



Tess of the d'Urbervilles (with original illustrations)

Thomas Hardy

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Although "Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented", is now affectionately known as just "Tess" and widely 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 Hardy's day. The original manuscript is on display at the British Library, showing that it was originally titled "Daughter of the d'Urbervilles." In 2003, the novel was listed at number 26 on the BBC's survey The Big Read.

Unfairness dominates the lives of Tess and her family to such an extent that it begins to seem like a general aspect of human existence in Tess of the d'Urbervilles.

Tess of the d'Urbervilles presents complex pictures of both the importance of social class in nineteenth-century England and the difficulty of defining class in any simple way. Certainly the Durbeyfields are a powerful emblem of the way in which class is no longer evaluated in Victorian times as it would have been in the Middle Ages—that is, by blood alone, with no attention paid to fortune or worldly success.

One of the recurrent themes of the novel is the way in which men can dominate women, exerting a power over them linked primarily to their maleness. Sometimes this command is purposeful, in the man's full knowledge of his exploitation... (OK, just read the book!)

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