

Thomas Hardy

Tess of the  
D'Urbervilles

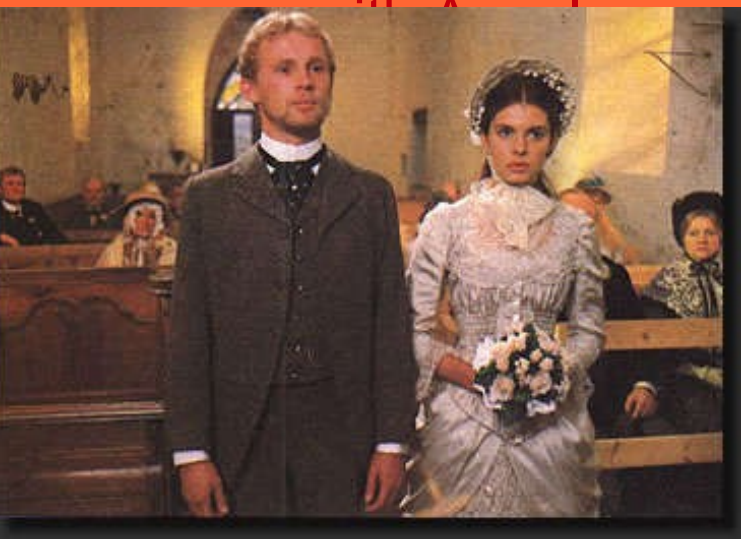


# *Plot*



- Tess is a girl from a working class family that, when they learn they're descendant of a noble family send Tess to a rich "relative" in Tantridge to get money or marry well so that her parents will be taken care of.
- The meeting with Alec d'Urberville, one of the "relatives" seals her dreadful fate. He is attracted to Tess and takes advantage of her when she comes to Tantridge. She returns home ruined.
- Alec promises to take care of her but she dislikes him so much that she'd rather suffer than have any contact with him. After many refusals Alec decides to rape her in the forest.
- Tess bears a child she names Sorrow who dies only days after it is born. Tess leaves home, goes to work to Talbothay dairy and falls in love with Angel Clare.

- Although she thinks herself unworthy of such a sweet man, Tess and Angel fall in love and decide to get married.
- She refused his proposals because she wants to find a way to tell him about her past with Alec d'Urberville, but she can't do it.
- So she writes him a letter and slips it under the door of his room, but he never gets the letter and he married her.
- During the first wedding night she tells Angel about Alec and her son. Angel is betrayed and tricked and goes to Brazil.
- She encounters Alec d'Urberville again and he begins visiting her to convince her to marry him. She agrees to be his wife. Angel then returns from Brazil and discovers that Tess married Alec; so she killed him and



# C h a r a c t e r s

## T e s s

➤ Hardy subtitled his novel “A Pure Woman”. He wants to stress his disagreement with Victorian morality that sees Tess like a fallen woman; Tess is a victim of the fate, an innocent young girl, pure at heart, crushed by a series of unhappy circumstances.

➤ Tess can be compared to M a g g i e in *The Mill of the Floss* by George Eliot and H e s t e r in *The S c a r l e t L e t t e r* by Hawthorne. The three characters are intelligent and sensitive. They are “round” figures in contrast with the Victorian ideals. They have a secret and everyone has an illicit love affair.



# C h a r a c t e r s



## A n g e l C a r e

- The son of a clergyman. He considers himself a freethinker but his notions of morality is fairly conventional: he rejects Tess on their wedding night when she confesses that she isn't a virgin,
- He is ridiculous and immature. When Tess want to confess him her secret, at first he doesn't want to listen to her. At the end of the story he finds immediately a new beautiful woman ,Tess's sister.

## A l e c ' D ' U r b e r v i l l e

- The libertine son of Simon Stoke and Mrs. d'Urberville. He either rapes or seduces Tess when she is seventeen. He is an absolutely a negative figurethe true villain in the story and he pays heavily for all his sins.



# A n a l y s i s   a n d   t h e   m

## A c h e   o f   m o d e r n i s m

This theme is notable in *Tess*, who portrays "the energy ways and the strength of the forces destroying them". Hardy describes modern farm machinery with infernal imagery; at the dairy that the milk sent to the city must be watered down because the townspeople cannot stomach whole milk.

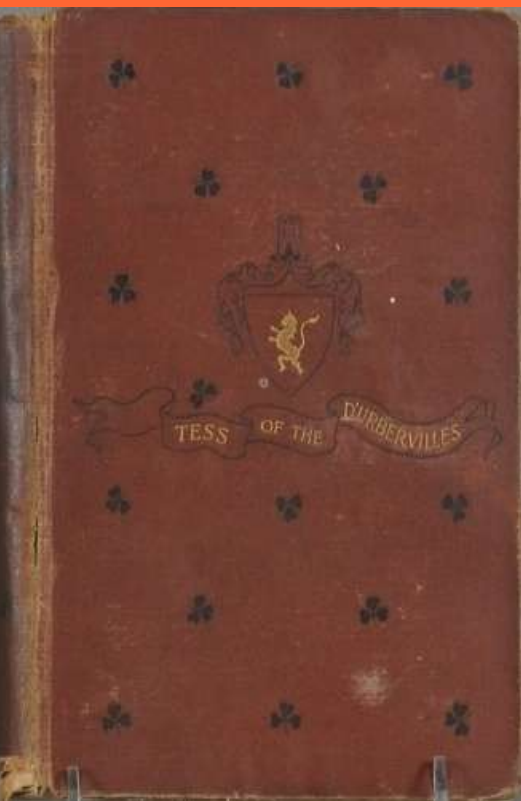
## M a n ' s   s e p a r a t i o n   f r o m   n a t u r e

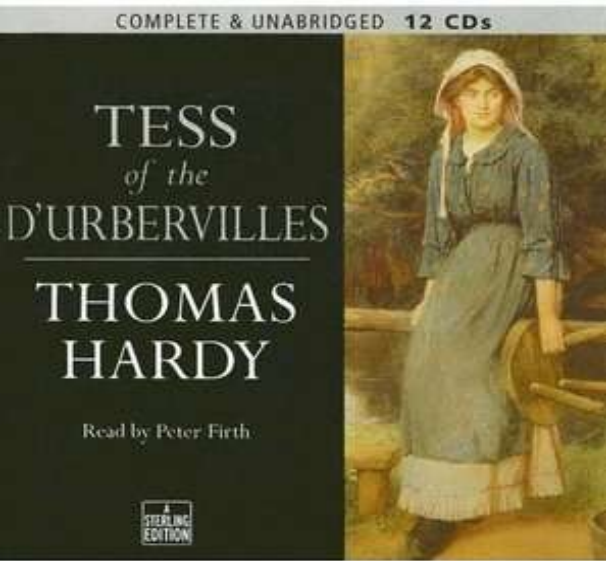
Angel's middle-class fastidiousness makes him reject Tess, a woman whom Hardy often portrays as a sort of Eve, in harmony with the natural world . When he parts from her he gets so sick that he is reduced to a "mere yellow skeleton." Man's separation from nature is implied both in the creation of destructive machinery and in the inability to rejoice in pure nature.



## Sexual double standard

Tess is a truly good woman, but she is despised by society after losing her virginity before marriage. Hardy is on her side since he subtitles the book "a pure woman faithfully presented" and prefaces it with Shakespeare's words "Poor wounded name! My bosom as a bed/ Shall lodge thee." The double standard also makes the heroine's tragedy possible, and thus serves as a mechanism of Tess's broader fate.





## Earth goddess and/or Sacrificial victim

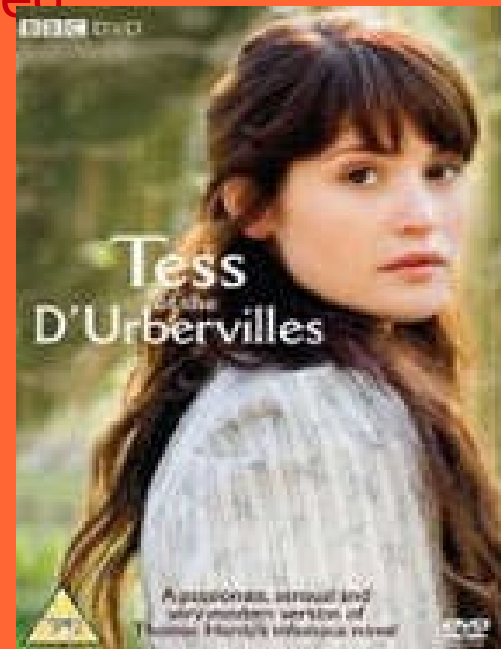
Tess can be viewed variously as an Earth goddess or as a sacrificial victim. Early in the novel, she participates in a festival for Ceres, the goddess of the harvest, and when she performs a baptism she chooses a passage from Genesis the book of creation, over more traditional New Testament verses. At the end, when Tess and Angel come to Stonehenge, believed in Hardy's time to be a pagan temple, she lies down on an altar, thus fulfilling her destiny as a human sacrifice.



# P e r s o n i f i c a t i o n o f n a t u r e

Tess as a personification of nature—lovely, fecund, and exploitable.  
Animal imagery throughout the novel strengthens the association.

- Tess's misfortunes begin when she falls asleep while driving Prince to market, causing the horse's death;
- at Trantridge, she becomes a poultry-keeper;
- she and Angel fall in love among cows in the fertile Froom valley;
- and on the road to Flintcombe-Ashe, she kills some wounded pheasants to end their suffering.



# A d a p t a t i o n s



## Theatre

- The novel was successfully adapted for the stage twice:
- 1897: a production by Lorimer Stoddard proved a great Broadway triumph for actress Minni Madder Fiskie was revived in 1902, and subsequently made into a motion picture in 1913, but of which no copies remain.
- 1946: an adaptation by playwright Ronald Gow became a triumph starring Wendy Hiller.

## C i n e m a

- The story has also been filmed at least seven times, including three for general release through cinemas and four television productions.
- 1913: the 'lost' silent version, mentioned above (in theatre), starring Minni Madder Fiskie as Tess and Scots-born David Torrence as Alec.
- 1924: an extant silent version made with Blanche Sweet (Tess), Stuart Holmes (Alec), and Conrad Nagel (Angel).
- 1979: Roman Polanski's film *Tess* with Nastassja Kinski (Tess), Leigh Lawson (Alec), and Peter Firth (Angel).

