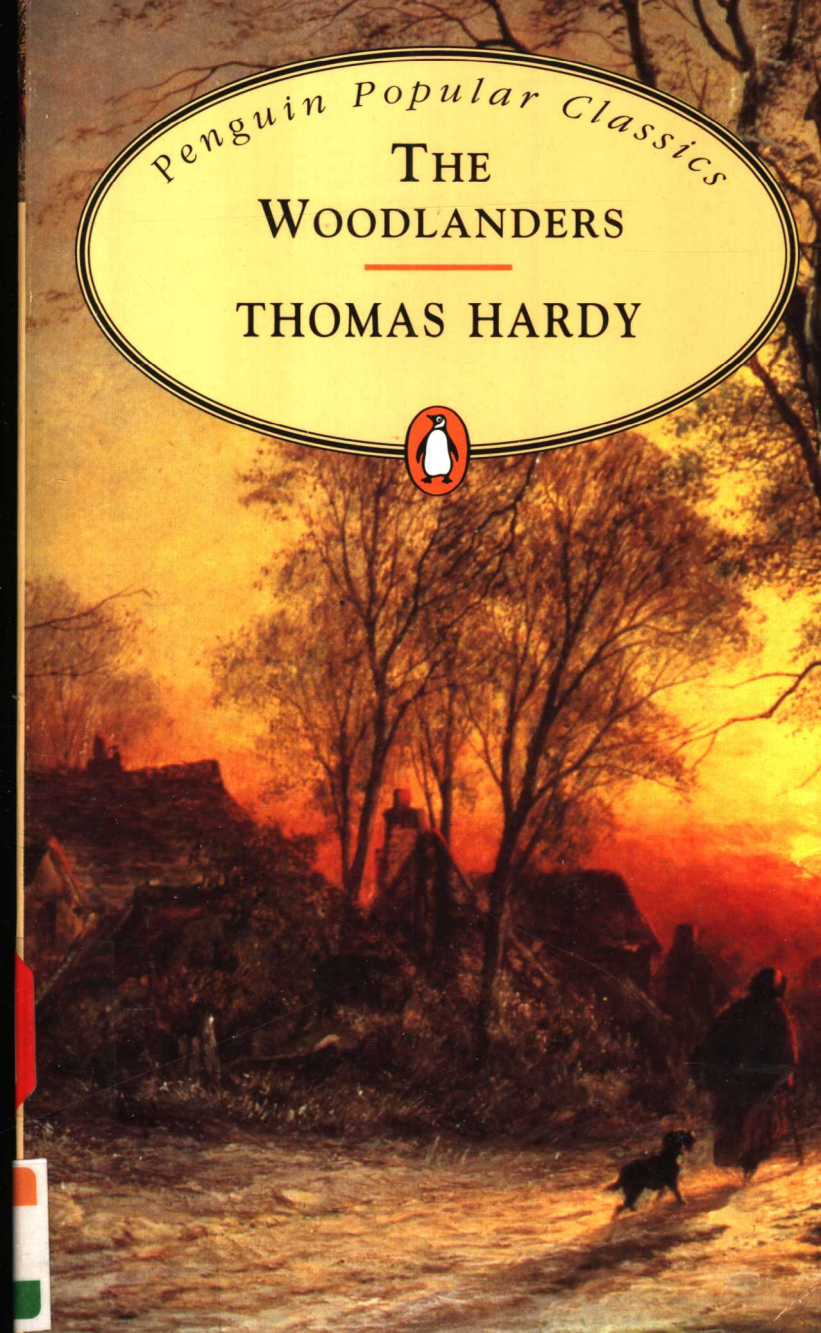


Penguin Popular Classics

THE
WOODLANDERS

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THE WOODLANDERS

BY THOMAS HARDY

THOMAS HARDY (1840–1928). One of the few writers to succeed as both major novelist and poet, Hardy is best known for his beautiful but often harsh portrayal of rural England set in and around his beloved Wessex.

The son of a master stonemason, Thomas Hardy was born in Higher Bockhampton, Dorset, in June 1840. He was educated first at the village school and then in Dorchester. His mother harboured intellectual ambitions for him and encouraged him to read widely; at the age of sixteen, however, he was apprenticed to John Hicks, a local architect, where he was trained in the architecture of Gothic revival, an interest that stayed with Hardy for the rest of his life. In 1862 Hardy moved to London to follow his profession, working for the architect Arthur Blomfield. It was during his busy years in London that Hardy started to write, greatly encouraged by his close friend Horace Moule.

Returning to Dorset in 1867 Hardy began his first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, but it was rejected for publication. While living in Dorset, Hardy became very attached to his cousin Tryphena Sparks; their relationship and hers with Horace Moule have been the subject of much speculation ever since. It was on an architectural mission to St Juliot in Cornwall in 1868 that Hardy met Emma Gifford, whom he was later to marry. Although their marriage was often strained, it was Emma who encouraged Hardy to renounce architecture in favour of writing full-time. Hardy wrote eleven novels between his first success with *Far from the Madding Crowd* in 1874 and the publication of *Jude the Obscure* in 1896. Among his most well-known novels are *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891). Increasingly harsh attacks by critics on his 'pessimism' and 'immorality' in the later novels led Hardy to abandon the novel form for ever. For the remainder of his life he devoted himself to poetry, publishing his first collection of verse, *Wessex Poems*, in 1898.

Emma died in 1912, which affected Hardy greatly, leading to some of his most deeply felt poems. Marrying his secretary and close companion Florence Dugdale in 1914, Hardy remained for most of the time at his house in Dorchester. An intensely private person, he set about writing his autobiography during the last years of his life, to prevent others from prying after his death. Published posthumously in 1928, it was passed off as the work of Florence Dugdale, as Hardy had intended it should be. Thomas Hardy is buried in Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey.

Hardy had contemplated the idea of 'a woodland story' as early as 1874, but had put it aside following the success of *Far from the Madding Crowd* for fear of being typecast as a novelist of country matters. At the time he remarked in his journal that 'he had not the slightest intention of writing for ever about sheep-farming'. He returned to the idea during the mid-1880s, and *The Woodlanders* was finally published in twelve monthly instalments running from May 1886 until April 1887.

Readers may also find the following books of interest: John Bayley, *An Essay on Hardy* (1978); Simon Gatrell, *Hardy the Creator* (1988); Robert Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy* (1975) and *The Older Hardy* (1978); J. Goode, *Hardy: The Offensive Truth* (1988); Patricia Ingham, *A Feminist Reading of Hardy* (1989); and Michael Millage (ed.), *The Life and Works of Thomas Hardy* (1985) and *Thomas Hardy: A Biography* (1982).

PREFACE

IN the present novel, as in one or two others of this series which involve the question of matrimonial divergence, the immortal puzzle—given the man and woman, how to find a basis for their sexual relation—is left where it stood; and it is tacitly assumed for the purposes of the story that no doubt of the depravity of the erratic heart who feels some second person to be better suited to his or her tastes than the one with whom he has contracted to live, enters the head of reader or writer for a moment. From the point of view of marriage as a distinct covenant or undertaking, decided on by two people fully cognizant of all its possible issues, and competent to carry them through, this assumption is, of course, logical. Yet no thinking person supposes that, on the broader ground of how to afford the greatest happiness to the units of human society during their brief transit through this sorry world, there is no more to be said on this covenant; and it is certainly not supposed by the writer of these pages. But, as Gibbon blandly remarks on the evidence for and against Christian miracles, ‘the duty of an historian does not call upon

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him to interpose his private judgment in this nice and important controversy.'

The stretch of country visible from the heights adjoining the nook herein described under the name of Little Hintock, cannot be regarded as inferior to any inland scenery of the sort in the west of England, or perhaps anywhere in the kingdom. It is singular to find that a world-wide repute in some cases, and an absolute famelessness in others, attach to spots of equal beauty and equal accessibility. The neighbourhood of High-Stoy (I give, as elsewhere, the real names to natural features), Bubb-Down Hill, and the glades westward to Montacute; of Bulbarrow, Hambledon Hill, and the slopes eastward to Shaston, Windy Green, and Stour Head, teems with landscapes which, by a mere accident of iteration, might have been numbered among the scenic celebrities of the English shires.

September 1895.

I have been honoured by so many inquiries for the true name and exact locality of the hamlet 'Little Hintock,' in which the greater part of the action of this story goes on, that I may as well confess here once for all that I do not know myself where that hamlet is more precisely than as explained above and in the pages of the narrative. To oblige readers I once spent several hours on a bicycle with a friend in a serious attempt to discover the real spot; but the

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search ended in failure ; though tourists assure me positively that they have found it without trouble, and that it answers in every particular to the description given in this volume. At all events, as stated elsewhere, the commanding heights called ' High-Stoy ' and ' Bubb-Down Hill ' overlook the landscape in which it is supposed to be hid.

In respect of the occupations of the characters, the adoption of iron utensils and implements in agriculture, and the discontinuance of thatched roofs for cottages, have almost extinguished the handicrafts classed formerly as ' copsework,' and the type of men who engaged in them.

The Woodlanders was first published complete, in three volumes, in the March of 1887.

T. H.

April 1912.

THE rambler who, for old association's sake, should trace the forsaken coach-road running almost in a meridional line from Bristol to the south shore of England, would find himself during the latter half of his journey in the vicinity of some extensive woodlands, interspersed with apple-orchards. Here the trees, timber or fruit-bearing as the case may be, make the wayside hedges ragged by their drip and shade, their lower limbs stretching in level repose over the road, as though reclining on the insubstantial air. At one place, on the skirts of Blackmoor Vale, where the bold brow of High-Stoy Hill is seen two or three miles ahead, the leaves lie so thick in autumn as to completely bury the track. The spot is lonely, and when the days are darkening the many gay charioteers now perished who have rolled along the way, the blistered soles that have trodden it, and the tears that have wetted it, return upon the mind of the loiterer.

The physiognomy of a deserted highway expresses solitude to a degree that is not reached by mere dales or downs, and bespeaks a tomb-like stillness more emphatic than that of glades and pools. The contrast of what is with what might be, probably accounts for this. To step, for instance, at the place under notice, from the edge of the plantation into the adjoining thoroughfare, and pause amid its emptiness for a moment, was to exchange by the act of a single stride the simple absence of human companionship for an incubus of the forlorn.

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At this spot, on the louring evening of a bygone winter's day, there stood a man who had thus indirectly entered upon the scene from a stile hard by, and was temporarily influenced by some such feeling of being suddenly more alone than before he had emerged upon the highway.

It could be seen by a glance at his rather finical style of dress that he did not belong to the country proper; and from his air, after a while, that though there might be a sombre beauty in the scenery, music in the breeze, and a wan procession of coaching ghosts in the sentiment of this old turnpike-road, he was mainly puzzled about the way.

He looked north and south, and mechanically prodded the ground with his cane.

At first not a soul appeared who could enlighten him as he desired, or seemed likely to appear that night. But presently a slight noise of labouring wheels, and the steady dig of a horse's shoe-tips became audible; and there loomed in the notch of sky and plantation a carrier's van drawn by a single horse.

The vehicle was half full of passengers, mostly women. He held up his stick at its approach, and the woman who was driving drew rein.

'I've been trying to find a short way to Little Hintock this last half-hour, Mrs. Dollery,' he said. 'But though I've been to Great Hintock and Hintock House half a dozen times, on business with the dashing lady there, I am at fault about the small village. You can help me, I dare say?'

She assured him that she could—that as she went to Abbot's Cernel her van passed near it—that it was only up the lane branching out of the road she followed. 'Though,' continued Mrs. Dollery, 'tis such a little small place that, as a town gentleman, you'd need have a candle and lantern to find it if ye don't know where 'tis. Bedad! I wouldn't live there if they'd pay me to. Now at Abbot's Cernel you do see the world a bit.'

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He mounted and sat beside her, with his feet outwards, where they were ever and anon brushed over by the horse's tail.

This van was rather a movable attachment of the roadway than an extraneous object, to those who knew it well. The old horse, whose hair was of the roughness and colour of heather, whose leg-joints, shoulders, and hoofs were distorted by harness and drudgery from colthood—though if all had their rights he ought, symmetrical in outline, to have been picking the herbage of some Eastern plain instead of tugging here—had trodden this road almost daily for twenty years. Even his subjection was not made congruous throughout, for, the harness being too short, his tail was not drawn through the crupper, and the breeching slipped awkwardly to one side. He knew every subtle incline of the ten miles of ground between Abbot's Cernel and Sherton—the market town to which he journeyed—as accurately as any surveyor could have learnt it by a Dumpy level.

The vehicle had a square black tilt which nodded with the motion of the wheels, and at a point in it over the driver's head was a hook to which the reins were hitched at times, forming a catenary curve from the horse's shoulders. Somewhere about the axles was a loose chain, whose only known function was to clink as it went. Mrs. Dollery, having to hop up and down many times in the service of her passengers, wore, especially in windy weather, short leggings under her gown for modesty's sake ; and instead of a bonnet a felt hat tied down with a handkerchief, to guard against an ear-ache to which she was frequently subject. In the rear of the van was a glass window, which she cleaned with her pocket-handkerchief every market-day before starting. Looking at the van from the back the spectator could thus see, through its interior, a square piece of the same sky and landscape that he saw without, but intruded on by the profiles of the seated passengers, who, as they rumbled onward,

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their lips moving and heads nodding in animated private converse, remained in cheerful unconsciousness that their mannerisms and facial peculiarities were sharply defined to the public eye.

This hour of coming home from market was the happy one, if not the happiest, of the week for them. Snugly ensconced under the tilt they could forget the sorrows of the world without, and survey life and discuss the incidents of the day with placid smiles.

The passengers in the back part formed a group to themselves, and while the newcomer spoke to the proprietress they indulged in a confidential chat about him, which the noise of the van rendered inaudible to himself and Mrs. Dollery sitting forward.

'Tis Barber Percomb—he that's got the waxen woman in his window,' said one. 'What business can bring him out here at this time, and not a journeyman haircutter, but a master-barber that's left off his pole because 'tis not genteel?'

The barber, though he had nodded and spoken genially, seemed indisposed to gratify the curiosity that he had aroused; and the unrestrained flow of ideas which had animated the inside of the van before his arrival was checked thenceforward.

Thus they rode on, and High-Stoy Hill grew larger ahead. At length could be discerned in the dusk, about half a mile to one side, gardens and orchards sunk in a concave, and, as it were, snipped out of the woodland. From this self-contained place rose in stealthy silence tall stems of smoke, which the eye of imagination could trace downward to their root on quiet hearthstones, festooned overhead with hams and flitches. It was one of those sequestered spots outside the gates of the world where may usually be found more meditation than action, and more listlessness than meditation; where reasoning proceeds on narrow premisses, and results in inferences wildly imaginative; yet where, from time to time, dramas of a grandeur and unity truly Sophoclean are

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enacted in the real, by virtue of the concentrated passions and closely-knit interdependence of the lives therein.

This place was the Little Hintock of the master-barber's search. The coming night gradually obscured the smoke of the chimneys, but the position of the wood-environed community could still be distinguished by a few faint lights, winking more or less ineffectually through the leafless boughs and the undiscernible songsters they bore, in the form of balls of feathers, at roost among them.

At the corner of the lane which branched to the hamlet the barber alighted, Mrs. Dollery's van going onward to the larger place, whose superiority to the despised smaller one as an exemplar of the world's movements was not particularly apparent in its means of approach.

'A very clever and learned young doctor lives in the place you be going to—not because there's anybody for'n to cure there, but because they say he is in league with the devil.'

The observation was flung at the barber by one of the women at parting, as a last attempt to get at his errand that way.

But he made no reply and without further pause plunged towards the umbrageous nook, and paced cautiously over the dead leaves which nearly buried the road or street of the hamlet. As very few people except themselves passed this way after dark, a majority of the denizens of Little Hintock deemed window curtains unnecessary; and on this account their visitor made it his business to stop opposite the casements of each cottage that he came to, with a demeanour which showed that he was endeavouring to conjecture, from the persons and things he observed within, the whereabouts of somebody or other who resided here.

Only the smaller dwellings interested him; one or two houses whose size, antiquity, and rambling

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appurtenances signified that notwithstanding their remoteness they must formerly have been, if they were not still, inhabited by people of a certain social standing, being neglected by him entirely. Smells of pomace, and the hiss of fermenting cider, which reached him from the back quarters of other tenements, revealed the recent occupation of some of the inhabitants, and joined with the scent of decay from the perishing leaves underfoot.

Half a dozen dwellings were passed without result. The next, which stood opposite a tall tree, was in an exceptional state of radiance, the flickering brightness from the inside shining up the chimney and making a luminous mist of the emerging smoke. The interior, as seen through the window, caused him to draw up with a terminative air and watch. The house was rather large for a cottage, and the door, which opened immediately into the living-room, stood ajar, so that a riband of light fell through the opening into the dark atmosphere without. Every now and then a moth, decrepit from the late season, would flit for a moment across the outcoming rays and disappear again into the night.

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II

IN the room from which this cheerful blaze proceeded he beheld a girl seated on a willow chair, and busily working by the light of the fire, which was ample and of wood. With a bill-hook in one hand and a leather glove much too large for her on the other, she was making spars, such as are used by thatchers, with great rapidity. She wore a leather apron for this purpose, which was also much too large for her figure. On her left hand lay a bundle of the straight, smooth hazel rods called spar-gads—the raw material of her manufacture; on her right a heap of chips and ends—the refuse—with which the fire was maintained; in front a pile of the finished articles. To produce them she took up each gad, looked critically at it from end to end, cut it to length, split it into four, and sharpened each of the quarters with dexterous blows, which brought it to a triangular point precisely resembling that of a bayonet.

Beside her, in case she might require more light, a brass candlestick stood on a little round table curiously formed of an old coffin-stool, with a deal top nailed on, the white surface of the latter contrasting oddly with the black carved oak of the sub-structure. The social position of the household in the past was almost as definitively shown by the presence of this article as that of an esquire or nobleman by his old helmets or shields. It had been customary for every well-to-do villager, whose tenure was by copy of court-roll, or in any way more permanent than that of the mere cotter,

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to keep a pair of these stools for the use of his own dead ; but changes had led to the discontinuance of the custom, and the stools were frequently made use of in the manner described.

The young woman laid down the bill-hook for a moment and examined the palm of her right hand which, unlike the other, was ungloved, and showed little hardness or roughness about it. The palm was red and blistering, as if her present occupation were as yet too recent to have subdued it to what it worked in. As with so many right hands born to manual labour, there was nothing in its fundamental shape to bear out the physiological conventionalism that gradations of birth show themselves primarily in the form of this member. Nothing but a cast of the die of destiny had decided that the girl should handle the tool ; and the fingers which clasped the heavy ash haft might have skilfully guided the pencil or swept the string, had they only been set to do it in good time.

Her face had the usual fulness of expression which is developed by a life of solitude. Where the eyes of a multitude continuously beat like waves upon a countenance they seem to wear away its mobile power ; but in the still water of privacy every feeling and sentiment unfolds in visible luxuriance, to be interpreted as readily as a printed word by an intruder. In years she was no more than nineteen or twenty, but the necessity of taking thought at a too early period of life had forced the provisional curves of her childhood's face to a premature finality. Thus she had but little pretension to beauty, save in one prominent particular—her hair.

Its abundance made it almost unmanageable ; its colour was, roughly speaking, and as seen here by firelight, brown ; but careful notice, or an observation by day, would have revealed that its true shade was a rare and beautiful approximation to chestnut.

On this one bright gift of Time to the particular

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victim of his now before us the newcomer's eyes were fixed ; meanwhile the fingers of his right hand mechanically played over something sticking up from his waistcoat pocket—the bows of a pair of scissors, whose polish made them feebly responsive to the light from within the house. In her present beholder's mind the scene formed by the girlish spar-maker composed itself into an impression-picture of extremest type, wherein the girl's hair alone, as the focus of observation, was depicted with intensity and distinctness, while her face, shoulders, hands, and figure in general were a blurred mass of unimportant detail lost in haze and obscurity.

He hesitated no longer, but tapped at the door and entered. The young woman turned at the crunch of his boots on the sanded floor, and exclaiming, 'O, Mr. Percomb, how you frightened me!' quite lost her colour for a moment.

He replied, 'You should shut your door—then you'd hear folk open it.'

'I can't,' she said ; 'the chimney smokes so. Mr. Percomb, you look as unnatural away from your wigs as a canary in a thorn hedge. Surely you have not come out here on my account—for——'

'Yes—to have your answer about this.' He touched her hair with his cane, and she winced. 'Do you agree?' he continued. 'It is necessary that I should know at once, as the lady is soon going away, and it takes time to make up.'

'Don't press me—it worries me. I was in hopes you had thought no more of it. I can *not* part with it—so there!'

'Now look here, Marty,' said the other, sitting down on the coffin-stool table. 'How much do you get for making these spars?'

'Hush—father's upstairs awake, and he don't know that I am doing his work.'

'Well, now tell me,' said the man more softly. 'How much do you get?'

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‘Eighteenpence a thousand,’ she said reluctantly.

‘Who are you making them for?’

‘Mr. Melbury, the timber-dealer, just below here.’

‘And how many can you make in a day?’

‘In a day and half the night, three bundles—that’s a thousand and a half.’

‘Two and threepence.’ Her visitor paused.

‘Well, look here,’ he continued, with the remains of a computation in his tone, which reckoning had been to fix the probable sum of money necessary to outweigh her present resources and her woman’s love of comeliness; ‘here’s a sovereign—a gold sovereign, almost new.’ He held it out between his finger and thumb. ‘That’s as much as you’d earn in a week and a half at that rough man’s-work, and it’s yours for just letting me snip off what you’ve got too much of.’

The girl’s bosom moved a very little. ‘Why can’t the lady send to some other girl who don’t value her hair—not to me?’ she exclaimed.

‘Why, simpleton, because yours is the exact shade of her own, and ’tis a shade you can’t match by dyeing. But you are not going to refuse me now I’ve come all the way from Sherton on purpose?’

‘I say I won’t sell it—to you or anybody.’

‘Now listen,’ and he drew up a little closer beside her. ‘The lady is very rich, and won’t be particular to a few shillings; so I will advance to this on my own responsibility—I’ll make the one sovereign two, rather than go back empty-handed.’

‘No, no, no!’ she cried, beginning to be much agitated. ‘You are tempting me. You go on like the Devil to Doctor Faustus in the penny book. But I don’t want your money, and won’t agree. Why did you come? I said when you got me into your shop and urged me so much that I didn’t mean to sell my hair!’

‘Marty, now hearken. The lady that wants it wants it badly. And, between you and me, you’d better let her have it. ’Twill be bad for you if you don’t.’