text, and also to prepare for the more extended discussion in the fourth section.

Phase the First · The Maiden · Chapter 1

As Jack Durbeyfield is walking drunkenly home, he is surprised when Parson Tringham greets him as 'Sir John'. The parson explains that he has discovered that 'Durbeyfield' is a corruption of the name 'd'Urberville', and that Jack's ancestors were once important people in the area. Jack is gratified by the news, and orders a boy to fetch him a carriage appropriate to his station, and to run home to prepare his wife for his return. The chapter closes with the sound of a club-walking in which Jack's daughter, Tess, is involved.

COMMENTARY: Hardy strongly emphasises the theme of Tess's ancestry by choosing to open the book with this incident.

Notice the way the scene is drawn in a very detached way; it is built up entirely by description. Hardy begins many chapters in this way.

In this chapter many small details prepare the reader for what is to come later. One example is the way Parson Tringham notices a resemblance between Jack and his ancestors, as Angel Clare is going to notice the similarity of Tess to portraits of her forbears in Chapter 34.

NOTES AND GLOSSARY:

haggler:	a travelling dealer
d'Urbervilles:	the name and history suggested by the real Dorset family of Turbeville
Battle Abbey Roll:	records kept at the abbey founded at the place of the battle of Hastings (1066) when the Normans, under William, successfully invaded England and defeated Harold
Pipe Roll:	early records of the Kings of England
King Stephen:	reigned from 1135 to 1154
King John:	reigned from 1199 to 1216
King Edward II:	reigned from 1307 to 1327
Oliver Cromwell:	Lord Protector from 1649 to 1658
Charles II:	reigned from 1660 to 1685
wold:	(<i>dialect</i>) old
mendacious:	untruthful
'how are the mighty fallen':	from the Bible, 2 Samuel 1:19
skellions:	(<i>dialect</i>) skeletons
shilling:	five new pence (then worth a great deal more)
lamb's fry:	sheep's organs
black-pot:	black pudding, a sausage made from pig's blood
chitterlings:	pig's intestine (all three the food of poor people)
club-walking:	annual celebration of a village mutual benefit society
vamp:	(<i>dialect</i>) trudge