



Tess of the d'Urbervilles

Thomas Hardy

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Thomas Hardy, the great, reluctant writer during Victorian England, wove tales of common people struggling in a harsh society fixated on a pretense of morality and uptight social conventions. Tess of the d'Uberilles, certainly his most famous and possibly his greatest novel, stirred quite a bit of controversy after its initial publication. Hardy wrote about the injustices and blatant hypocrisy that rose out of Victorian English society, and was especially sympathetic of the plight of poor women who were dominated not only by men, but by an unfair moral and legal system. Tess of the d'Uberilles is set in rural England. Tess Durbeyfield is a poor maiden in England at a time where social status meant everything. Her father, a peddler, finds out he is related to a noble family, the d'Uberilles. Hoping to secure his daughter's future and fortune, he sends her off to live and work for the d'Uberilles. What Mr. Durbeyfield does not realize is that while his family is indeed of an aristocratic lineage, the wealthy d'Uberilles are not: Mr. d'Uberille simply changed his name. When Tess arrives at the d'Uberille estate, she tends to the family's fowls and catches the eye of Mrs. d'Uberilles' dashing son, Alec. One night, alone with Alec in a carriage after returning from a fair, Tess succumbs to Alec. Was she raped or seduced? Sadly, it does not matter how it happened, Tess has been forever tainted and returns home, pregnant with an illegitimate child. And this is only the beginning of Tess's journey. Hardy writes a heartbreaking tragedy about a naïve girl who has no chance against the stringent conventions of 19th-century English society. A critique of England's upper-classes, Tess is also a sweeping story with twists and turns and an ending no one saw coming. Tess of the d'Uberilles is one of the great literary masterpieces of the 19th century.

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