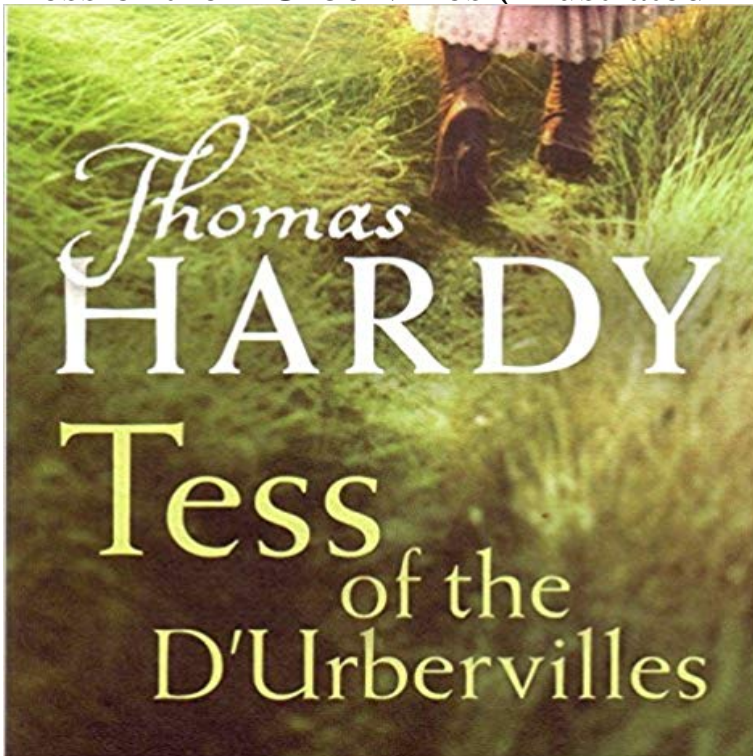


Tess of the D'Urbervilles (Illustrated Edition)



Tess of the d'Urbervilles or just Tess, is a novel by Thomas Hardy. Though now considered an important work of English literature, the book received mixed reviews when it first appeared, in part because it challenged the sexual mores of Hardys day. Hardys writing often illustrates the ache of modernism, and this theme is notable in Tess, which, as one critic noted, portrays the energy of traditional ways and the strength of the forces that are destroying them. Hardy describes modern farm machinery with infernal imagery; also, at the dairy, he notes that the milk sent to the city must be watered down because the townspeople cannot stomach whole milk. Angels middle-class fastidiousness makes him reject Tess, a woman whom Hardy often portrays as a sort of Wessex Eve, in harmony with the natural world. When he parts from her and goes to Brazil, the handsome young man gets so ill that he is reduced to a mere yellow skeleton. All these instances are typically interpreted as indications of the negative consequences of mans separation from nature, both in the creation of destructive machinery and in the inability to rejoice in pure nature. Another important theme of the novel is the sexual double standard to which Tess falls victim; despite being, in Hardys view, a truly good woman, she is despised by society after losing her virginity before marriage. Hardy plays the role of Tesss only true friend and advocate, pointedly subtitled the book a pure woman faithfully presented and prefacing it with Shakespeares words from The Two Gentlemen of Verona: Poor wounded name! My bosom as a bed/ Shall lodge thee. However, although Hardy clearly means to criticise Victorian notions of female purity, the double standard also makes the heroines tragedy possible, and thus serves as a mechanism of Tesss broader fate. Hardy variously hints that Tess must suffer either to atone for the

misdeeds of her ancestors, or to provide temporary amusement for the gods, or because she possesses some small but lethal character flaw inherited from the ancient clan. Note: This is an illustrated edition of the book for an engaging read.

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