



Wessex Tales

Thomas Hardy

Download now

Read Online ➔

Wessex Tales

Thomas Hardy

Wessex Tales Thomas Hardy

In addition to his great "Wessex Novels," Thomas Hardy wrote *Wessex Tales* (1896), a collection of six stories written in the 1880s and 1890s that, for the most part, are as bleakly ironic and unforgiving as the darkest of his great novels -- *Jude the Obscure*. But this great novelist began and ended his writing career as a poet. In-between, he wrote a number of books that many readers find emotionally-wrenching, but which are considered among the classics of 19th Century British literature, including *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Readers will experience Hardy's uncompromising, unsentimental realism in *Wessex Tales*, and for those seeking a taste of the Dorset poet and novelist, they represent an ideal start.

Wessex Tales Details

Date : Published January 1st 2007 by Aegypan (first published 1888)

ISBN : 9781603120166

Author : Thomas Hardy

Format : Paperback 200 pages

Genre : Classics, Short Stories, Fiction, Literature

 [Download Wessex Tales ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Wessex Tales ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Wessex Tales Thomas Hardy

From Reader Review Wessex Tales for online ebook

Nancy says

In the first place, I love Thomas Hardy so the fact I would like his Wessex Tales is a given. Hardy also shows his versatility in depicting the lives of every day people, the poor and the rich, a supernatural tale, a story about smuggling and smugglers and a potential love affair gone awry. Hardy was also recording legends and customs of his native Dorset. For me, at least, it was just fun to "go home" and listen to the music of the language.

Everett Darling says

Hardy's got a true talent for tragedy. The Melancholy Hussar, a doleful tale of ill-fated lovers, brought a tear to my cheek, while Fellow-Townsmen and The Withered Arm nearly did the same.

The stories are simply too short. Not that short-story writing isn't an art unto itself, where one could concede to a certain format. Only that Hardy's world seems to call for a lengthier story. I found myself drawn in, and before being completely in the throws, was pulled out again to speculate on lives I was just starting to understand. Perhaps this is a moot point, being after all a collection of short-stories, but next time I turn to Hardy, I am picking up a novel. Or perhaps these were even ideas for novels that hadn't panned out for him, I can just guess.

Stewart says

Thomas Hardy has more and more impressed me as I have, late in life, reread "The Return of the Native," and read for the first time "The Mayor of Casterbridge" and "Tess of the D'Urbervilles." All of these novels take place in the southwest part of England that Hardy called "Wessex."

Hardy is less known for his short stories, but I found that the seven short stories in his "Wessex Tales," published in 1886, achieve the same high standard of his famous novels. They use his same intimate knowledge of local customs and language, his discerning eye for detail in the lives of the local people and their environment, and his substantial insight into the human condition.

The stories employ a variety of styles and moods. "The Withered Arm" is a bizarre tale similar in style to some of the writing of Edgar Allan Poe.

"The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" is a story torn from history about the King's German Legion, a few thousand German infantry and cavalry stationed in southern England just after the turn of the 19th century during the Napoleonic Wars. The legion later fought alongside British troops on the continent. The plot concerns a love triangle involving a young English woman, Phyllis Grove; her fiancé, Humphrey Gould; and a German corporal, Matthaüs Tina.

"Fellow-Townsmen" is a moving story about wrong choices and lost opportunities. Barnet, a rich son of a successful flax merchant, recently elected a councilman of an unnamed town near the coast, tries to undo a choice he made many years before the time of the story, the details of which can be discerned only from oblique references.

My favorite story was "The Distracted Preacher," written in 1879, with a note at the end, penned in 1912. It is one of the funniest short stories I have ever read, a tale based on regional history, full of great absurdity, but told with a "straight face."

Hardy's amazing power of description, a strength of his novels, is also evident in this short story. Here he

describes the title character Mr. Stockdale entering a room: "He advanced to the parlour, as the front room was called, though its stone floor was scarcely disguised by the carpet, which only overlaid the trodden areas, leaving sandy deserts under the furniture. But the room looked snug and cheerful. The fire-light shone out brightly, trembling on the bulging mouldings of the table-legs, playing with brass knobs and handles, and lurking in great strength on the under surface of the chimney-piece."

The young Methodist minister Stockdale is assigned temporarily to the church in a coastal village called Nether-Moyton. He meets Lizzy Newberry, a widow who owns and runs the lodging house in which he resides. He soon is enamored of her, and the narrator says, "Thus a titillating fortnight was passed by young Stockdale, during which time things proceeded much as such matters have done since the beginning of history: he saw the object of attachment several times one day, did not see her at all the next, met her when he least expected to do so, missed her when hints and signs where she should be at a given hour almost amounted to an appointment."

As Mr. Stockdale gets to know Mrs. Newberry, he discovers all sorts of odd behavior from her and the villagers, and smuggling-related comedy and gentle satire ensues. Some of the scenes (think sniffing) had me laughing so hard, I had to put the book down. In a 1920 endnote to the 1879 story, he disowns the original ending and suggests another more likely one.

In these short stories as in his novels, Hardy takes a more realistic view of the bittersweet relations between men and women, the fragility of romantic love, and the harshness of life than that taken by novelists of the time and expected by the British and American reading audiences of the late 19th century, steeped as they were in convention and sentimentality. I would dare say that even today Hardy is – to me – a welcomed antidote to sentimentality often found in popular novels, TV shows, and films (especially American films), whose writers subscribe (or are forced to subscribe) to the pervasive feel-good sentiments of "love conquers all," "there is one true love – and only one true love – for every person," and other romantic claptrap passed on from one generation, that should know better, to the unsuspecting next generation. As Hardy observed and pondered life around him, he thought, in his writing, that providing the "ahs" of romantic sighs and happy endings for every story was dishonest.

Elizabeth (Alaska) says

Not all editions of Wessex Tales are created equal. It was first published in 1888 with 5 stories. A new edition was published in 1896, which included a new story "An Imaginative Woman." There was one more edition in 1912 which included the core five stories, but seemingly played musical chairs with others.

I have been reading Hardy on my Kindle (Complete Works of Thomas Hardy) which included the 1896 edition. I'm so glad for that, else I would have missed that added story, which was one of my favorites of the collection. A married woman thinks she has fallen in love with a popular poet, though she has never met him other than through his poetry and some very minor correspondence. The second story, "The Three Strangers", has led me to see that Hardy often uses lighter, perhaps more simple/innocent people, to contrast even more sharply the darker side of his work.

Those two stories together with the last story, "The Distracted Preacher" were my favorites of the six. This story uses as its vehicle a smuggling operation and showed that Hardy is quite capable of foregoing his darker side and has a sense of humor, though the humor is definitely not the broader humor of Trollope. Yes, I had my favorites in this collection, but all were enjoyable.

Margie says

Many years ago we visited Thomas Hardy country in Dorset, England and I bought *Wessex Tales*, seven short stories that Hardy wrote about his native county. The book holds special memories for me of the summer day that we visited the cottage where Hardy was born in 1840 in Higher Bockhampton, Dorset, and where he wrote *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *Far From the Madding Crowd*. For me it was a literary pilgrimage to the shrine of one of my favorite authors.

Hardy fictionalized Dorset County as Wessex in this group of seven short stories. Wessex also became the setting for most of his novels. These tales are based on stories and folklore of his native Dorset in the early 1800s to about 1830, a generation before Hardy was born. Hardy was afraid that the folklore, history and tales that had been passed down for generations were disappearing and set about preserving them in several volumes of short stories.

Alternately macabre (*The Withered Arm*), humorous (*The Three Strangers*), sadly fatalistic (*Fellow-Townsmen*), and tragic (*The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion*), these tales are all strongly connected to Hardy's love of his native Dorset.

I loved the humorous tale of the rum smugglers in *The Distracted Preacher* and could feel the excitement of Lizzy as she encouraged the preacher to accompany her on a smuggling expedition. "I'm sure you will enjoy it! Everybody does who tries it," said Lizzy, and indeed, smuggling was not only the excitement, but the lifeblood of the town. "My father did it, and so did my grandfather and almost everybody in Nether-Moynton lives by it and life would be so dull if it wasn't for that, that I should not care to live at all," she elaborates. By the time Hardy was born, there was no more rum smuggling, it having been taken over by a criminal element and strongly quashed by the government.

Hardy, ever faithful to his beloved Dorset, knew and wrote about his county fervently, forever preserving its folklore and history in the characters who lived in Wessex (however much he constrained them with circumstance and timing). I was excited to come upon this book once again and not only enjoy Hardy's engaging tales, but also relive the time we visited Dorset and the cottage where he was born.

Following is a picture and information about Thomas Hardy's cottage:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_...

Jim says

It took me a long time to read Hardy, I guess there is a fear of approaching a great novelist. These short stories are an ideal introduction, after reading these I was inspired to read "*Tess of the D'Ubervilles*" and I am currently reading "*The Return of the Native*". Hardy is like the rural equivalent of Dickens, exposing the inequalities of the Victorian Countryside just as Dickens was exposing the inequalities in Victorian London. Hardy's tales are set in Wessex which loosely corresponds with Dorset. Industrialisation is slowly coming to the countryside, there is a sense keenly felt by Hardy that many of the ways will be gone for ever. In *Wessex Tales* Hardy shows sympathy with the work of shepherds, dairymaids and smugglers. The stories are never rushed they have a gentle pace befitting their 19th century rural setting. Hardy is meticulous with details of the land and agricultural practices, he is a reliable companion to take you on a journey back to 19th century England.

Courtney says

Hardy, Thomas

The Thomas Hardy Omnibus: 4 Great Novels and 7 Short Stories

In compilation only.

- 1) The Three Strangers
 - 2) A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four
 - 3) The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion
 - 4) The Withered Arm
 - 5) Fellow-Townsmen
 - 6) Interlopers at the Knap
 - 7) The Distracted Preacher
-

Nell says

This is a great introduction to those unfamiliar with Hardy's work. Easy to digest and never 'bogged down' with allusive or flowery language, this is Hardy stripped down. Each tale possesses its own element of scandal, with characters embroiled in extra-marital affairs of the heart, illegitimate children and jealousy. What's all the more tantalising is often Hardy refrains from being so explicit. Much is revealed through the gossip aside from an otherwise irrelevant stock character, with the seed planted for the reader to let their speculation grow. Hardy loves a good plot twist, so for those who like a bit of suspense in their classic lit, this is the perfect read.

Below are my thoughts on my favourite of the tales -

The Imaginative Woman

An unfulfilled housewife, her intellect unchallenged by her blasé husband and her want of passion unmet, becomes infatuated with the absent tenant of a room she is temporarily occupying. With only the thinnest of associations between them, Ella Marchmill becomes increasingly desperate in her attempts to orchestrate a meeting - one she vainly hopes may turn a correspondence into something more real. In this short tale, Hardy paints a passionate vignette of unrequited love laden with irony.

I loved the irony in this tale. Hardy perfectly evokes the maddening desperation of an unrequited 'relationship' - made all the more desperate considering that the 'couple' never physically meet or actually see each other. I'm always drawn to the timelessness of a story's sentiment or message, and in an updated version, this same tale could be told in the modern world of social media and 'Facebook stalking' - though the premise is a lot more eloquently put in 'The Imaginative Woman'! This was surprisingly straight forward to read, and for those not yet familiar with his work, a brilliant first foray into Hardy.

First posted on And Nell Writes

Karishma says

Riveting stories.

Elaine says

Sometimes I tire of reading a short story anthology because you get into a story, and then it ends, and then you have to meet a new set of characters, etc. However, for anyone who reads a lot of Hardy, some of these stories were expanded to be included as scenes of some of his novels, and I thought it was fun to examine them under that light.

Brooke Tallent says

Thomas Hardy short stories leave out nuances of happiness because of the brevity and I found them overall just depressing.

Dana Loo says

Una bella raccolta impreziosita da una prefazione davvero esaustiva e interessante. Racconti che non smentiscono la grandezza di Hardy anche in un genere da molti sottovalutato...

Chari says

Realmente me gusta muchísimo la narrativa de Thomas Hardy, ya sean cuentos o novelas.
Me encanta.

Maneja con total maestría las descripciones, las presentaciones de los personajes y el desarrollo de las tramas expuestas en cada uno de sus libros y relatos.

Me encanta.

Lo había dicho..?

Katie Lumsden says

A ready enjoyable read - a lot of great stories, and some quite different to other Hardy works, more influenced by the gothic, etc. I especially loved the story 'An Imaginative Woman'.

Ali says

By now I think I must have made it fairly obvious that I love Thomas Hardy, and so I was looking forward to my re-reading of this superb collection of Hardy shorter fiction for my on-going Hardy reading challenge. Wessex Tales contains seven stories, the first two of them really very short – the others considerably longer. In this collection Hardy explored familiar themes of marriage and rural life that we see in his novels, but he also experiments rather in a supernatural tale, ‘The Withered Arm’, which I think I have read at least three times, as it crops up in various other short story collections. The Three Strangers is wonderfully atmospheric, with a delightful little twist, although short it is a perfectly crafted little story, a small isolated cottage, packed with local folk for a celebration, inclement weather and the unexpected arrival of three strangers. ‘The Withered Arm’ – for me at least – is right up there with the best of the gothic type ghost and supernatural stories. There’s a wronged woman, an illegitimate child, a pretty young wife, a curse and a wonderful twist – delicious.

Hardy doesn’t allow himself to be in anyway curtailed by the genre of the short story – he gives full reign to his imagination, and his characters are fully explored. Hardy presents us with men making foolish and rash decisions in the pursuit of marriage, the women they reject so obviously superior. Using irony, coincidence, comedy and tragedy, devices that are so familiar to readers of his novels, Hardy could quite easily have spun out several of these brilliantly constructed stories into novels. In ‘Fellow Townsmen’ and ‘Interlopers at the Knap’ the stories span many years – characters are made to regret the decisions of the past. While in ‘The Distracted Preacher’, a good man puts his principles to one side in order to help the woman he loves – in a wonderfully atmospheric and slightly comic tale of smugglers.

Hardy was very aware of the changing world in which he lived – and in the Wessex Tales it is a world that is presented to us with the great understanding and affection that he had for it. Born and brought up in a humble home Hardy understood the rural world that he wrote about, he understood the work of the furze cutter and the shepherd, he had an ear for the dialect of the region, which he reproduces in many minor characters, characters who no matter how minor they are manage to be completely real.

“Is it necessary to add that the echoes of many characteristic tales, dating from that picturesque time, still linger about here, in more or less fragmentary form to be caught by the attentive ear? Some of them I have repeated; most of them I have forgotten; one I have never repeated, and assuredly can never forget.”

Hardy even manages to lend some of his stories an air of traditional folklore – the story being re-told by a nameless narrator after a passage of time. I wonder if it these were the kind of stories that Hardy would have grown up hearing.

Although I do love Hardy’s pastoral novels best, I think his shorter fiction to be very well worth reading, and wonder if it doesn’t sometimes get overlooked a little. I actually think that The Wessex Tales wouldn’t be a bad place to start for those who have never read any Thomas Hardy.