

Edinburgh Fringe 2015 Review: TES

Steve Larkin's modern retelling of Tess of the D'Urbervilles fails to inspire reviewer [Amy Wong](#)

Thursday 27 August 2015



Image: TBC

★★☆☆☆

Venue: Underbelly George Square

A modern day version of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* in which Tess is a teenage boy falsely accused of rape has the potential to be very interesting. Unfortunately, Steve Larkin's *TES* doesn't quite get off the ground and is mediocre at best. Several of the story's connections to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* feel forced, such as the main character Kester finding out he's a descendant of Byron. *TES* would have probably worked better if it had been an original story rather than an adaptation. However, the biggest problem with the show is that Larkin appears to have more fun performing it than the audience do listening to it.

A lot of the show's characters are crudely drawn caricatures, from Kester's apathetic father to his gormless best friend. Kester is an uninspiring protagonist and Larkin makes an unconvincing teenager in his hoodie, especially as his depiction of life on a council estate is hideously simplified. Larkin also seems to struggle with creating realistic female characters. Alice and Claire, Kester's two love interests, feel far too similar and neither one of these relationships feels particularly believable.

The plot is thinly sketched and leaves the audience with too many questions. It'd be naïve to think that miscarriages of justice never happen but you'd think the messages Alice sends to Kester would at least be mentioned during the trial. Even if you attribute this to the inefficiency of Kester's lawyer, it's hard to believe that Kester would go on to get teaching jobs with his criminal record. More attention to detail is needed when it comes to *TES'* plot. It's difficult to connect with characters that are so contrived so key scenes lack drama because there's no reason to care about what happens. The depictions of the poetry slams in the second half need more dynamism too.

There are times when *TES* drifts towards something vaguely resembling social commentary. Larkin implicitly criticises the inadequacy of state education, cuts to arts funding and how class inequality affects the validity of the legal system. There's even a sly dig at the *Daily Mail*. However, these issues are never explored in enough depth to justify their presence in *TES*.

Larkin's got some good ideas but *TES* would benefit greatly from a bit more life and imagination. In its current state, it's lazily written, bland and easily forgotten.



Most Read Discussed

1. [The Movements: The Theatre of Cruelty](#)
2. [Old Favourites: Mary Poppins](#)
3. [Old Favourites: Looking for Alaska](#)
4. [Theatre Review: An Inspector Calls](#)
5. [Theatre Review: Antigone](#)
6. [Review: After The End](#)

Write for Nouse Arts

[Get in touch with the editors](#)

[Join the Facebook group](#)

More in Arts

[Old Favourites: Mary Poppins](#)

[Old Favourites: Looking for Alaska](#)

[Theatre Review: Antigone](#)

[Matilda's Turning Thirty](#)

[Listen Up: Generation Podcast](#)

[A Simple Light in the Dark](#)

[About Nouse](#)
[Who's Nouse](#)
[Website Credits](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[Advertising](#)
[Archives](#)
[Student Discounts](#)
[Print Editions](#)

Mini-Sites

[Nouse on Twitter](#)

[Nouse on Facebook](#)

[Nouse on Google+](#)

© 1964–2018 Nouse

[Policies](#) |

