



EVERYMAN

TESS OF THE
D'URBERVILLES

THOMAS HARDY

INTRODUCTION

Tess of the d'Urbervilles was first published in 1891, towards the end of the long reign of Queen Victoria. It was twenty years since Hardy, now aged fifty-one, had published his first novel, and those years had seen him slowly climb the ladder of literary success. Even if the sales of his books could not begin to compare with those of such popular novelists as Mrs Henry Wood or William Black or Mrs Humphry Ward, his *Far from the Madding Crowd* published in 1874, *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) and *The Woodlanders* (1887) had brought him praise from the more critically aware of Victorian readers and critics. *Tess* was the twelfth of his fourteen published novels, and it is now generally regarded as his finest, the triumphant fulfilment of his career as a novelist. We see in it the mature exploration of those themes which had occupied his thoughts and feelings from the beginning – 'the deadly war between flesh and spirit', the ironical relationship between fate and character, the cruelty and injustice of Victorian convention and dogmatism, the need to temper our idealism with reality, and man's inhumanity to man and woman.

The publishing history of the novel is fascinating. It first appeared as a serial in the weekly magazine the *Graphic*, where it was published in twenty-four instalments between July and December 1891. Hardy began to write it in 1888 for a newspaper syndicate, but the publishers, having set up the proofs to chapter 16, took fright at the explicitness of the material and cancelled their contract with Hardy. After two further rejections by magazines Hardy decided that he would have to bowdlerise his story, and this he did with what he called 'cynical amusement'. The Saturday night dance at Chaseborough was deleted, as was the illegitimate baby, Sorrow, and the poignant account of its death and burial. In the serial *Tess* is tricked into a bogus marriage with Alec, finds that she is not really married to him, and returns home to her family, no longer a virgin but at least not sullied by having had a child. And at the end of the story the reader is asked

to believe that Sandbourne b ship. Even the late stage of th could not be :

road because this brought him into too close a physical proximity with them. An expert now in this kind of situation, Hardy satisfied the demands of morality by having the girls pushed through the flood in a wheelbarrow.

When the novel was first published in volume form in December 1891 Hardy restored most of the cuts, and Tess is seduced and has her baby. The outcry was predictable. the *Saturday Review* wrote, '... Mr Hardy, it must be conceded, tells an unpleasant story in a very unpleasant way.' the *Independent*, although forced to admit that Hardy's workmanship was superb, disliked this 'study of adultery', and a reviewer in the *Nation* described Tess as 'a weak and sensual woman', Alec as 'an incorrigible rogue', and saw Angel Clare as 'the only moral character in the novel', while the novel was 'as profoundly immoral and dangerous a book as a young person can read'. At a society dinner in London Hardy was told by a woman guest that her complaint about the book was not that he had had Tess hanged but that he did not have all his characters hanged, and Archbishop Temple, as late as 1943, thought *Tess* 'amongst the worst books ever committed to paper'.

The sensitive Hardy was deeply hurt by such criticisms, and not even the praise of other reviewers – and there were many of them – could atone. He wrote in his notebook, 'Well, if this sort of thing continues, no more novel-writing for me. A man must be a fool to stand up to be shot at.' It is one of life's little ironies that *Tess*, partly because of its scandalous reputation, rapidly became his most successful and profitable novel. Tess's misfortunes made him a rich man, and it has remained a bestseller ever since, inspiring plays, films and even an opera, which, at its first performance in Naples in 1906, suffered from an eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

As we look back on that *succès de scandale* of a century ago, knowing that *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* has stood the test of time and is now indisputably one of the greatest novels of that great period of novel-writing, the nineteenth century, it is easy to forget just how remarkable was Hardy's achievement and courage. He

ent rooms of the platonie relation- enough, and at a raphic that Angel cross the flooded

had always b novelist well and deal w Establishme literature of possible all v Lilians' in T to be intro murdered, c illegitimate afterwards. in London, a to mention, which a pros her friend v poems in w and in whi relationship

If for Pa anthologists pleasure . . . the world', the novel, obliquely in outspoken Establishme which sees s in a man but of virginity i and which, lepers. Harc uses the m dogmatism than compa giving his re execution, should be courageous

Tess of t questions of contact with

'O sir!' She seized his hand as she spoke.

He withdrew it, shaking his head.

'Then I don't like you!' she burst out, 'and I'll never come to your church no more!'

'Don't talk so rashly.'

'Perhaps it will be just the same to him if you don't? . . . Will it be just the same? Don't for God's sake speak as saint to sinner, but as you yourself to me myself – poor me!'

How the Vicar reconciled his answer with the strict notions he supposed himself to hold on these subjects it is beyond a layman's power to tell, though not to excuse. Somewhat moved, he said in this case also –

'It will be just the same.'

So the baby was carried in a small deal box, under an ancient woman's shawl, to the churchyard that night, and buried by lantern-light, at the cost of a shilling and a pint of beer to the sexton, in that shabby corner of God's allotment where He lets the nettles grow, and where all unbaptised infants, notorious drunkards, suicides, and others of the conjecturally damned are laid. In spite of the untoward surroundings, however, Tess bravely made a little cross of two laths and a piece of string, and having bound it with flowers, she stuck it up at the head of the grave one evening when she could enter the churchyard without being seen, putting at the foot also a bunch of the same flowers in a little jar of water to keep them alive. What matter was it that on the outside of the jar the eye of mere observation noted the words 'Keelwell's Marmalade'? The eye of maternal affection did not see them in its vision of higher things

Chapter 15

'By experience,' says Roger Ascham,* 'we find out a short way by a long wandering.' Not seldom that long wandering unfits us for further travel, and of what use is our experience to us then? Tess Durbeyfield's experience was of this incapacitating kind. At last she had learned what to do; but who would now accept her doing?

If before going to the d'Urbervilles' she had vigorously moved

under the guidance of her and to the work which had been imposed on her. Anybody's power while it is possible might have ironically hast counselled a

She remained in plucking fowls, and clothes for her sister. d'Urberville had given. Apply to him she went behind her head as hard.

She philosophized the revolution of the Trantridge with its of the baby's birth other day individual share. She suddenly glass at her fairer importance to her these charms would unseen among all sound when she a there. When was it encounter with su thought that some would say: 'It is the and there would statement. Of that through all the age season, or year.

Almost at a leap woman. Symbols of of tragedy at times eloquent. She became creature; her aspect woman whom the had quite failed to experiences would

heard of by the cottagers remembered well enough and obviously never used any sense of their total abstinence than by the which he now learnt for the or more funds.

Durbeyfield had gone, tents on the other side of necessary to find Mrs not now at Marlott, but al address, and the only for it. The farmer who ate smooth-tongued to to drive him towards ent back to Emminster; horse was reached.

the farmer's vehicle for a the Vale, and, sending it e put up at an inn, and ein was the spot of his in the year for much ge; the so-called spring of greenness, and it was

years of her childhood o had never known her. ing as much interest in never passed its primal others, beside which the an idiot.* They walked of their own concerns s at every moment into ehind them, talking as e not one whit intenser ng over their heads as if n particular.

to whom even the name ory, Clare learned that w and children had left o live at Kingsbere, but

instead of doing so had gone on to another place they mentioned. By this time Clare abhorred the house for ceasing to contain Tess, and hastened away from its hated presence without once looking back.

His way was by the field in which he had first beheld her at the dance. It was as bad as the house – even worse. He passed on through the churchyard, where, amongst the new headstones, he saw one of a somewhat superior design to the rest. The inscription ran thus:

In memory of John Durbeyfield, rightly d'Urberville, of the once powerful family of that Name, and Direct Descendant through an Illustrious Line from Sir Pagan d'Urberville, one of the Knights of the Conqueror. Died March 10th, 18—

HOW ARE THE MIGHTY FALLEN.

Some man, apparently the sexton, had observed Clare standing there, and drew nigh. 'Ah, sir, now that's a man who didn't want to lie here, but wished to be carried to Kingsbere, where his ancestors be.'

'And why didn't they respect his wish?'

'Oh – no money. Bless your soul, sir, why – there, I wouldn't wish to say it everywhere, but – even this headstone, for all the flourish wrote upon en, is not paid for.'

'Ah, who put it up?'

The man told the name of a mason in the village, and, on leaving the churchyard, Clare called at the mason's house. He found that the statement was true, and paid the bill. This done he turned in the direction of the migrants.

The distance was too long for a walk, but Clare felt such a strong desire for isolation that at first he would neither hire a conveyance nor go to a circuitous line of railway by which he might eventually reach the place. At Shaston, however, he found he must hire; but the way was such that he did not enter Joan's place till about seven o'clock in the evening, having traversed a distance of over twenty miles since leaving Marlott.

The village being small he had little difficulty in finding Mrs Durbeyfield's tenement, which was a house in a walled garden,* remote from the main road, where she had stowed away her clumsy old furniture as best she could. It was plain that for some