Tess of the D’Urbervilles
A Pure Woman

A Review
The Setting of the Novel

- Most of the action takes place in the late 19th Century in Southwestern England in the county of Wessex, the fictional name of Dorset County. The town where Tess lives, Marlott (fictional), is four hours from London by horse-drawn coach or wagon. In Chapter 41, the action shifts for a time to Curitiba, Brazil, where Angel Clare and other Englishmen discover that the promise of riches is a deception they have fallen for. In Chapter 58, the scene shifts to the prehistoric monument of Stonehenge, north of the town of Salisbury, England, in the county of Wiltshire. Since Author Thomas Hardy was born in Dorset County in 1840 and died there in 1928, he knew the county intimately, his descriptions of its landscape, its people, and its customs ring with authenticity.
Charcters

- Tess – the Protagonist
  * Intelligent, sensitive, and attractive 16 yr old who lives with her impoverished family
  * a diligent worker who helps her father support the family and assists her mother in looking after the younger children
  * has completed the Sixth Standard in the National School under a London teacher and, therefore, can speak two languages: the local dialect and standard English.
Cont.

- **John Durbeyfield:**
  * Middle-aged father of Tess
  * self-described haggler who peddles goods and works the land
  * lazy and irresponsible, his family lives in constant want in a Marlott cottage
  * he relies heavily on Tess to help keep the family going

- **Joan Durbeyfield:**
  * Mother of Tess
  * a pleasant, easygoing woman, although at times she manipulates Tess
  * Tess gets her looks from Joan
Abraham (Aby) Durbeyfield: Brother of Tess. He is nine years old at the beginning of the novel. Aby is with Tess on the night of the accident that kills their horse, Prince.

Eliza-Louisa (Liza-Lu) Durbeyfield: Sister of Tess. At the beginning of the novel, she is twelve years old. She is with Angel Clare at Salisbury when Tess is executed.

Hope and Modesty Durbeyfield: Very young sisters of Tess.

Durbeyfield Toddlers: Brothers of Tess, ages three and one at the beginning of the novel.
Alexander (Alec) Stoke-d'Urberville:
* Son of Simon Stoke-d'Urberville
* Gives Tess a job as a poultry keeper and immediately makes sexual advances toward her. Tess rejects them, but he persists. One evening, while Tess is asleep, he sees his opportunity and seizes it, forever changing her and sending her on a tragic journey.
* Temporarily finds God because of influence of Mr. Clare.

Mrs. Stoke-d'Urberville:
* Mother of Alec d'Urberville and widow of Simon
* She is blind and confined to her home
* One of Tess's tasks as a poultry keeper is to take chickens to Mrs. d'Urberville so that she can feel them.
Angel Clare:
* Son of a vicar and the vicar's second wife.
* Although Angel's father wants him to be a minister, Angel, who has studied at Cambridge, wishes to pursue a career in agriculture
* He is more open-minded to new ideas than the rest of his family and more accepting of common folk
* While studying agriculture at a dairy where Tess works, he falls in love with her, and they eventually marry
* When he learns about Tess's past, he leaves her shortly after the wedding – goes to Brazil
Rev. James Clare:  
* Vicar and father of Angel Clare  
* The narrator describes him as a "spiritual descendant in the direct line from Wycliff, Huss, Luther, Calvin; an Evangelical of the Evangelicals, a Conversionist, a man of Apostolic simplicity in life and thought . . . [whose] creed of determinism was such that it almost amounted to a vice."

Cutherbert and Felix Clare:  
* Brothers of Angel Clare  
* Both become ministers  
* They look down upon common folk, including Tess.

Mercy Chant:  
* Prissy young woman who conducts Bible classes  
* Before Angel Clare meets Tess, his parents think she would make him a fine wife.
Richard Crick: Master dairyman at Talbothays Dairy, where Tess takes a job and falls in love with Angel Clare.

Mrs. Crick: Wife of Richard Crick.

Izz Huett, Retty Priddle, Marian: Milkmaids at Talbothays Dairy who befriend Tess and share a room with her. They fall in love with Angel Clare and are broken-hearted when he marries Tess.
**Car Darch:**
* Shrewish young woman who was a favorite of Alec Stoke-d'Urberville before he met Tess
* Nicknamed the Queen of Spades
* When she picks a fight with Tess, Alec comes to Tess's “rescue” – “out of the frying pan and into the fire.”

**Nancy Darch:**
* Car Darch's sister, known as the Queen of Diamonds
* Backs her sister in the fight with Tess.
* Both end up on Mr. Groby’s farm with Tess 😞.
Farmer Groby:
* Cruel supervisor at Flintcombe-Ash dairy farm
* Got the knockdown from Angel when he recognizes Tess
Tess as a Naturalistic Novel

- *Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman* exhibits the characteristics of literary naturalism, an extreme form of realism that developed in France in the 19th Century.

1. Heredity and environment are the major forces that shape human beings. In *Tess*, Cuthbert and Felix Clare exemplify this principle in that they adopt their father's views and follow him into the ministry. Angel Clare dares to entertain different views and pursue a different career. However, when he learns about Tess's past, the mindset of his family asserts itself and he abandons Tess.

2. Human beings have no free will, or very little of it, because heredity and environment are so powerful in determining the course of human action.

3. Human beings, like lower animals, have no soul. Religion and morality are irrelevant. (Hardy's narrator promotes this position with preachments that are sometimes less than subtle.)

4. A literary work should present life exactly as it is. In this respect, naturalism is akin to realism. However, naturalism goes further than realism in that it presents a more detailed picture of everyday life. Whereas the realist writer omits insignificant details when depicting a particular scene, a naturalist writer generally includes them. He wants the scene to be as “natural” as possible.
(5) The naturalist writer should be painstakingly objective and detached. (Hardy, however, sometimes injects his own views, allowing his narrator to rail against God and religion.)

(6) Rather than manipulating characters as if they were puppets, the naturalist writer prefers to observe the characters as if they were animals in the wild. Then he reports on their activity.

(7) Naturalism attempts to present dialogue as spoken in everyday life. Rather than putting "unnatural" wording in the mouth of a character, the naturalist writer attempts to reproduce the speech patterns of people in a particular time and place. (Hardy usually succeeds in this respect when presenting dialogue spoken by common folk, such as Tess's mother, Joan Durbeyfield. When she informs Tess about her father's noble heritage, she says, "O yes! 'Tis thoughted that great things may come o't. No doubt a mampus of volk of our own rank will be down here in their carriages as soon as 'tis known. Your father learnt it on his way hwome from Shaston, and he has been telling me the whole pedigree of the matter."
Thomas Hardy invests his narrator with omniscient, third-person point of view. In other words, the narrator can present not only what people speak and say but also what they think. Oftentimes, an omniscient narrator in a novel is objective, unbiased, reporting only what takes place. However, in *Tess*, Hardy frequently uses his narrator as a mouthpiece for his own opinions.
Nature Imagery

*Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is rich in nature imagery that establishes moods, presents allusions, makes comparisons, suggests the fate of Tess or another character, and presents views of the author.

From Chapter 29

At first Tess seemed to regard Angel Clare as an intelligence rather than as a man. As such she compared him with herself; and at every discovery of the abundance of his illuminations, of the distance between her own modest mental standpoint and the unmeasurable, *Andean altitude* of his, she became quite dejected, disheartened from all further effort on her own part whatever.

**Andean Altitude**: Metaphor and hyperbole comparing Angel's intellect to the altitude of the Andes, a mountain range in South America with the highest peak in the western hemisphere, Mount Aconcagua, which rises 22,831 feet.
Chapter 19: Angel Clare as Peter the Great

It was true that he [Angel Clare] was at present out of his class. But she [Tess] knew that was only because, like Peter the Great in a shipwright's yard, he was studying what he wanted to know. He did not milk cows because he was obliged to milk cows, but because he was learning to be a rich and prosperous dairyman, landowner, agriculturist, and breeder of cattle. He would become an American or Australian Abraham, commanding like a monarch his flocks and his herds, his spotted and his ring-straked, his men-servants and his maids.

Peter the Great: Peter I (1672-1725), czar and later emperor of Russia who shaped his country into a great power. Early in his rule, one of his priorities was to educate himself about life in Europe and to learn technology that would empower his regime. To accomplish these tasks, he lived in Western Europe for a time under an assumed name. To gain the knowledge necessary to build a formidable navy, he worked as a carpenter in a Dutch shipyard and later labored in a British Royal Navy yard. Abraham: Hebrew patriarch who went forth in the Second Millennium BC. from his native city, Ur, to found a great nation, supervising the tending of sheep and other animals along the way.
Chapter 19: Tess as a Dispirited Queen of Sheba

"Why do you look so woebegone all of a sudden?" he [Angel Clare] asked. "Oh, 'tis only—about my own self," she said, with a frail laugh of sadness. Just a sense of what might have been with me! My life looks as if it had been wasted for want of chances! When I see what you know, what you have read, and seen, and thought, I feel what a nothing I am! I'm like the poor Queen of Sheba who lived in the Bible. There is no more spirit in me."

Queen of Sheba: Ruler of Saba' (Sheba) in Arabia in the Tenth Century BC who visited King Solomon to test his knowledge and wisdom. Here was the result, as told in 3 Kings, Chapter 10, Verses 3-5: And Solomon informed her of all the things she proposed to him: there was not any word the king was ignorant of, and which he could not answer her. And when the queen of Saba saw all the wisdom of Solomon, and the house which he had built, and the meat of his table, and the apartments of his servants, and the order of his ministers, and their apparel, and the cupbearers, and the holocausts, which he offered in the house of the Lord, she had no longer any spirit in her.
Chapter 20: Happiness in the Garden of Eden

Being so often—possibly not always by chance—the first two persons to get up at the dairy-house, they [Angel and Tess] seemed to themselves the first persons up of all the world. In these early days of her residence here Tess did not skim, but went out of doors at once after rising, where he was generally awaiting her. The spectral, half-compounded, aqueous light which pervaded the open mead impressed them with a feeling of isolation, as if they were Adam and Eve.
Chapter 35: Allusion to Shakespeare's Lear ......... "Angel!–Angel! I [Tess] was a child—a child when it happened! I knew nothing of men."

........ "You were more sinned against than sinning, that I [Angel Clare] admit."

Sinned . . . sinning: In Scene 2 of Act 3 of Shakespeare's play King Lear, the title character says, "I am a man / More sinn'd against than sinning." Lear had just been rejected by two of his daughters, who are conspiring against him.
References in Literature

- **Tess in popular culture**
  - Art Garfunkel named his first post-Simon & Garfunkel solo album *Angel Clare* after the character of the same name.
  - American writer Christopher Bram wrote a novel entitled *In Memory of Angel Clare* (1989).
  - The British comedy troupe Monty Python mention *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* on their 1973 comedy record album *Monty Python's Matching Tie and Handkerchief* on the track "Novel Writing", in which Thomas Hardy writes *Return of the Native* before a live audience.
  - *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is mentioned towards the end of M.R.James' short ghost story 'The Mezzotint' (1904).
  - Third Eye Blind's recent new song 'Summertown' refers to 'Nabokov, Miller, and Tess' as the favorite fiction of the song's protagonist.
  - John Irving's novel *A Prayer for Owen Meany* mentions the narrator, John, teaching Tess.
Climax

- The climax of the novel takes place on the wedding night of Tess and Angel after Tess reveals to her new husband the details of her relationship with Alec d'Urberville. The key moment occurs when Angel rejects Tess, saying that her disclosure makes him realize that she is not the woman he believed her to be. His inability to accept Tess as she is precipitates the tragic events that follow. There is a kind of secondary climax that occurs when police catch up with and arrest Tess at Stonehenge.
**Themes**

- **Fatalism**
  Hardy presents a world in which circumstances beyond the control of Tess determine her destiny. Luck, chance, coincidence, and environmental forces continually work against Tess to entangle her in one predicament after another. Her social status, her accident with the horse, her row with Car Darch, the forest encounter with Alec and the resulting pregnancy, the death of her father, the eviction of her family, and so on all weave her into a web from which there is no escape. The narrator calls attention to this theme in Chapter 11 after Alec rapes—or seduces—Tess:

  As Tess's own people down in those retreats are never tired of saying among each other in their fatalistic way: "It was to be." There lay the pity of it. An immeasurable social chasm was to divide our heroine's personality thereafter from that previous self of hers who stepped from her mother's door to try her fortune at Trantridge poultry-farm.
Male Predominance and Sexual Harassment  In the 19th Century, males dominated society and expected females to do their bidding. Tess’s resistance to the advances of Alec succeed for a time, but he eventually entraps her after continually harassing her. Although Angel loves Tess and marries her, he abandons her shortly after their wedding when he discovers what happened between her and Alec. It does not matter to him that he himself had an affair before he was married. Men may stray with impunity, he believes. Women may not. After Tess’s father, John Durbeyfield dies, his wife and children are evicted. It was he who was privileged to hold the lease to their property, not his wife.
Prejudice
This theme manifests itself in Chapter 2 when Angel Clare asks his brothers to attend the country May dance with him. Felix replies, “Dancing in public with a troop of country hoydens—suppose we should be seen!” In Chapter 40, Mercy Chant exhibits an anti-Catholic bias after she hears that Angel is going abroad. Here is the passage:

-------She had learnt that he was about to leave England, and observed what an excellent and promising scheme it seemed to be.
-------"Yes; it is a likely scheme enough in a commercial sense, no doubt," he replied. "But, my dear Mercy, it snaps the continuity of existence. Perhaps a cloister would be preferable."
-------"A cloister! O, Angel Clare!"
-------"Well?"
-------"Why, you wicked man, a cloister implies a monk, and a monk Roman Catholicism."
-------"And Roman Catholicism sin, and sin damnation. Thou art in a parlous state, Angel Clare!" [third person reference to himself].
-------"I glory in my Protestantism!" she said severely.
Conformacy

Angel Clare's brothers, Felix and Cuthbert, are conformists who adopt current fashions and adjust their literary and artistic tastes to whatever is popular at the time. They seem to represent the conformists in the general population who exhibit little original thinking and lack the courage to consider new ideas or challenge established ideas. In the following passage from Chapter 25, the narrator discusses their conformacy:

After breakfast he walked with his two brothers, non-evangelical, well-educated, hall-marked young men, correct to their remotest fibre, such unimpeachable models as are turned out yearly by the lathe of a systematic tuition. They were both somewhat short-sighted, and when it was the custom to wear a single eyeglass and string they wore a single eyeglass and string; when it was the custom to wear a double glass they wore a double glass; when it was the custom to wear spectacles they wore spectacles straightway, all without reference to the particular variety of defect in their own vision. When Wordsworth was enthroned they carried pocket copies; and when Shelley was belittled they allowed him to grow dusty on their shelves. When Correggio's Holy Families were admired, they admired Correggio's Holy Families; when he was decried in favour of Velasquez, they sedulously followed suit without any personal objection.
The Lure of Money After John Durbeyfield learns that he has noble ancestors, he and his wife hatch a "projick," as Joan Durbeyfield calls it, to send Tess on a mission to claim a relationship with a wealthy family, the Stoke-d'Urbervilles, that the Durbeyfields mistakenly believe has descended from the same ancestors. Their goal is straightforward and crass: to establish kinship with the Stoke-d'Urbervilles and thereby qualify for financial assistance from them. The Durbeyfields entertain the hope that Tess may even marry into the family and become a source of benefactions. When Tess first resists the idea, the Durbeyfield children join their voices with those of their parents in urging Tess to seek out the Stoke-d'Urbervilles, saying that if Tess does not accede to the plan, "we shan't have a nice new horse, and lots o' golden money to buy fairlings!" Later in the novel, Alec d'Urberville uses money to attempt to win Tess. He succeeds. Here is the scenario: After John Durbeyfield dies and his family is evicted, Alec offers to house the Durbeyfields if Tess will yield to him. Tess—ever concerned about the welfare of her family—accepts his proposition.
Irony

- **Situational Irony**

  Tess Durbeyfield and her family are commoners descended from nobility. Alec d'Urberville and his mother are wealthy landowners who, though perceived as nobility, are really members of the bourgeois class. It seems that Hardy intends this situational irony as a rebuke of society's excessive emphasis on lineage and material possessions—or, in short, name recognition and appearances. True nobility, he says, lies in the heart, not in a genealogical table or a wallet. It is also ironic that Tess, a young woman of modest education, intuitively knows more about what really matters in life than either Angel Clare or Alec d'Urberville, both exhibiting a knowledge of literature, art, philosophy, and religion but lacking in the knowledge to make the right moral decisions.
Hardy uses Dramatic Irony to create suspense or to reveal a truth, a situation, an attitude, or a trait of which at least one character is unaware. In the climax of the story, for example, dramatic irony reveals a bias in Angel of which he is ignorant. The moment occurs when he has a change of heart after Tess tells him about her past. Previously, he had declared himself more tolerant and less judgmental than his brothers, as well as Victorian society in general. But this moment reveals him as just as biased as his brothers in regard to what they deem acceptable or unacceptable conduct for a woman. However, he is blind to this shortcoming; to him, it is Tess who is blameworthy. The narrator stresses his self-blindness later, when Angel visits his parents. At supper, they have a Bible reading from Chapter 31 of the Book of Proverbs, Verses 10-31, in which King Lemuel reports a vision of his mother. In it, his mother instructs him in the ways and qualities of a wise and virtuous wife.