

OLLI, Fall, 2020, The Victorian Family on Film and TV, Lost and Found

“Tess,” 1979 film, directed by Roman Polanski, was based on the 1891 Thomas Hardy novel, “Tess of the D’Urbervilles.” Adapted from Hardy’s Novel by Gérard Brach, Roman Polanski, and John Brownjohn.

The Cast:

Nastassia Kinski as Tess Durbeyfield  
Peter First as Angel Clare  
Leigh Lawson as Alec Stokes-D’Urberville  
John Collin as John Durbeyfield  
Rosemary Martin as Mrs. Durbeyfield  
Carolyn Pickles as Marian  
Richard Pearson as Vicar of Marlott  
David Markham as Reverend Clare  
Pascale de Boysson as Mrs. Clare  
Suzanna Hamilton as Izz Huett  
Caroline Embling as Retty  
Tony Church as Parson Tringham  
Sylvia Coleridge as Mrs. D’Urberville  
Fred Bryant as Dairyman Crick  
Tom Chadbon as Cuthbert Clare  
Arielle Dombasle as Mercy Chant  
Dicken Ashworth as Farmer Groby  
John Bett as Felix Clare  
Tom Chadborn as Cuthbert Clare

Lesley as Girl in Henhouse

Roman Polanski (1933-- ) was inspired to make a film of the Hardy novel by his wife Sharon Tate, who gave him a copy of the book. She said that it would make a great movie, and she would like to play the part of Tess. Sharon was on her way to America, leaving Polanski in Europe, and that was the last time Polanski saw Sharon. She was murdered by the Manson Family on August 9, 1969. The film was dedicated to her.

The film is set in Dorset, England, and the shooting of the film was in Normandy, Brittany, and Nord de Calais. In 1978, when the film was made, Polanski was in exile from the U.S. because of a sex charge, from 1977, and he could have been extradited from the U.K. to the U.S. Polanski is still in France, in flight from American justice. Polanski is now 87 years old.

Polanski intended the film to give the feelings of an ancient peasant culture, like the Polish countryside which he knew as a child. Some scenes resemble the genre paintings of the French artists Georges de la Tour from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and Gustave Courbet of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The cinematographer for this film, Geoffrey Unsworth, died of a heart attack on Oct. 28, 1978. He had shot most of the exterior scenes at the beginning of the film. He was replaced by Ghislain Cloquet who shot the rest of the film, including most of the interior scenes. The two

men won the Academy Award for Best Cinematography. It was nominated for other awards, and won awards in the U.K., and France, where it won a "Best Foreign Film" award. The film cost an estimated 12 million dollars, and it grossed 20 million in the U.S. It premiered in France at 186 minutes. Later it was cut down to as little as 136 minutes in theatres and on home video. Around 2012, the film was restored to its original condition.

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) was born near Dorchester in Dorset in Southern England. His novels mostly take place in "Wessex", the name that Hardy used for some counties in South Western England. "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" (1891) was his next to last novel. "Tess..." was first published in a self-censored newspaper version, and finally, in 1912, it appeared in an uncensored edition.

Hardy was famously accused by his critics of pessimism. The phrase "the implanted crookedness of things suggests the struggle of man against the indifferent force that rules the world and inflicts on him the sufferings and ironies of life and love." (Oxford Companion to English Literature) It is easy to complain that Hardy seems to stack the deck against his heroes and heroines. If something can go wrong, it will. That said, Hardy writes of Tess with abounding compassion, and his prose evocation of English country life is beyond praise. His subtitle to the novel was "A Pure Woman," a gesture which threw the gauntlet down to the social ostracism of the "fallen woman." This novel caused a scandal, dividing critics and readers in the acceptance or rejection of the novel's message. The character of Tess challenged Victorian ideas of female virtue and especially the taboo subject of pre-marital sex. But the scandal of "Tess" was nothing to the storm of disapproval aroused by "Jude the Obscure" in 1896. After that, in the 28 years left to him, Hardy gave up novel writing, and devoted himself to poetry, becoming one of the most important poets of his time.

The novel "Tess..." was frequently adopted for the stage, originally in 1924, with a script by Hardy himself, and it has since been often presented on the stage.

Among the more recent TV versions are: 1998: with Justine Waddell as Tess (our Molly in "Wives and Daughters"), Jason Flemyng as Alex, and Oliver Milburn as Angel (3 hours)

2008: Gemma Atherton as Tess, Hans Matheson as Alex, and Eddie Redmayne as Angel. (4 hours).

The story has inspired two Indian film versions and one Ammanese version, also two Rock Operas.

The music is by Philippe Sarde, and the melody which Angel Clare plays on the recorder is a popular Polish folk song, which is usually sung to the words from Franceszek Karpiński's idyl "Laura I Filon."