Thomas Hardy

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Thomas Hardy — *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891)

ENH 401 — Nineteenth Century Novel | Study Pack for DCU English Honours 4th Year

📖 Overview — the story in simple English

Tess of the d'Urbervilles tells the sad life of a poor, beautiful country girl named Tess Durbeyfield. Her lazy father learns that their family is really descended (বংশোদ্ভূত) from an old noble family, the d'Urbervilles, so he sends Tess to "claim kin" (আত্মীয়তা দাবি করা) with a rich family who use that name. There a young man, Alec d'Urberville, forces himself on Tess in a dark wood called The Chase and ruins her (সতীত্বহরণ করে). Tess goes home, gives birth to a baby boy she calls Sorrow, but the baby soon dies. Later Tess goes to work at Talbothays Dairy, where she meets and loves a gentle, educated man, Angel Clare, the son of a clergyman. They marry, but on the wedding night Angel confesses his own past sin, and Tess confesses hers — yet Angel, who forgives himself, cannot forgive Tess (দ্বৈত নীতি / double standard). He abandons her and sails to Brazil. Poor, alone, and desperate, Tess is slowly pushed back to Alec, who now supports her ruined family. When Angel finally returns, full of regret, he finds Tess living with Alec. In her despair Tess stabs Alec dead. She and Angel flee and share a few happy days before she is arrested at Stonehenge. Tess is hanged, and Angel walks away with her younger sister 'Liza-Lu. Throughout, Hardy insists that Tess is innocent at heart and that fate (নিয়তি), men, and a cruel society together destroy her.

> 💡 ***One-line meaning:*** *A pure, innocent country girl is crushed step by step by a seducer, by bad luck, and by a hypocritical society that punishes the woman for a wrong done to her.*

Quick Facts	Detail
Published	1891 (serialized in 1891; issued as a three-volume novel the same year)
Genre	Tragic novel; realist / naturalist fiction — Hardy's own group name: a "novel of character and environment"
Setting	Hardy's fictional **"Wessex"** (rural south-west England), late 19th century — Marlott, Trantridge, Talbothays, Flintcomb-Ash, Sandbourne, Stonehenge
Narration / Form	Third-person **omniscient** (সর্বজ্ঞ) narrator; divided into seven "Phases"
Author remark	Hardy defiantly subtitled the book *"A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented,"* insisting on Tess's essential innocence — this shocked many Victorian readers

🎯 Themes & Technique

1. **The sexual double standard — "The Woman Pays."** This is the beating heart of the novel and Hardy even names Phase the Fifth *"The Woman Pays."* Angel confesses that he once lived loosely with a stranger, and Tess forgives him at

once. But when Tess confesses that Alec ruined her, Angel rejects her. The same "sin" is pardoned in the man and punished in the woman. Hardy attacks this unfair Victorian rule (দ্বৈত নীতি) with deep anger and pity.

2. **Fate, chance, and an indifferent universe (Hardy's pessimism).** Again and again small accidents destroy Tess: the death of the horse Prince, the confession-letter that slips under a carpet and is never read, Angel's late return. The famous closing line says the "President of the Immortals" had ended "his sport with Tess," suggesting the gods (or the universe) toy cruelly with humans. This bleak vision (নৈরাশ্যবাদ) is central to any "Why is Hardy pessimistic?" answer.
3. **A redefined idea of purity.** Society says a "fallen" woman is impure. Hardy's subtitle answers back: Tess is *"A Pure Woman."* Her innocence lies in her honest, loving heart and in the fact that she was a victim (বলি), not a sinner. Hardy separates true moral purity from mere physical or social "respectability" (সামাজিক সম্মান).
4. **Nature and the natural world.** Tess is a "daughter of the soil," and her fortunes are mirrored by the landscape: she is happy in the rich, green Valley of the Great Dairies (Talbothays) and suffers in the cold, barren upland of Flintcomb-Ash. Hardy's warm, pagan feeling for nature (pathetic fallacy — প্রকৃতির সঙ্গে মানুষের আবেগের মিল) treats Tess as natural and good, while human "law" is unnatural and cruel.
5. **Class, decline, and rural change.** The empty pride in the old d'Urberville name begins Tess's ruin, while the money of the "new" Stoke-d'Urbervilles (who simply bought the name) shows a changing rural England (গ্রামীণ পরিবর্তন). The threshing machine at Flintcomb-Ash shows harsh industrial power crushing the old peasant life. Hardy mourns the destruction of the country poor.
6. **Religion and hypocrisy.** Hardy criticizes conventional, loveless Christianity (ভণ্ডামি). The church refuses proper burial to Tess's dead baby; the red-painted texts of doom on walls seem cruel, not kind; Alec's sudden "conversion" to a preacher is false and quickly dropped. True goodness in the novel lies in feeling, not in religious rules.
7. **Woman as victim.** From Alec's violence to Angel's cold rejection to economic desperation, Tess is passed between men and forces she cannot control. Hardy presents her as a suffering, silenced victim (শিকার) of a male-ordered society — a theme feminist critics find powerful.

Narrative technique (use these terms in the exam):

- **Omniscient, intrusive narrator** — the narrator openly judges events and society (e.g., the "President of the Immortals" comment).
- **Tragic structure** — Tess is a **tragic heroine**; the novel follows a classical downward movement toward doom (সর্বনাশ), like Greek tragedy in prose.
- **Colour symbolism** — repeated **red and white** imagery (Prince's blood, the red ribbon, the strawberry, the roses, the murder stain) links Tess to blood, passion, and sacrifice.
- **Symbolism and omen** — the killing of the horse Prince, the afternoon cock-crow at the wedding, the pagan altar of Stonehenge.
- **Pathetic fallacy / symbolic landscape** — the setting reflects Tess's inner life.
- **Classical and biblical allusion** — Aeschylus, goddess-names (Artemis, Demeter), Eden imagery.
- **Foreshadowing and coincidence** — accidents that seem to plan Tess's ruin in advance.
- **Structure in seven "Phases"** — each phase title comments on Tess's moral journey (*The Maiden, Maiden No More, The Woman Pays, Fulfilment*).

💬 Key Quotations — memorize

- **The subtitle:** *"A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented"* — Hardy's own defiant claim about Tess. The single most useful phrase for the "pure woman" question.
- **The closing line (Phase the Seventh):** *"'Justice' was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess."* — spoken by the narrator after Tess is hanged. Note Hardy's own ironic quotation marks

around "Justice." Perfect for pessimism, fate, and injustice.

- **Phase title (Phase the Fifth):** *"The Woman Pays"* — three words that sum up the whole double-standard theme.
- **Phase title (Phase the Second):** *"Maiden No More"* — marks Tess's changed social state after Alec.
- **The "blighted star":** to her little brother Abraham, Tess describes the worlds as being like apples on a tree — *"Most of them splendid and sound — a few blighted"* — and calls the earth *"A blighted one."* This early scene foreshadows her doomed life on an unlucky world.

(Other famous moments — best paraphrased, not quoted word-for-word: the seduction in The Chase and the narrator's question about where Tess's guardian angel was; Angel telling Tess that the woman he loved is not the woman before him; Alec feeding Tess strawberries at Trantridge; the red-painted biblical texts of damnation; the blood from Alec's body soaking through the ceiling in the shape of "a gigantic ace of hearts"; Tess's arrest asleep on the stone at Stonehenge; the black flag rising over the prison at Wintoncester.)

🧠 Critics' Views (safe to cite)

Critic	View	Use for
Tony Tanner	In his essay on colour and movement, he shows how patterns of **red and white** run through the book, binding Tess to blood, passion, and inevitable sacrifice.	Technique, symbolism, fate
Dorothy Van Ghent	Reads Tess as bound to the **earth and the soil**; the many "coincidences" express a natural, impersonal order that overwhelms the individual.	Nature, fate, coincidence
Irving Howe	Praises Tess as one of the great heroines of English fiction and stresses Hardy's rare tenderness in imagining a woman's inner life; notes her strange **passivity** under suffering.	Character of Tess, tragedy
Penny Boumelha	A feminist reading: the male narrator's gaze both pities and *possesses* Tess; her body and sexuality are constantly watched and controlled by men.	Woman as victim, narrative voice
Raymond Williams	Places Hardy within the crisis of the **rural community** — the educated observer watching an old country world break down under class and economic change.	Class, rural change, society
D. H. Lawrence	Argues Tess is destroyed for asserting her natural, individual life against a rigid **social convention** that cannot allow it.	Purity, nature vs. society
Virginia Woolf	Regarded Hardy as among the great tragic writers of the English novel, whose power lies in sudden "moments of vision."	Tragedy, overall greatness

📘 Exam Q&A Bank

Part A — Reference to Context (5 marks)

Passage 1 — "Justice was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess." 🔥 *Very likely*

These closing lines are from Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), spoken by the **omniscient narrator** at the very end of Phase the Seventh. Tess has been hanged in the city of Wintoncester for the murder of Alec d'Urberville; the black flag has just risen over the prison to signal her death, and Angel Clare and Tess's sister 'Liza-Lu watch from a hill. The narrator borrows an "Aeschylean phrase" — an image from the Greek tragedian Aeschylus — to say that the ruling powers of the universe have treated Tess's whole life as cruel "sport." The word "Justice" is bitterly **ironic** (ব্যঙ্গাত্মক): the law calls this justice, but Hardy shows Tess as an innocent victim of chance, of two men, and of an unjust society. **Significance:** the lines are the

clearest statement of Hardy's **pessimism** (নৈরাশ্যবাদ) — the belief in an indifferent or hostile universe (নিয়তি) that toys with good human beings — and they leave the reader questioning what "justice" really means.

Passage 2 — the "blighted star" (Tess speaks to her brother Abraham). ⭐ *Likely*

This early passage is from Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, in Phase the First, as Tess and her little brother Abraham drive the cart with the beehives to market at night. When Abraham asks whether the stars are worlds like ours, Tess answers that they are like apples on their tree — most "splendid and sound," but a few "blighted" (রোগে নষ্ট) — and she says that we live on "a blighted one." Moments later, worn out, Tess falls asleep, and the family horse Prince is killed by an oncoming mail-cart, an accident that pushes the poor family to send Tess to the d'Urbervilles. **Significance:** the "blighted star" is powerful **foreshadowing** (পূর্বাভাস). It shows Tess already feeling that she was born onto an unlucky, damaged world — Hardy's pessimistic vision of fate (নিয়তি) — and the death of Prince that follows becomes the first accident in the long chain of misfortunes that destroys her.

Part B — Short Notes (5 marks)

Why is Hardy pessimistic? ⭐ *Likely*

Hardy is called a **pessimist** (নৈরাশ্যবাদী) because his novels show good, innocent people crushed by forces they cannot control. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the pure and loving Tess suffers endlessly and is finally hanged, while the universe seems cold and indifferent (উদাসীন) to her goodness. Hardy suggests that human life is ruled not by a kind God but by blind **chance and fate** (নিয়তি). This is why so many cruel accidents shape the plot: the death of the horse Prince, the confession-letter that slips unseen under the carpet, and Angel's return from Brazil *just* too late. The famous closing line, that the "President of the Immortals" had ended "his sport with Tess," pictures the ruling powers as playing cruelly with human suffering. Hardy also attacks a hypocritical society whose rigid rules punish the innocent. Yet we should call his view **"realistic sadness"** rather than simple despair: Hardy pities his characters deeply and protests against injustice. His pessimism, then, is a serious moral cry against a world that does not reward goodness.

Angel Clare — idealist or hypocrite? 💡 *Possible*

Angel Clare is the clergyman's son whom Tess meets and marries at Talbothays Dairy. At first he seems modern, gentle, and free-thinking: he rejects a narrow church career, respects country people, and loves Tess for her natural freshness, even calling her by the names of goddesses. But Angel loves an *ideal* image of Tess more than the real woman. On their wedding night he confesses that he once spent a dissolute time with a stranger, and Tess forgives him instantly. When Tess then confesses that Alec ruined her — through no fault of her own — Angel cannot forgive her and abandons her, saying that the woman he loved is not the woman before him. This exposes his cruel **hypocrisy** (ভণ্ডামি) and the **double standard** (দ্বৈত নীতি): the same fault is pardoned in the man but condemned in the woman. Angel later repents bitterly and returns, but too late to save Tess. He is therefore not a simple villain but a well-meaning idealist whose cold conventional morality helps destroy the woman he loves.

Part C — Essays (15 marks)

"Discuss Tess as a pure woman." 🔥 ***Very likely***

When Thomas Hardy published *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* in 1891, he gave it a deliberately provocative subtitle: *"A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented."* Many Victorian readers were shocked, because their society believed that a woman who had lost her virginity outside marriage was "fallen" and impure. Hardy's whole novel is an argument against that cruel judgement. He shows that Tess Durbeyfield, though she is seduced, bears an illegitimate child, and finally kills a man, remains morally **pure** (পবিত্র) in the deepest sense — pure in heart, honest, loving, and innocent of real guilt. This essay argues that Hardy successfully proves Tess a pure woman by separating true moral purity from mere social "respectability."

First, Tess is pure because her ruin is not a sin but a **victimization** (তার উপর অন্যায়). Alec d'Urberville takes advantage of her exhaustion and innocence in the dark wood of The Chase. Tess does not go to him from lust or greed; she is a child-like girl trapped by poverty and by a scheming man. Hardy's narrator even asks where Tess's guardian angel was, placing the blame on cruel circumstance rather than on Tess. By titling this section "Maiden No More," Hardy shows that Tess has lost only her social

status, not her inner goodness. As the critic **D. H. Lawrence** argued, Tess is punished for asserting her natural life against a rigid convention that cannot allow it.

Secondly, Tess shows her purity through her honesty and conscience. Unlike Angel, who hides his past until it is convenient, Tess is desperate to confess the truth before marriage. She writes a letter of confession and, when it is lost, tries again and again to tell him. Her pain comes from her refusal to deceive the man she loves. Hardy contrasts this with the **hypocrisy** (ভণ্ডামি) of respectable society, which Hardy attacks through Phase the Fifth's bitter title, *"The Woman Pays."* Angel forgives his own loose past yet cannot forgive Tess's misfortune — proving that the impurity lies in the **double standard**, not in Tess.

Thirdly, Hardy links Tess with **nature** to underline her natural innocence. She is a "daughter of the soil," happiest among the green fields and cows of Talbothays. Her body and feelings are as natural as the birds and flowers around her. In this pagan, natural world, Tess's love and desire are healthy and good; it is human law, not nature, that calls her a sinner. The critic **Dorothy Van Ghent** reads Tess as deeply bound to the earth, part of a natural order larger than narrow human morality.

Finally, even Tess's greatest crime does not destroy her purity. When she kills Alec, she acts in a moment of despair and love, after years of suffering and betrayal. Hardy presents the murder almost as a tragic release rather than an evil act, and the few days Tess then spends with Angel are described with tenderness. At the end, the narrator's bitter remark that the "President of the Immortals" had ended "his sport with Tess" tells us that the guilt belongs to fate and to society, not to the pure heart of the woman herself.

In conclusion, Hardy fully earns his subtitle. By showing Tess as a victim rather than a sinner, by stressing her honesty and her natural goodness, and by exposing the hypocrisy of those who judge her, Hardy redefines purity as a matter of the heart. Tess remains, in the truest sense, "A Pure Woman" — and the impurity Hardy exposes belongs to the men and the society that destroy her.

"Who is responsible for Tess's Death?" 🔥 ***Very likely***

At the end of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), the innocent heroine is hanged for murder, and the narrator remarks that the "President of the Immortals" had ended "his sport with Tess." The novel forces us to ask a difficult question: who is truly responsible for the death of this pure and loving woman? The answer is that no single person is to blame. Tess is destroyed by a chain of causes — two men, a cruel society, blind chance, and even her own family — all working together. Hardy uses her tragedy to attack the injustice of the world.

The most obvious guilty man is **Alec d'Urberville**. He begins Tess's ruin by seducing (ছলনা করে সর্বনাশ) her in The Chase when she is young and helpless. Later, when she is poor and alone, he pursues her again and uses her family's desperation to make her his mistress. Alec turns Tess's life into a trap from which she cannot escape, and it is the reappearance of Alec that finally drives her to murder. Without Alec's selfish desire, Tess would never have "fallen" or been driven to the crime that hangs her.

Yet **Angel Clare** is just as responsible. Angel wins Tess's whole heart and then abandons her over a fault that was never hers, revealing the cruel **double standard** (দ্বৈত নীতি) that Hardy names in his phase title *"The Woman Pays."* If Angel had forgiven Tess as she forgave him, she would have been safe and loved. His cold idealism leaves Tess poor, lonely, and defenceless — exactly the condition that pushes her back to Alec. Angel's late repentance and return come too late; by then the damage is done.

Behind both men stands an unjust **society** and its narrow morality. Victorian rules label Tess "impure" for a wrong done to her, deny Christian burial to her baby, and offer a poor woman almost no way to survive alone. The critic **Raymond Williams** stresses how Hardy shows the old rural community breaking down, leaving the country poor exposed and powerless. Tess's poverty — the eviction of her family after her father's death — is a social force that hands her back to Alec as surely as any villain.

Hardy also blames **fate and chance** (নিয়তি). A whole series of accidents traps Tess: the death of the horse Prince, which first sends her to the d'Urbervilles; the confession-letter that slips under the carpet unread; Angel's return from Brazil just a little too late. Even in childhood Tess feels she lives on "a blighted one," a damaged, unlucky star. As **Dorothy Van Ghent** notes, these "coincidences" express an impersonal order that crushes the individual, and the closing image of the gods' cruel "sport" makes fate itself a defendant.

Finally, we must add Tess's own **family** and even, in a small way, Tess herself. Her father's foolish pride in the d'Urberville name and her mother's careless scheming first send Tess into danger. Tess's own deep sense of guilt and her loyalty make her accept punishment she does not deserve. But Hardy is careful to show that her "faults" spring from goodness — honesty, love, and self-sacrifice — not from sin.

In conclusion, responsibility for Tess's death is shared. Alec ruins her, Angel abandons her, society condemns her, poverty traps her, and fate arranges the fatal accidents. Hardy's real target is a whole unjust order that lets an innocent woman be destroyed and then calls it "Justice." The tragedy of Tess is therefore not the fault of one villain but the verdict of a cruel and indifferent world.

⚡ One-Page Revision Sheet

Item	Quick Recall
Story in 3 lines	Poor Tess is seduced and ruined by Alec d'Urberville; she loves and marries Angel Clare, who abandons her over her past; driven back to Alec by poverty, she kills him, and is finally hanged — Hardy calling her all along "A Pure Woman."
2 must-quotes	(1) "*A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented*" (subtitle). (2) "*Justice was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess.*" (closing line)
2 backup quotes	(1) "*The Woman Pays*" (Phase the Fifth title — double standard). (2) "*Maiden No More*" (Phase the Second title).
2 critics	Tony Tanner (red/white colour symbolism). D. H. Lawrence (Tess destroyed for her natural individuality against convention).
Technique words	Omniscient/intrusive narrator, tragic heroine, colour symbolism (red & white), pathetic fallacy, foreshadowing, coincidence, classical allusion, seven "Phases."
Top 3 likely essays	(1) Discuss Tess as a pure woman. 🔥 (2) Who is responsible for Tess's death? 🔥 (3) Why is Hardy pessimistic? ⭐

Exam-timing tip: In a 4-hour paper, give each 15-mark essay about 40–45 minutes — spend 5 minutes planning a thesis and points first, then write intro + 4–5 body paragraphs + conclusion, and drop in at least one exact quote and one critic's name in every essay.