

TESS OF THE
D'URBERVILLES

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TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

Benjamin Crotty

Esperanza

TESS OF D'URBERVILLES

Novel by Thomas Hardy

Film by Roman Polanski

Explanatory text by Benjamin Crotty and Esperanza

SYNOPSIS: TRANSCRIPTION OF THE ORAL RECOUNTING OF THE PLOT (BENJAMIN CROTTY TO ESPERANZA)

Tess is played by Natasha Kinski.

The film begins with Tess' family living in poverty in the English countryside. It turns out that Tess is from a very rich old family: d'Urbervilles. Tess' parents send her off to live with her uncle or cousin and get some money for them, because she is VERY pretty. It turns out that the rich D'Urbervilles aren't really the d'Urbervilles at all, they just bought the name to be more prestigious. Anyways, Tess's cousin is really into her and keeps making eyes, but Tess is very virtuous and won't have anything of it. After a county fair, however, he takes her for a ride in the forest, and, well . . . Tess gets pregnant and no one really knows what is going on and I think she has twins. She becomes a kind of social outcast and the villagers seem to think she's a slut. So,

the babies die but when Tess asks the village priest to bury them in the cemetery he says he can't because those babies are damned! At this point Tess more or less turns her back on God. Eventually, Tess ends up working on some kind of farm and meets a boy. Actually, all the ladies who work on the farm are very sweet on this boy but he chooses Tess because she is the prettiest and she has a sad face. When they get married she finally tells him that she's actually not a virgin, she'd been taken advantage of by her cousin, she had babies . . . and he is not happy. He goes to Brazil and leaves her. She writes him every week or something but he never even replies once. When he comes back to England, a LONG time later, he can't find Tess anywhere. When he does track her down she is living in a house by the sea, dressed up in furs and she is married to her COUSIN. Her husband asks her to come back with him, she kind of stares blankly like she gave up on life a long time ago. So, he leaves. After he leaves, Tess STABS her cousin to death with a knife he had been using to carve up a ROAST only moments before. Tess runs out, finds her husband and they are now on the run from the law. But Tess is still really pessimistic about everything and seems to think happiness is impossible for her. At the end, they've been chased from everywhere and they end up sleeping at Stonehenge on a misty night. Finally the police come and lead Tess away.

The end.

THEMES: EDITED AND COMPILED BY BENJAMIN CROTTY AND ESPERANZA

The Injustice of Existence

Unfairness dominates the lives of Tess and her family. For example, when the preacher refuses to bury her innocent babies in the churchyard. Christianity teaches that there is compensation in

the afterlife for unhappiness suffered in this life, but even the Church turns its back on Tess. Thus one could say that the moral atmosphere of the novel is not Christian justice, but rather pagan injustice. Tess's final rest at Stonehenge at the end, remind us of a world where the gods are not just and fair, but whimsical and uncaring.

Brazil

Rather surprising for a novel that seems set so solidly in rural England, the narration shifts very briefly to Brazil when Angel takes leave of Tess and heads off to establish a career in farming. Even more exotic for a Victorian English reader than America or Australia, Brazil is the country in which Robinson Crusoe made his fortune and it seems to promise a better life far from the humdrum familiar world. Brazil is thus more than a geographical entity on the map in this novel: it symbolizes a fantasyland, a place where dreams come true. As Angel's name suggests, he is a lofty visionary who lacks some experience with the real world, despite all his mechanical know-how in farm management. He may be able to milk cows, but he does not yet know how to tell the difference between an exotic dream and an everyday reality, so inevitably his experience in the imagined dream world of Brazil is a disaster that he barely survives. His fiasco teaches him that ideals do not exist in life, and this lesson helps him reevaluate his disappointment with Tess's imperfections, her failure to incarnate the ideal he expected her to be. For Angel, Brazil symbolizes the impossibility of ideals, but also forgiveness and acceptance of life in spite of those disappointed ideals.

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