

JIHOČESKÁ UNIVERZITA V ČESKÝCH BUDĚJOVICÍCH
FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
ÚSTAV ANGLISTIKY

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

STRONG FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THOMAS HARDY'S NOVELS

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Studijní obor: Anglický jazyk a literatura, Německý jazyk a literatura

Ročník: 5.

2023

I confirm that this thesis is my own work written using solely the sources and literature properly quoted and acknowledged as works cited.

1.7. 2023 České Budějovice

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Acknowledgement

At this point, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis supervisor doc. PhDr. Ladislav Nagy, Ph.D. for his guidance, patience, and valuable advice he provided during the creation of this thesis.

Anotace

Bakalářská práce se zabývá postavením žen ve Viktoriánské době, konkrétně ve fikci Thomase Hardyho. Cílem práce je analyzovat a charakterizovat Hardyho hrdinky, které navzdory zavedeným Viktoriánským společenským normám, vyčnívaly z davu. Thomas Hardy poukázal na problémy tykající se žen, které byly v té době převážně přehlíženy. Porovnáním hrdinek s tradičním představou viktoriánských žen, odhalíme jejich odlišnosti. Základem této práce je analýza tří ženských románů a jejich protagonistek – Bathsheby Everdenové z *Daleko od hlučícího davu* (1874), Eustacie Vyeové z *Rodákova návratu* (1878) a Tess Durbeyfieldové z *Tess z D'Urbervillů* (1891). První kapitola se bude soustředit na popis Viktoriánského období a jeho společnosti, obzvláště žen a jejich status v patriarchální společnosti. Následující kapitoly se budou věnovat již zmíněným ženským postavám, jejich modernímu smýšlení a pokusům vzdorovat Viktoriánským ideálům. Tyto ženy čelily tradičním genderovým rolím Viktoriánské společnosti a usilovaly o zrovnoprávnění.

Klíčová slova: Viktoriánské období, ženy, Thomas Hardy, *Daleko od hlučícího davu*, *Rodákův návrat*, *Tess z D'Urbervillů*

Abstract

The bachelor thesis focuses on the position of women in the Victorian Era, concretely found in the fiction of Thomas Hardy. The principle of this work is to analyse and characterise Hardy's heroines who, in defiance of the established Victorian social standards, stand out in a crowd. Thomas Hardy brought the female-related issues, at the time mostly overlooked, into focus. We reveal the dissimilarity of the heroines by comparing them to the traditional Victorian portrayal of women. The core of the thesis is the analysis of three feminine-centred novels with their protagonists – Bathsheba Everdene from *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), Eustacia Vye from *The Return of the Native* (1878) and Tess Durbeyfield from *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891). The first chapter centres on the description of the Victorian era and its society, especially women and their status in a patriarchal society. The following chapters will be devoted to the above-mentioned female characters and their modern mindsets and attempts to defy the Victorian ideal. These women face the traditional gender roles of Victorian society and struggle for emancipation.

Keywords: Victorian era, women, Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

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Introduction

Thomas Hardy was a highly regarded English novelist and poet from the late-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. His novels are unique in many aspects, as he called various Victorian social, sexual, and religious conventions into question. Furthermore, he even ventured to criticise the English Victorian society, such as behaving toward rural or destitute inhabitants, thus implying the gap between social classes. In addition, he is considered a progressive author by paying attention to women and their struggles in a male-dominated society defined by Victorian moral codes, which were unfair to the female sex. As Harvey says, women "were denied political and economic power and were expected to conform to the idea of separate spheres for men and women" (34). In other words, women were entrusted with the sole task of marrying and becoming proper spouses who handled domesticities.

In contrast, men were seen as providers who engaged in business and politics. Additionally, husbands had legal power over their wives. In support of this view, a respected English jurist from the eighteenth century, Sir William Blackstone, declared that "by marriage the husband and wife are one, and that one is the husband" (Blackstone 418), emphasising the husband's authority over his spouse.

A patriarchal society tied the life of Victorian women with societal conventions. During these times, virtues were considered the alpha and omega of their existence, and women were expected to adhere to them. Any deviation from these regulations had severe implications, such as rumours that could harm their chances of a successful marriage. For instance, if an unmarried lady was seen in a male's presence without a chaperone, it would be considered a grave error.

Unfortunately, women were often idealised and expected to be wary of social faux pas. Several writers contributed to this idealisation with their works. As in the case of Coventry Patmore, a Victorian poet whose "much-acclaimed" narrative poem called *The Angel in the House* (1854–63) praised virtuous women and marital life. (Harvey 34) Patmore's poem

describes the ideal Victorian woman as "amiable, innocent, pious, simple, circumspect, subtle, fancy-free or discreet in mind and manners." Furthermore, he extolls "the haunting fairness of her face, pure dignity, composure, ease" and, last but not least, "her modesty, her chiefest grace." Needless to say, she is expected to focus on childcare and domestic duties once married. (Patmore 39-41) This poem reveals Patmore's attitudes towards women, which did not differ from the widely accepted notion of submissive women and separate spheres for men and women. Most twentieth-century commentators criticise the poem for propagating the idealisation of women and their limitation to the domestic sphere. Nevertheless, it was popular in the second half of the nineteenth century. (Landow)

Despite the patriarchal society conventions and laid down gender roles, Hardy broke stereotypical views on women as he introduced them in a new light. His protagonists are not idealised, submissive, or obedient as was the custom of that time. However, they are intelligent, strong, independent, unconventional, and have ambition, feelings, and inner strength. On the other hand, they also have flaws and can decide and think for themselves. (Morgan 1988, x) Therefore, the topic of this thesis is "Strong female characters in Thomas Hardy novels". Whereas most Victorian authors comply with the societal stereotypes, Hardy shows us noticeably different "'real', flesh-and-blood women" (Ibid. xi). He created believable and relatable heroines by focusing on imperfection rather than perfection (Morgan 2007, 90).

When reading Hardy's novels, one may sense a feminist perspective and see the genuine picture of women of rustic origin who work hard and endure struggles while trying to shape their own lives. Hardy's attention moved to exploring female nature, revealing that fulfilment can be found beyond matrimony.

From several of Hardy's works, three subsequent novels have been chosen: *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Return of the Native* (1878) and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), which I consider most suitable for the analysis with their proto-feminist approach. For instance,

Tess Durbeyfield was raped; hence, others perceive her as impure and a fallen woman due to this sin. Later, she avenges Alec, the rapist, and kills him for causing her all the miseries like humiliation, abuse or lying about Angel. Her punishment for the murder is the death penalty by execution; nonetheless, she accepts it without objections. At the story's end, she dignifiedly faced "her prosecutors with readiness of will and pure, undaunted spirit from which heroes are made" (Morgan 2007, 92). Despite Tess's transgression against Victorian virtues, Thomas Hardy gave the first volume edition a subtitle: "A Pure woman Faithfully Presented", which caused an uproar. (Ibid. 89) Although Tess is no longer chaste, Hardy considers her a pure woman; thus, "he directly confronted late Victorian attitudes to the 'fallen woman'" (James 122).

Eustacia Vye is a passionate heroine "drawn with fire and dash" (Higonnet xiv). Within her is a rebel who rejects the traditional roles assigned to women and desires a life full of freedom and excitement. Despite having a pre-marital affair, she eventually marries someone else. However, their marriage turns out to be miserable; she hopes they leave Egdon Heath for Paris but in vain. Ultimately, Eustacia runs away from her husband Clym with her former lover Wildeve and follows the vision of a better life. Tragically, in the end, both Eustacia and Wildeve drowned.

This thesis aims to analyse and compare three protagonists - Bathsheba Everdene, Eustacia Vye and Tess Durbeyfield, who are at odds with predominating Victorian values. A factor which all selected novels share is that all three stories include a conflict between a female character and society. Heroines "are often caught between a sense of their social obligations and a desire, which at times can be a selfish desire, to be true to themselves". Notably, that the protagonists do not oppose intentionally; however, "there is something in their natures that makes it difficult for them to fit in. They can see the advantages of conventional behaviour, but simply do not seem able to conform" (Peck 3-5).

In the stories, Hardy reveals the hidden desires of his female characters and highlights issues of female suppression, even though such topics were seldom discussed in public during his time. Consequently, Hardy became controversial as many Victorians were not ready for intimate topics like "unusually explicit descriptions of female desire" in his writings (Brady 94). Moreover, Brady further argues that Hardy's depiction of a woman's desire as "inconstant" is an even bigger issue. "As Tess makes clear, even the fallen woman was expected to remain fixated on her first sexual partner". Eustacia's indecision between Clym and Wildeve in the novel casts doubt on the importance of the monogamous behaviour of women. (Ibid. 94) At that time, it was not commonplace for a decent woman to have multiple sexual partners, which was prevalent in men. As James Barrie aptly defined Hardy's heroines in this context:

They think would like to marry, but are not sure when they arrive at the altar. They hesitate about becoming engaged lest they should then cease to love; they marry in secret, get engaged in secret, and even ask the gentleman whom they engage to get engaged to by-and-by to keep it to himself. They are seldom sure of their own love unless there is ground for believing that it is not returned, and the only tolerably safe thing to predict of them is, that first they will have two lovers and then marry a third. On the subject of matrimony no woman knows her own mind. (173)

In other words, such actions contradict the traditional idea of "love-at-first-sight-followed-by-engagement-and-marriage"; instead, they call it into question (Brady 94). By preferring their desires over the demands of society, they oppose the social roles assigned to them and even "undermine the social institution of marriage". Hardy's plots often feature a character resisting marriage and instead "craving freedom or adventure or passion" to exemplify: Bathsheba's rejection of Gabriel or Eustacia's of Wildeve. (Peck 4,5)

Hardy's progressive writings often received criticism, primarily due to his feminine attitudes. This led to difficulties in publishing, as seen with *The Return of the Native*. A manuscript with the first fifteen chapters was rejected by three magazines - *Cornhill*, *Temple Bar* and *Blackwood* (Higonnet 2009, xiii) before being published in *Belgravia* magazine in 1878 (Millgate 2004, 181). One of the editors who rejected the manuscript, Leslie Stephen of

Cornhill magazine, explained "that the relations between Eustacia, Wildeve, and Thomasin might develop into something "dangerous" for the family magazine, and he refused to have anything to do with it unless he could see the whole" (Maitland and Stephen 276). He worried that a text of this sort could negatively influence young ladies due to its depiction of relationships and marital troubles, including extramarital affairs. Additionally, the atypical title character of Eustacia Vye provoked fears by refusing to subordinate to deep-rooted traditions and giving up her dream of exciting life in a city. (Ibid. 276)

However, the most heated disputation provoked the publication of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, with many magazines rejecting the story like *Tillotson & Son of Bolton, Murray's Magazine and Macmillan Magazine*. "This was largely due to the widespread controversy over [character's] morality and their general attitude to life" (Cox, xxiii). Despite this, Graphic magazine eventually agreed to bring the story out, but only if certain parts involving "seduction and the illegitimate child" were omitted. This was a common practice at the time, where authors must often expurgate their work until it was found acceptable for publication. However, in 1891, the novel was finally published in its full-text version. (xxiii) Mary Jacobus believes "that the textual changes which Hardy introduced offer a valuable insight into Victorian society's control of female sexuality" (Harvey 182).

The main goal of this thesis is to demonstrate how the chosen protagonists challenge the patriarchal norms of the Victorian Era through their thoughts and actions. In connection with this, the first chapter will provide insight into the social status of women during the reign of Queen Victoria and the era in general. Furthermore, learning about Victorian life, particularly the status of women and the societal expectations and limitations placed upon them, helps us understand the disturbance the selected heroines caused among readers and critics.

Then, in the following part, I intend to concentrate on three aspects of the female protagonists: their home environment, ambitions, and sexual lives. First, the home environment

chapter describes the characters' backgrounds, such as living conditions or financial situations. Next, the chapter on ambitions shall address the protagonists' concrete desires and dreams, like Bathsheba's interest in farm management or Eustacia's yearning for exciting life somewhere other than the heath. These heroines possess an unusual and modern mindset that distinguishes them from the deep-rooted societal patterns. The final chapter considers their sexual lives, including taboo topics such as premarital relationships and giving birth to an illegitimate child, as seen in Tess's storyline or Eustacia's relationships with Wildeve and Clym.

The main intention is to show Thomas Hardy's attitudes and criticism on issues related to women. Although he was not actively defending the suffragist movement, Hardy strived for a more open society towards women. By believing women should be free to run a farm, "travel unaccompanied beyond the neighbourhood, embark upon enterprises of their own volition, or initiate relationships" (Morgan 1988, xi). It is worth noting that what is considered regular today, like when women are interested in education or express their opinions, was highly outrageous in Victorian times. I aim to depict the personalities and motivations of the heroines in his novels, highlighting the exceptional qualities of his female-centred works and their protagonists.

1 Victorian Era

At the outset, it is essential to introduce the era in which Hardy's novels occur. Learning about the given period helps us better understand the background of heroines' lives and the difficulties and pressure they endured. Principally, this chapter will briefly specify the social standing of Victorian women, including their skills, rights, education, and society's expectations. Presenting the aspects of traditional women's lives in a patriarchal society emphasises the strength of Hardy's protagonists, who resist this prescribed scenario.

All three selected novels were published in the course of the Victorian Era. This period corresponds with the long reign of Queen Victoria from 1837, as she ascended the throne until she died in 1901. The nineteenth century is characterised by an unprecedented acceleration of technological, industrial, cultural, and social change. It was a time of great inventions and crucial transformations like steam engines, which affected society in almost every aspect of its life. For instance, steam-powered railways connected towns nationwide, enabling the transport of minerals, materials, products or people. Before the invention of railway networks, horses and carts were used for distribution, but merely in nearby surroundings. Because country villages were self-sufficient, and various artisans offered local products.

Moreover, railway networks brought another benefit - the uniformity of time. Until 1847, most towns had slight differences in local times because the sun's position defined them. However, with the invention of railways, the country had to establish one standard time to synchronise the time at all stations. Consequently, in December 1847, Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) became the official 'Railway Time'. (What is Greenwich Mean Time?)

During the late 18th century, Britain began a tremendous economic expansion and changed from an agricultural nation into an industrial one. Industrialisation was on the upswing, and the urban population increased as a mass of rural people moved from the countryside to the industrial cities. Due to the incapability to compete with industrial technologies, rural

inhabitants migrated to the cities for work because the countryside was on the downgrade. (Snodgrass 2,3)

Regarding industrial successes, The Great Exhibition of 1851 must be mentioned. It was a massive industrial production and culture exhibition in London's Hyde Park. From 1798 were in France regularly organised such exhibitions, but they introduced only French production. The Great Exhibition was the first international event of this kind. Prince Albert, the main organiser and the head of the Royal Society of Arts, aimed to impress other nations with the British Empire's ingenuity and display its industrial power. This exposition achieved incredible success; within six months, six million people used the opportunity to visit it. (Black, Hobhouse and Emsley)

On the other hand, this epoch also has its darker side – economic and social problems resulting in huge contrasts between members of social classes. While upper- and middle-class members enjoyed pleasant living standards, in contrast, working-class people lived in poverty at the very bottom of the social ladder. They had to endure appalling conditions in their physically demanding jobs, working 12-16 per day, six times a week, for a ludicrous small wage. The usual workplace was some factory, for instance, a cotton mill. It was a dirty, scarcely ventilated place with no security or meal breaks. So, it was no surprise when someone got hurt or died while working. Besides, they lived in overcrowded shanty towns, where various diseases spread. Whilst upper families did not suffer from hunger and kept servants, the lower classes often starved and may not live to see tomorrow. (Documentary Base)

1.1 The position of women in the Victorian Era

People in the 19th century led a considerably different life than nowadays. Both sexes had to live up to society's demanding expectations back then. However, Victorian society was male-dominated; thus, female options were significantly limited compared to males. They were inferior to men in many aspects. For instance, women of all social classes were not allowed to

receive higher education, oversee their property or vote. Besides, they had no legal status, were financially dependent and represented by their father, husband, or other male relatives.

Women were generally regarded as the weaker sex, while men represented the physically stronger sex. Therefore, men were associated with the public sphere and business, whereas the female domain was domesticity. They led different lives in two "separate spheres", which came together twice a day at the family table during breakfast and dinner but did not mingle much. Everyone's position was straightforward, and one cannot assume that a husband would initiate his spouse into mysteries of the business or ask her for advice. The Victorian era was not a period of equal partnerships. (Hudges)

Victorians firmly believed in the importance of marriage and family. Queen Victoria represented "an icon of late-19th-century middle-class femininity and domesticity" because she focused on family values and domestic virtues (Abrams). The fundamental vocation of every Victorian girl was to marry and subsequently reproduce. Society expected women to become idealised "angelic figures" whose tasks were running a household, raising their offspring, and pleasing their husbands while husbands earned a living. "It was the wife who made the home, who cared for her children within it, who brought her husband back to it when work was done, who provided the hot dinners and created the atmosphere of comfort and protection" (Calder 27). Therefore, they tried to hold their roles as proper wives, mothers, and homemakers. If a woman had not found a husband, she would have remained utterly dependent on her parents or other relatives, becoming a financial burden. (Hudges)

However, a woman could not marry whomever she wanted because she needed approval from her father. Besides, it is essential to emphasise that people of different social classes could not intermarry. One cannot expect a respectable middle- or upper-class gentleman to marry his maid. (Langland 290) Their social ranks must accord.

For an upper- or middle-class girl, a healthy, wealthy, and respectable gentleman was considered the perfect match who would provide for her. Nevertheless, such a wife of a higher social class had a vital function to represent her husband's name in a good light. She was a "living testimony to his social status" (Klein 264) and could not disappoint him. So, naturally, she had to be accomplished and behave according to etiquette. This view was supported by Elizabeth Langland, stating that: "The wife performed a more significant and extensive economic and political function than is usually perceived. The house and its mistress in fact, served as a significant adjunct to a man's business endeavours." (Langland 290, 291)

It is essential to say that low-class women were not awaiting such bright prospects as upper-class ladies but rather challenging life. In most cases, "working women shouldered the double burden of waged work and the bulk of household responsibilities" (Hudson) because the household could not live on one income. In the 1850s in Britain, "around 75 per cent of the population was working class" (Calder 70), and around "30-40 per cent of women from working-class families contributed significantly to household incomes" (Hudson). Thus, unlike upper-class ladies, they had to learn at a young age how to hold the household chores such as cooking, cleaning, or washing by themselves. They trained domestic abilities practically, knowing they could never afford servants.

Regarding female jobs, industrialisation provided a chance to work even for women and children. Working-class people worked under poor and dangerous conditions, as described before. However, it is essential to mention that females got smaller wages than men, frequently for the same performance and even had to work during pregnancy.

Female job options included domestic services such as cooking, laundering, or working in sweatshops. They "were found in large numbers in metalwares and pottery and in a variety of petty trades, especially in towns: confectionery, brewing and other provisioning, seamstressing, laundry work, cleaning and retailing." (Hudson) The very last option for a

desperate woman meant prostitution. Unsurprisingly, society harshly condemned women with such earnings; therefore, most women tried to keep it a secret. Nobody cared that, in many cases, it was the only way for poor women to earn a living for themselves or their children. For instance, divorced women, spinsters, widows or women who could not perform strenuous factory jobs. (Hudges) Nevertheless, whatever occupation they had left no time for leisure. Apart from the job, they took care of their household, which was demanding.

1.2 Education and rights

As for education, upper-class ladies had broader knowledge and accomplishments than those of lower origins. If a lady wants to charm a gentleman, she must have a command of certain qualities, which she polished during her growing up. (The British Library) She was supposed to play the piano, read, dance, have a good command of needlework, and last but not least, know how to behave among people in society. Besides, the ideal Victorian woman should be religious and virtuous with good manners. Some girls of well-off families spoke various foreign languages such as French, Latin, or Greek. However, on the other hand, it became an issue when a lady was too intelligent and curious about politics or books. These qualities, such as intellectual or literary interests, were considered rather masculine, and ladies with such hobbies were called "bluestocking". (Ibid)

Moreover, they were discouraged and even warned to avoid giving the impression of being educated. "Many manuals indeed specifically warn women against being too clever in the company of men. Men don't like clever, opinionated women" (Calder 44). On top of that, Dr Clarke believed that: "A woman who thinks is liable to damage her ovaries". Because her brain and reproductive organs compete for the same resources, and if the brain uses too much of them, there is not enough left for reproductive organs. So as a consequence of such behaviour, procreation would be jeopardised, which is impermissible. "Women must choose between

babies and thought"(qtd. in Ermarth 187), and if they want to live up to Victorian expectations, they will choose babies.

As we can see, society believed it was unnecessary or even harmful to educate female beings minutely since education or business were men's domains. Besides, allegedly, women had no biological dispositions for studying and could not possess the same brain capacity or rational thinking as men. Therefore, girls received the basic knowledge of writing, reading and domestic skills. They attended schools or had governess to gain "a smattering of accomplishments with the sole object of catching a husband as soon as possible after leaving". (256 Grylls)

However, this very aspect, the quality and limited access to education, created a crucial barrier for women. They would achieve better work positions, property rights, and political power through proper education. Nevertheless, during the nineteenth century, women could no longer endure social limitations and were frustrated with the lack of educational opportunities. Therefore, around the 1850s, the first organised women's movement was formed to gain equal rights and treatment as men. As Grylls states, "the capital event in women's emancipation" was the establishment of Queen's College in London in 1848. It was the first female college which provided education for future governesses. (Grylls 255) In addition 1860, Florence Nightingale founded *The Nightingale Home and Training School* providing qualified training for future nurses at St Thomas's Hospital in London. Alternatively, in 1878, London University granted degrees to women for the first time. (Gatrell xl)

Also, female property rights underwent a crucial turning point. In 1870 the Married Women's Property Act allowed women to keep their earnings. (Gatrell xxxix) Furthermore, the Married Women's Property Act of 1882 stated that "married women to have complete personal control over all of their property". Until then, no woman could legally possess property. Ultimately, "in 1926 [all] women were allowed to hold and dispose of property on the same

terms as men", not only married but also unmarried ones, which ensured their economic independence. (UK Parliament, Marriage: property and children)

However, Parliament repeatedly vetoed female enfranchisement due to concern about insufficiently educated potential female voters. Many Victorians were in two minds about this issue. For instance, Thomas Hardy assumed that "giving the vote to women would free both sexes, all superstitious institutions will be knocked down or rationalised – theologies, marriage, wealth-worship, labour-worship, hypocritical optimism, & so on". But on the other side, "he wasn't convinced that they would use [the vote] wisely." (Pearsall)

Nonetheless, a long-desired time when women got the right to vote came in 1928 with Equal Franchise Act. They achieved equal rights with men and could vote over the age of 21. Previously, the Act of 1918 granted "women over the age of 30 who met a property qualification" a voting right. (UK Parliament, Women get the vote)

This era brought many courageous women who went against deep-rooted conventions and strived for change. Such as Florence Nightingale, who came from a wealthy family and refused to marry a "suitable" gentleman, defending herself that she: "could not satisfy this nature by spending a life with him in making society and arranging domestic things. Voluntarily to put it out my power ever to be able to seize the chance of forming for myself a true and rich life would seem to me like suicide." (Beales 346) Defying her parents' expectations, she followed her dream and went to Germany for nursing training. At that time, it was not regarded as a respected profession. However, Nightingale instituted various reforms that improved medical care, and sanitary conditions, reducing the death rate. This woman became a national hero as she cared for wounded British soldiers overseas in Crimean War. Her most outstanding achievement is the foundation of modern nursing, making it a respected profession. (History Channel) Other women who stood out and became famous for their fight towards emancipation are a social reformer who fought against the Contagious Disease Act, Josephine Butler, the first

qualified English physician Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, or Annie Besant, a British reformer fighting for Indian independence and many others.

1.3 Purity and sexuality

One more issue must not go unmentioned; according to Victorian norms, a potential wife must be a virgin before marriage. Female purity was her greatest virtue. So, if she lost her innocence before marriage, she would become a fallen woman who had to bear the consequences of her sin and become an outcast from society. In the case of rape, it makes no difference; the woman was doomed.

Similarly, ladies had to be careful not to converse with a man unchaperoned. Leonore Davidoff, in his work *The Best Circles: Society, Etiquette and the Season*, shared some thoughts related to this topic: "An unmarried woman under thirty could not go anywhere or be in a room even in her own house with an unrelated man unless accompanied by a married gentlewoman or a servant" (qtd. in Jalland 24). If an unmarried girl was caught in such a situation, rumours could get around and ruin her reputation. Therefore, meetings with men had to be carefully observed.

Furthermore, Petrie writes of nineteenth-century "innocence" in his article. In addition to remaining chaste until marriage, ladies' external appearance and attitudes must also attest to their purity.

Innocence was what he demanded from the girls of his class, and they must not only be innocent but also give the outward impression of being innocent. White muslin, typical of virginal purity, clothes many a heroine, with delicate shades of blue and pink next in popularity. The stamp of masculine approval was placed upon ignorance of the world, meekness, lack of opinions, general helplessness, and weakness; in short, recognition of female inferiority to the male. (184)

In this relation, Victorians believed women were naturally innocent without sexual instincts. Allegedly, they had no interest or passion for any sexual activity. (Harvey 34) Sexual intercourse bring joy and pleasure only to men because "the majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feelings of any kind. What men are habitually, women are only exceptionally." (qtd. in Marcus 31) Therefore, they passionlessly endure sexual intercourse merely to impregnate; otherwise, they would not practise it.

The significant pioneer of this view was British gynaecologist Dr William Acton. He claimed that:

The best mothers, wives, and managers of households, know little or nothing of sexual indulgences. Love of home, children, and domestic duties are the only passions they feel. As a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband's embraces, but only to please him; and, but for the desire of maternity, would far rather be relieved from his attentions. The married woman has no wish to be treated on the footing of a mistress. (qtd. in Marcus 31,32)

Such a view presented by a medical specialist strengthened the prevailing convictions about female roles and their "traditional spheres of activity, home and family" (Boumelha 1982, 14). Acton tries to preserve the stereotypical Victorian puritanism, which cherishes decent women's ideals and where sex is taboo for public discussion. An ideal Victorian woman represents a symbol of sexual restraint; therefore, it was required to ignore female sexuality and underline the lack of female sexual awareness to keep traditionally regarded morals. Therefore, society further inculcated women "to have desires not for themselves but always for others" and that average women have no sexual appetite (Ermarth 186).

Ermarth comments, "one can only wonder that his [Acton's] conclusion was treated as scientific" (186). Nevertheless, men "adopted the official mid-Victorian view of women as creatures of effortless sexual immaculacy" (Boumelha 1982, 45), creatures who considered

sexual intercourse solely necessary due to procreative function. According to William Thompson, this entire regimen "encourages a husband to regard his wife as an involuntary breeding machine and household slave who is not permitted even to wish for any gratification for herself" (qtd. in Ermarth 189) However, it corresponds with the Victorian stance of male dominance and female submissiveness.

Nonetheless, historians discovered that behind Victorian society's overly strict moral principles hides hypocrisy. As Victorian men preached sexual restraint, to which they did not adhere. Instead, outwardly respectable, they doggedly enforced honourableness while keeping a prostitute or mistress before or throughout the marriage without any penalties. Moreover, husbands demanded faithfulness from wives while their affairs were socially acceptable.

In Victorian times, prostitution remained in high demand by male beings, even though it later caused the spreading of venereal diseases like syphilis. According to Jeremy Paxman, in the 1850s, there were up to 80 000 prostitutes in London. (212) In most cases, prostitution posed the only option for poor women to earn a living for themselves or their children—for instance, divorced women, raped women, spinsters, widows or women who could not perform strenuous factory jobs. (Hudges)

In conclusion, while men were forgiven for their womanizing, fallen women were harshly condemned without mercy for their downfall. In general, women were judged and valued mainly by their chastity. It does not matter if a woman was "fallen" due to practising prostitution or the reason was rape; the result was the same. By losing her virginity, she committed an unpardonable sin. That was the sad reality of the acknowledged double standard of Victorian times, where "sexual morality brand liberated women as 'fallen' while condoning their lovers"(Harvey 34).

2 Home environment

First and foremost, in this part, it is crucial to include the backgrounds of Hardy's protagonists. To be more specific, aspects like economic situation, family relations, living conditions, or social environment in order to give an idea of their domestic space because these factors have an immense impact on their personalities and behaviour.

Thomas Hardy is known for his authentic settings. His novels are set in the semi-fictional region of "Wessex", closely modelled on the landscape in southwest England, namely his native county of Dorset. Furthermore, stories embody the lifestyles of the English-countryside folk with their manners and customs. For instance, in *Return of the Native*, readers observe customs like Guy Fawkes's bonfire-making, maypole-dance, or the mummers' play (Gatrell 23). Alternatively, *Far from the Madding Crowd* depicts an agricultural county with descriptions concerning farming, sheep-keeping, or harvesting (Cox 31). So one could see a realistic picture of rural England and the countryfolk of the nineteenth century. "Wessex" initially stood for "the Kingdom of the West Saxon". However, from the late nineteenth century, Hardy used this term for rural areas in southwestern England - for the first time in 1874 in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. (Gatrell, Wessex 19-21)

2.1 Weatherbury

Let us begin with the main protagonist of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba Everdeen. She is a poor orphan; however, by birth belongs to the middle-class (Morgan 2007, 39). At the novel's beginning, she stays with her aunt Mrs Hurst for a season, helping her with cows, then moves to Weatherbury with her uncle. We learn little about her parents; they were townfolk, and both died long ago. Her mother "was a lovely woman," and her father, Levi Everdene, was "a gentlemen-tailor, worth scores of pounds". (FFMC 97) Therefore, Bathsheba received a good education. Mrs Hurst claims she was "an excellent scholar" and was supposed to be a governess, but it did not happen due to her wildness (FFMC 64). Also, Morgan suggests

that our heroine is "by education accomplished and by inclination daring and adventurous" (Student Companion 39). To demonstrate her riding a horse without a side saddle. It was socially unacceptable and outrageous for women to ride astride. In order to "preserve ladies' modesty", they had to use side-saddle (Johnson). However, in Bathsheba's defence, she did so, unaware that she was being observed.

At 19 years, Bathsheba surprisingly inherited a farm in Weatherbury with adjoining estates from her deceased uncle. Uncle Everdene was "a very good-hearted man" (FFMC 96) who had known his niece since childhood. "Impressed by her capacities and fully trusting in her abilities", he entrusts his estate to Bathsheba even though the farm would have a female owner. Such acting shows "disregard for prevailing sexually discriminating codes and practices" (Morgan 2007, 39). In Victorian times, a farmer's position was traditionally held by men. Therefore, a woman farmer who oversees male workers caused a disturbance. Hardy presents a "courageous, self-determined young woman" who accepts the challenge of running a farm. "There is not a single man in her world who believes she has a right to it, [therefore she has to make] "her way in a world made by men for men"(ibid 39). Alone, without any role model, in the presence of judgmental looks of her workers, but bold enough not to give up. Through this character, Thomas Hardy displays that female beings are also skilled and capable of hard work, such as running the farm, as males.

Throughout the novel, readers witness Bathsheba's transition from a young inexperienced maiden into a mature woman who is "open to experience, meeting life and suffering with activity and responsibility, rising again with increased strength after a disaster, and at the end opening her arms to new experience" (Morrison 60). In addition, she is depicted as intelligent, strong, lively, reckless, and impulsive, which is not in compliance with the Victorian stereotype of a woman. Consequently, she is criticised, for instance, for her "vanity" (FFMC 45). Gabriel Oak, a modest bachelor shepherd, considers Bathsheba conceited. Seeing

her for the first time while she was examining and admiring her face in the hand mirror without a specific purpose it gave him an impression of pride.

There was no necessity whatever for her looking in the glass. She did not adjust her hair, or pat her hair, or press a dimple into shape, or do one thing to signify that any such intention had been her motive in taking up the glass. [Afterwards] blushed at herself and seeing her reflection blush, blushed more. She simply observed herself as a fair product of Nature in the feminine kind [without knowing somebody watching her]. (FFMC 44)

However, according to Boumelha, Oak evaluates the situation wrongly. From his point of view, there is a proud girl who likes to admire her appearance. Nevertheless, Bathsheba perceives this moment in another way, as a moment of her auto-eroticism.

[Seeing herself as] "a warm creature aglow with the soft heat of her sex. Her feminine sensuousness prompts first a parting of lips then a roseate tumescent glow. A dawning is clearly taking place and not only in the morning skies; but while Hardy's appreciative gaze rests upon Bathsheba's openeyed wonder and soft arousal... [Oak] promptly assumes vanity in place of sensuous self-delight." (Morgan 1988, 24)

It is important to note that Gabriel Oak represents a Victorian moral perspective - a critical judge with "a narrow point of view and with not a few cynical preconceptions." Therefore, Oak as a 'conventional' hero (Ibid 25), limited in his views, did not become conscious of Bathsheba's awakening sexuality and self-realisation, which will be further discussed in subsequent chapters. In comparison, Thomas Hardy sided with Bathsheba, perceiving her as "imperfect but human [and not] "the agent of disorder". (Ibid 25)

2.2 Egdon Heath

In *The Return of the Native*, Thomas Hardy presents Eustacia Vye, who lives with her grandfather, Captain Vye, in a small cottage at Egdon Heath. Initially, she was born in Budmouth, a town by the sea, and loved that place. Unfortunately, her parents died, so she started living with her grandfather. Consequently, Eustacia misses her native town with its life immensely. "She hated the change; she felt like one banished; but here she was forced to abide." (RON 68) Budmouth was a natural habitat for her spirited, unconventional soul, which loves rich social and cultural life. Her beloved memories include "sunny afternoons on an esplanade, with military bands, officers, and gallants around " (Ibid 68). However, contrary to Budmouth, the heath feels like a bad dream; in this gloomy environment, nothing exciting happens, and Eustacia cannot adapt.

Although Captain Vye used to pay for Eustacia's education instead of her father (a poor musician), the current financial situation will not allow him to provide his granddaughter with a life at the sea resort. Ever since he got injured, he could not perform his occupation and lives humbly at Egdon. Therefore, his granddaughter stays where he lives since being a Victorian woman means financial dependence on a male relative.

Thomas Hardy presents a woman of an "intelligent mind and energetic body" who is frustrated by her "unvarying, unchallenging, isolated" life (Morgan 1988, 42). Eustacia despises Egdon Heath, together with its inhabitants, rigid social conventions and the general tediousness of a rural place. Rosemarie Morgan illustrates that: "Eustacia is very much a prisoner in her world which she roams restlessly, night and day, yearning for freedom, action, passion—a yearning manifest in the burning fires she sets by night as beacons of her desire." (Ibid 42) What troubles her the most is secluded life without any particular purpose and loneliness.

The sole relative is her grandfather, who does not pay her much attention and "leaves her to her own devices" (Morgan 2007, 71). Sometimes he chides her, for instance, for using

too much wood for the bonfire, but the scold needs to be more consistent. Instead of obeying, his granddaughter orders him to go to bed "in a way which told at once that she was absolute queen here." (RON 59) Robert Evans criticizes Eustacia's behaviour towards "her aged grandfather [because she] nowhere in the novel reveals any natural affection or tenderness for him" and calls her "a thoroughly selfish woman" (255).

Patently, Captain Vye has no power over Eustacia and cannot control her. Therefore he "let her free as a bird to follow her own courses" (RON 144) since attempts for dialogues about principles are in vain.

Also, it should be noted that it is hard for Eustacia to find familiar with the locals. Likewise, most folks are not fond of her; she is scorned for being different and "throughout the novel, is physically and socially, marginal to the Egdon community" (Boumelha 1982, 53).

One of the reasons for the marginalization represents her exotic origin. It is essential to emphasize Eustacia's outward appearance because she does not bear a resemblance to ordinary English women. For her remarkable physical appearance, she owes her father, a Corfiot bandmaster of the regiment. (RON 68) That is one of the reasons why other rural folks stay aloof from her. She is known for her striking beauty and is described as:

The raw material of a divinity. On Olympus she would have done well with a little preparation. She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman. Had it been possible for the earth and mankind to be entirely in her grasp for a while, had she handled the distaff, the spindle, and the shears at her own free will, few in the world would have noticed the change of government. (RON 66)

In light of the above quotation, Hardy emphasizes that Ms Vye is not the model woman of her era but represents "a modal goddess" who belongs to another world (Morgan 1988, 44). She is likened to Greek goddesses, a creature of ethereal beauty, which also refers to her Corfiot origin.

Furthermore, Hardy adds that her qualities are pointless and "her power is limited "in such a place as Egdon Heath. "Egdon was her Hades, and since coming there, she had imbibed much of what was dark in its tone, though inwardly and eternally unreconciled thereto " (RON 67). He suggests that her physical appearance – dark hair, "pagan eyes full of nocturnal mysteries, lip-curves like fragments of forgotten marbles" (RON 66-67) reflects the "rebellion and nonconformity running in her blood. She does her housework on Sundays when others take their rest" (Evans 252), and when heath-folk works, she takes her rest. Singing psalms on Saturday nights and reading the Bible on a weekday, therefore, "she might be unoppressed with a sense of doing her duty." (RON 70)

Her unusual habits include wandering the heath alone at night, constantly dreaming about love, or having secret meetings with Wildeva. Moreover, once, at the Christmas mummer's play, she secretly played the Turkish Knight instead of the local boy, which was bold because women are not allowed to play.

Within her is a rebel who rejects the traditional view of women with their prescribed roles, therefore, does not get along with heath folk. They mostly think poorly of her owing to her untraditional opinions, way of living or character traits like arrogance, pride, or lack of interest in others. To demonstrate, Mrs Yeobright claims that Eustacia is "lazy and dissatisfied" (RON 188). And added:

She mopes about by herself, and don't mix in with the people. You see more in her than most of us do. Miss Vye is to my mind too idle to be charming. I have never heard that she is of any use to herself or to other people. Good girls don't get treated as witches even on Egdon. (RON 176)

Eustacia's behaviour differs from expected social codes; consequently, her neighbours have never accepted her and defamed her. However, despite facing a hostile environment, she does not give up and acts upon her own will, which confirms the following chapter.

2.3 Marlott

The novel *Tess of the d'Urberville* depicts a life of a beautiful 16-year-old country girl Tess Durbeyfield and her sorrows. The principal character comes from humble origins; she lives with her family in a rural area in Marlott. Her parents, Joan and John Durbeyfield, have seven offspring, and Tess is the eldest. John works as a haggler, while Joan looks after the household and children, which places them according to Victorian conventions. Nevertheless, both behave irresponsibly - John often visits the local pub, and Joan postpones housework rather than carries it out. Therefore Tess, as the eldest, often has to help with domesticities and care of her younger siblings. Nevertheless, as a dutiful daughter, she takes over all the responsibilities heaped upon her without demur.

It is clear from the author's description that the daily household tasks of working-class families were a vicious circle without an end – activities like cooking, cleaning, caring for children or washing clothes. Thus Mrs Durbeyfield pins her hopes on Tess, hoping she will find an excellent match to enhance their social standing and financial situation.

At the novel's very beginning, John learns from a parson that Durbeyfields are descendants of the formerly great aristocratic family of the d'Urbervilles, which is now extinct. Nevertheless, even without the vision of inheritance, it is a reason for celebration since John overindulges in alcohol. The following day, owing to his drunkenness, he cannot transport beehives to the market; therefore, Tess goes with her younger brother Abraham instead of him.

However, they fall asleep during their journey and, unfortunately, have an accident with a mail cart through which their only horse, Prince, is wounded. As a result of this misfortune, Prince dies. The event had a disastrous impact on the whole family. Without a horse, their breadwinner, they are helpless and without income. In this scene, Hardy depicts the struggles of the "rural proletariat of the late nineteenth century" (Boumelha 2008, xviii) and how one mistake could cause the ruin of the whole family.

Tess blames herself for this tragedy and wants to rectify it. Therefore, despite the primary reluctance, at the request of her family, she visits Mrs d'Urberville's seat at The Slopes to "claim kin" and ask for money or work for herself. (TOD 41) There she meets Alec d'Urberville, a son of Mrs d'Urberville, of whom she is not fond—but, eventually, driven by guilt and the pressure of her mother and siblings, she accepts the offer to look after Mrs d'Urberville's poultry farm. Tess's idea is to earn money to purchase a new horse for Durbeyfields. However, her family expects a marriage between her and Alec. It would enable them to escape poverty and make Tess a lady. Nevertheless, Tess, "being mentally older than her mother did not regard the matrimonial hopes" seriously (TOD 54).

The novel has several implications regarding the differing education of Tess and her mother. Tess "had passed the sixth standard in the National School* under a London-trained mistress and spoke two languages; the dialect at home, more or less; ordinary English abroad and to persons of quality (TOD 27)." In contrast to Tess, both parents lack education. To demonstrate that uneducated Mrs Durbeyfield habitually speaks the dialect and strongly believes in superstitions and folklore. This aspect draws attention to educational reforms, which have caused a considerable gap between generations. "A gap of two hundred years as ordinarily understood. When they were together, the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed." (TOD 29)

In 1870 the Elementary Education Act enabled local authorities to set up schools in areas where they were needed to provide primary education, but it was not officially compulsory. Then in 1880, another Education Act established compulsory elementary education for children between the ages of 5 and 10. Consequently, the poor gain access to education. However, there was still a problem because many children had to contribute to the family budget. (The 1870 Education Act) Therefore, they often worked instead of attending

school, such as Tess, who gave up her wish to become a teacher in order to support her family financially.

3 Ambition

This chapter focuses on the protagonists' aspirations and hopes, allowing us to understand their behaviour better. In the Victorian period, women were not expected to have other life ambitions besides marriage and motherhood. However, despite such beliefs, selected heroines chose to follow their inner desires instead of conforming to societal expectations. Which did not accord with the ideal portrayal of Victorian women; therefore, their surroundings reacted outraged. Apart from their dreams, this part also depicts their handling of confrontational situations to which they were exposed, such as how Bathsheba deals with the unexpected inheritance or Tess with her pregnancy. The focus is on their reactions and dealings with unforeseen situations, whereas, in Eustacia's case, it is predominantly about fulfilling her inner desires.

3.1 Bathsheba Everdene

Initially, Bathsheba Everdene possesses "hardly a penny in the world" and stays with her aunt for her "bare sustenance" by helping her with cows (FFMC 68). Most likely, her wish is to lead a better life. Then, unforeseeably, she inherited a farm and decided to run it. It probably never came to her mind that she could possess such estate and have this career. As was stated in previous chapters, Victorians believed "management is for men" only (Morgan 2007, 39). Therefore, Bathsheba faces the embedded gender prejudice that a woman cannot be in charge of a farm because it is a male profession.

Farm menfolk are shocked that a mistress, instead of a master, took over the farm. At first, "all the characters from Gabriel Oak down to the most menial labourer" assumed that Bathsheba was incapable of such responsibility (Ibid 39). Therefore, the boss-woman "has to face the suspicion and criticism of the predominantly male world in which she lives and works." (Morgan 2007, 48) This male world considers her "a headstrong maid [who] won't listen to no advice at all. Pride and vanity have ruined many a cobbler's dog." (FFMC 137)

Workers fear that Bathsheba will fail, which would mean losing their source of livelihood. They are experiencing a new sense of insecurity and anxiety as their income depends on the farmer's competence, and this farmer is an inexperienced young girl. (Morgan 2011, 92) Therefore, the new female farmer "is rarely free of man censure," like in the incident with a bailiff Pennyways.

A few days after her arrival, she caught Pennyways while he was stealing a barley crop, dismissing him and then voluntarily taking over his place, emphasising "[I] manage everything with my own head and hands." (FFMC 112) Such a decision came as a shock to her employees. They "breathed an audible breath of amazement" after hearing she would carry out this position alone. Henery Fray, a farmhand who often doubts Bathsheba's abilities, criticises her "strange doings" and complains that she will surely rue her new function as a bailiff. Another farmhand, Mark Clark, adds that "all will be ruined and ourselves too." (FFMC 137)

Furthermore, Henery Fray adds that he deserved the place of a bailiff. To all appearances, he feels offended that a woman spoilt his promotion. So, his indignation would not be so strong if a male took over this function.

Although Bathsheba faces gender prejudice that females are incapable of such responsibilities as running the farm, she refuses to yield. She is not discouraged despite the "aware[ness] of being constantly watched and monitored" and realising she would be "blamed for just about every mishap under her management" (Morgan 2007, 48). During assembly with staff members, she "addressed a few words to them with a pretty dignity" (FFMC 117).

Now mind, you have a mistress instead of a master. I don't yet know my powers or my talents in farming; but I shall do my best, and if you serve me well, so shall I serve you. Don't any unfair ones among you (if there are any such, but I hope not) suppose that because I'm a woman I don't understand the difference between bad goings-on and good. (Ibid. 117)

Our heroine becomes conscious that she has to earn their trust and respect, therefore assures others, perhaps also herself, with these words: "I shall be up before you are awake; I shall be afield before you are up; and I shall have breakfasted before you are afield. In short, I shall astonish you all." (Ibid. 117)

Such determination to work hard is admirable. Bathsheba's character gradually develops, and she proves her ability to manage a farm. Through her intellect and self-sufficiency, she quickly adapts to her new role. Nevertheless, adjusting to new responsibilities is challenging. It involves dealing with multiple miscellaneous duties like managing finances. For example, while paying her workers their salaries for the first time, she inquires if the information about payrolls in the book after the previous farmer is truthful. She did so to ensure that the information corresponded with executed work, as she did not want to rob someone of his salary. On top of that, to the workers' surprise, the new mistress paid everyone extra ten shillings as a small present.

Participation in the corn market at Casterbridge is also one of her new duties as farm mistress. It was "the first public evidence of Bathsheba's decision to be a farmer" (FFMC 123). There, she quickly learnt the skill of negotiating the prices or adopting "the professional pour [of the corn] into the hand" (FFMC 124). Firstly, she spoke to farmers whom she knows. Afterwards, despite being among many unknown faces, she finds enough confidence "to speak and reply boldly to men merely known to her by hearsay" because being a practical woman means showing herself and carrying on a business. (Ibid. 124)

In general, she successfully explores the male business world. Moreover, she remembers to treat her employees fairly and kindly. For instance, after extinguishing the barn fire, she invited them to her house "to take a little refreshment after this extra work". (FFMC 85) Alternatively, when her youngest servant Fanny Robbin is missing, she makes efforts to find her – asking neighbours and eventually arranging the transport of her coffin to Weatherbury

house since Fanny was Everdene's servant. Despite the initial distrust of Everdene's trustees in her abilities, our female farmer succeeded and earned their "confidence entirely in her own right." (Morgan 1988, 30)

It is also essential to highlight that being an orphan allows Bathsheba to choose a husband based on her preferences or whether she wants to marry at all. This is possible because she lacks a father who would act as her legal representative and "whose role is to make, accept, or refuse the marital choice on behalf of his daughter" (Boumelha 1999, 134), as was traditionally expected. However, Bathsheba does not have a father who would fulfil this role; therefore, she is: "freed to negotiate [her] own re-entry into the family through [her] choice of a marital or sexual partner - a choice which equally marks [her] re-assimilation into class-structure" (Boumelha 1982, 140). Additionally, her inherited possessions enhance her chances of marrying a man of higher status. Therefore, it made her an attractive candidate for potential suitors. (Boumelha 1999, 40-41)

Nevertheless, at the novel's beginning, Bathsheba declines Mr Oak's proposal, even as an orphan girl without funds. Despite the Victorian stereotypes about the female life fulfilment as wives, she rejected him with these words: "I hate to be thought men's property in that way— though possibly I shall be to be had some day." However, the picture of being a bride lures her, "people would talk about [her]...[she] should feel triumph. [Only] if [she] could be one without having a husband. But since a woman can't show off in that way by herself, I shan't marry - at least yet." (FFMC 67)

If she ever marries, she is determined to marry for love and for somebody who could tame her. With Mr Oak, "it wouldn't do..., I am too independent, and you would never be able to [tame me]" (FFMC 68). Ironically, this wish comes true as she marries Sergeant Troy, who tamed her indeed. However, the whole marriage backfired on her.

Through the marriage, Sergeant Troy gains legal authority over the farm. First of all, the new farm owner buys "his discharge from the Army with Bathsheba's hard-earned money." (Morgan 1988, 126) However, he fails to manage the farm responsibly and prefers drinking and gambling. Such as when he loses over a hundred pounds through horse racing. (FFMC 289) His behaviour nearly bankrupts the farm, so Bathsheba fears that "the days of their tenancy of the Upper Farm would be numbered" (FFMC 351). After Fanny's death, who was Troy's former fiancée and Bathsheba's servant, Troy leaves Weatherbury without telling anyone. His wife has to face the consequences alone. As Morgan emphasises, "her tenure as James Everdene's successor is now threatened by Troy's legal ownership of her entitlement, by his desertion, and by his jeopardising of her good name. (Morgan 1988, 30)

Probably, a year later, to the surprise of all villagers, since they had thought that Troy drowned, he returned to claim another money. Bathsheba, "as a married woman whose husband has sole control over her estates"(Ibid. 30), was obliged to comply with his request since The Married Women's Property Act did not come into force then. Nevertheless, the problem was solved otherwise because Farmer Boldwood shot Troy.

To draw a conclusion, the marriage "does stifle and compress [Bathsheba's] existence. It robs her of control of her estates, nullifies her legal existence, and renders her man's property into the bargain". (Morgan 1988, 30) She realises that her mistake in marrying Troy was a "fatal one," it did not occur to her that it would have such an impact on the farm (FFMC 352). Before, she successfully handled all farming responsibilities alone. However, through this hasty commitment, she sacrificed her possessions, independence and primarily herself.

"In those earlier days, she had always nourished a secret contempt for girls who were the slaves of the first good-looking young fellow who should choose to salute them" (FFMC 303)—now, regretting not adhering to her earlier determination to resist marriage. "Until she had met Troy, Bathsheba had been proud of her position as a woman" (FFMC 303). Now, by

contrast, she hates herself. Since Troy's death, Bathsheba neglected her farmer duties. Therefore, Mr Oak attends "all sales and fairs for her, transacting her business" (FFMC 415). The earlier spirited Bathsheba is gone, and her character rapidly changes into a somewhat submissive one, "bewildered by the prospect of having to rely on her own resources again: it seemed to herself that she never could again acquire energy sufficient to go to market, barter, and sell." (Ibid. 415) The circumstances of such transformation are discussed in the subsequent chapter addressing her love life and suitors.

3.2 Eustacia Vye

At the outset, it is necessary to note that *The Return of The Native* presents a new type of woman approaching "the incomparable Eustacia...drawn with fire and dash" (Higonnet xiv). Compared to female nineteenth-century societal conventions, Eustacia considerably differs. She is a prominent character who is free-spirited, passionate, and unconventional, following the vision of independence, adventure, great love, and dreams of a different life. However, unfortunately, it is impossible to make her dreams come true in this rural and hostile environment.

As a beautiful and passionate young girl, Eustacia will never be satisfied with her current life at Heath. Despite living there for years, she never got familiar with life there and did not accustom to it. Because heath folk still keeps the traditional ways of life, which she considers dull and hates the tediousness of a rural place. However, when an opportunity to leave presented itself, Ms Vye startlingly refused.

A reddleman Digory Venn offers Eustacia a way to leave Egdon Heath if she is willing to work as a company keeper for a rich widow-lady in a Budmouth. Luring her into her beloved native town with these words: "Think of the company and the life you'd lead, miss; the gaiety you'd see, and the gentleman you'd marry." In defiance of her longing for Budmouth, this position seems inferior to Eustacia. She has self-respect, which does not allow her to accept a

job position beneath her dignity; therefore, she replies: "It is to wear myself out to please her, and I won't go. O, if I could live in a Budmouth as a lady should, and go my own ways, and do my own doings, I'd give the wrinkled half of my life! Yes, reddleman, that would I." So even when she got the opportunity to leave this place, she refused to "not sink her independence to get there", which is admirably feminist (RON 92). Morgan says, "Venn may shame her, may degrade her, may humiliate her but he cannot dupe her. Seeing, instantly, his ploy to have her reduced yet further—to the menial position of unpaid serving-woman—she turns on him angrily and snaps back that she will not go." (Morgan 1988, 49) Such a reaction displays Eustacia's moral strength and determination to abandon Egdon under her circumstances.

Therefore, she further rambles the hills alone, like some apparition dreaming about stunning love. Since her most fervent dream is: "To be loved to madness—such was her great desire. Love was to her the one cordial which could drive away the eating loneliness of her days. And she seemed to long for the abstraction called passionate love more than any particular lover." (RON 69)

As we can see, she is eager to experience passionate love. However, something troubles her more – loneliness and boredom. Eustacia lives secluded; her grandfather does not pay her much attention, it is hard for her to find familiar with locals, and she does not have a particular purpose in life. Therefore, Eustacia's only kind of experience is her emotions, which she experiences intensely. (Boumelha 1982, 56)

One can feel a sense of frustration behind the words "the eating loneliness of her days", most likely even that life depresses her. Probably for that reason, she became attached to the idea of the great love, which would save her from this fearful gloom and loneliness. (RON, 69)

However, as Boumelha says, the problem lies in finding "a lover adequate to her longing" rather than choosing a random lover (1982, 51). Since "on Egdon, coldest and meanest kisses were at famine prices" (RON 69). It is not the case where a single woman looks for some

man to serve him as a dutiful wife. Eustacia's demands on potential suitors are too high, and it is hard to find a "man in silver armour" in an environment like Egdon's heath. Eventually, she considers Damon Wildeve worthy of her love, but only because suitable suitors cannot be found in her surroundings. Nevertheless, after some time, she left him. This act confirms Robert Evans' theory that Eustacia finds the intensity of love the most important rather than its duration. (253)

As Harvey contends, Eustacia "is a middle-class girl who dreams of cosmopolitan pleasures" (67), to be a part of a higher social class and to experience "what is called life, [which comprises] music, poetry, passion, war and all the beating and pulsing that is going on in the great arteries of the world" (RON 272). Because not every Victorian woman wished to lead a traditional, decent life, including respectable marriage with financial provisions and no big love fantasies. Through Eustacia, Hardy uncovered:

The anger and frustration experienced by the intelligent woman confined, mind and body, to an inutile (nothing to do), unvarying, and isolated existence. This condition spoke to countless middle-class Victorian women confined to house and home with no opportunity whatsoever for expanding their horizons. (Morgan 2007, 64)

Nonetheless, at Egdon Heath, she is the only one with such aspirations, which makes her odd in the eyes of other villagers.

The rumour spread through the Heath that a native of Egdon Heath, Clym Yeobright, is returning home from Paris, where he traded with diamonds. Such news perks Eustacia up so that she begins to fantasise about a life with a diamond merchant in Paris; regardless, she has never met him. One dweller remarked that Eustacia and Clym would make a lovely couple, which gives hope to Eustacia's picture of her bright future of city life with Clym in Paris. Eventually, they meet and fall in love, even marrying despite Mrs Yeobright's disapproval.

However, regrettably, everything turned out differently than Eustacia imagined. Ultimately their unhappy marriage results in a tragedy, including Eustacia's death.

3.3 Tess Durbeyfield

As was already stated, Tess hoped to become a teacher. However, she sacrificed this dream for her family, leaving her domestic sphere for work to save her closest from destitution. Then, the next obstacle caused her unplanned pregnancy, followed by the necessity to secure her family again financially. Therefore, her education plans are thwarted. Later in the story, Angel Clare asks her if she is interested in taking up "any course of study—history, for example" (TOD, 142). Despite her former wish, her answer is:

Sometimes I feel I don't want to know anything more about it than I know already... What's the use of learning that I am one of a long row only—finding out that there is set down in some old book somebody just like me, and to know that I shall only act her part; making me sad, that's all. The best is not to remember that your nature and your past doings have been just like thousands' and thousands', and that your coming life and doings'll be like thousands' and thousands'. (Ibid. 142)

Angel supposes that Tess, as "a daughter of the soil could only have caught up the sentiment by rote"(Ibid. 142). In other words, he believes Tess had to learn such a pessimistic attitude from books since she is inexperienced and innocent. Nonetheless, her attitude is sincere as she already went through many hardships and realizes her social insignificance.

Tess further explains, "I shouldn't mind learning why—why the sun do shine on the just and the unjust alike... But that's what books will not tell me." (Ibid. 142) This view refers to limited access to factual information for women due to the assumption that women are unable to comprehend other issues apart from courting or household tasks. To demonstrate, Tess is

depicted as less intelligent compared to Angel or Alec. For instance, Angel calls her "Artemis, Demeter and other fanciful names", which she does not understand. (TOD 146)

At Trantridge, Alec is obsessed with Tess and cannot resist her to the extent that once "he took advantage of her helplessness" and raped her in the woods, resulting in Tess's pregnancy (TOD 94). A few weeks after this incident, they meet again, and Alec tells Tess, "I am sorry to wound you. I did wrong--I admit it," offering her compensation. "I am ready to pay to the uttermost farthing. You know you need not work in the fields or the dairies again. You know you may clothe yourself with the best, instead of in the bald plain way you have lately affected, as if you couldn't get a ribbon more than you earn." (TOD 89)

Luring her with prospects of financial security and comfortable life, he is counting on her affirmative reply because a typical Victorian woman would agree to save her reputation—however, not Tess, who surprisingly refuses his proposal with these words: "I have said I will not take anything more from you, and I will not--I cannot! I SHOULD be your creature to go on doing that, and I won't!" I have never really and truly loved you, and I think I never can." Notwithstanding her realization that people will disdain her impurity, she chooses not to marry a man to whom she feels no affection and cannot forgive his betrayal. Therefore, she decides to act upon her honour.

"Perhaps, of all things, a lie on this thing would do the most good to me now; but I have honour enough left, little as 'tis, not to tell that lie. If I did love you I may have the best o' causes for letting you know it. But I don't." It is admirable that she did not yield to his pressure, found the courage to reject him and left Trantridge instead of submitting "to a conventional solution to her predicament" (Morgan 1988, 68).

Nevertheless, her mother Joan disapproves of Tess's decision because she holds Victorian views, chiding her for not persuading Alec to marry her, emphasizing: "Any woman would have done it but you, after that!" Further blaming Tess for selfishness.

Why didn't ye think of doing some good for your family instead o' thinking only of yourself? See how I've got to teave and slave, and your poor weak father with his heart clogged like a dripping-pan. I did hope for something to come out o' this! To see what a pretty pair you and he made that day when you drove away together four months ago! And yet you've not got him to marry! (TOD 93)

While Joan acts upon Victorian established codes and focuses only on finding a husband for her daughter no matter the circumstance, Tess defies these codes intending never to see again the man who humiliated and ruined her life, even on the condition that she will be shunned from society and will look after her child alone.

"The event of Tess's return from the [Trantridge] manor at was rumoured abroad, if rumour be not too large a word for a space of a square mile" (TOD 95). One Sunday morning, Tess finds the courage to go to church. However, the neighbours turn their heads towards her and whisper about her; thus, Tess "grew sick at heart and felt that she" (TOD 97) could not attend it anymore. Consequently, she secludes herself from the outside world and leaves home only after dark to avoid villagers because she is ashamed of her sin. Her pregnancy out of wedlock "made her a social warning" (TOD 104).

Tess eventually delivers a baby boy, and even though he is an illegitimate child, she is determined to raise him, reconciling with her status as a fallen woman. Subsequently, in the summer, this spouseless mother wants to feel "useful again"; therefore, she decides to work in fields during harvest when whatever "hands [were] greatly in demand" (TOD 103-104).

"Whatever Tess's reasoning, some spirit had induced her to dress herself up neatly as she had formerly done and come out into the fields... borne herself with dignity, and had looked people calmly in the face at times, even when holding the baby in her arms"(Ibid.104). Alternatively, during lunch breaks, she breastfeeds the baby, caresses and kisses it in front of other workers.

Naturally, such behaviour came as a shock to others, such as when one woman remarks: "She's fond of that there child, though she mid pretend to hate en, and say she wishes the baby and her too were in the churchyard" (TOD 103). Nevertheless, on the other side, readers experience how Tess's innate instinct of a mother outweighs the unnaturally defined social rules. She realises that "most of the misery had been generated by her conventional aspect, and not by her innate sensations.... The past was past; whatever it had been it was no more at hand. Whatever its consequences, time would close over them; they would all in a few years be as if they had never been, and she herself grassed down and forgotten." (Ibid. 103) So this realisation encouraged her not to hide her baby.

Unfortunately, her poor baby boy suddenly became ill, and his horrified mother realised he had not been baptised (TOD 105). Without baptism, a human is neither entitled to a Christian funeral nor salvation. The idea of Tess's son "consigned to the nethermost corner of hell as its double doom for lack of baptism and lack of legitimacy" compels her to christen him on her own, subsequently naming him Sorrow (TOD 106). Morgan argues that "whether or not Christian orthodoxy would deem her act sacrilegious" is for Hardy of no importance. (Morgan 1988, 71)

In his eyes, the moment of christening Tess's illegitimate child in her younger siblings' presence represents "the purest act of grace and loving-kindness. [It is] seen through the eyes of innocents, [therefore], the relevance lies simply in innocence speaking to innocence, child-mother to child-son, before an audience of innocent children". (Ibid. 71)

Despite all the efforts to save him, Sorrow dies the following day. Thus, his mother asks a parson to bury him. Albeit he must refuse, he simultaneously takes pity on a young mother, advising her to bury the child by herself. As a result of this conversation, Tess secretly buried her son at night in the corner of a churchyard, where "the conjecturally damned are laid," bravely making a tiny wooden cross for his grave (FFMC 109).

After all these sad events, Tess leaves Marlott again to find a job and hopes for a new start in a place where nobody will know her past. "Her crises [is]weathered, albeit leaving her deeply scarred, and she moves on. Only the past remains, a shadow on her young life" (Morgan 2007, 92-93).

4 Sexual life

This section of the bachelor thesis aims to present the romantic relationships and sexual experiences of the chosen heroines. In Victorian times it was not allowed to discuss sexual matters openly. Society was narrow-minded, especially concerning female chastity. Therefore, Hardy endeavoured to break the taboo on this topic. Thus, he attacked these beliefs and "took upon himself the task of the frank presentation of sexuality and the realistic discussion of marital and sexual matters" (Kaur 72).

4.1 Bathsheba and her broken spirit

During her lifetime, Bathsheba Everdene had three potential suitors. The first one was a shepherd Gabriel Oak, whom she refused in order to maintain her independence. She appreciates her youth and freedom and has little interest in becoming a man's property through marriage. Although Victorian societal norms considered marriage essential, Bathsheba dislikes the notion of being inferior to a man.

Despite her current decision, she contemplates marriage in the future, declaring: "I shan't marry – at least yet." (FFMC 67) However, it will be a man of her choosing for whom she will have feelings. Bathsheba does not have any romantic affection towards Oak. Additionally, she believes it is not in his nature to tame her independent spirit. These are reasons sufficient enough for turning down his proposal. This scene emphasises the importance that women should consciously decide to marry instead of following society's expectations.

When Bathsheba attends the corn market at Casterbridge as a woman farmer, she enjoys the attention she receives with everyone's eyes on her. Our beautiful heroine moves gracefully among others, compared to "a chaise between carts and a breeze among furnaces" (FFMC 123). All faces turn towards her, except for one man who does not notice her at all. "Her charms were thin air" for him, which offended her. (FFMC 126)

Later, she discovers the man is her neighbour, a bachelor gentleman farmer named Boldwood. On St. Valentine's Day, she frivolously sends him an anonymous valentine with the inscription 'Marry me'. However, he took the message 'Marry me' seriously instead of taking it as a joke. When he discovers that the author of the valentine is Bathsheba, he falls deeply in love with her. Her unreflecting deed demonstrates, "Of love as a spectacle Bathsheba had a fair knowledge, but o love subjectively she knew nothing" (FFMC 131). Boumelha argues that Bathsheba's intention with the valentine was to provoke desire in Boldwood, not realising he would pursue a relationship. As Wotton said: Bathsheba "demands to be seen by men". However, once a woman becomes an "observed object", a man will treat her based on his perspective, regardless of her perspective. (Boumelha 1982, 33-34)

A few days after receiving the valentine, Boldwood asks for Bathsheba's hand in marriage, unaware that the love declaration was a mean trick. Bathsheba regrets her foolish actions, "it was a wanton thing which no woman with any self-respect should have done...I cannot bear you to feel so much, and me to feel nothing" (FFMC 160, 161). However, Boldwood remains firm in his desire to marry her, promising to care for all her household and farm affairs. After which, Bathsheba agrees to consider his proposal.

In every point of view, ranging from politic to passionate, it was desirable that she, a lonely girl, should marry, and marry this earnest, well-to-do, and respected man. He was close to her doors: his standing was sufficient: his qualities were even supererogatory. Had she felt, which she did not, any wish whatever for the married state in the abstract, she could not reasonably have rejected him, being a woman who frequently appealed to her understanding for deliverance from her whims. Boldwood as a means to marriage was unexceptionable: she esteemed and liked him, yet she did not want him. (FFMC 163)

Although Boldwood is a suitable match for her in terms of social class and wealth, Bathsheba has no intention of accepting the proposal, as she does not love him. Furthermore,

Bathsheba is content with her current status as an independent farmer. Her "position as absolute mistress of a farm and house was a novel one, and the novelty had not yet begun to wear off" (FFMC 163).

However, despite her reasons for objecting, "she had a strong feeling that having been the one who began the game, she ought in honesty to accept the consequences" (Ibid. 163). As a result, she is still hesitant about her answer.

During the days of Bathsheba's decision-making, while Boldwood is out of town, something unexpected happens. Another man "intervenes in Bathsheba's busy life" (Morgan 2007, 38). The man is Sergeant Troy, who "is dashing, adventurous, irresponsible and seductively charming" (Morgan 2007, 38).

The first encounter between Bathsheba and Troy caused a stir among critics and readers. Bathsheba was returning home at night after running some errands. While going through a forest, she came across a stranger. As they tried to pass each other, her dress got caught on his military spur. During their disentanglement, Bathsheba discovered that the stranger was a handsome soldier and "whether by accident or design," he touched her hand. (FFMC 194)

Furthermore, he flirted with her, calling her "Beauty", or complimenting her appearance, saying: "I've never seen a woman so beautiful as you. Take it or leave it--be offended or like it--I don't care." (FFMC 195) Even though these remarks made her feel uncomfortable and embarrassed, on the other side, they also excited her. Once her skirt was finally untangled, she decided to run home "instead of walking home demurely in a dignified assertion of womanly pride" (Morgan 1988, 23).

Victorian critics were outraged by the "body contact between the sexes, and, no doubt, Bathsheba's unconstrained delight in the event." The scene poetically evokes sexuality, which is morally wrong. (Ibid. 23) For instance, a reviewer from *Observer* complained about her lack of modesty in the following way:

The first interview between Troy and Bathsheba represents the latter in so odious a light, if women in whatever rank of society are supposed to retain any trace of modesty and reserve, that we confess we do not care one straw about her afterwards, and are only sorry that Gabriel Oak was not sufficiently manly to refuse to have anything more to say to such an incorrigible hussy. (qtd. in Morgan 1988, 21)

Nevertheless, an even more scandalous moment occurs during a clandestine meeting between Troy and Bathsheba. Before the meeting, Bathsheba contemplates whether or not to go, but eventually, her adventurous spirit takes over. As a result of this decision, "she [is] now literally trembling and panting at this her temerity in such an errant undertaking." Thus they meet "in the evening sunshine among the ferns". (FFMC 214)

First, Troy demonstrates his sword skills there, rotating the sword's sharp edge around her body. Then, he removes a caterpillar from her bosom and cuts a lock of her hair, which he keeps. This moment profoundly affects Bathsheba to the point that she:

Overcome by a hundred tumultuous feelings resulting from the scene, abstractedly sat down on a tuft of heather. She felt powerless to withstand or deny him [...] He was altogether too much for her, and Bathsheba seemed as one who, facing a reviving wind, finds it blow so strongly that it stops the breath. (FFMC 218)

Afterwards, he kissed her, which "brought upon her a stroke resulting, as did that of Moses in Horeb, in a liquid stream--here a stream of tears. She felt like one who has sinned a great sin" (FFMC 218). At that moment, Bathsheba experiences her awakening sexuality. "Intense desire overwhelms her sense of shame - the body tells its own erotic story" (Morgan 2007, 50). Her attraction to Troy is apparent from her "feeling of being hypnotised, paralysed, rendered will-less" (Boumelha 1982, 33).

According to Jekel: "Her sexuality has been aroused, but it is not the localised passion, which is traditionally associated with male eroticism, rather a typically feminine passion which yearns for a mingling with the loved one" (64).

Bathsheba loved Troy in the way that only self-reliant women love when they abandon their self-reliance. When a strong woman recklessly throws away her strength she is worse than a weak woman who has never had any strength to throw away. One source of her inadequacy is the novelty of the occasion. She has never had practice in making the best of such a condition. Weakness is doubly weak by being new. (FFMC 219)

At first, Bathsheba resisted becoming some man's property. Then, however, her feelings changed as she found someone who could control and tame her passionate nature. Unfortunately, this person is Sergeant Troy – "a flatterer, good-humoredly aware of his own charm, and callous in his philandering" (Morgan 2007, 41), whose glamour she succumbed. "Passion brought her round to heel" while meeting him (Jekel 62).

Bathsheba gets engaged to Troy "primarily at the level of private, light-hearted sexual exploration without guilt or shame or fear" (Morgan 1988, 31). Despite hearing rumours about his philandering, "being infatuated, she does not allow herself to believe them" and falls for his charm. (Morgan 2007, 41)

At that moment, a shepherd at her farm, Gabriel Oak, advises Bathsheba not to trust Sergeant Troy since he might be evil. Furthermore, in order to "keep [her]self well honoured among the workfolk, [she] should be more discreet [in her behaviour] towards this soldier" (FFMC 223). When Boldwood returns, he is furious to discover that Troy has kissed Bathsheba and is now his rival. He demands that Bathsheba end her relationship with Troy.

After much contemplation, Bathsheba decides to obey "Oak's entreaties and Boldwood's denunciations and give up Troy altogether." (FFMC 245) Nevertheless, despite Bathsheba's initial "intention of breaking off her engagement Mr Troy", they secretly marry in Bath. (FFMC

282) Troy feels Bathsheba's hesitation in wedding, saying he has "that day seen a woman more beautiful than [her, so] his constancy could not be counted on unless [she] at once became his..." Therefore, in the end, Bathsheba, driven by "jealousy and distraction, marries him." (FFMC 282)

Nonetheless, after some time, Troy got tired of Bathsheba, their passion faded, and he indulged in alcohol and gambling. Furthermore, the death of his former girlfriend, Fanny, who was bearing his child, strikes him with compunction. To briefly outline their story, Troy had intended to wed Bathsheba's servant Fanny Robin, before he got together with Bathsheba. Unfortunately, Fanny missed the wedding ceremony by attending the wrong church, which upset Troy. He felt humiliated and refused to marry her. As a result of his rejection, Fanny fell into poverty and kept her pregnancy hidden from Troy. Eventually, Troy met Bathsheba, and they got married.

Bathsheba is devastated to learn about his husband's former girlfriend with a child, and her humiliation peaks when Troy repudiates her "before the dead bodies of Fanny Robin and her child" (Boumelha 1982, 33). Troy even kisses the corpse upon which Bathsheba exclaims: "Don't--don't kiss them! O, Frank, I can't bear it--I can't! I love you better than she did: kiss me too, Frank--kiss me! You will, Frank, kiss me too!"

The narrator comments: "There was something so abnormal and startling in the childlike pain and simplicity of this appeal from a woman of Bathsheba's calibre and independence." (FFMC 326) Troy is shocked by Bathsheba's demeanour and "could hardly seem to believe her to be his proud wife Bathsheba"(FFMC 327). Refusing to kiss her and pushing her away, he responds:

This woman is more to me, dead as she is, than ever you were, or are, or can be. If Satan had not tempted me with that face of yours, and those cursed coquetries, I should have married her.

I never had another thought till you came in my way. Would to God that I had; but it is all too late! [...] You are nothing to me—nothing. (FFMC 327)

Whereas Troy tells Bathsheba these heartless words, contrarily, to Fanny's corpse, he remorsefully utters: "Darling, in the sight of Heaven you are my very, very wife!" Bathsheba is emotionally devastated upon hearing those words, as it confirms the end of their marriage. Stricken by grief, Troy uses his last money to purchase a tombstone for Fanny and abandons Bathsheba. A few days later, a rumour about Troy's alleged drowning makes Bathsheba a widow.

Troy's drowning gives hope to Boldwood, who is still obsessed with Bathsheba, hoping for the wedding. Months later, he asks her if she makes "a bargain with [him] for a far-ahead time—an agreement which will set all things right and make [him] happy, late though it may be." He wants to marry her in six years when her reputedly drowned husband Troy will be proclaimed dead. (FFMC 377)

By the reckless sending of the valentine's card, Bathsheba is in debt to Boldwood and believes the only way to repay this debt is by marrying him. "I believe I am bound to do it if it honestly lies in my power, without any consideration of my own future at all. I hold that man's future in my hand." (FFMC 379, 380)

It is ironic because she used to believe love was necessary for marriage. So, despite not having any romantic feelings for Boldwood, she accepts his proposal at his Christmas party. However, supposedly drowned Troy suddenly appears at the party and claims his wife and property back. Bathsheba is in utter shock, and when Troy grabs her, Boldwood shoots him to death. Afterwards, he is imprisoned for murder.

Throughout the novel, Bathsheba's personality has drastically changed. After Troy's tragic decease, the remains of her spirited nature are bygone; she is no longer enthusiastic about her farmer role, therefore, fails to attend to her responsibilities. So, Gabriel Oak takes care of

her business on her behalf. (FFMC 415) However, recently, Gabriel Oak informed her about his plans to leave Weatherbury for California. At which point, such news:

Broke upon her at length as a great pain that her last old disciple was about to forsake her and flee. He who had believed in her and argued on her side when all the rest of the world was against her, had at last like the others become weary and neglectful of the old cause, and was leaving her to fight her battles alone. (FFMC 414)

Bathsheba realises she cannot manage and survive in this cruel world on her own and needs Oak. Thus, she and Oak finally reveal their feelings without "pretty phrases and warm expressions". Instead, they recognise their affection as "good fellowship or camaraderie", contrary to a passionate romance with Troy. The relationship between Bathsheba and Gabriel formed gradually, as "the two who are thrown together begin first by knowing the rougher sides of each other's character, and not the best till further on, the romance growing up in the interstices of a mass of hard prosaic reality." (FFMC 419)

It is based on mutual understanding rather than physical attraction. According to Boumelha, their relationship is "economic interaction", where they come together "as landowners, workers, and social equals. Their engagement is confirmed by the discussion of the details of his forthcoming tenure of the other farm." (Boumelha 1999, 139)

Throughout the novel, he serves as her moral guide, who advises her on what is appropriate and what is not, slowly recreating her in his image of a docile woman. In comparison, feminist critics perceive Gabriel Oak "as a patriarch who controls Bathsheba from the start." Ultimately, she is "passive, entangled in a sexual ideology which positions the woman only in terms of her being desired and not in terms of her desiring" (Shires 1991, 163). Initially, she was energetic and resisted male control; however, she yielded to their charm and became submissive. Jekel notes, "Troy begins the process of 'taming' Bathsheba, and Boldwood and

Gabriel Oak complete her transformation into docile womanhood"(59). Consequently, "Bathsheba is but a ghost of her former self" (Morgan 1988, 40).

4.2 Eustacia and her relationships

Eustacia is a "seductive enigma" (Higonnet xv). Men are captivated by her physical beauty, while women consider her a manipulative witch who has the power to control men. However, Eustacia is not concerned with negative opinions because her only focus is on finding a man worthy of her and who satisfies her passionate desires. So she seeks an equal partner who matches her standards, which is not achievable on Egdon Heath. Unfortunately, the only man on the heath who appears to be suitable is Damon Wildeve. Although Eustacia confesses that she "should have cared nothing for him had there been a better person near" (RON 91), she continues to meet with him since there is no other "mouth matching hers" in the heath (RON 69). Eventually, their relationship comes to an end because Wildeve becomes boring to her.

However, upon hearing the rumour of Wildeve's and Thomasin's unsuccessful wedding ceremony, Eustacia is attracted to Wildeve again. Nevertheless, her only motivation for this sudden interest is based on jealousy. Eustacia cannot stand the thought of someone else having Wildeve, as she believes: "He was mine before he was hers!" (RON 91). In support of this view, Miller states:

Eustacia ceases to love the man who is not loved by others and loves him again when he becomes desirable to another person. Her relation to Wildeve is mediated by way of his relation to Thomasin. When Eustacia has Wildeve to herself she soon tires of him; but as soon as he turns from her to Thomasin he becomes desirable again...The divine radiance which seems intrinsic to Wildeve is a subjective mirage cast on Eustacia's vision of him by the fact that Thomasin loves him. (159-161)

When Clym Yeobright returns home from Paris, Eustacia's interest in Wildeve quickly decreases. Then, she visits the Christmas mummer's play, secretly playing the Turkish Knight to see Clym. She attends this celebration without an invitation and talks to Clym without being properly introduced, which crosses customs. Nevertheless, she decided to break these traditions and do what she wanted. (Wilson 123) After that night, "the perfervid woman already was half in love with a vision" (RON 117). Over time, they develop romantic feelings and marry despite his mother's objections.

Eustacia realises that "the Victorian maid taken in marriage as man's property marries not only the man but also his way of life, she must need canvass his intentions, his affiliations, his line of country" (Morgan 1988, 54). Readers can notice that Eustacia views Clym as a means to escape her unpleasant surroundings. "Her love is directed not toward him, but toward what he seems to stand for or to promise her – rich life for which she longs" (Miller 129). Even after discovering that he prefers to stay at the heath instead of returning to Paris, Eustacia attempts to change his mind. Her strategy is to evoke memories of beautiful days in Paris, which would result in reconsidering his decision. However, she did not expect that she would fail. Although Clym is not bothered by recalling his memories of Paris, he remains firm in his decision not to return.

Eustacia realises she cannot find happiness in her marriage with Clym. She cannot bear to see her husband throwing away his potential when he ends up as a furze-cutter. He almost lost his sight because he often studied at night. Due to his physical limitations, there was no other choice of profession but to become a furze-cutter. Despite this exhausting profession, Clym is satisfied. However, his spouse is disappointed as she had envisioned a luxurious life with a diamond merchant in Paris. In contrast, her husband is a low-paid furze cutter instead, which makes Eustacia feel ashamed of him and degraded as an educated lady-wife.

It wounded her "to hear him sing [about Paris while working] and not at all rebel against" his humiliating job. She expresses her disappointment in the following way: "Well, you follow out your own ideas, and won't give in to mine... Is there anything you dislike in me that you act so contrarily to my wishes? I am your wife, and why will you not listen?" (RON 246)

Eustacia is disillusioned and feels her current life is "a mockery of her hopes." Living in a small cottage on Egdon with her half-blinded husband, who ignores her request "to leave this shameful labour", is not her vision of an ideal marriage. Moreover, her husband also fails to acknowledge her interests or "individual existence", which frustrates her. (RON 246-249) In Morgan's perspective, the most frustrating part is that marrying Clym could not "relieve the enervating emptiness of her days." (2007, 61)

In his portrayal of Eustacia, Hardy exposes "the anger and frustration experienced by the intelligent woman confined, mind and body, to an inutile (nothing to do), unvarying, and isolated existence." It points out the sad reality of Victorian society, where women were entrusted only with household duties, unable to accomplish their aspirations or broaden their horizons. Eustacia is tired of this helpless situation and yearns for equal rights. (Morgan 2007, 64).

Even though Clym and Eustacia had different visions of mutual life, they hastily married. On one side, Clym aspired to become a teacher and hoped that Eustacia would support him. "He is an idealist, who dreams for the ennoblement of Egdon people by providing them with spiritual thoughts." (Kaur 64) While Eustacia rejects to help him with teaching local folk: "I don't quite feel anxious to. I have not much love for my fellow-creature. Sometimes I quite hate them." (RON 183) On the other side, Eustacia imagined a lavish life in Paris, where she could fully express herself. They could have avoided their suffering if they had recognized their differing expectations.

As John Peck comments: "The marriage between these two is a marriage of two people of unconventional, impractical temperaments. Clym, then, like Eustacia, is swayed by his feelings, but, whereas Eustacia seems romantic and passionate, Clym seems more of an idealist and a dreamer." (Peck 25)

Boumelha emphasises another essential feature of Eustacia's disappointment; it is not only emotional but also sexual. She overtly expresses her sexual frustration to Clym in the following scene:

Yes, I fear we are cooling—I see it as well as you... And how madly we loved two months ago! You were never tired of contemplating me, nor I of contemplating you. Who would have thought then that by this time, my eyes would not seem so very bright to yours, nor your lips so very sweet to mine? Two months - is it possible? (RON 247)

The connection they once had is gradually fading away. In contrast, when Eustacia comes across Wildeve at a village picnic and he whispers her name, she blushes instantly. "The sight of him instigated that sudden rush of blood"(RON 252). Then, they dance together, and Eustacia becomes overwhelmed with passion.

Eustacia floated round and round on Wildeve's arm, her face rapt and statuesque; her soul had passed away from and forgotten her features, which were left empty and quiescent, as they always are when feeling goes beyond their register [...]How near she was to Wildeve! [...]She could feel his breathing [...]The enchantment of the dance surprised her. Her beginning to dance had been like a change of atmosphere: outside, she had been steeped in arctic fridity by comparison with the tropical sensations here. (RON, 253)

Their dance "is described in language that exactly echoes the language of her earlier dream." It awakens her suppressed desires and could lead to infidelity. The excerpt that "outside, Eustacia had been steeped in arctic fridity" indicates that, in her marriage with

Clym, her sexuality is "unaroused or unsatisfied." Additionally, this sexual dissatisfaction is reinforced by the fact that pregnancy does not follow their marriage. (Boumelha 59, 60)

As previously mentioned, Wildeve was formerly romantically involved with Eustacia. Specific references suggest their relationship was not strictly platonic and innocent according to Victorian norms. Morgan points out that the following scene indicates their sexual intercourse. "Their black figures sank and disappeared from against the sky. They were as two horns which the sluggish heath had put forth from its crown, like a mollusk, and had now again drawn in." (RON 85)

The word "horns" stand for "twinned erectile protuberances and therefore heightened sexual appetites in both his lovers." Moreover, Eustacia is also "aligned with Hera, the chief goddess of sexuality." (Morgan 2007, 75-76) Since sex was a taboo topic, Hardy described it through symbols and metaphors.

In the novel, Eustacia also admits to Wildeve that they were once "hot lovers." (RON 274) Alternatively, in the Osgood McIlvaine edition 1895, Hardy states that Eustacia belongs to Wildeve with her "body and soul" (Higonnet, xv). It is unlikely that Eustacia is an "innocent, pre-sexual virgin maiden" (Boumelha 61).

After the dance, Eustacia and Wildeve start to see each other again. However, while Wildeve is visiting Eustacia at her home one day, Clym's mother unexpectedly arrives. Eustacia wants to avoid being seen with Wildeve, therefore, does not open the door for Mrs Yeobright. Unfortunately, on her way home, Mrs Yeobright is bitten by a snake and consequently dies.

Clym later finds out that Eustacia was partly to blame for his mother's death and had a secret male visit at home, which leads to a heated argument between them during which he says: "How bewitched I was! How could there be any good in a woman that everybody speaks ill of?" (RON 318) Afterwards, Eustacia decides to leave Clym and goes back to her grandfather.

Meantime, Wildeve inherits money and suggests to Eustacia to escape to Paris. However, she faces a moral dilemma as abandoning a husband was considered disgraceful in Victorian society. Despite her unhappiness in Egdon Heath, she does not find Wildeve worthy enough to break a marriage vow for him. Therefore, she hesitates, crying out with bitterness and defiance:

I can't go, I can't go! He's not great enough for me to give myself to- he does not suffice for my desire!... If he had been a Saul or a Bonaparte -ah ! But to break my marriage vow for him- it is too poor a luxury!... And I have no money to go alone! I must drag on next year, as I have dragged on this year, and the year after that as before. How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me!... I do not deserve my lot! O, the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control! (RON 341)

This is a call of a woman who feels restricted by the societal norms of the Victorian era, and Eustacia is "a passionate, determined female who yearns to participate in life, to be 'splendid' and independent" (Larson 60).

Unfortunately, on the rainy night of Wildeve's and Eustacia's escape, a misfortune happens, and both drown. We never find out if Eustacia drowned on purpose or by accident. This issue remains ambiguous until the end. Nevertheless, having a moral dilemma, she was still ambivalent about whether to leave Egdon for Paris or stay. Furthermore, considering her history, she had already attempted to take her life. Therefore, it would be more probable that she went to a weir voluntarily and wanted to end her life. Peck also supports the view of suicide, highlighting that:

Characters who will not observe social conventions are likely to come to grief because if you want to live in society, you have to accept the rules of society. We know Eustacia is bound to be defeated. She cannot settle down and live an ordinary life, and, as much as she might long

for a glamorous alternative existence in Paris, there is no escape from the realities of everyday experience except through death. (26, 27)

Finally, it is crucial to note that Eustacia is not a fallen woman who, due to her social expulsion, "seeks death by drowning" (Larson 59). Instead, she has come to the realisation that:

No man, no city, no amount of money will serve as a substitute for that which she so desperately longs for: the chance to be extraordinary. It is not for love, or even lack of it, then, that Eustacia dies, but rather because she can see no change from the limited role that she is forced to play in life...therefore, discontented with the cultural and moral status quo of her time, seeks death as a way out of social and sexual limitations. (Larson 60-62)

4.3 Tess as 'A Pure Woman, Faithfully Presented'

From the very beginning, the novel portrays Tess as a naive and innocent girl, described as "a mere vessel of emotion untinged by experience." (TOD 21) However, throughout the novel, that crucially changes. "At an early age Tess is encouraged, or shall we say procured, by her mother for a relationship with Alec d'Urberville, the "gentleman "who rapes her" (Ermarth 222).

Ever since Alec visited Durbeyfields to ask if their daughter would accept the job position, Joan Durbeyfield had harboured hopes for a marriage between Tess and this noble gentleman - a "mighty handsome man wearing a beautiful diamond ring" (TOD 52). Despite Tess's reluctance, she accepts the job due to the inducement of her family. However, regrettably, nobody realizes that this man is actually an imposter. Alec d'Urberville, the alleged relative, is, in fact, Alec Stoke. His father, Mr Stoke, was a merchant who wanted to conceal his past. Therefore, instead of "bald stark words", he needed a name "that would not too readily identify him with the smart tradesman" (TOD 44). So he picked a name of a half-extinct family and purchased its estate, d'Urberville, which implies that Alec's real name is not respectable, nor is his behaviour decent.

During their very first encounter at Trantridge, Alec flirts with Tess already, by offering her strawberries and holding them "by the stem to her mouth", which makes her uneasy and visibly upset as she replies: "No, no!... I would rather take it in my own hand." (TOD 47) Nevertheless, he persistently persuaded her despite her reluctance until Tess "in a slight distress parted her lips and took it in" (Ibid. 47). After that, they "passed round to the rose-trees, whence he gathered blossoms and gave her to put in her bosom. She obeyed like one in a dream and when she could affix no more he himself tucked a bud or two into her hat, and heaped her basket with others in the prodigality of his bounty." This scene creates an atmosphere of impending danger. Right from the beginning, readers view Alec as a negative character who manipulates Tess into doing things she does not want, such as eating the strawberries.

As Tess commences her occupation as a poultry keeper at Trantridge, she faces unwanted advances from Alec, who is physically attracted to her. He calls her "coz" with mockery because he knows they are unrelated, but Tess is ignorant of this information and believes they are relatives. Unfortunately, Alec's lust for Tess eventually results in rape. While driving her from a market in Chaseborough at night, he took advantage of her fatigue and raped her in the wood of The Chase.

This scene caused a stir among reviewers as well as readers, but also confusion because it is ambiguous. To overcome Victorian censorship, the description of the incident is brief, "as the explicit narration of a sexual encounter would have been unthinkable at his period" (Boumelha 2008, xxi). That is the cause of the confusion since it is unclear whether the act was rape or consensual sex. (Shires 152) Assumptions that Tess was seduced by Alec and not raped are based on their conversation a few weeks after the incident in the woods. While Tess is determined to depart and return home after four months, she is stopped on her way by Alec, who tries to persuade her to stay. Further, they discuss why she came to Trantridge in the first place:

‘You didn't come for love of me, that I'll swear.’

‘Tis quite true. If I had gone for love o' you, if I had ever sincerely loved you, if I loved you still, I should not so loathe and hate myself for my weakness as I do now! ... My eyes were dazed by you for a little, and that was all. ‘

He shrugged his shoulders. She resumed--

‘I didn't understand your meaning till it was too late.’

‘That"s what every woman says.’

‘How can you dare to use such words!" she cried, turning impetuously upon him, her eyes flashing as the latent spirit (of which he was to see more some day) awoke in her.[...] Did it never strike your mind that what every woman says some women may feel?’ (TOD 88, 89)

According to critics, Tess hates herself for her weakness, which lies in yielding to Alec's temptations willingly. (Shires 153) Furthermore, the fact that Tess leaves "some few weeks subsequent to the night ride in The Chase" (TOD 87) raises questions. According to Boumelha, it "provides contradictory evidence of some kind of acquiescence, at least" (2008, xxi). It suggests that during Tess's last weeks at Trantridge, they could have sex multiple times.

However, on the other side, the novel presents several pieces of evidence of Tess's sincere disinterest in Alec. For instance, leaving Marlott in a gig, Alec attempts to kiss Tess. Notwithstanding Tess expressing her clear disapproval: "But I don't want anybody to kiss me, sir!" even coming close to tears, Alec kissed her. After that, Tess felt ashamed and even used her handkerchief to "wipe [off] the spot on her cheek" where he had kissed her. (TOD 61)

Moreover, on that unfortunate night, Tess was dead tired; she suffered "an appropriation of her sleep" (Morgan 1988, 64), which made her "frighteningly vulnerable as she rides with Alec" (Morgan 2007, 96).

She was inexpressibly weary. She had risen at five o'clock every morning of that week, had been on foot the whole of each day, and on this evening had in addition walked the three miles

to Chaseborough, waited three hours for her neighbours without eating or drinking [...] it was now nearly one o'clock. Only once, however, was she overcome by actual drowsiness. In that moment of oblivion, she sank gently against him. (TOD 78, 79)

At this point, Alec reacted by putting his arm around her waist. In spite of her exhaustion, Tess struggles to push him away, and he almost falls into the road. So, Morgan emphasises that "this is not dumb, passive yielding but self-determined volatile resistance" of Tess upon Alec's harassment. (1988, 66).

However, as she later fell asleep in the forest, she could no longer defend herself. The novel explicitly states that Tess "was sleeping soundly" (TOD 82), which suggests that Alec violated her without her consent. Morgan agrees with this interpretation as she defends Tess: "Perhaps the greater improbability is not that of her innocence but that the exhausted young girl could ever manage to stay awake at all (as some critics have maintained she should), let alone remain on guard on this fateful evening of her first sexual encounter." (2007, 96) How could she defend herself in such a condition? Alec turns the maiden Tess into a woman involuntarily, making her an object of his lust; therefore, "Hardy expects his readers unequivocally to condemn" the scene as rape (Shires 1999, 153).

Upon Tess returning home pregnant, Joan Durbeyfield blamed her for not being more careful if she "didn't mean to get him [Alec] to make his wife!" After this accusation, Tess reproaches her mother for lack of information concerning sexual danger. Her mother should caution her sixteen years old daughter against the dangers that might arise from interacting with men.

How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house four months ago. Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn't you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o' learning in that way, and you did not help me! (TOD 94)

Mrs Durbeyfield, despite being described "as a good-natured shiftless woman [...] she does not hesitate to send her daughter deliberately into temptation, with as much *sangfroid* as if she had been the vilest of her sex" ("Saturday Review" 204). Therefore, "the silly mother, is [also] responsible for Tess's fall" (Trent 245).

During her time as a dairy-maid at Talbothay, Tess meets Angel Clare, a man of higher social standing than hers, a gentleman farmer. Soon after their acquaintance, they develop feelings for each other, and he eventually proposes to her. Even though she loves Angel, she hesitates to accept the marriage proposal. Firstly, due to her humble origin because Angel is a clergyman's son. Secondly, and most primarily, she is apprehensive about confessing her sin from the past to him. Nevertheless, she eventually "yields to his pressure to be married, although against her better judgment. She would rather simply live and love—being, after all, courageous, independent minded, and capable of sustaining herself." (Morgan 2007, 93)

After long ruminating, and despite her mother's advice against telling Angel about her loss of virginity, as "no girl would be such a fool, specially as it is so long ago, and not your fault at all" (TOD 210), Tess reveals the truth on their wedding night. According to Morgan, "many Victorians argued that Tess should have behaved differently, but Hardy's whole point is that she abides by her own moral code, not society's" (2007, 93).

Prior to Tess's confession, Angel had already disclosed that he had an affair while in London, which Tess responded to with enthusiasm, saying: "O Angel— I am almost glad— because now you can forgive me!" (TOD 243) Therefore, she willingly forgave him and proceeded to share her story about "Alec d'Urberville and its results" (TOD 244), expecting he would also forgive her since they both had committed similar sins.

'It is as serious as yours, or more so.'

'It can hardly be more serious, dearest.'

'It cannot— O no, it cannot!' She jumped up joyfully at the hope. No, it cannot be more serious, certainly," she cried, "because 'tis just the same! I will tell you now.' (TOD 243)

Unfortunately for Angel, it is devastating news, and he feels betrayed. Before, he viewed Tess as a goddess, "a visionary essence of woman— a whole sex condensed into one typical form (TOD 146)." As Morgan points out:

His idealization of her is in part a psychological barrier to difference—sexual difference, class difference. Alternating between rarefying her and condescending to her, Angel treats her as a higher being (goddess) or a lower (child), but not as his equal, and emotionally distances himself from her without threatening his own sense of power and control. This is the manner of creating idols, by placing them on a pedestal. Tess is sensitively aware that she is not completely real to him. (Morgan 2007, 96-97)

However, he did not see and know the genuine Tess; he saw an idealised flawless version of her. Tess "does not constitute an ideal [nor] allegorical stereotype"(Jekel 175). Like any other individual, she possesses emotions like anger, stubbornness, or pride, which may lead her to commit mistakes. Nonetheless, she takes responsibility for such errors and handles them in her way. (Ibid. 175)

In Angel's "fantasy of Tess as the unspoilt and incorruptible country girl, [he] adopts a romanticising patronage" (Boumelha 1982, 43). Therefore, learning about Tess's unchastity shatters his perfect image and reveals his repressed prejudices. As a result, he now perceives Tess contrarily in a negative light as a "fallen woman" instead of a goddess. (Morgan 2007, 91)

"I thought, Angel, that you loved me— me, my very self ! If it is I you do love, O how can it be that you look and speak so? It frightens me! Having begun to love you, I love you for ever— in all changes, in all disgraces, because you are yourself. I ask no more. Then how can you, O my own husband, stop loving me?"

"I repeat, the woman I have been loving is not you."

"But who?"

"Another woman in your shape. " (TOD 248, 249)

Regrettably, she realises that her past fears become true, and Angel perceives her as a fraud, "a guilty woman in the guise of an innocent one" (TOD 249). As Boumelha remarks that "her wedding night confession transforms her, for him, from "a child of nature" (TOD 252) to an instance of "nature in her fantastic trickery" (TOD 257) (Boumelha 1982, 123). So our newlywed couple did not consummate their commitment as anticipated on their wedding night. However, Angel abandons his wife and goes to Brazil instead, while she "tries desperately to cope with the heartbreak of this brutal rejection but, understandably, plunges into deep despair." (Morgan 2007, 91)

Although Angel leaves Tess some money, she is compelled to toil at Flintcomb-Ash farm to provide for her family again due to unforeseen circumstances. On top of that, sadly, her father passes away, which leaves her with no choice but to reluctantly accept the offer to become Alec D'Urberville's mistress and live at Sandbourne. She could ask Angel's parents for help, but her pride will not let her do so. Finally, after a few months, Angel Clare, her legal husband, returns to tell her he loves and forgives her.

Angel's role shifts "from victimizer to victim". The discovery of Tess's whereabouts at Alec's home as his mistress caused him great distress. Tess is devoted to Angel, her true love; therefore, she kills Alec, believing that the murder is the only means of breaking free "of circumstances that bind her. This [act leads to] her triumph and establishment of individuality." (Kaur 59)

Afterwards, Tess escaped with Angel. They spent a few days happily together until officers came for Tess to punish her for the murder. Tess is reconciled with her punishment, saying to Angel that: "It is as it should be! [...] This happiness could not have lasted— it was

too much– I have had enough, and now I shall not live for you to despise me" (TOD 418). In the end, Tess is executed. However, her peaceful acceptance of her fate is perceived as a moment that "breaks her free from the grip of circumstances she is in as well as establishes her individuality in the novel even though she has to lose her life in return"(Kaur 85).

In conclusion, Victorian critics mainly viewed Tess as "excessively voluptuous" (Morgan 1988, 60). LaValley even called her "loathsome, degrading, disgusting and vile" (qtd. in Jekel, 157). Her virginity loss "seems to parallel death as a physical event of irreversible consequence." (Boumelha 2008, xxv) This involuntary sexual experience "puts her [beyond] the pale of respectability (Jekel 176)," separates her from the community, and causes her "social death" (Boumelha 2008, xxv).

Although Tess had no intention of doing anything wrong, she still faced harsh judgments. "She has to pay for the sexual transgression committed by Alec [over and over again]. She has been made pregnant by Alec, borne his child, nurtured it, baptized it, and buried it. [Later] she is confronted with Angel's sexual double standard", the status of mistress or murderer. (Morgan 2007, 91). It is unfair that she is constantly being punished for sins committed unintentionally instead of deliberately.

Moreover, the novel highlights the double standard accepted in Victorian society as male sexual affairs outside marriage were forgiven, while female ones were unpardonable. When Angel Clare repudiates Tess for her unchastity, he supports the Victorian view that virginity is "the only definition of woman [as he] has not entirely been able to shake off the conventions or class-consciousness in his relationship with Tess" (Kaur 71). However, Angel took the forgiveness of his affair in London for granted and refused to forgive his wife for the same sin. In fact, he is a bigger sinner because he had sexual intercourse deliberately, whereas Tess was raped. Even though she unintentionally became a victim of male lust, she is a villain

for Angel and society. Nobody investigates nor cares for the reason for Tess's sins, of the rape or the murder of her seducer.

However, Thomas Hardy defends Tess by labelling her bravely by the subtitle, *A Pure Woman, Faithfully Presented*, even though she has fallen from virtue. In this novel, he "has shown himself to be one of that brave and clear-sighted minority [of writers] as he highlights the idea "that a woman's moral worth is measurable not by [a single] deed, but by the whole aim and tendency of her life and nature" (C. Black 202). This principle which was prevalent for men, should also apply to women, and Hardy proclaimed this as a universal truth. (Ibid. 202)

Therefore, he managed to create "a powerful sympathy and reader identification with Tess and her situation and thereby questions social morality and her fate at the hands of that morality"(158 Jekel). Because Tess proved that purity lies in "her goodness, her courage and steadfastness, her love of Clare, her unselfishness, her honesty. All these are much more important than the fact that she is not physically a virgin." (Morrison 45)

Even as Alec's mistress, Hardy still considers her pure and a victim of the patriarchal system, "which has entrapped her into such grotesque choices deserves the blame as much as any individual may. Any system which perpetually victimizes women and men, by forcing them to assume reductive parts in a repetitive age-old drama, should itself be drained of blood and breath." (Shires 154) There was no other way to support her family sufficiently, so she acted to save her loved ones from miserable penury. Moreover, even when killing Alec, Hardy does not blame her but exonerates her. Since "his interest goes beyond individual right and wrong". (Ibid. 154) Despite not being the perfect woman, Tess is an individual in her own right who is also worthy of a voice. (Jekel 175)

Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine the heroines in Thomas Hardy's novels. The first chapter is dedicated to a brief evaluation of the Victorian Era and primarily the social status of women, which gives the reader the idea of what it meant to be a Victorian woman. During this time, society placed a high value on morals and social norms, favouring men and placing women in a lower social standing. Female opportunities in terms of politics or education were limited compared to men. Moreover, women were financially and legally dependent on male relatives or husbands. The prevailing patriarchal ideology determined that a woman's primary role was to become a wife and mother, confining them to the domestic sphere.

Thomas Hardy defied the conventional portrayal of Victorian women, who were expected to be passive, obedient, and virtuous. His female characters are nonconforming and do not embody traditional female roles. Instead, they are intelligent, passionate, and strong. Furthermore, they display progressive attitudes as they resist the patriarchal society. By doing so, they crossed the boundaries of what was thought proper and challenged Victorian beliefs.

On top of that, many reviewers and readers were shocked by Hardy's daring to include sexual themes in his works. Although, during Victorian times, sex or sexuality was regarded as a taboo topic for the public, Hardy "made a pioneering effort to break down sexual taboos in literature" (Kaur 25). Consequently, he came across troubles with the publishing of his work.

The three following chapters introduce the reader to the novels *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Return of the Native* (1878) and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and depict three crucial areas of the heroines' lives: their home environment, aspirations and sexual experiences. These novels all take place in rural areas of Victorian England and feature heroines from lower social classes, which is discussed in the chapter on the home environment.

The ambition chapter focuses on the heroines' inner desires and efforts to decide about their lives by themselves. Bathsheba has little interest in marriage and the courage to face

gender prejudice and is determined to become a successful farm manager. Tess decides to raise her baby without its father, and Eustacia Vye strives for luxurious life full of adventures.

The last chapter points out predominantly the Victorian sexual double standard. Victorian women were supposed to be fixated only on one sexual partner - their husband. A proper girl could not lose her virginity before entering the marriage. If that happened, she would become a fallen woman who was an outcast of society. However, Victorian society had a hypocritical attitude towards male chastity. If a man was a philanderer, his affairs were forgiven, such as in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* where Tess is ostracized for her loss of virginity, which was not her fault since she was raped, while Alec, the raper, is forgiven.

This thesis draws attention to women's transition from passive and virtuous to active and autonomous. The chosen novels display the then social pressure women had to endure and how societal expectations affected their lives. Resisting the given norms was not welcomed in the Victorian era. The thesis shows what happens if a woman defies the defined manners and how others react and treat her. Tess and Eustacia fought for their desires to the extent that both heroines laid down their lives not to adapt to societal expectations. The reader can see that Bathsheba is the only heroine who stays alive. However, at the expense of her independence - Bathsheba's initial independent spirit was broken, and she did not remain unmarried as she had wished. Only her character yielded to the pressure and adapted to societal expectations. While Tess and Eustacia, heroines who do not submit to societal pressure, died.

In conclusion, this thesis has proven the exceptionality and distinctive qualities of Hardy's heroines and helps to comprehend why they tend to cause a disturbance in Victorian times. People should admire authors like Thomas Hardy, who found the courage to write about controversial topics at their time.

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