

# Tess of the d'Urbervilles: (f) A tragic tale?

☞ refers to links on [www.crossref-it.info](http://www.crossref-it.info)

## Tess of the d'Urbervilles: (f) A tragic tale?

- ❖ **Lesson focus:** To examine the concept of tragedy and how well it fits the novel.
- ❖ **Opening exercise:** Provide several recent newspapers (the teacher could pre-select and cut out appropriate reports, if this is seen as helpful)
  - Students identify, and discuss, which stories are tragic (in the common usage of the word and in a literary sense)
  - Look for any links to the characters and events of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*
  - The website definitions.net > definitions > tragedy gives a series of images which represent tragedy and which could prompt interesting discussion. See also
    - ☞ Structure in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* > Moral patterns in *Tess* > The moral structure of the traditional English novel + The moral pattern of romances + The significance of Tess's fall + Reward
- ❖ **Discussion ideas:** Divide the students into groups and give each group one of the definitions of tragedy found on **Worksheet f)i**
  - There are others available by doing an internet search, if required
  - Each group should decide how well the definition fits *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, giving specific examples and references whenever possible
    - ☞ Themes > Coincidence, fate and destiny in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*
  - Try to agree a group definition of tragedy which specifically fits both this novel and what you think are Hardy's intentions in writing it.
- ☞ Religious / philosophical background > Challenges to established religious belief + An alternative belief framework + Hardy's pessimism
  - ☞ Critical analysis > Philosophic analysis of *Tess* > Determinism)
- ❖ **Textual examination:** Re-read Chapter 59
  - How well does it fit as an ending to your definition of tragedy?
    - ☞ Synopses and commentary > Chapter 59; see especially the note on endings in Victorian novels
  - Discuss what other possible endings there could have been, and why you think Hardy did not choose them.
- ❖ **Recreative task:** Write a speech for the prosecution, and one for the defence, in Tess's trial
  - You could also write some witnesses' statements.
- ❖ **Critical task:** 'The characters, more sinned against than sinning, are helpless victims of fate.'
  - Consider the novel in the light of this remark.
    - ☞ Themes in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* > Tess as a victim > Tess as a tragic heroine)
- ❖ **Extension task:** Apply your definition of tragedy to another Hardy novel you know
  - If you have not read any other ones, try to use a detailed summary of one of his other works, easily found on the internet
  - Alternatively, apply it to a modern novel which you might describe as tragic.