

*"Tess tries so hard to do what's right and
it seems she gets punished every time;
I feel very sorry for her."* Lizzy, 11

Following a series of misfortunes, Tess Durbeyfield leaves her impoverished family to seek work with her rich relations.

Her new employer, Alec d'Urberville, seems charming and kind. Tess has a mind of her own, but she is vulnerable and alone among strangers. Can she trust Alec?

A year later Tess meets Angel Clare, and they fall in love. If Angel discovers the truth about Tess's past, will he still love her?

In this gripping story of courage, love and betrayal, Thomas Hardy asks many difficult questions. Are the expectations of women and men the same? Can we ever escape the consequences of our past actions? How much pain can one person live with?



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TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES Thomas Hardy



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THOMAS HARDY



Retold by Maxine Linnell
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THE CHARACTERS

Tess Durbeyfield

Tess is a young, simple country girl. Can she withstand the pressures that Alec subjects her to? Can she find happiness at last as Angel's wife?



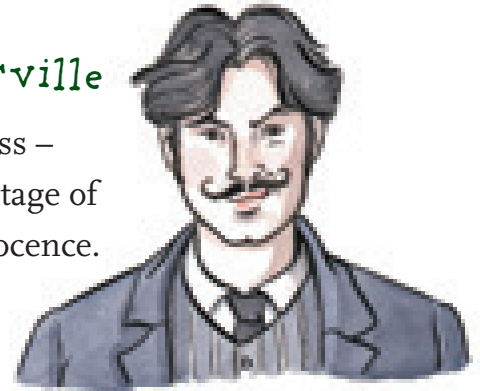
Angel Clare

Angel is a dreamer who falls in love with Tess, but will he still love her when she tells him the truth?



Alec d'Urberville

Alec also wants Tess – but he takes advantage of her youth and innocence. How far will he go to get her?



Mrs Durbeyfield

Tess's mother is burdened with a large family and no income. Will she persuade Tess to put herself in danger in order to help the family's fortunes?



John Durbeyfield

Tess's father is a drinker, and cannot provide for his family. Will his misplaced pride in his ancient family lead Tess into trouble?



TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

It was Mayday in the Vale of Blackmore. The spring sun shone on the women of Marlott as they paraded through the village in their white gowns, each clasping a bunch of fresh white flowers. Tess Durbeyfield stopped as she saw her father, John, being driven in a chaise by a brawny, frizzle-headed damsel, a servant at the local inn. Her father had been drinking, and he was singing. 'I've got a great family vault at Kingsbere – and forefathers in lead coffins there.'

Tess blushed as the girls around her tittered.

'He's tired, that's all,' she tried to excuse him, 'and he's got a lift home because our horse has to rest today.'

'Bless you, Tess, he's had a few drinks too many.'

'I won't walk with you if you're going to laugh at him.'



The others moved on. Tess recovered herself and caught up with them. By the time they arrived at the meadow she was in good spirits and ready to dance.

Tess was a fine, handsome girl, hovering between childhood and womanhood. As she joined the other women in a lively dance, three young men stopped their walk to watch. The youngest man, somewhat unkempt, laid down his stick and walked forward uncertainly.



‘What are you doing, Angel?’ asked the oldest. ‘I’m going to have a dance. Why don’t we all go – just for a minute or two?’

‘Dancing in public with country hoydens?’ said the first. ‘Suppose we’re seen? Besides, we need to get on to Stourcastle.’

‘You go on. I’ll catch up in five minutes.’

The others walked on, and Angel Clare danced – but not with Tess. It was not until he turned to go that he noticed her, and saw how beautiful she was. In her gently expressive face he thought he saw disappointment. Could it be because he had not asked her to dance? He regretted it now, but it was too late. His friends were waiting and Angel had to go.



Opening the door to her home, Tess stepped into its unspeakable dreariness. One yellow candle lit the room. Her mother was singing, balanced on one foot beside the wash-tub, the other foot rocking the baby’s cradle. Its rockers

the seasons and nature. This was Hardy's own world.

Victorian times in Britain were times of change. The old social order was crumbling. Alec's father had bought his name and built his mansion on the proceeds of his trading. But there was no support for people like Tess's family, no social benefits for people with little income, and no National Health Service. Most Victorians believed that poverty was a sign of weakness, and the class system in Britain which kept privilege locked in place was far more rigid than it is today. Tess's family relied on its wits, and perhaps we can forgive Tess's parents for wanting her to make the most of any opportunity that came their way.

Women in particular were the victims of double standards. Men were allowed – even expected – to have sex with whoever they chose. But if a woman was found to be 'impure', she was judged severely. The situation was made worse because there was no birth control available to prevent pregnancy.

Hardy had many problems publishing his books as he wrote them, which had much to do with what it was and wasn't possible to write about. In *Tess*, for example, we cannot know from the way Hardy describes it whether Alec rapes Tess, or whether he seduces her. Hardy leaves it to us to decide – if he had given us any more detail his publisher would not have been allowed to publish the book. It was probably to persuade his publisher and readers that Tess's story was truly a 'moral tale' that he subtitled his book 'A Pure Woman'.

Hardy's strong defence of Tess at a time when she would have been judged by many people as a 'fallen woman' led some reviewers to judge the book harshly. After all, Tess had brought all her troubles on herself, they said, so why should she be held up as an example to other young women? Nowadays we understand that all the main characters play a part in Tess's undoing, especially Alec for his lack of respect for women and Angel for his double standards and abandonment of Tess.