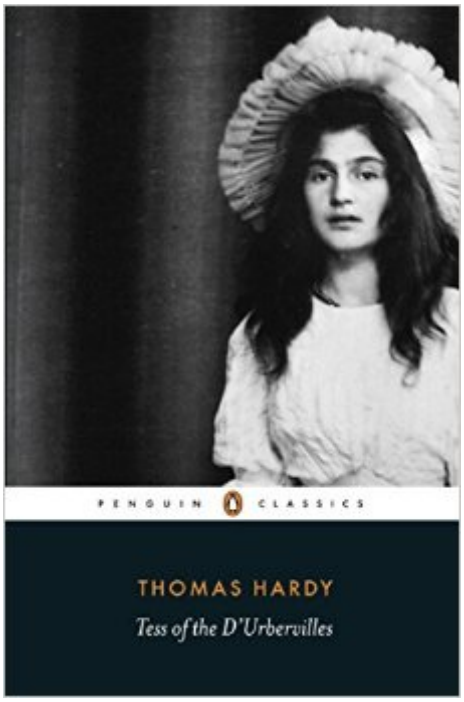
Tess Of The D'Urbervilles (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

A heartbreaking portrayal of a woman faced by an impossible choice in the pursuit of happiness When Tess Durbeyfield is driven by family poverty to claim kinship with the wealthy D'Urbervilles and seek a portion of their family fortune, meeting her 'cousin' Alec proves to be her downfall. A very different man, Angel Clare, seems to offer her love and salvation, but Tess must choose whether to reveal her past or remain silent in the hope of a peaceful future. With its sensitive depiction of the wronged Tess and powerful criticism of social convention, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, subtitled "A Pure Woman," is one of the most moving and poetic of Hardy's novels. Based on the three-volume first edition that shocked readers when first published in 1891, this edition includes as appendices: Hardy's Prefaces, the Landscapes of Tess, episodes originally censored from the Graphic periodical version, and a selection of the Graphic illustrations.For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700Â titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust theÂ series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-dateÂ translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

I was looking for another edition of TESS and couldn't believe my eyes when I saw the "average customer rating" was only three stars. So I'm taking a moment to correct the balance.TESS OF THE

D’URBERVILLES must be as close to a perfect novel as anyone has written in English. It is a genuine tragedy with a girl/woman as tragic hero. It is about life on earth in a way that transcends mere sociology. It has the grandeur of Milton but concerns itself with the lives of mortal beings on earth, as much with sex as with dirt, blood, milk, dung, animal and vegetative energies. It concerns itself with only essential things the way the Bible does. It is almost a dark rendering of the Beatitudes.The story is built with such care and such genius that every incident, every paragraph, reverberates throughout the whole structure. Surely Hardy had an angel on his shoulder when he conceived and composed this work. Yet it was considered so immoral in its time that he had to bowdlerize his own creation in order to get it published, at first. Victorian readers were not prepared for the truth of the lives of ordinary women, or for a great many truths about themselves that Hardy presents.The use of British history as a hall of mirrors and the jawdropping detail of the landscape of "Wessex" make it the Great English Novel in the way we sometimes refer to MOBY DICK as the Great American Novel, though the works don’t otherwise bear comparison. Melville’s great white whale is a far punier creation.Hardy’s style is like no one else’s. It is not snappy, as Dickens can be. It is not fluid and elegant, like George Eliot’s. It can feel labored and awkward and more archaic than either.

Recently, my brother and I were discussing the "poverty penalty," the concept that the poor pay more for what they must buy because they have no bargaining power to invite competition, which drives down prices. This is obviously not a new phenomenon, because poor Tess Durbeyfield pays quite a poverty penalty through the course of Tess of the D’Urbervilles by Thomas Hardy.This is the first novel of Hardy’s I have read, but I chose it after reading "What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew" by Daniel Pool, a fabulous book about 18th century daily life.Hardy’s title, as quickly becomes evident, is tongue-in-cheek (he is author of my favorite title of a book, Jude the Obscure, which I haven’t yet read) is ironic and mocking. Tess, the lovely and somewhat educated daughter of a cottager in Hardy’s British district of Wessex, has the last name of Durbeyfield, but in the first pages of the book, her father, the ne’er-do-well, learns that he is descended from Norman aristocracy, the D’Urbervilles, and there aren’t many of them left, except his clan, as the local reverend informs him. He instantly thinks himself very grand and takes it as an excuse to go carousing, which causes Tess and one of her many younger siblings to have to make an early morning journey with the horse for the family’s means of making money. Sleeping on the journey, Tess wakes to find the horse impaled in a wreck and killed. Feeling guilty, she agrees to be sent as a poor relation to the Stoke-D’Urbervilles to seek assistance of some kind. (They are "new money"

and have bought the name "D'Urberville" to build position for themselves, so they are actually no relation.)There she encounters Alec D'Urberville, who pursues her vigorously, though she repeatedly eschews his attentions.

Despite its seemingly needless tragedy, its persistently downbeat tone, and its relentlessly persecuted heroine, Thomas Hardy's 1891 novel, "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," is without doubt one of the greatest novels I have ever read. And I have read a few. Tess is the only truly well-developed character in the novel, which, coupled with the fact that Hardy renders the landscape of Wessex as to make it a character itself, gives one the sense of a real struggle between humanity and nature. This, for me, is one of the great themes of the novel - the tension between nature and the artifices with which we fill our relations with other people. The beauty of Hardy's pastoral setting is never idyllic - Hardy keeps us always aware that human society, with its false moral standards and technological advancements, is ever encroaching upon the already vanished past.As the novel begins, Tess Durbeyfield's irresponsible wastrel of a father is casually and jokingly informed by the local minister that he is a descendant of a long-degenerated and disenfranchised noble family, the D'Urbervilles, whose influence stretches back to the Norman invasion. This simple, careless act, nothing more than a name, wreaks such havoc upon everyone in the novel, that I'm actually having a hard time right now even looking at the title - the name itself, now having read the novel, is such a powerful condemnation of status, of privilege, of reputation, of all the injustices of English society from the eighteenth century through the time of this novel, almost the dawn of the twentieth. Sent by her nearly indigent parents, whose heads have swelled with the possibilities of lineage, Tess leaves her home in Marlott, going to claim kinship with the last apparently wealthy D'Urberville, in the village of Trantridge.

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