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THOMAS HARDY
TESS OF
THE
D'URBERVILLES

Introduction by Alice H. Hogan



COMPLETE
AND UNABRIDGED

TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES



THOMAS HARDY

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Tess the D'Urbervilles



THOMAS HARDY

Introduction

More than half a century after its publication, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is still Thomas Hardy's most popular and most readable novel. It is also ranked among his greatest, equaling and, in many critics' opinion, excelling *Jude the Obscure*, *The Return of the Native*, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles is the tragic tale of a beautiful and innocent peasant girl who is the victim, not only of her Victorian environment, but also of people, including her shiftless parents, her cruel seducer, Alec D'Urberville, and her morally rigid husband, Angel Clare, who recognizes too late his wife's fundamental purity. It is the study of a human being who remains fine, steadfast, and uncomplaining through experiences which would have hardened and embittered a weaker soul.

In his characterizations, Hardy shows hatred for hardness of heart, egotism, insensitivity, and hypocrisy. He writes ironically of Alec D'Urberville, egotistical and cruel in his actions toward Tess, and hypocritical in his brief conversion to religion. Ironical, too, is Hardy's portrayal of Angel Clare, the parson's intellectual son, who, seemingly broad-minded, is essentially egotistical and prudish and even more cruel to Tess than Alec.

The novel is also filled with Hardy's deep love and compassion for noble and tragic victims of the wrongs of others.

It is Tess, therefore, who endures in the reader's mind and heart, not only because Hardy, like Shakespeare, excelled in his portrayals of women, but also because Tess, a noble and tragic victim, is so changeless in her tenderness, generosity, bravery, and integrity, from our first glimpse of her with her "mobile, peony mouth and large innocent eyes."

Phases of her childhood lurked in her aspect still. As she walked along to-day, for all her bouncing handsome womanliness, you could sometimes see her twelfth year in her cheeks, or her ninth sparkling from her eyes; and even her fifth would flit over the curves of her mouth now and then.

Hardy displays an especial affection for the simple countryfolk, heroic in their acceptance of life "as it is." The infrequent humor found in his novels is supplied by the rustics, in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, it centers about Tess's unconcerned father and mother. Although undeniably comic, this humor is tinged with sadness because it helps to point up Tess's tragedy.

Her mother bore Tess no ill-will for leaving the housework to her single-handed efforts for so long: indeed, Joan seldom unbraided her thereon at any time, feeling but slightly the lack of Tess's assistance whilst her instinctive plan for relieving herself of her labours lay in postponing them.

As he loved the simple countryfolk, so Hardy loved the uncorrupted life of the country which forms the background of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Fictitiously named Wessex, it actually is Dorsetshire, the region where Hardy himself lived most of his life. Hardy chose it because he knew that Wessex was Everywhere and because, being so familiar with it, he felt it would best serve him to point out those universal truths and values which derive from any man's background. Wessex serves this purpose magnificently. Symbolically, the earth, even the seasons, change with the action of the story, becoming bleaker as Tess's tragedy deepens, until the places where things happen to Tess become as memorable as the things themselves. Hardy's keen observation, his attention to

detail, and his ability to give mood and tone to these changes in nature are reminiscent of Wordsworth.

There had not been such a winter for years. It came on in stealthy and measured glides, like the moves of a chessplayer. One morning the few lonely trees and the thorns of the hedgerows appeared as if they had put off a vegetable for an animal integument. Every twig was covered with a white nap as of fur grown from the rind during the night, giving it four times its usual stoutness; the whole bush or tree forming a staring sketch in white lines on the mournful gray of the sky and horizon. Cobwebs revealed their presence on sheds and walls where none had ever been observed till brought out into visibility by the crystallizing atmosphere, hanging like loops of white worsted from salient points of the out-houses, posts, and gates.

Underlying Hardy's characterization of people and of nature lies his vision of life. Hardy shows the loneliness of the human being, the tragedy of human life, and the helplessness and irony of an individual in a world where life is shaped by chance, not by moral design. True, Tess is a tragic figure partly because of her own character; yet the forces that destroy her are her fate. The pessimism and fatalism which have been ascribed to Hardy's philosophy are evident in greater or lesser degree throughout *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

All these young souls were passengers in the Durbeyfield ship—entirely dependent on the judgment of the two Durbeyfield adults for their pleasures, their necessities, their health, even their existence. If the heads of the Durbeyfield household chose to sail into difficulty, disaster, starvation, disease, degradation, death, thither were these half-dozen little captives under hatches compelled to sail with them—six helpless creatures who had never been asked if they wished for life on any terms, much less if they wished for it on such hard conditions as were involved in being of the shiftless house of Durbeyfield. Some people would like to know whence the poet whose philosophy is in these days deemed as profound and trustworthy as his song is breezy and pure, gets his authority for speaking of "Nature's holy plan."

Purely Greek in its fatalism is this line at the end of the book:

"Justice" was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess.

Fused with character, setting, and theme, the structure of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is, like them, strong and simple. Because the novel progresses from one incident to the next, casual readers have sometimes considered it loosely structured. Actually, it has great unity of plan, first because it is almost epic in its life story of one human being, and as such goes forward without interruption or divergence, uncomplicated by subplots and minor themes. In the simplest way possible, Hardy tells his heroine's tragic story. In addition, from beginning to end, there is a strong physical movement, as Tess, harassed and pitiful, trudges from place to place over endless distances to her final capture at Stonehenge. Even her occupations change, becoming more burdensome and terrible as her life moves onward. So, against the most magnificent, the most symbolic, and, at the same time, the most simple of backgrounds, this moving story of one human being's life and death ends as it begins with her.

In spite of its greatness, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is not without flaw. Some of the speech is too ornate to be realistic; some of the scenes, notably the sleepwalking scene, are unbelievable. Critics have attacked its many accidents and coincidences as having been "set up" to fit Hardy's fatalistic philosophy, but because he has established sufficient motivation in most instances, there is less validity to this criticism and to the criticism that Tess's killing of Alec is out of character. That the novel was also denounced by the Victorian public as "immoral" will seem ridiculous to the modern reader, who will find it, with Hardy, the story of "a pure woman."

Thomas Hardy was born in Victorian England in 1840, the son of a contractor. His mother, the daughter of a farmer, developed in him an early love for reading, which included the Old Testament and the ancient Greeks. After studying to be an architect, he worked at the age of sixteen, helping an architect restore old churches in Dorsetshire. At twenty-two he went to London, where, in addition to working at archi-

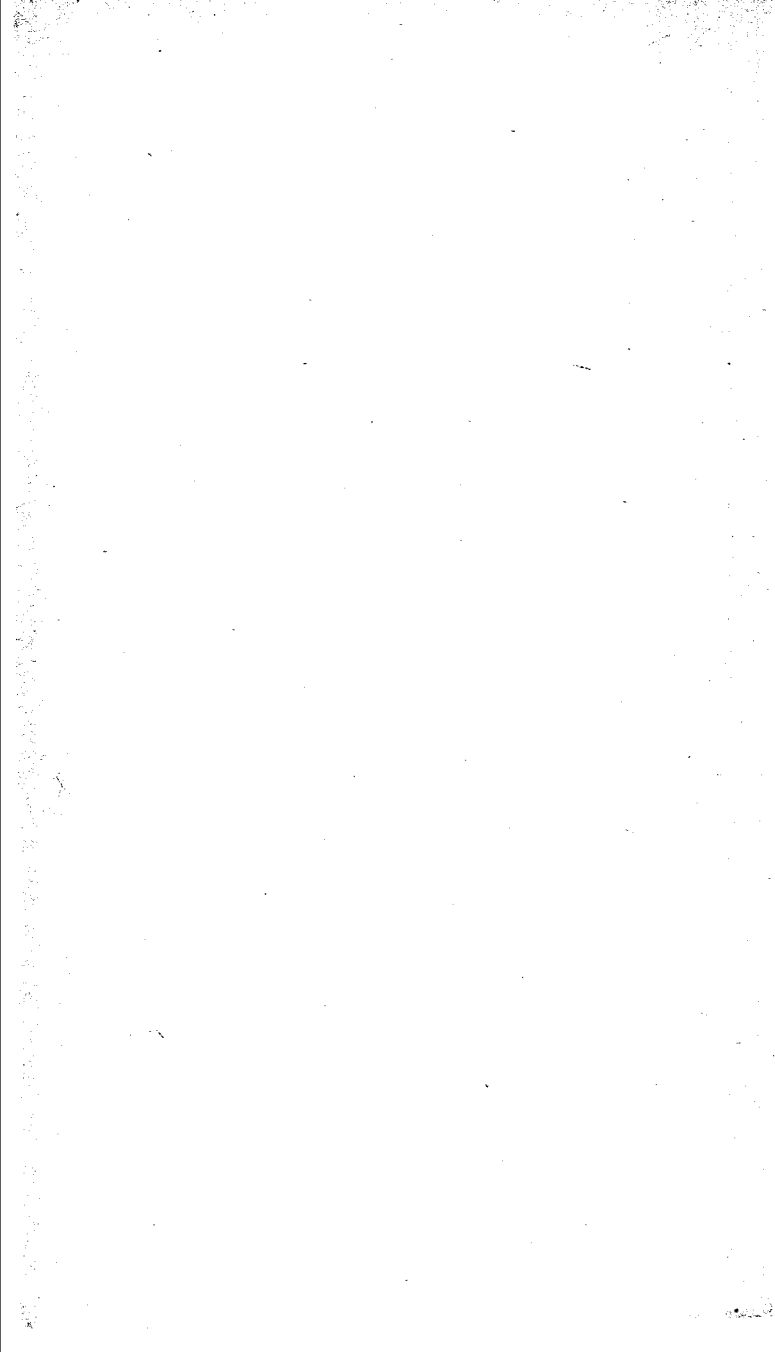
lecture, he studied at King's College, attended concerts, and visited art galleries. After five years, he returned to Dorsetshire, where, except for brief periods in London and Paris, he spent the rest of his life. Hardy was married twice, to Lavinia Gifford, a church organist, and, after her death, to Florence Emily Dugdale, his secretary, author of a Hardy biography.

Hardy began his writing career as a poet, but it was not until he became a novelist that he attained eminence. He was strongly influenced by the foremost writers of the day, including Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Keats, and Coleridge, as well as by the leading social and political thinkers, including Carlyle and John Stuart Mills. His condemnation of Victorian social conventions offended the public, and his books, especially *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, were strongly attacked. Offended, Hardy returned to the writing of poetry and ended his writing career as he had begun it, a poet. He died January 11, 1928, his place in literature established.

What is that place? Hardy is, of course, a first-rate storyteller. But he is much more than that. He is the first of the "modern" novelists and one of the most important figures in the end-of-the-century revolt against Victorian tradition. In addition, he is the first great tragic novelist to write in English; many critics consider him still the greatest, with a real sense of the Aristotelian concept of tragedy. A true historian of the Dorsetshire region of England, better known as Wessex and as the background of all of his fourteen novels, he is matchless in his portrayal of folklore, dialect, and local color. Possessed of great poetic and dramatic gifts, he raised the novel to an *art*. But most of all, his greatness lies in his insight into the workings of the human heart and in his deep feeling for all human beings. Certainly, it is this quality more than any other which continues to make *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* enjoyed and loved by each new generation of readers.

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"Poor wounded name! my bosom as a bed
Shall lodge thee till thy wound be thoroughly heal'd."

—Shakespeare

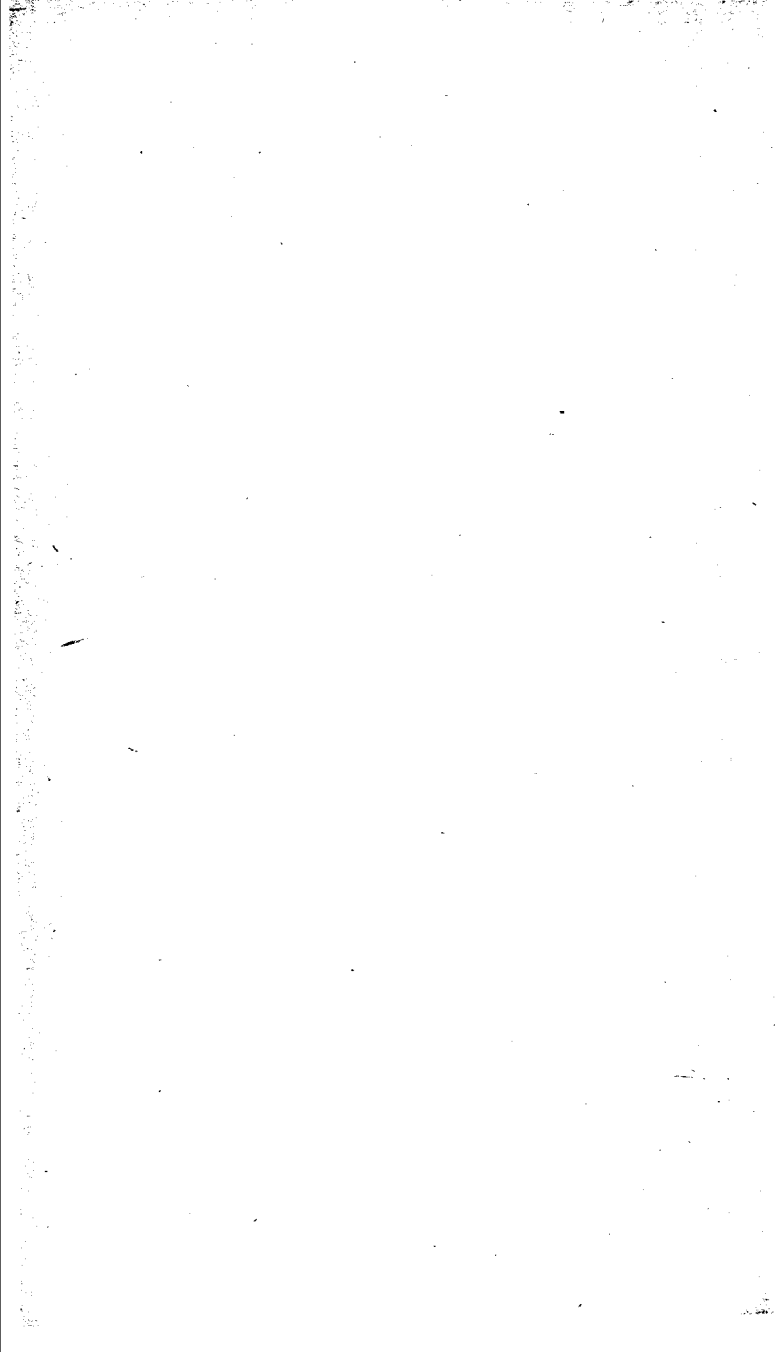
Explanatory Note to the First Edition

The main portion of the following story appeared—with slight modifications—in the *Graphic* newspaper and *Harper's Bazaar*; other chapters, more especially addressed to adult readers, in the *Fortnightly Review* and the *National Observer*, as episodic sketches. My thanks are tendered to the editors and proprietors of those periodicals for enabling me now to piece the trunk and limbs of the novel together, and print it complete, as originally written two years ago.

I will just add that the story is sent out in all sincerity of purpose, as an attempt to give artistic form to a true sequence of things; and in respect of the book's opinions I would ask any too genteel reader who cannot endure to have said what everybody nowadays thinks and feels, to remember a well-worn sentence of St. Jerome's: "If an offence come out of the truth, better is it that the offence come than that the truth be concealed."

T.H.

November, 1891.



Preface to the Fifth (English) Edition

This novel being one wherein the great campaign of the heroine begins after an event in her experience which has usually been treated as extinguishing her, in the aspect of protagonist at least, and as the virtual ending of her career and hopes, it was quite contrary to avowed conventions that the public should welcome the book, and agree with me in holding that there was something more to be said in fiction than had been said about the shaded side of a well-known catastrophe. But the responsive spirit in which *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* has been received by the readers of England and America would seem to prove that the plan of laying down a story on the lines of tacit opinion, instead of making it to square with the merely vocal formulae of society, is not altogether a wrong one, even when exemplified in so unequal and partial an achievement as the present. For this responsiveness I cannot refrain from expressing my thanks; and my regret is that, in a world where one so often hungers in vain for friendship, where even not to be wilfully misunderstood is felt as a kindness, I shall never meet in person these appreciative readers, male and female, and shake them by the hand.

I include amongst them the reviewers—by far the majority—who have so generously welcomed the tale. Their words show that they like the others have only too largely repaired my defects of narration by their own imaginative intuition.

Nevertheless, though the novel was intended to be neither didactic nor aggressive, but in the scenic parts to be representative simply, and in the contemplative to be oftener charged with impressions than with opinions, there have been objectors both to the matter and to the rendering.

Some of these maintain a conscientious difference of sentiment concerning, among other things, subjects fit for art, and

reveal an inability to associate the idea of the title-adjective with any but the licensed and derivative meaning which has resulted to it from the ordinances of civilization. [The original title is *Tess of the D'Urbervilles—A Pure Woman*.] They thus ignore, not only all Nature's claims, all aesthetic claims on the word, but even the spiritual interpretation afforded by the finest side of Christianity; and drag in, as a vital point, the acts of a woman in her last days of desperation, when all her doings lie outside her normal character. Others dissent on grounds which are intrinsically no more than an assertion that the novel embodies the views of life prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century, and not those of an earlier and simpler generation—an assertion which I can only hope may be well founded. Let me repeat that a novel is an impression, not an argument, and there the matter must rest, as one is reminded by a passage which occurs in the letters of Schiller to Goethe on judges of this class: "They are those who seek only their own ideas in a representation, and prize that which should be as higher than what is. The cause of the dispute, therefore, lies in the very first principles, and it would be utterly impossible to come to an understanding with them." And again: "As soon as I observe that any one, when judging of poetical representations, considers anything more important than the inner Necessity and Truth, I have done with him."

In the introductory words to the first edition I suggested the possible advent of the genteel person who would not be able to endure the tone of these pages. That person duly appeared, mostly mixed up with the aforesaid objectors. In another of his forms he felt upset that it was not possible for him to read the book through three times, owing to my not having made that critical effort which "alone can prove the salvation of such an one." In another, he objected to such vulgar articles as the devil's pitchfork, a lodging-house carving-knife, and a shame-bought parasol appearing in a respectable story. In another place he was a gentleman who turned Christian for half an hour the better to express his grief that a disrespectful phrase about the Immortals should have been used, though the same innate gentility compelled him to excuse the author in words of pity that one cannot be too thankful for: "He does but give us of his best." I can assure this great critic that to exclaim illogically against the gods,

singular or plural, is not such an original sin of mine as he seems to imagine. True, it may have some local originality; though if Shakespeare were an authority on history, which perhaps he is not, I could show that the sin was introduced into Wessex as early as the Heptarchy itself. Says Glo'ster to Lear, otherwise Ina, king of that country:

"As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods;
They kill us for their sport."

The remaining two or three manipulators of *Tess* were of the sort whom most writers and readers would gladly forget, professed literary boxers, who put on their convictions for the occasion, modern "Hammerers of Heretics"; sworn discouragers of effort, ever on the watch to prevent the tentative half-success from becoming the whole success; who pervert plain meanings, and grow personal under the name of practising the great historical method. However, they may have causes to advance, privileges to guard, traditions to keep going; some of which a mere tale-teller, who writes down how the things of the world strike him, without any ulterior intentions whatever, has overlooked, and may by pure inadvertence have run foul of when in the least aggressive mood. Perhaps some passing perception, the outcome of a dream-hour, would, if generally acted on, cause such an assailable considerable inconvenience with respect to position, interests, family, servant, ox, ass, neighbor or neighbor's wife. He therefore valiantly hides his personality behind a publisher's shutters, and cries "Shame!" So densely is the world thronged that any shifting of positions, even the best warranted advance, hurts somebody's heels. Such shiftings often begin in sentiment, and such sentiment sometimes begins in a novel.

T.H.

July, 1892.

