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**Crass Casualty:**  
**Crisis of Faith in Selected Novels of Thomas Hardy**

Bakalárska diplomová práca

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## Introduction

The tumultuous Victorian era brought to light many serious social issues rooted deep in history along with shocking scientific findings as well as a controversial outlook on life. Thomas Hardy, finding himself in quite a special position, in touch with the old foundations of life in England, having an ever-curious mind, and being able to witness groundbreaking changes unfold around him, created a literary world as a reflection of the possibilities and pitfalls that modernity brings.

Thomas Hardy had a curious relationship with his faith and he began to reconsider its foundation, leading him to doubts and essentially to agnosticism. This thesis aims to discuss the effect his religious journey had on selected works and therefore map the role of religion, specifically religious doubt and the crisis of faith in them. Specifically, the effects his critical approach towards Christianity accompanied by religious doubt had on the characters and their surroundings in the novels.

To carry out a literary analysis of three major chosen works *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, it is necessary to briefly introduce the life of Thomas Hardy. For this thesis, the biography focuses on his religious background and philosophical journey throughout the span of his life, as he had been keeping up with new ideas and works in the intellectual sphere until the weeks leading up to his passing. Another section sheds light on the later part of the nineteenth century, known as the Victorian era, and its cultural and social specifics. The last section of the theoretical part of the thesis presents the summaries of the novels, a decision made for coherence.

The theory sets the ground for work on the actual analysis, which is split into three categories concerning the relation of religion to sexuality, class and education respectively. Each chapter will follow Hardy's religious viewpoints and the corresponding issues he felt necessary to incorporate into his works and in that way reveal to the public. The analysis demonstrates how the reality of Hardy's Victorian England found its way into the works in the sense of the rational response to new ideas, philosophical standpoints, and political operations happening in the background. The human side of Christian reality and its social aspect are also the targets of the analysis, with each chapter emphasizing its topic. The core idea of bringing the contents of the chapters together is the crisis of faith in the lives of the characters. The last section of

the theses is reserved for a conclusion, summarizing the findings that have arisen from the analysis in the previous chapters.

# 1 Thomas Hardy's Religious Biography

## 1.1 Earlier Years – Before London

The focus of the present chapter is aimed at introducing the life of Thomas Hardy concerning his experiences with religion. The exposure to Christianity from an early age had an immense forming effect on the author and was at the same time the foundation for the critical attitude he was to adopt later, leading up to the loss of faith and lifelong interest in philosophy.

Thomas Hardy was born on 2 June 1840 in Higher Bockhampton, in the parish of Stinsford, Dorset that would also become the parish where he was baptised. He was a descendant of the once important family of Le Hardys, from his father's side, his father working as a stonemason and local builder. From the maternal side of the family, especially grandmother Elizabeth and mother Jemima, he inherited the love of books.<sup>1</sup>

The beginning of Hardy's religious journey seems to be rather uneventful, as he was said to be a rigorous student who regularly attended the services at Stinsford alongside his family. Although he used to engage in playful enactments of church services and recite quotes from hymns that would suite a certain feeling or a moment, which caused some predictions for his future occupation.<sup>2</sup> During Hardy's childhood, young vicar Arthur Shirley had been attempting to reform the casual way of Christian following at the parish, that showed maybe a little more interest in the local customs and traditions than was desired by the Church. Some of this is also present in the world Hardy has constructed in his works since he takes into account the dominant role of Christianity and a kind of paganism that seems still to be the driving force of decisions made, consciously or unconsciously. For Hardy's father, mainly the church music, devotion and passion passed onto him also from his father and the social side of the service appears to have been drawing him in every Sunday.<sup>3</sup>

In 1850, Hardy witnessed the burning of the effigies of the Pope and Cardinal Wiseman in the old amphitheatre in Dorchester that took place as the aftermath of re-

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hardy and Michael Millgate. *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), 7-9.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hardy and Michael Millgate. *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, 20.

<sup>3</sup> Jan Jędrzejewski, *Thomas Hardy and the Church*, 7-8.

establishment, which seemed to strike him with its dramatic execution, and in his own words, he has never forgotten it.<sup>4</sup> As the question of his future profession became pressing, him being sixteen even though previously contemplating entering the Church, decided for an apprenticeship to become an architect.<sup>5</sup> Widespread discussions emerged on the significance of the infant baptism that led Hardy to undergo a much more detailed study of the Bible, thanks to his frequent annotations offering evidence of his regular attendance at services. Those marked passages can also suggest that after the apprenticeship, his devotion to Anglicanism and High Church was just as emotionally based as well as intellectually. Although, they can also be interpreted as an account of his artistic observations. This is backed by his interest in music and poetry dating to childhood supported by his parents' similar interests, just as his later claim that, "he could not forget that the church was in the old days the centre of all the musical, literary and artistic education in the country village."<sup>6</sup>

One very influential figure in the life of young Thomas Hardy was Horace Moule, having entered his life in 1857. His liberal understanding of religion while still being part of the Church, showed Hardy new possible ways of thinking and life even if parting with the traditional. What were the events crucial in further developing an understanding of Christianity, particularly the Creation and other basic teachings of Christianity, was the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1859 and the publication of *Essays and Reviews* in 1860 that much impressed Hardy. The wave of positivism, crucial in scientific inquiries seemed to be overtaking other aspects of life as well. Positivism works mainly with prepositions, that the search for causes is futile and that it must be conducted in an objective way.<sup>7</sup> These texts among others also equipped Hardy with arguments for forming his criticism.

More of the intellectual exploring took place in London, the city where he was to find employment in 1862. There he to some extent continued with the churchgoing even by visiting different churches based on what they had to offer in terms of music or required his attendance due to his profession. Further notes he took on Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua* consequently show his consideration of the struggles with the

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Hardy and Michael Millgate. *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, 26.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Hardy and Michael Millgate. *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, 31.

<sup>6</sup> Jan Jędrzejewski, *Thomas Hardy and the Church*, 9-10.

<sup>7</sup> Frank E. Hartung, "The Social Function of Positivism." *Philosophy of Science* 12, no. 2 (1945): 120.



basic principles of Christianity and doubt.<sup>8</sup> What could have interested him was that Newman was writing from a standpoint of lesser attention on theory and dogmatism, in pursuit of reconciliation of religion and science.<sup>9</sup>

In 1865 he saw John Stuart Mill's political speech which might have inspired him, along with the already published *On Liberty* and *Utilitarianism*.<sup>10</sup> Mill's later *On Nature* which presents the idea that nature itself is "unmoral, blindly cruel, indifferent" seems to have directly influenced, or helped to express Hardy's views. His interest in the origin of the doubt seems to coincide with his readings spread over the London years. For example, Alfred Tennyson, a central poetic figure of the period, is described by Alexander as well read in science and religion and his work *In Memoriam A.H. H.* published in 1850 is said to dramatize the struggle of faith and doubt better than any other work while coming to terms with geological time and evolution.<sup>11</sup> Another author fondly read by Hardy was Robert Browning, keeping the romantic legacy alive in a similar way as Tennyson. Although his judgement of the dogmatic Christianity and Catholicism in some of his works was explicit, he avoided such claims outside of the literature. Algernon Charles Swinburne deserves a mention as an influential writer, described by Alexander as a hedonist, literary aesthete and an amateur of Greek lyric poetry also taking interest in Greek religious practices, especially the ecstatic cults.<sup>12</sup> His interest in Greek mythology was represented by anger directed at the Olympians with which he joined Tennyson who described them as "amused at the agonies of humanity"<sup>13</sup> and also to the Christian God, both letting humans suffer the agonies of earth. The notion of an indifferent deity was not well received by the Victorians, since it came alongside Darwin's theory and publication of *Essays and Reviews*.<sup>14</sup>

Due to the lack of success in the publishing of his poems, he considered a career in the Church, with the assumption that it could give him for his literary pursuits,

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<sup>8</sup> Jan Jędrzejewski, *Thomas Hardy and the Church*, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Stefania Grosso, "Hellenism, Paganism and Aestheticism: Arnold's Influences on Hardy's Later Novels" (Tesi di Laurea, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, 2013), 15.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy* (London: Heinemann, 1975), 90.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Alexander, *A History of English Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 274-276.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Alexander, *A History of English Literature*, 281.

<sup>13</sup> Margot K. Louis, "Gods and Mysteries: The Revival of Paganism and the Remaking of Mythography through the Nineteenth Century." *Victorian Studies* 47, no. 3 (2005): 343.

<sup>14</sup> Margot K. Louis, "Gods and Mysteries: The Revival of Paganism and the Remaking of Mythography through the Nineteenth Century." *Victorian Studies* 47, no. 3 (2005): 344-345.

having even written to Cambridge for details for admission.<sup>15</sup> Jędrzejewski states there is not sufficient evidence to show the change that Hardy undergone around 1866 apart from his readings of literary figures such as Tennyson and Swinburne, Darwin, Mill and others all touching the subject of doubt, but after his return from London, he showed an ability to take a standpoint to difficult existential questions, parting with orthodox Christian views. Robert Gittings, in his biography *Young Thomas Hardy*, offers an argument for another contributory factor in Hardy's change of mind, a woman. He supports his claim with verses marked by Hardy suggesting an emotional upheaval at this time, a love-above-faith mindset possibly connected to the figure H.A., possibly an educated woman who might have inspired the character of Sue some quarter of a century later.<sup>16</sup>

## 1.2 Later Years – After London

His life back in Dorset in the 1870s seems quiet and in accordance with societal expectations as there is evidence of him visiting church and, once again, reading the Bible.<sup>17</sup> His further attendance at services seems from some notes rather that of an observant, religiously detached from the preaching. After his success at publishing a novel, *Desperate Remedies* in 1871, he was introduced to another influential figure on his religious path, Leslie Stephen, a literary critic and the editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*. Their close friendship was expressed through Stephen picking Hardy to be a witness for his resignation from clergy.<sup>18</sup> In 1870, Hardy met his future wife Emma Lavinia Glifford. Over the next two decades, he published ten novels and over fifty short stories, the last three of the novels concentrating on marriage and divorce amid Victorian treatment of women. After that, he concentrated on his poetry and subsequently published nine hundred poems written over the course of his life starting from his early life in London.<sup>19</sup>

Going back to the 1870s, the quotation from George Henry Lewes's *The Story of*

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy*, 90.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy*, 92-99.

<sup>17</sup> Jan Jędrzejewski, *Thomas Hardy and the Church*, 15-16.

<sup>18</sup> Jan Jędrzejewski, *Thomas Hardy and the Church*, 18.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Alexander, *A History of English Literature*, 307-319

*Goethe's Life* marked by Hardy "Goethe's religion was all taken out of him by the Lisbon earthquake" Jędrzejewski interprets as a demonstration of Hardy's interest in the problem of the nature and origin of the religious doubt.<sup>20</sup> His reading of Comte and the quotes from the philosopher he copied in his notebook point to the struggle to link science and religion together. The mentioned struggle was ongoing in Victorian society for a few decades by the 1870s. Jędrzejewski further states that it is from the mid-1870s onwards that Hardy stops writing notes in his Bible and Prayer Books and noting his church visits and links this with his developing agnosticism.<sup>21</sup> After 1885 he began to voice his unorthodox views on many aspects of life, just as religion, much more clearly with the publishing of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. He also expressed a proposal for a reinvented un-dogmatic religion, while seeing the transformed Church as a positive moral and cultural guidance for humanity. The proposed changes leave the ethics untouched focusing on a system of human values on the contrary the focus being on dogmas, which is in general an agnostic view.

From the positivists' works he read, he selected quotes expressing the negative impact of the traditional theological view. Hardy is critiquing the way the clergy seems to have resigned at acquiring a deeper connection with the people. Hardy had vehemently disagreed with accusations of atheism and questionable morality he was confronted with after the publication of *Jude*, claiming in his personal writings, he was merely "a harmless agnostic".<sup>22</sup> Agnosticism is a philosophical concept by T. H. Huxley first presented in 1869 and twenty years later discussed in his essay with the same name. The term itself derives from a Greek word translated as unknowable. He presented the concept as an attitude of mind to be sceptical about claims concerning theology and metaphysics without sufficient scientific evidence.<sup>23</sup> Agnosticism seems to have established a position where an individual was allowed to take into account all of the new, as the theory of evolution, and the old, the classical influences and take the time to respond, or don't.

Fourteen months after the death of his wife in 1912, he committed to another relationship with Florence Dugdale, his long-term assistant or a secretary who was

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<sup>20</sup>Jan Jędrzejewski, *Thomas Hardy and the Church*, 20.

<sup>21</sup> Jan Jędrzejewski, *Thomas Hardy and the Church*, 24.

<sup>22</sup> Jan Jędrzejewski, *Thomas Hardy and the Church*, 38.

<sup>23</sup> James Woelfel, "Victorian Agnosticism and Liberal Theology: T. H. Huxley and Matthew Arnold." *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (1998): 61-65.

considerably younger than him, with whom he spent his last years. During those final years of his life, he had expressed his wish that he “had lived in the Middle Ages, when the Church was supreme and unquestioned. Life must have been very sweet and beautiful then, before doubt had arisen”.<sup>24</sup> In his sixties, he had been more open about the regret and some kind of longing for the simplicity of unquestioned devotion deviating from the typical agnostic standpoint of his contemporaries. In a similar tone, he describes his religious attitudes in the autobiography as “churchy, not in an intellectual sense, but in so far as the instincts and emotions ruled.”<sup>25</sup> These instincts and emotions might have gained the upper hand in his last years of life as he began to engage more with the Church in a broader sense, and this change might have been what had gained him a place of burial in the Poets’ Corner of Westminster Abbey after his death of 11 January 1928, an honour often denied his contemporaries, authors of unorthodox views.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Jan Jędrzejewski, *Thomas Hardy and the Church*, 42.

<sup>25</sup> Jan Jędrzejewski, *Thomas Hardy and the Church*, 53.

<sup>26</sup> Jan Jędrzejewski, *Thomas Hardy and the Church*, 54-55.

## 2 Social and Cultural Background of Late Victorian Britain

This chapter aims to present late Victorian Britain with respect to the most important social and cultural events, and movements that dedicated their efforts to essentially further democracy while granting more opportunities to members of all classes. From the mid-century onwards, there was a rise in attempts to rethink and reform several spheres of life, namely gender, education, and religion. The crisis of faith that took place during this period was closely connected to these undergoing changes. Viewing Hardy's religious attitudes as dynamic leads to the examination of the dynamic times he had been living in.

By the 1950s, the typical image of Victorian middle-class-dominated society has been already established with the economic growth, imperialism and industrialisation at work. The major step towards democracy, the right to vote, gradually came to existence powered by liberalism based on John S. Mill's ideas of progress, social reform and individual responsibility.<sup>27</sup> The Second Reform Act marked the men of the working class with families who were employed in urban areas, as well as men who rented certain type of lodgings, as eligible to vote.<sup>28</sup> Another group of men was added almost twenty years later by the 1884 Reform Act, this time those of rural areas, the decision being approached with timidity. Many Victorians had an unappealing image of uneducated and crude "Hodge" in mind since they were unfamiliar with the rural population.<sup>29</sup> Even though this decision included many English men, there was still a large portion of the nation unable to participate in the policy-making.

Gender had, however, pervaded in being a divisive element. Men and women were thought to belong to separate spheres, which practically tied women for the most part to their homes in celebration of domesticity. Steinbach further clarifies the distinctions of women being seen as morally superior, while men were perceived as characteristically independent and individualistic.<sup>30</sup> Working-class women were, however, in need of employment and often found it in domestic services, respectable professions reserved for the more fortunate were mostly that of a governess and a

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<sup>27</sup> Susie Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 39.

<sup>28</sup> Susie Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians*, 51-52.

<sup>29</sup> Susie Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians*, 54-55.

<sup>30</sup> Susie Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians*, 166.

teacher, both being paid very little.<sup>31</sup> John Stuart Mill was one to try and shed some light on this problem in his work *The Subjection of Women* from 1869, in which he condemned the inequality between the sexes in the face of the law. The right to vote, granted to several groups of men as discussed above, was repeatedly denied to women throughout the nineteenth century up until the year 1918 and 1928 when the conditions were made equal for both men and women.<sup>32</sup>

Another life-changing policy introduced was the 1857 Divorce Act which enabled both men and women to terminate marriages, although making it more difficult for women to succeed requiring more evidence than from men.<sup>33</sup> The suffrage movement, the core idea being the right to vote for women, had been active since the 1870s achieving at least some success nearing the end of the century with some protection of separate property in marriage and with the local elections.<sup>34</sup> As Perkin states, it was much more difficult to accept a woman as a separate person in a marriage legally than to make divorce accessible because men were fearful of the consequences. Marriage was still much more prevalent than divorce and the right to separate property made women even more eager to receive education.<sup>35</sup> The efforts of women to be able to participate in the public life was also evident in the Salvation Army, since half of its officers were female and in the organisational structure provided the same rights as men.<sup>36</sup>

The hierarchical order of Victorian society continued throughout the nineteenth century, and philanthropy along with the strive for self-improvement was rooted in the superiority of the higher classes. Their members offered help only to the deserving poor selected upon a close inspection, and promoted discipline to inspire the lower classes. What proved to be the efficient tools in elevating the aforesaid, introduced gradually, were the reforms concerning the working conditions of women, lowering the number of work hours for men in 1874 and increased access to education.<sup>37</sup>

Education had also undergone a great development during this period with two

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<sup>31</sup> Susie Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians*, 177.

<sup>32</sup> Susie Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians*, 60.

<sup>33</sup> Susie Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians*, 176.

<sup>34</sup> Susie Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians*, 56.

<sup>35</sup> Joan Perkin, *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1989), 304.

<sup>36</sup> T. R. Gourvish and Alan O'Day, *Later Victorian Britain, 1867-1900* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 213.

<sup>37</sup> Susie Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians*, 4-5.

reforms, the groundwork for them being laid by the professionalisation of science in the middle of the century. The 1870 Education Act officiated elementary level of education, followed by an act in 1881 when it became compulsory for all children. Up until this time, the education was mainly provided by the Anglican and Nonconformist officers who received the changes by the later part of the century with some distaste, in worries that it might lessen their influence.<sup>38</sup> The higher number of schools required more teachers, what alongside the Married Women's Property Acts prompted the access to education for women. The first secondary schools were already established after the 1850s, and prestigious universities provided education for women from the 1870s onward.<sup>39</sup> It is notable, that education continued to be distinguished on the grounds of gender.

The relationship of the Victorians towards religion is marked by the crisis of faith, or in other words decline in belief in religious doctrines. This phenomenon was most noticeable in the intellectual circle. It is also notable, that its influence decreased with the many reforms of government which to an extent took over the responsibility for education and care for the poor.<sup>40</sup> The Church also faced a problem of the declining interest from the working class. However, organized religion still played a significant role in society, with a variety of theologies available. Nonconformist churches grew in popularity, in the second half of the century namely the Salvation Army, and the Anglican church also inspired several approaches to religious practice, for example, the Tractarian movement. It is notable for stressing the aspect of tradition and leaning towards Roman Catholicism. Protestant Methodism mostly attracted the working class and the middle class with its emphasis on the congregation and its preferences in types of prayer.<sup>41</sup> Evangelicalism largely influenced the view of religion in the Victorian era, building on study of the Bible and the notion that faith should be present in the everyday life. They achieved this with Sunday schools, magazines and many organizations promoting self-improvement and philanthropy.<sup>42</sup>

Victorians also continued with the newly found admiration for the classical culture that came with romanticism, focusing on the light and beauty associated with the

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<sup>38</sup> Lawrence Stone, "Literacy and Education in England 1640-1900." *Past & Present*, no. 42 (1969): 81-82.

<sup>39</sup> Susie Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians*, 177-178.

<sup>40</sup> Susie Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians*, 261.

<sup>41</sup> Susie Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians*, 264-267.

<sup>42</sup> Susie Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians*, 275-276.

Greek religion just as well as the mysteries and myths. The interest in mythology and paganism became even more widespread with the publication of James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* in 1890.<sup>43</sup> The interest in Greek culture was just one of the many aspects of the crumbling stability of the Church, and the rising appreciation of science. Up until the 1840s the scientific sphere of Victorian society could be compared to a social club with few scientists regularly conducting scientific research. A great portion of the members of the Royal society were clergymen wishing to preserve a notion that science and religion need to be parts of one and coexist in symbiosis. However, T. H. Huxley, John Tyndall, Herbert Spencer and many more introduced quite a different definition of scientific methods.

The epistemology was established as the one correct theory of knowledge containing the ways of correct methodology in line with the pursuit of science free from bias based on religious dogmas. Consequently, as Turner puts it, "the faith that the truth of science and the truth of religion need to be the same became severely strained."<sup>44</sup> The Church being already threatened by Neoclassicism and by the Pagan revival along with a growing number of leisurely activities provided for the middle-class, did not take well the publication of the new theory of evolution by Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* in 1859. Darwin disrupted the role of God in the creation and therefore discredited the Bible as a factual book. The intellectual portion of the society responded to the scientific evidence provided by Darwin by adopting a highly sceptical stance towards the dogmatic Church and even completely parting with it. As a consequence, agnosticism became popular. Thomas Henry Huxley's view of nature as amoral and indifferent to human feelings and values, evolutionary and scientific, was in contrast with the traditional view and labelled pessimistic. The notion of the natural world took on the shapes already mentioned by Huxley, with processes characterized by "the struggle for existence".<sup>45</sup>

There seems to be a considerable amount of struggle for existence in the nineteenth century, which manifested itself through the many reforms, most importantly

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<sup>43</sup> Grosso, Stefania. "Hellenism, Paganism and Aestheticism: Arnold's Influences on Hardy's Later Novels" (Tesi di Laurea, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, 2013), 25.

<sup>44</sup> Frank M. Turner, The Victorian Conflict between Science and Religion: A Professional Dimension. *Isis* 69, no. 3 (1978): 364.

<sup>45</sup> Grosso, Stefania. "Hellenism, Paganism and Aestheticism: Arnold's Influences on Hardy's Later Novels" (Tesi di Laurea, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, 2013), 18.



the gradual extension of the right to vote, gained by a large portion of the male population. All women and the poorest of men were left excluded. Legalizing divorce was another critical step, alongside the protection of property owned by married women. Making elementary education obligatory raised the literacy rates and fuelled the access to higher education for women who were to become teachers. The spheres of men and women largely remained separate. The Church lost some of its power and experienced a decrease in followers from intellectual circles, however, managed to hold a considerable amount of influence throughout the century.

### 3 Summary and Reception of Selected Works

The core of this thesis is the analysis of three major novels by Thomas Hardy therefore I believe it is critical to offer the summaries of the selected works. These will allow for better orientation in the consequent chapters and overall structure. The reception of the works will help to underline the atmosphere of late Victorian England, and therefore connect the socio-cultural background of reality to the points raised in the analysis.

#### 3.1 Far from the Madding Crowd

The novel opens up with Gabriel Oak, a farmer, meeting a beautiful confident woman, Bathsheba Everdene. She saves his life which fuels his romantic feelings. She, however, declines his marriage offer arguing she does not wish to marry at the present. She moves away and Gabriel is then met with a disaster which throws him into poverty.

Gabriel is looking for employment after being forced to give up his farming, as he stumbles across a fire. He helps to extinguish it, and at the same time learns that the farm he found himself at has recently been inherited by Bathsheba. She accepts him as her new shepherd and they adjust to the changes in their social standing. Bathsheba is set on earning the respect of the people working on her farm and proves to be a just employer. She jokingly attracts the attention of an older gentleman, an owner of a neighbouring farm, Mr Boldwood. He then starts to pursue her almost obsessively. Feeling remorseful and helpless, she promises him to think about his marriage proposal.

Young sergeant Troy appears in town after having backed out of marriage to a local girl, Fanny Robins. He is attracted to Bathsheba's bold nature and the two of them grow closer. Gabriel, now a friend to Bathsheba, states his disapproval of their relationship. Bathsheba chooses to ignore this on the ground of her strong feelings, and as a result of her impulsive journey to visit Troy, they get married. The joy from the marriage lasts only a short while. He, by chance, meets sick and pregnant Fanny Robin, who dies soon after that. The revelation of their relationship causes deep sorrow in Bathsheba. Troy, who suffers from guilt, leaves, and is soon after thought to be drowned. Mr Boldwood regains hope and restores his role as a suitor. The night when Bathsheba is supposed to reveal her decision on their marriage, Troy reappears and is

shot by Mr Boldwood, who refuses to lose Bathsheba to him once again. The period after that allows Bathsheba to realize that true love is best built on friendship, thus she and Gabriel, now bailiff on two successful farms, become companions for life through marriage.

The novel was published in 1874 as the third work of Hardy serialized in the *Cornhill Magazine*, as requested by Leslie Stephen. The novel was to be concerned with a young woman farmer, a shepherd and a sergeant of cavalry, drawing inspiration from figures in his own family, immediate surroundings of his childhood home, and creating a story set in a pastoral world. A tragedy, Horace Moule's suicide, put a tragic stain on this time. The novel was deemed a great success and brought Hardy the recognition in the literary sphere he needed at the beginning of his career as an author.<sup>46</sup>

### 3.2 Tess of D'Urbervilles

The starting point of the novel is the meeting between John Durbeyfield and parson Tringham, from whom Durbeyfield receives information on his descent from the family d'Urbervilles stretching back to knighthood in the eleventh century. Durbeyfield, Tess's father, who ends up drunk after a celebration of the news, is unable to undergo a journey to the market, which is essential for the survival of their large family. Tess takes his place and the following accident costs them the life of the horse. Tess's parents find out about a family of d'Urbervilles living nearby, whom they assume to be relatives and send Tess to ask for work. As she blames herself for the loss of the horse, she reluctantly agrees to go.

Alec d'Urbervilles informs her of the lack of blood relation between them and promises her a job, acting dubiously. After she joins the household, he pays a lot of attention to her, causing her to shy away from him. One night, coming home from a dance with other servants, she is forced to accept his seeming protection which results in him taking advantage of her. Upon her departure, she stands up to him and refuses to accept anything from him. Her return disappoints her parents. Tess, who is pregnant and

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<sup>46</sup>Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 136-148.

feeling judged, withdraws from society. Her son becomes sick, and she, fearful of the image of his soul in hellish flames, performs a ritual of Christening. She buries her son in the unconsecrated part of the greave yard, boldly adds a cross and leaves Marlott for the second time.

She finds employment at a dairy farm in a picturesque valley and is introduced to a young-to-be farmer, Angel Clare. Angel, is an intellectual son of a passionate parson, who moved away from the doctrines of his father. He is stricken by Tess's melancholy nature, interesting thoughts and blooming feminine looks, which leads him to the idolization of her. They become close and eventually plan to get married. She confesses her past in a letter and learns he had not read it only on the day of their marriage. After the ceremony, Angel confesses to his brief affair with an older lady, which prompts Tess to her revelation. Angel, however, fails to accept Tess's past and in his pain of disillusionment, part ways with her. He leaves for Brazil, giving her money and only a vague idea of a possibility of a future reunion. Tess gives most of her money to her parents and goes to look for work. She finds a job in very harsh conditions, and after a considerable amount of time, meets Alec by chance.

Alec is seemingly a conformed man, fully emerged in religion, until the moment he sees Tess. His old desire resurfaces and he eventually gives up preaching, unknowingly encouraged by Tess's views on religion, which she partly adopted from Angel. Tess writes a desperate letter to Angel and resists Alec's propositions until her father's death forces the family to leave their house, making them practically homeless. Alec proposes a solution.

In the meantime, Angel is recovering from a long illness, disheartened by the abroad. He questions his treatment of Tess and strives for reconciliation. When he finally gets a hold of her, she is living with Alec, having accepted Angel's abandonment. The realization of his presence strikes her, and she murders Alec. She flees and spends a few days with Angel, making him promise to care for her sister. Tess gets arrested at Stonehenge, reconnecting in a way with her ancestors on her mother's side and severing the ties with the d'Urbervilles.

*Tess of d'Urbervilles* was published in 1891, in a serialized form in *The Graphic*, and then in volumes with the subtitle *A pure woman*. The first reviews he received were greatly positive, apart from one in the *Saturday Review* which criticised it for being too unnatural. This review was only the beginning of the negativity yet to come. *Tess* was further criticised for her questionable morality and the image of God

pictured as vengeful, which Hardy reflected in a preface of the volume edition in the following year.<sup>47</sup> “So densely is the world thronged that any shifting of positions, even the best warranted advance, galls somebody’s kibe.”<sup>48</sup> Despite the criticism, the novel remained popular.

### 3.3 Jude the Obscure

The novel opens up with a schoolmaster leaving a village in pursuit of higher education. Mr Phillotson says goodbye to a young boy, an earnest student of his, urging him to read and behave. The orphaned boy, Jude Fawley, takes his advice to heart and in books finds a purpose for his life. For the next years, he focuses solely on learning Latin and Greek in the little free time he is allowed to spare from work and seems to be succeeding. He learns the trade of stonemasonry and plans to move to the collegial city of Christminster, where he believes the former schoolmaster to reside. At this point in life, he meets a sensual country girl, Arabella, and with the awaking of his desire, becomes entrapped in a marriage he had no plans of.

The marriage is very unhappy due to the differences in their natures, and they part ways with Arabella moving to Australia and Jude moving to Christminster. There he meets his intellectual and well-read cousin Sue for the first time and starts to develop feelings for her. She, however, gets engaged to Mr Phillotson, who remained a school master, and is enrolled on a strict school with goals of future joint teaching. She and Jude spend some time together and realise they get along really well. Jude is simultaneously faced with his dream of academia crumbling due to his persistent poverty. Their time together causes Sue to get into trouble at the school and she impulsively escapes, finding refuge at Jude’s place. She decides to marry Phillotson to avoid a scandal. Their marriage is loveless and after spending some time again with Jude, she decides to ask Phillotson for permission to leave.

He lets her go, a decision which costs him his teaching job and a reputation. Sue

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<sup>47</sup> Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited*, 294-296.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2000), XXI.

and Jude start to share lodgings without furthering their relationship romantically until a visit from Arabella, who has since married another man and with him returned from Australia. Sue gets jealous and the two of them start to live together as a husband and wife. Both of them obtain a divorce from their previous spouses but do not marry each other. Arabella surprises Jude by revealing the information of having his child, a son, in Australia. The boy is sent to live with Jude and Sue, and they accept him even with his peculiar nature and the nickname Little Father Time.

After contently living together for some time, Sue is expecting their third child. Their financial situation is difficult, which eventually leads them back to Christminster. Jude is reminiscent of his old dream as he watches a parade with the new graduates, delaying finding their lodgings. They find a shelter for the night for Sue and the children, with Jude having to spend the night elsewhere. Sue is tired of the constant fights against societal norms and answers Little Father Time's worried questions with honesty. He then accuses Sue of irresponsibility for the number of children she has born into poverty. Sue sees their situation a bit less negative in the light of the morning until she discovers that Little Father Time has hanged her babies and himself in his misguided sense of helping. This tragedy affects Sue tremendously and she gives birth to a stillborn. She sees the events as her punishment from God and returns to Phillotson for repentance. Jude struggles to accept all the losses, and is, once again entrapped by Arabella who became a widow not long before. The two pairs remarry their original spouses, Sue living in a state of suffering and Jude, not long after that, dying.

The publication of *Jude the Obscure*, took place in 1895 in one volume. The controversial novel was met with a criticism harsher than any Hardy experienced before. The *Guardian* likened it to a nightmare and many readers also criticised the bleak atmosphere of the whole novel. Hardy had been accused of being anti-marriage, which he denied, and had to defend himself upon the infamous burning of the novel by the Bishop of Wakefield. Only later emerged some more positive reviews from, for example, William Dean Howells and H. G. Wells. Millgate further clarifies, that the amount of the negative and positive reviews might have been very similar. The harshness of those unfavourable have touched Hardy in such a way, he decided to never write another novel. <sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited*, 340-345.

## 4 Religion and Sexuality

In this chapter, I attempt to link the theme of religious doubt and loss of faith in the selected novels to the religious treatment of sexuality. The Church and its view of sexuality as impure, emotion and desire as animalistic and in opposition to culture play a crucial role in creating an environment where characters struggle to come to terms with their needs and wants and in the process betray either society or themselves.

The basis of the demonization of sexuality in religion is the mentioned aspect of animalism. Freely following one's instincts is regarded as barbaric, and therefore in clear opposition to the notion of civilization. Christianity preaches self-restraint and chastity, with sexuality being restricted to marriage and even then, used mainly for the object of procreation<sup>50</sup>. It is then understandable, that affection of any kind, though especially romantic, comes with an extent of rules drawing the line between the acceptable and unacceptable. Emotion and desire, however, are an important part of human experience and its suppression, with the lack of necessary guidance, can often lead to a myriad of issues.

### 4.1 Desire as the Unknown

Depiction of romantic emotions as being worthy of discussion and forethought is almost nonexistent in the selected works. Almost all of the characters seem to be unprepared for heightened emotions connected to either sexual attraction or the lack of it. Jude, having been raised by Greek and Latin texts with academia on the mind, is awestruck upon the meeting with Arabella, who serves as his polar opposite, her philosophy of living being very pragmatic. Her attention causes the awaking of his desire, which effectively paralyses him into marriage. The scene is then described with emphasis on the permanent nature of this commitment: "And so, standing before the aforesaid officiator, the two swore that at every other time of their lives till death took them, they would assuredly believe, feel, and desire precisely as they had believed, felt and desired during the few preceding weeks. What was as remarkable as the undertaking itself was

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<sup>50</sup> Joan Perkin, *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1989), 20.

the fact that nobody seemed at all surprised at what they swore.”<sup>51</sup> Their feelings cease, and Jude ponders on the nature of the now-consecrated-mistake which effects, in fact, last till death takes him. The incident can also be marked as the first time, when he, who wishes to become perhaps a bishop, questions and even downplays the importance of a crucial Christian institution - marriage.

Sexuality is a part of being human. However, since it is being alluded to in a negative way, it is hardly discussed in practice, leaving characters unequipped to deal with it while experiencing it in some form or another, for the first time. Tess, a very young woman, is the very example of a lack of information on the dangers of sexual attraction, as she laments to her mother after confessing to being raped by Alec d'Urberville.

“O mother, my mother!” cried the agonized girl, turning passionately upon her parent as if her poor heart would break. “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!”<sup>52</sup>

The Church, with its official role at the centre of life in the parish, seems rather absent when it comes to providing the young people with knowledge on the possible action when facing desire, or rather being faced with it. Tess thinks such matters are discussed in novels, only once again pointing in the direction away from Church and toward profanity. There is evidence of magazines for middle-class women containing information on the dangers of desire in men as early as the start of the nineteenth century, and the woman is presented as responsible for the outcome of such situation.<sup>53</sup> Tess feels, to some extent betrayed by her parent, who has withheld something fundamental from her. The role of the parent can be also extended to the Church and its officials, who, offer only empty words on the matter, and when it is too late, contempt, as when Tess meets the very convinced artisan with paint on the way from D'Urberville manor. He believes that an effective way to save people from sin is through fear: “Thy,

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2000), 46.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2000), 72.

<sup>53</sup> Joan Perkin, *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England*, 276-277.



damnation, slumbereth, not. II Peter 2:3 Against the peaceful landscape, the pale, decaying tints of the corpses, the blue air of the horizon and the lichened stile-boards, these staring vermillion words shone forth.”<sup>54</sup> These words strengthen the feelings of guilt and shame she carries within herself, while also making her question this image of God. “Pooh – I don’t believe God said such things!”<sup>55</sup>

The use of sex as a means to an end, whether it be pleasure, securing a social role or something else, is much easier when the targeted person is uninformed. Apart from Tess’s case, there is also Arabella’s treatment of Jude to prove the point. She grows impatient with Jude, who at the time doesn’t have a place for marriage in his life, and receives advice from her friends: “As he is a romancing, straightfor’ard, honest chap, he’s to be had, and as a husband, if you set about catching him in the right way.” ... “And how do you mean – a sure way to gain a man?” “As a husband.”<sup>56</sup> The implied right way is through the sexual act, which would have with considerable probability end in pregnancy, and as marriage is the only way to do right by such a situation, should it arise, Arabella chooses this strategy to hasten things up with Jude. In his temporal paralysis evoked by the desire, he seems oblivious to not only a scheme such as this but also the high probability of pregnancy.

The biblical image of a woman, Eve, is that of the temptress. She is the prototypical fallen woman, losing her innocence in exchange for something forbidden. Hardy approaches the trope of a fallen woman in this particular work from a different perspective. With regards to Fanny, a woman who crossed the border of decency for Troy’s love, being promised marriage. She is the fallen woman in the typical sense, which is confirmed when she and her child meet tragic end of dying from exhaustion and harsh living conditions. However, she is not regarded as such in the novel. Troy words his view of marriage as a social construct, calling already passed Fanny his “very, very wife in the sight of Heaven.”<sup>57</sup> Confirming it once again with his consequent rejection of Bathsheba. “You are nothing to me – nothing,” said Troy, heartlessly. “A ceremony before a priest doesn’t make a marriage. I am not morally yours.”<sup>58</sup> The passage suits the character of Troy, who seems to be rooted in the

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 70.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 71.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 40.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2000), 237.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 238.

emerging modernity and the notion of rapid change. Here, the sexual relations are suggested to surpass marital ones in their legitimacy, which in itself is a claim undermining the very foundation of the Christian faith. It can be interpreted as a metaphorical victory of nature over culture.

The trope is revisited by Hardy once again, seemingly using it to subvert the assigned connotations and at the same time, inspire compassion in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, even using a subtitle *The Pure woman*. The character is introduced as so young, barely a woman, as someone whose good looks cause more harm than good, someone who doesn't seek attention: "The struggles and wrangles of the lads for her hand in a jig were an amusement to her – no more; and when they became fierce, she rebuked them." <sup>59</sup> The reader is constantly reminded of the fact that Tess did nothing to bring the fall upon herself, and that interpretation is strengthened after her many trials when she is at a place worse than ever and reunites with Alec by accident. She feels nothing for him and seek no contact whatsoever. She is nonetheless accused of being a temptress: "Tess, my girl, I was on the way to, at least, social salvation till I saw you again!" he said freakishly shaking her, as if she were a child. "And why then have you tempted me? I was firm as a man could be till I saw those eyes and that mouth again – surely there never was such a maddening mouth since Eve's!" <sup>60</sup>

## 4.2 Children as a Symbol of Punishment

In all three of the selected novels, children born out of wedlock are granted very little time on earth. Three views of their deaths are presented by Hardy. Fanny's child is to be buried with her inside a casket, which is at first concealed before Bathsheba and the rest of society. After she discovers the truth, the connection linking Troy and Fanny, she feels as if she had lost to her: "The one feat alone – that of dying – by which a mean condition could be resolved into a grand one, Fanny had achieved. And to that had destiny subjoined this rencounter tonight, which had, in Bathsheba's wild imagining, turned her companion's failure to success, her humiliation to triumph, her lucklessness

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<sup>59</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 13.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 283.

to ascendancy; it had thrown over herself a garish light of mockery, and set upon all things about her an ironical smile.”<sup>61</sup> It is received as such by Troy, as previously stated, however, not in the eyes of society. The existence of Fanny’s child is erased. She almost faces the same fate, as “the persistent torrent from the gurgoyne’s jaws directed all its vengeance into the grave.”<sup>62</sup> The gothic gargoyle can be considered a symbol of the obsolete dogmas of the Church, directly focusing its power on the erasure of people endowed with misfortune during their fragile youth. Hardy could be in this way shifting the focus from the mistakes of an individual to the mistakes of the whole institution, subtly criticizing its indifference to practical guidance.

Tess’s child Sorrow is met with a similar fate, buried in a small deal box, in the corner of the churchyard where sinners and unbaptized children lay. Before his death, she herself performs the christening ritual, later asking the parson about its credibility: “The man and the ecclesiastic fought within him, and the victory fell to the man.”<sup>63</sup> This suggests that the Church must take a step back to offer peace of mind, kindness to a grief-stricken woman. Indeed, it does, when the parson admits the legitimacy of Tess’s version of the ritual and consequent burial. Tess’s simple faith is by this time already severely disturbed by the unfortunate episode in her life, she threatens to abandon the Church: “...if providence would not ratify such an act of approximation, she, for one, did not value the kind of heaven lost by the irregularity – either for herself or for her child.”<sup>64</sup> The man, parson, soothes her just enough, she manages to hold on to what’s left of her faith for a while longer.

Hardy seems to be challenging the view of the fallen woman, by shifting the responsibility to the man, in this case, Alec, who reflects his unprocessed desires unto Tess. He is recognized as the aggressor, the seducer, the pursuer. It is only ironic that their reunion happens when Tess has already adopted heterodox views of religion from her intellectual, now absent, husband Angel and abandoned the faith of her childhood, and Alec, on the contrary, has started preaching after his mother’s death, claiming to be a reformed man: “God forbid that I should say I am a good man – and you know I don’t say any such thing. I am new to goodness, truly; but new comers see furtherest

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<sup>61</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 234.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 249.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 85.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 84.

sometimes.”<sup>65</sup> Here, the word goodness is almost interchangeably used to religion, suggesting a synonymous meaning. However, Hardy seems to contrast his converted soul to his consequent actions, since his newly found faith does not last when met with even a single obstacle, his desire for Tess. The faith acquired in the face of loss is painted here as fleeting.

The theme of faith as an answer to grief is elaborated on later in *Jude the Obscure*, after the death of Jude and Sue’s children born out of wedlock. Sue understands the murder of her children by Jude’s son from his first marriage as a punishment for her sexuality. She then betrays her original view of religious matters and exercises extreme self-control by returning to Phillotson. In search for an explanation of this tragedy, she settles on the lack of legitimacy, both state and religious: “My children – are dead – and it is right that they should be! I am glad – almost. They were sin-begotten. They were sacrificed to teach me how to live! – their death was the first stage of my purification....”<sup>66</sup> Her interpretation of the tragedy is reminiscent of the Biblical punishments from the Old Testament. These events, her self-rejection, seem to indicate a falsity of religion as bringing peace of mind. With her children, she effectively loses her faith in freedom of thought and obeys. Her scheme is then consecrated by a Church official who unites her with Phillotson in marriage for the second time. The same claim, the supremacy of sexual relation in terms of belonging, reappears throughout all three selected works, which can be interpreted as an extreme answer to the socially accepted notion of belonging to someone in marriage.

### 4.3 Marriage and the Consequences

Marriage seems to be an institution reserved for saving women from being disgraced, almost, from its usage in the selected works. It is a tool to preserve social standing along with respect in society. One such incident underlining this aspect arises when Boldwood tries to offer Troy some money to get him to leave Bathsheba and therefore clear the path for himself. Troy mocks Boldwood with Bathsheba’s overnight invitation

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 271.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 321.

suggesting it is not the first one made and accepted between the two of them. The reaction signifies how alarming the situation is:

Boldwood loosened his hand, saying "By Heaven I've a mind to kill you!" "And ruin her." "Save her." "Oh, how can she be saved now unless I marry her?" ... "Troy, make her your wife, and don't act upon what I arranged just now. The alternative is dreadful, but take Bathsheba, I give her up! She must love you indeed to sell soul and body to you so utterly as she has done. Wretched woman – deluded woman – you are, Bathsheba!"<sup>67</sup>

Had she spent a night with a man she was not married to, it would affect her life in a serious way. It is consequently revealed, that the two of them are already husband and wife, but the dread of indecency played a crucial role in the execution of the marriage. The society built on the dogmatic views of religion does not allow any sort of moment of weakness for individuals experiencing romantic affection for the first time, or any time, especially those of higher social standing. Marriage offers safety from the rest of society to women, but at the same time, it is depicted as a cage, where the two individuals are at mercy of one another. So, Troy's denial of marriage, the aftermath of Fanny's death, does not change the law and while he leaves and is living in anonymity, Bathsheba is paralysed: "She belonged to him: the certainties were so well defined, and the reasonable of its issue so bounded, that she could not speculate on contingencies."<sup>68</sup> While unmarried she exhibits strength, independence and emotional detachment that help her in acquiring respect among her employees. With marriage, she is stripped of the power, as Troy takes on the role of the head of the house. With him gone, she is unable to restore her position. A divorce would also be very hard to obtain for her as a woman, even though there was certain protection of her property in such a case of abandonment.<sup>69</sup>

The limitations of marriage are the most harshly criticized in *Jude the Obscure*. The character of Sue is rooted in knowledge acquired from contemporary, most importantly Mill and Comte, and ancient philosophers, questioning everything connected to tradition and the Middle Ages. She claims the cathedrals have had its time,

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<sup>67</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 183.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 256.

<sup>69</sup> Joan Perkin. *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England*, 301.

and cherishes her independence. When she is to be married, she criticizes the treatment of women during the procedure.

“I have been looking at the marriage service in the Prayer-book, and it seems to me very humiliating that a giver away should be required at all. According to the ceremony as there printed, my bridegroom chooses me of his own will and pleasure; but I don’t choose him. Somebody gives me to him, like a she-ass or she-goat, or any other domestic animal. Bless your exalted views of woman, O Churchman!”<sup>70</sup>

The quote underlines the nature of marital institution as one where the woman has no choice, whereas the man can choose to enter it. Jude’s example of being entrapped was based on his Christian qualities of honesty and responsibility, he had the choice of abandoning Arabella. Alec only offers marriage to Tess when he is briefly reformed. However, Bathsheba, a woman of higher social rank, is expected to marry and is almost unable to refuse Mr Boldwood. She then chooses marriage to Troy for the fear of indecency. Troy pursues Bathsheba almost as a sport and then chooses to leave her. Angel is also the one who makes the decision to marry, and then the one of placing distance between himself and Tess. Sue, as she states, enters the marriage, not of her own free will, and when she leaves, she does so with Phillotson’s permission.

The characters of Richard Phillotson and Mr Boldwood have both in common their mature age and the fact they have remained wifeless for so long. There is a theory as to why Mr Boldwood is so reserved and indifferent: “It is said – but not known for certain – that he met with some bitter disappointment when he was a young man and merry. A woman jilted him, they say.”<sup>71</sup> Would there be some truth to the gossip, the farmer would have been dealing with some unresolved issues for many years, living inside of him. The suppression of strong emotions seems to have a negative impact on his mental state, leaving him sick with feeling and desire for Bathsheba and finally resulting in a crime. The question arises, what role does the Church, which he regularly attended, play in upkeeping a good mental state of a man, when it does not offer any consolation? He expresses doubts after Bathsheba chooses Troy over him: “I had some faint belief in the mercy of God till I lost that woman. Yes, he prepared the gourd to

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<sup>70</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 146.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 73.

shade me, and like the prophet I thanked Him and was glad. But the next day He prepared a worm to smite the gourd and wither it, and I feel it is better to die than to live!”<sup>72</sup> A notion of unfairness seems to be hinted at in the speech. Boldwood questions his misfortune because it does not really add up with his respectably led life. Hardy might be alluding to the fact, that being a good follower of God does not ensure a good life.

Another reserved older man, Phillotson, outgrows his character with respect to composure, when he accepts Sue’s plea and lets her leave the marriage. His religious views up to the point of the marriage become irrelevant. He chooses the humane path and does, indeed, let her go even if the decision is controversial: “I know I can’t logically, or religiously, defend my concession to such a wish of hers; or harmonise it with the doctrines I was brought up in.”<sup>73</sup> Phillotson consciously and willingly makes up his mind when being faced with a certain unpredictable situation and is willing to make a case out of it. He then suffers accordingly, since society condemns him as an example of dangerous morals. Hardy’s critique of the unnecessary restriction marriage represents is far from subtle in his last novel. He seems to use the character to show the reader there is no shame in changing one’s mind amidst special circumstances and at the same time critique the society for its treatment of controversial acts of kindness.

Jude’s character is at the beginning of the novel shown as an unwanted, uprooted boy. He seems to pick education and religion as his anchorage while having no outside help with either. He then struggles with his sexuality and struggles with the doctrines surrounding marriage. This combined with the volume of carefully selected arguments he keeps on hearing from Sue ultimately leads him to renounce his traditional view of faith. In the end, he chooses the deep connection he feels to a fellow human, over the dogmas that gave him the stability he needed as a child. In doing so, he reconciles with his emotional side and ponders on the state of things.

Strange that his first aspiration – towards academical proficiency – had been checked by a woman, and that his second aspiration – towards apostleship – had also been checked by a woman. “Is it”, he said, “that the women are to blame; or is it the artificial system of things, under which the normal sex-impulses are

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<sup>72</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 203.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 201.

turned into devilish domestic gins and springes to noose and hold back those who want to progress?"<sup>74</sup>

Hardy once again, seems to be hinting at the accepted dichotomy of nature versus culture, and the consequences it has on the lives of individuals and society as a whole. The Church is depicted here as the cause for stagnation and even fallbacks in the strive for progress.

Hardy seems to be critical of the typical Victorian notion of sexuality and its limitations. He brings to the light the issues women face, the responsibility for the decency of the behaviour of a man, and inequality in the face of law and society. He also explores the link between religious doubt and sexuality, which seems to be the restrictive nature of it. The inability of the characters to deal with romantic emotions can be also interpreted as a direct consequence of the teaching of the Church.

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<sup>74</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 188.



## 5 Religion and Class

The Church is an institution with a set hierarchy, which it also, to some extent, promotes in the society. The class system underwent a significant change during the Victorian era, which is also reflected in Hardy's work. However, his main focus is on the lower classes and the distinctions in the opportunities they get in life as opposed to the characters from the higher class. This chapter examines mainly the role of religion in the lives of characters in Wessex and the different perceptions of it based on their rank. It will also take into consideration how does religion coincide with the differentiation of people based on their living conditions.

The public religious life of Victorians has been affected by the Reformation due to which the Church lost some of its charm that previously attracted the lower classes. On one hand, some very poor people who simply had not the time to attend services or they chose the pub instead, as the church and the pub were the two main places to lay the work aside, on the other hand, there was the flourishing middle class that held churchgoing synonymous to good morals and harshly criticised those who did not attend. The aspect of education played a significant part in the decline of church attendance in the latter part of the century, alongside the popularity of agnosticism.<sup>75</sup>

### 5.1 Social Aspect of Christianity

Hardy had been interested in the social aspect of religion, and his works very much reflect the wide scale of practicalities of religious belief across the classes, and also decades. The opening of the *Far from the Madding Crowd*, informs the reader of Gabriel Oak's good character, swiftly followed by his churchgoing practice: "...he went to church, but yawned privately by the time the congregation reached the Nicene creed. and thought of what there would be for dinner, when he meant to be listening to the sermon."<sup>76</sup> Hardy, or rather, the narrator, however, cleverly states that there are six

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<sup>75</sup> Hugh MacLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1996), 57-62.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 3.

times as many working days than Sundays, which can be interpreted as warning the reader as to not judge him too harshly for his lack of interest in sermons and to not assume his morals to be of the same manner. This separation of morality and religiousness is a focal point of agnosticism, which can be subtly hinted at by Hardy. On the other hand, he provides the reader with a sort of opposite example of Joseph Poorgas, who preaches scriptures and promotes the Church at every chance he gets, all the while having a drinking problem. He is called out on this hypocrisy when he fails to deliver the dead Fanny Robins for the burial and instead gets stuck at an inn. He defends himself with a claim: "I feel too good for England: I ought to have lived in Genesis by right, like the other men of sacrifice, and then I shouldn't have b-b-been called a d-d-drunkard in such a way!"<sup>77</sup> His reasoning is built upon the fact, that he attends church, prays regularly and that he does so humbly. The irony is, that he boasts about his holy ways. The idea presented here seems to be a mix of pre-reformation Christianity, which worked mainly with the importance of ceremonies and rituals, and the post-reformation one claiming the study of the Bible as fundamental. Poorgass's appeal to the Old Testament reflects the fact that the progression of religious practice took longer in the rural areas. Hardy seems to be illustrating, through the native character, the dangers of synonymizing morality and religion. The added humour softens the blow of the critique in one of the earlier novels, at the time the author was more cautious with handling controversial topics.

When Bathsheba tries to defend the morals of sergeant Troy, which are publicly known to be questionable, at least in his treatment of women, she argues with his attendance of Sunday services in private. This turns out to be a lie. It could also be argued, that his immorality lies not exclusively in the absence of his religious practice but exists separately. In the same manner, an individual who has good intentions is to be driven from the Church, eventually ceasing to attend. Morality is thus also to be perceived as existing outside organized religion. Tess is a regular attendee of church, up to the point where she is carrying an illegitimate child and she no longer feels neither welcome nor safe: "The people who had turned their heads turned them again as the service proceeded; and at last observing her they whispered to each other. She knew what their whispers were about, grew sick at heart, and felt that she could come to

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<sup>77</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*. 227.

church no more.”<sup>78</sup> A place of worship is therefore at the same time almost a parade of people’s conditions allowing for observation and judgement.

The people belonging to the higher class, were the ones whose public appearance was inspected with more detail:<sup>79</sup> “Did you notice Mr Boldwood’s doings in church this morning, miss? ...But everybody else was noticing you, and it was odd he didn’t. There, ‘tis like him. Rich and gentlemanly, what does he care?”<sup>80</sup> It is evident, that in the country, there were still few public events held besides Sunday service which would allow for a similar inspection. Hardy also seems to allude to the notion that the congregation is filled with people who have their own personal thought processes which are in parallel, or rather, in contrast to the sermons. The content of the sermons is left undiscussed, whereas the attention and the lack of it is foregrounded.

The observation and following harsh judgement inside a temple are revisited by Hardy in *Jude* when Sue helps him with relettering of the Ten Commandments in a little church. She is with a child, and their family status seems to be a mystery to people who come to see their work. The newcomers disprove their presence at restoration and they are shortly after let off of the job. Even their honest work offended the people of the parish. Sue finds hard to accept such treatment of them: “I can’t bear that they, and everybody, should think people wicked because they may have chosen to live their own way! It is really these opinions that make the best intentioned people reckless and, actually become immoral!”<sup>81</sup> Hardy seems to place a pair of watchful eyes looking for conformity, wherever his characters enter a place connected to religion and then, makes them suffer the harsh consequences from the absence of it. This paradox of a place of worship with the act of merciless judgement is likely the true hypocrisy he is seeking to criticize.

When it comes to attention, the clothing and its distinctiveness to the one of the working days is also repeatedly mentioned throughout the novels: “...but on this day of vanity, this Sun’s-day, when flesh went forth to coquet with flesh while hypocritically affecting business with spiritual things; on this occasion for wearing their white stockings and thin shoes, and their pink, white, and lilac gowns, on which every mud

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<sup>78</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 75.

<sup>79</sup> Hugh MacLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 58.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 75.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 266.

spot would be visible, the pool was an awkward impediment.”<sup>82</sup> The narrator jokingly jabs at their attire on the way to church, while he contrasts with Angel’s appearance, which is *as* “un-Sabbatarian a one as a dogmatic parson’s son often presented; his attire being his dairy clothes, long wading boots, a cabbage-leaf inside his hat to keep his head cool, with a thistle-spud to finish him off.”<sup>83</sup> The distinction between their self-presentation is not only dictated by the fact that Angel distances himself from orthodox Christianity, but also by their social standing. The institution of the Church was made to cater mostly to the upper class, as McLeod states, since the minister was a member of high society, the sermons were spoken by the language of high society and the seating was arranged to suit the upper-class members.<sup>84</sup> The need, especially but not exclusively, of the working class, to present themselves in a respectable manner, in their finest clothes, then seems fully understandable. It shows their wish to be seen as equal, to at least seemingly lessen the differentiation between the classes, which I think is what Hardy was trying to communicate with his remark on vanity.

## 5.2 Religion Supporting the Class System

The already outlined hierarchy of the Church itself is realized through the characters of Reverend Clare and Mrs Clare, Angel’s parents and even Angel himself. They care for the poor and live very modestly, yet they consider themselves very distinct from them, all on the ground of class. Mrs Clare especially does not seem very pleased with the bride her son chose, as she expected him to marry a girl with a status similar to his. He admits to himself “... that there yet existed certain latent prejudices of theirs, as middle class people, which it would require some tact to overcome.”<sup>85</sup> However, he fails to recognize, that he too, held similar distinctive views before he spent some time at the Talbothays dairy farm and abandoned his old associations. The words used by the narrator, suggest prejudices as, if not more, significant than those of his parents:

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<sup>82</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 125.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 125.

<sup>84</sup> Hugh MacLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 58.

<sup>85</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 145.

“Sitting down as a level member of the dairyman’s household seemed at the outset an undignified proceeding. The ideas, the modes, the surroundings, appeared retrogressive and unmeaning. But with living on there, day after day, the acute sojourner became conscious of a new aspect in the spectacle. Without any objective change whatever, variety had taken the place of monotonousness.”<sup>86</sup>

The change he undergoes is significant, although, not as permanent as it may seem.

With his rejection of orthodox faith, he wants to distance himself from the rigidity of the world of his parents. In doing so, he sets to embrace nature and becomes blinded by it. Tess serves as the personification of nature he seeks, and as this idealized version of her does not coincide with reality, he feels betrayed and is ready to once again adopt some of his seemingly overcome prejudices.: “Don’t, Tess, don’t argue. Different societies, different manners. You almost make me say you are an unapprehending peasant woman, who have never been initiated into the proportions of social things. You don’t know what you say.”<sup>87</sup> The statement is a direct contradiction to the one previously quoted, to his admission that the working class does in fact have its own heterogeneous views of social things. However, he feels too much of a gap between his own and different view of the matter, and the middle class one is once again destined to become the norm.

The original cause of Tess’s tragedy is parson Tringham, who informs her father of the noble lineage of the Durbeyfield, originally d’Urberville, the family he belongs to. The fact that it is the church official who sets the plot into motion, is telling in itself. Perhaps Hardy is trying to suggest the Church’s detachment from reality, from the working class and the poor, to expect the Durbeyfield to be able to philosophically ponder “how are the mighty fallen”<sup>88</sup> when all he would possibly want in life is to somehow escape his present condition. The idealization of the past is present during Tess’s astonishment upon arrival at the d’Urberville manor, “I thought we were an old family; but this is all new!”<sup>89</sup> The narrator informs the reader of the fact that this family has no blood relation to neither Durbeyfields nor d’Urbervilles. The inhabitants of the house have only annexed the old name to their own, Stoke, and this was very well

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<sup>86</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 204.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 203.

<sup>88</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 5.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 31.

known to parson Tringham, however, not to Tess with her parents: “indeed the very possibility of such annexations was unknown to them; who supposed that, though to be well-favoured might be the gift of fortune, a family name came by nature.”<sup>90</sup> The naturalized view of class is reminiscent of the protestant notion of predestination, where the nature is effectively joined into one with God.

Jude is also a character, who strives to escape poverty. He unknowingly chooses to do so through the combination of education and religion and almost mindlessly gets into his studies. There is, however, no mentor in either of the spheres and he is left to himself. The absence of a member of the clergy to take care of his spiritual life, since he seems to be willing to accept the help, is striking, and no doubt a conscious authorial decision. What Hardy might have been illustrating is the decline of organized religious life in the latter part of the century along with the marginal position of the poor in it,<sup>91</sup> which might have prevented Jude from being met with help in his childhood. Young Jude dreams of being a bishop and earning enough to give to the less fortunate and still live comfortably. When his dreams of attending the university in Christminster fail, he is forced to reassess his position in life: “The old fancy which had led on to the culminating vision of the bishopric had not been an ethical or theological enthusiasm at all, but a mundane ambition masquerading in a surplice. He feared that his whole scheme had degenerated to, even though it might not have originated in, a social unrest which had no foundation in the nobler instincts; which was purely an artificial product of civilization.”<sup>92</sup> The realization that his dream was inspired by his conditions saddens him. The possible interpretation of his introspection could be that of ultimately revealing the elitism of Church, and the gap between the classes even in theology. The elitism allows the bishop to earn enough of a living to be able to give. Is Jude’s idea of acquiring a decent and charitable lifestyle with bishopry so ignoble as he feels in this troubled moment, or is the number of opportunities for the lower classes to choose from so limited that a quest as such seems noble enough? I think Hardy might be hinting at the latter. Jude’s intentions are not to be simply condemned.

“I am only peasant by position, not by nature!”<sup>93</sup> Tess’s answer to being called a peasant by Angel during a fight, also, signals the fact, that once a person is aware of the

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<sup>90</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 32.

<sup>91</sup> Hugh MacLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 58.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 111.

<sup>93</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 203.

socio-economical causes of one's living conditions, it is progressively more difficult to conform to the position. Thus, Jude's unconscious reasoning discussed above, with the knowledge he gained through reading, makes sense. An example of the very secular aspect of higher rank in the clergy – wealth – is to be found in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, when a Cainy Ball visits Bath. “And I went to grand churches and chapels. And how the parson would pray! Yes, he would kneel down and put up his hands together, and make the holy gold rings on his fingers gleam and twinkle in yer eyes, that he'd earned by praying so excellently well”<sup>94</sup> The boy is amused at the sight of a larger town he visits for the first time, and he links together the earthly possessions of the parson, or possibly a bishop, to his spiritual qualities. His remark suggests the still present aspect of magic attributed to the clergy by the rural population along with the importance of prayer. Hardy seems to be using the oversimplified notion of earning something by praying to highlight the artificial superiority of the Church.

### 5.3 Religious practice

In the nineteenth century, prayer had an almost exclusive role in practical Christianity of the working-class people as a source of strength and as an explanation for unexpected and, or, expected events and their effects which were attributed to God's will.<sup>95</sup> Hardy is reflecting these attitudes most often through the characters of Joan Durbeyfield and Joseph Poorgass, minor characters in *Tess of d'Urbervilles* and *Far from the Madding Crowd* respectively. While Poorgass preaches caution: “For my poor self, I always say “please God” afore I do anything...”<sup>96</sup>, Tess's mother embodies acceptance, even when she could help to avoid the situation: “Tis nater, after all, and what do please God!”<sup>97</sup> This fatalism seems to be contributing to the continuation of the class system, since it prevents individuals from accepting their possible agency, and foremost responsibility.

Similar fatalism is adopted by Sue when facing the unimaginable tragedy, the violent death of her children: “We must conform!” she said mournfully. “All the ancient

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<sup>94</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 175.

<sup>95</sup> Hugh MacLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 64.

<sup>96</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 123.

<sup>97</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 73.

wrath of the Power above us has been vented upon us, His poor creatures, and we must submit. There is no choice. We must. It is no use fighting against God.”<sup>98</sup> Her retrograde into a position of submission shows how deeply rooted are the doctrines of the rural childhood she experienced. Paired with her desire for self-punishment, the possible negative impact of orthodox religion to mental wellbeing is illustrated in this example.

The detachedness of lower-class people from the language the theological teachings are passed onto them, due to the lack of necessary education, is also touched upon by Hardy. The origin of Cain’s name, however, suggests more than one critical interpretation:

“Oh, you see mem, his pore mother, not being a Scripture-read woman made a mistake at his christening, thinking ‘twas Abel killed Cain, and called en Cain, but ‘twas too late, for the name could never be got rid in the parish. ‘Tis very unfortunate for the boy.”... “She was brought up by a heathen father and mother, who never sent her to church or school, and it shows how the sins of the parents are visited upon the children, mem.”<sup>99</sup> This thought-provoking story, exposes the Church’s indifference towards the lives of poor people. To have a Church official let a woman name her child Cain, a name with negative biblical connotation, all the while having the knowledge the woman lacks, indicates not only already mentioned indifference but almost cruelty. The other thing implied might be the problematic and misused image of sin. The image presented as such is clearly beneficial to the leading figures of the area and the country. This aspect of religious fatalism, as opposed to the one discussed above, attributes false agency to the individual, stripping the government and the Church of responsibility.

When it comes to religious practice, it can be often presented as something happening outside of the ordinary life of the working class. It stems from the notion that, for the most part, religion was perceived as “a luxury of the emotional and leisured classes”<sup>100</sup> Arabella’s character, an example of a lower-class person, with little interest in religion, reflects the distinction, upon the slaughter of a pig, which did not go according to the plan due to Jude’s compassion towards the animal: “Thank God!” Jude said. “He’s dead.” “What’s God to do with such a messy job as pig-killing, I should like

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<sup>98</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 303.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 64.

<sup>100</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 78.



to know!” she said scornfully. “Poor folks must live.”<sup>101</sup> Jude’s emotion and invocation of God, seem to her, out of place. Her remark can be interpreted as a reminder of Jude’s belonging to the poor. His knowledge in itself does not elevate him practically and a person such as he, read and compassionate, but still poor, does not as of yet seem to have a role in late Victorian society. The atmosphere of the time seems to represent, that while religion is considered obsolete, an essentially classless individual such as Jude, having inside him combined attributes from more than one class, is obscure.

The Church and religion alike held the central position in the spiritual lives of people, providing them with an amusing program and the promise of an afterlife from the Middle Ages, up until the end of the century. Its weakening influence can be explained by wide access to basic education, fewer followers from the upper class, more labourers and the increase in a variety of leisure providing services.<sup>102</sup> A conversation between Jude and Sue accurately describes the effects of this gradual process: “Shall we go and sit in the Cathedral?” he asked, when their meal was finished. “Cathedral? Yes. Though I think I’d rather sit in the railway station,” she answered, a remnant of vexation still in her voice. “That’s the centre of town life now. The Cathedral has had its day!”<sup>103</sup> It also points out Jude’s unsubstantiated view of seeking success in the theological sphere, its popularity being on the decline. Hardy does only point out that nearing the twentieth century, there seem to be many views to examine apart from the orthodox one. It can also be seen as an allusion to the theory of evolution extended to society.

Religion and Christian practice through the eyes of the characters is presented as being crucial in determining one’s personality, often closely associated with morality. Hardy uses various tools to suggest that this association is rather superficial and often misleading. The novels also hint at the role of the Church in perpetuating the class system and prejudice against the poor. Lastly, the relativity of one’s belief and actual practice is highlighted, with the special attention paid to the changes in its perception across the classes.

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<sup>101</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 53.

<sup>102</sup> Hugh MacLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 63-65.

<sup>103</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 116.

## 6 Religion and Education

The present chapter focuses on analyzing the themes of education in the selected novels, inspecting the correlation between the Victorian perception of the purpose of education and the Church. I will also pay attention to Hardy's representation of inequality between the classes in pursuit of education and the consequences of its unavailability, linking it to the slowly changing system of schooling in nineteenth-century England. Lastly, I would also like to sketch out the nature of the relationship between religion and intellectual characters in the novels.

### 6.1 An Access to Education

Tess is a character with a solely rural upbringing, often juxtaposed to her parents on behalf of her ability to speak without the dialect thanks to her completed national elementary education. Not only did the state education refine her speech, but it also made her "mentally older than her mother"<sup>104</sup>, seeing the tragedy of her many siblings and their lives doomed to poverty and acquiring a tendency to critical thinking. At Tess's departure to d'Urbervilles, the reader learns also about her academic aspirations that set her apart from her parents: "She had hoped to be a teacher at the school, but the fates seemed to decide otherwise."<sup>105</sup> Hardy reports on her relationship with faith only after her mistreatment at the hands of Alec, and her feelings are prevalently those of shame and fear. Fear becomes the focal point of her actions when she performs the christening rite for her dying son to save him from the torment in hell, which she has learned about most probably at Sunday school. Her acquired state-regulated education paired with her nature and the traumatic experiences she undergoes make her prone to questioning her religious beliefs: She suddenly stopped and murmured: "But perhaps I don't quite know the lord as yet."<sup>106</sup>

She is only allowed to satisfy the curiosity of her mind later, when Angel takes

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<sup>104</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 40.

<sup>105</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 40.

<sup>106</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 91.

on a role of a tutor, furthering the scope of her knowledge. Hardy, however, continues to hint at the effect of education as that of a realization of one own's limitations within the social structure.

“Why do you look so woebegone all of a sudden?” he asked. “Oh, ‘tis only – about my own self,” she said, with a frail laugh of sadness, fitfully beginning to peel ‘a lady’ meanwhile. “Just a sense of what might have been with me! My life looks as if it had been wasted for want of chances! When I see what you know, what you have read, and seen, and thought, I feel what a nothing I am! I’m like the poor queen of Sheba who lived in the Bible. There is no more spirit in me.”<sup>107</sup>

Tess’s disheartened reaction to the differences in her and Angel’s circumstances suggests Hardy’s critical attitude towards the problematic nature of elitism in education in the nineteenth century England. Angel’s education in terms of religion plays a crucial role in the evolution of faith in Tess. When they meet, she is already begging to be critical of some aspects of religion stated further above. When her doubt is combined with sound arguments from a man she not only loves but highly respects, she swiftly adopts his view on the matter as hers, and later fully admits: “He never forced my judgement! He would never argue on the subject with me! But I looked at it this way; what he believed, after inquiring deep into the doctrines, was much more likely to be right than what I might believe, who hadn’t looked into the doctrines at all.”<sup>108</sup> What might be perceived as simplistic and submissive, seems also to be, in fact, logical on the part of Tess. She further states, that they believe in the moral teachings attributed to Jesus Christ, which shows the loss is of faith in the institution of Church rather than faith as a concept.

The elitist character of education in early modern England is supported by the evidence of the number of scholarships offered to individuals from low-income families interested in enrolling on grammar schools or universities.<sup>109</sup> Hardy might have been pointing at this particular issue when Jude, a perfect candidate for this type of aid, receives none. Sue is granted a scholarship, while it is implied, that her enrollment involved help from Mr Phillotson, either financial, administrative or of using his

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<sup>107</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 111.

<sup>108</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 281.

<sup>109</sup> Lawrence Stone, “Literacy and Education in England 1640-1900.” *Past & Present*, no. 42 (1969): 72-73.

connections. Jude is rejected without any sort of consideration or testing of his abilities, he is rejected precisely on the ground of his class: “Sir – I have read your letter with interest; and, judging from your description of yourself as a working-man, I venture to think that you will have a much better chance of success in life by remaining in your own sphere and sticking to your trade than by adopting any other course. That, therefore, is what I advise you to do.”<sup>110</sup> The comment in itself is not as cruel as Jude perceives it, when the practicality of chances in future employment, which, it is possible to assume, due to a limited number of white-collar worker positions, is taken into consideration. It can still, however, be criticized as disabling the working man to even try to rise above his level in social terms and the country and thus continuing to embody the character of a closed society.

Hardy actually paints a picture of a member of such elite in Sergeant Troy:

“Such a clever young dand he is! He’s a doctor’s son by name, which is a great deal, and earl’s son by nature.” “Which is a great deal more. Fancy! Is it true?” “Yes. And he was brought up so well, and sent to Casterbridge Grammar School for years and years. Learnt all languages while he was there, and it was said he got on so far that he could take down Chinese in shorthand, but that I don’t answer for, as it was only reported.”<sup>111</sup>

Troy’s education serves almost as a spectacle in the rural setting, and is, therefore, never questioned in terms of his behaviour. It also seems to add to his status as a successful member of the middle class, into which he was born. His level of education is mainly observable through his refined use of language, sometimes used to bend the truth. Hardy later shifts the focus to his modern ideas, no doubt acquired through his schooling experience, when Troy, now a husband to Bathsheba, expresses his distaste for the design of the house they are to live in while quoting a philosopher: “Creation and preservation don’t do well together,” says he, “and a million of antiquarians can’t invent a style.”<sup>112</sup> The decision to incorporate a higher level of education into the mosaic of a character with questionable morals, seems to be a deliberate one. It opens up the interpretation of Hardy criticizing society for seeing education as granting respectability

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<sup>110</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 99.

<sup>111</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 130.

<sup>112</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 187.

and showing the reader that it often, in fact, does not. On the other hand, the link between a lack of religious faith and education can be certainly made, concerning Troy.

The abundance of available information and critical thinking acquired through studies seem to be critical in setting aside one's faith. A strong example of such a course is Angel Clare, the youngest son of a passionate and widely popular parson. His extensive study of the Bible alongside more, no doubt, significant philosophical works then led him to a point irreconcilable with the orthodox ideas held by his father: "My whole instinct in matters of religion is towards reconstruction. To quote your favorite Epistle to the Hebrews, "the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain."<sup>113</sup> His stance very much reflects the atmosphere of late Victorian intellectual society, perhaps to an extent even Hardy's view on Christianity. The desire to remove the dogmatic aspect of religion in favour of scientific evidence and at the same time put emphasis on unique personal experiences while navigating the sphere of morality echoes throughout two of the latest novels of Hardy.

## 6.2 University: A Preface Without Volume

The almost synonymous view of education and religion can be observed with Mr Clare's decision to not send Angel to college as a consequence of his heterodox declarations and his refusal to become a minister.

And if Angel were not going to enter the Church, what was the use of sending him to Cambridge? The University as a step to anything but ordination seemed, to this man of fixed ideas, a preface without volume. ... "What is the good of your mother and me economizing and stinging ourselves to give you a university education, if it is not to be used for the honour and Glory of God?" his father repeated. "Why, that it may be used for the honour and glory of man, father."<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 102.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 102.

The link is not much surprising, since evangelical Mr Clare, a man of an older generation, is only repeating the idea necessary for the Protestant society, who heavily relied on the Scripture and therefore have been encouraging the spread of literacy across all classes for several centuries at this point.<sup>115</sup> It can easily seem like a sort of betrayal, to be using this knowledge to reason against the very thing that enabled it in the first place. However, it also can be interpreted as an unavoidable progression, resembling the natural selection that caused the evolution in the Darwinian theory. The metaphor in Angel's statement: "I love the Church as one loves a parent. I shall always have the warmest affection for her."<sup>116</sup> implies the regressive aspect of the institution. The metaphor can also be extended to its relationship with education. Church in fact does have a role of a parent to the spread of literacy, which then caused individuals to seek knowledge, analyze and eventually outgrow the original set of ideas, similarly to Angel here. It is, however, rather ironic, that out of all the parson's children, the most intelligent one, should not be allowed to acquire a higher education on the grounds of faith.

The same idea of education and religion going hand in hand is also shared by Mr Phillotson, who is somewhat closer in age to the generation Mr Clare belongs to. He unknowingly sets the direction of Jude's life when presenting his own plan to acquire a degree and to be ordained he hopes to carry out in Christminster. He fails to mention more of his reasons, likewise the course of action he needs to undertake to do so. Jude, in his very vulnerable state of orphaned childhood, starts to cling to these goals and adopts them as his own. He, however, seems to be consciously choosing religion as an object of his studies only because he thinks he is required to do so. Not because he feels to be called to do so by a higher power, not because he wants to analyze the mysteries of divine power, not because he has a special relationship with God. Hardy leaves out any evidence of this sort of spiritual connection Jude would have with Christianity.

Sixteen-year-old Jude becomes fully immersed in the moment of appreciating sunset one, which leads him to recite a pagan prayer to the sun-god and the moon-goddess, a piece from classic literature he is currently reading up on. This goes against his wish "next to being a scholar, to be a Christian divine"<sup>117</sup> as the narrator puts it: "He

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<sup>115</sup> Stone, "Literacy and Education in England 1640-1900.", 76-79.

<sup>116</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 102.

<sup>117</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 26.

began to wonder whether he would be reading quite the right books for his object in life.”<sup>118</sup> His next decision to shift his attention to the Christian texts in Greek and to start attending all the churches nearby, seems to be purely of practical character and can be perceived as such since Hardy devotes only a small paragraph of the chapter to this reassessment. I would go as far as to suggest that Jude’s religious conviction is mostly conventional and only partially owed to his sense of compassion he feels for all living things. Once again Hardy seems to be subverting the traditional view of positive characteristics to be only acquired through religion and instead presenting these to be innate and sometimes even in actual contradiction with certain dogmas and commandments.

It is also worth mentioning that the notion of religion and education being interconnected is shared by common people also, in this particular passage by a carter, which early on encourages Jude in his plan. “’Tis all learning there – nothing but learning, except religion. And that’s learning too, for I never could understand it. ... You know, I suppose, that they raise pa’ sons there like radishes in a bed?...”<sup>119</sup> There is truth in the metaphor when connected with the characters of Angel’s brothers who attended university and who are perceived by him as very limited in their world view.

“When Wordsworth was enthroned they carried pocket copies; and when Shelley was belittled, they allowed him to grow dusty on their shelves. When Correggio’s Holy Families were admired, they admired Correggio’s Holy Families; when he was decried in favour of Velasquez, they sedulously followed suit without any personal objection.”<sup>120</sup>

Their higher education and involvement in clergy did not encourage them to broaden their horizons but merely enclosed them in conventionality and conformity. It does seem they were to the school, just objects, one like the other, pulled out from the dirt and send into the world more representatives of their class and less of individual beings. Hardy thus suggests not only the disadvantages of self-education but also the dangers of systemic education.

The metaphor could be easily also extended to the fact, that attending University

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<sup>118</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 27.

<sup>119</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 18.

<sup>120</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 139.

does not guarantee intellectual advancement as is illustrated in the scene where Jude is challenged to recite a certain Creed, which he indeed successfully manages to do with an applause from his audience: “Good! Excellent Latin!” cried one of the undergraduates, who, however, had no slightest conception of a single word.<sup>121</sup> This narrator’s remark comes out as incredibly ironic, given the circumstances of Jude just having been denied access to the University. Here he proves his knowledge to be eligible for the position, with the slight error in the nature of the crowd consisting not of the Masters but the contrary. Outside the academic setting, his knowledge appears to be useless in the eyes of society.

Similarly, Hardy seems to point out the disinterest in students as individuals in the example of the Training College, briefly attended by Sue. When Sue breaks the rules and spends the night outside of the dormitory, she is to be punished and subsequently escapes without having left a word behind. “The mind of the matron was horrified – not so much at the possible death of Sue as at the possible half-column detailing that event in all newspapers, which, added to the scandal of the year before, would give the College an unenviable notoriety for many months to come.”<sup>122</sup> It is clear that schools of the time had a reputation to upkeep, being a sort of elite as already discussed above. What is suggested here, is the superficiality of the image they work so hard to present to society. The credibility of the inside structure and philosophy of systemic schooling is in this way challenged by Hardy, who does not seem to present either higher education or religion as the better institution.

### 6.3 Knowledge in Everyday Life

In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, published in the earlier stage of Hardy’s career, the author seems to choose an approach of offering the reader a positive example concerning the topic of education in the light of religion rather than the criticism of the negative one which I have pointed out in the later novels. Gabriel’s position as a farmer, suggests only a certain level of education, supported by his statement “I never

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<sup>121</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 103.

<sup>122</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 123.



was very clever in my inside.”<sup>123</sup> while apologizing. The confession is an account of his humble nature along with social standing rather than his intellect since he has considerable knowledge of astronomy, veterinary science, farming, and philosophy and is fully capable of calculating economical profits. His small book collection contains, aside from the practical manuals, works such as *Paradise Lost*, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, and *Robinson Crusoe*. It is Gabriel’s character, who seemingly represents the untouched pastoral world, that is actually the character associated with science and education the most in this particular work. The narrator even goes as far as to comment on the library: “. . . though a limited series, it was one from which he had acquired more sound information by diligent perusal than many a man of opportunities has done from a furlong of laden shelves.”<sup>124</sup> He represents the middle ground in the ongoing Victorian conflict between Church and science.

His stance on the matters of religion is far from both fanaticism and indifference, resembling mostly the philosophy of stoicism with its emphasis on the meditation, here in the form of a prayer. He is not particularly educated, yet very knowledgeable. The way he uses astronomy on daily basis to determine the time of day suggests the importance of science through its practical utilization: “Charles’s Wain was getting towards a right angle with the Pole star, and Gabriel concluded that it must be about nine o’clock – in other words that he had slept two hours. This small astronomical calculation was made without any positive effort, and whilst he was stealthily turning to discover, if possible, into whose hands he had fallen.”<sup>125</sup> I believe Hardy suggests the idea that people need not choose between religion and science when the dogmatic approach is left out.

There is also a parallel to be drawn between Gabriel and Jude, both of them having a humble background, intellectual interests and a practical occupation requiring a specific set of skills. The critical difference between them is the approach to their respective occupations. When Gabriel’s dreams of being a farmer are hindered and he is made to lower his position to that of a shepherd, he accepts it. He still dedicates time to his studies and engages in a plethora of different jobs on the farm, practicing his skills and in the end, is rewarded with the position he originally planned for. Jude, on the

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<sup>123</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 19.

<sup>124</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 56.

<sup>125</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 34.

other hand, chooses his occupation of a stonemason for practical and sentimental reasons combined but sees it only as a temporary source of finances: “For a moment there fell on Jude a true illumination; that here, in the stone yard was a centre of effort as worthy as that dignified by the name of scholarly study within the noblest of the colleges, but he lost it under the stress of his old idea.”<sup>126</sup> Jude refuses to accept this part of his life as of similar importance as the academic one, and thus deprives himself of that harmony between the practical and intellectual. Hardy seems to be implying that Jude’s dichotomous view of the matter contributes to his ultimate failure.

Jude is also lacking in the sphere of emotional intelligence, already discussed in the previous chapters, which might be a direct consequence of his decision to isolate himself from the society in the company solely made of books. This opposes the approach of various characters from the novels interested in learning such as Gabriel, Angel and Sue. The mentioned characters often draw their knowledge from their immediate surroundings with its different cultures and number of world views, which gradually makes them grow and evolve.

Finally, Jude’s decision to give up his pursuit of a career in the Church, after previously giving up the academic one, is symbolically completed with the burning of his books: “It was nearly one o’clock in the morning before the leaves, covers, and binding of Jeremy Taylor, Butler, Doddridge, Paley, Pusey, Newman and the rest had gone to ashes; but the night was quiet, and as he turned and turned the paper shreds with the fork, the sense of being no longer a hypocrite to himself afforded his mind a relief which gave him calm.”<sup>127</sup> This act sets him free, not from religious belief altogether, but from the expectation, he had placed upon himself with his almost fanatic obsession with academia and the Church. This is a symbolic parting with the belief in doctrines that preach the irreconcilability between the flesh and the mind. Hardy this way suggests the need for a new outlook on the matters of certain seemingly separate aspects of human life because, in the end, all the parts are needed to make up the whole.

Hardy seems to be inspecting education and the role of religion in it through many different perspectives, without choosing sides. He comments on the selective accessibility of education and the outcomes of receiving both a secular and religious

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<sup>126</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 72.

<sup>127</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 189.

one, with an emphasis on the effect of becoming self-aware and subsequently striving for a change in the social order. He also seems to examine the critical attitude granted by education in the process of losing faith, exemplifying it through several characters. He also suggests a reconciliation between the two seemingly separate worlds of faith and science.

## Conclusion

Thomas Hardy is an author widely known for his depiction of controversial themes in times when the social order dictated otherwise. He received both praise and critique during his career and his literary works remain regarded as extraordinary to this day. His untraditional view of the social divisions, so very present in the nineteenth century, was closely associated with his religious stance as an agnostic. The very specific era in which progress was promoted and at the same time fought against, left him with critical regard for what was seen as ethical and what was deemed scandalous. He then used his authorial voice to share his impressions, as an imaginative discussion more so than as a declaration.

The era produced an environment for this sort of critical thinking with the rise of scientific research, radical theory of evolution, positivism and liberalism in politics. The changes were often subtle or gradual but laid the ground for modern society to arrive in the twentieth century. Not only Hardy, but in the latter part of the century, the law itself seemed to concern itself with the less fortunate and slowly began to address their needs. The divisive elements pointed out by Hardy were sexuality or gender, which denied women the same rights as men, ultimately making them inferior in the social order, education with its either selective or dogmatic nature and lastly, class.

The focus of this thesis was the connection between religion, specifically the Church, and all of the divisive elements mentioned above in the light of a phenomenon, the crisis of faith. The crisis was experienced by many contemporary intellectuals, including Hardy, leading many of them to abandon institutional religion. The analysis stems from the socio-cultural context of the era and the study of the author's biography with the emphasis on personal experience of religion.

Religion and the view of sexuality proved to be connected in the sense of the Church classifying sexuality as impure and essentially concealing its many aspects from its followers, the lowest classes to the most extent. Overall, Hardy seems to have pointed out the flaws in the notion of morality being synonymous with religion and the possibility of adapting views of said morality to match the needs of nineteenth-century people. He also dedicated a great deal of thought to the believed inferiority of women.

The analysis revealed a critique of the class system in society and the hierarchically high position of the Church inside this structure, perpetuating the former

to preserve the latter. The tool of this process seems to be the scrutiny aimed at the parishioners by the clergy reflected in the strong tendency to judge, even each other, harshly. This also prevents the most powerful in the structure from accepting the responsibility for poverty and its consequences. Prejudice and ostracization of the individuals who in one way or another do not conform, often seem to be the downfall of religion in Hardy's novels.

The theme of education is approached by Hardy from more than one point of view. He stresses the importance of access to education for the possibility of mobility in society, and also for the opportunities for individual growth of character. However, he also emphasizes the elitist form of higher education and its disinterest in innovation and inclusion. Pointing out the imagined link between knowledge and ethics, he proceeds to undermine it with the reminder that morality can exist outside books, similarly to outside religion. There seems to be a strong link between knowledge and frustration, just as well as doubt.

Religion pervaded most aspects of life in the nineteenth century and it seems that Thomas Hardy had taken an advantage of his own experiences with doubt to critically inspect the many societal problems of the era. Although his work has been studied extensively in the last century or so, I believe there are still interesting interpretations to be made with respect to the topic of religion and philosophy. Hardy's impressions inspired many authors in future generations to further question the norms and create complex characters in complex situations.

## Resumé

Náboženstvo bolo vo viktoriánskej spoločnosti súčasťou všetkých aspektov života. V časoch rapídnych zmien však vznikol priestor na prehodnotenie zaužívaných postojov. Cieľom tejto práce je skúmať tematiku krízy viery vo vybraných dielach Thomasa Hardyho a tak priblížiť, ako sa kritický prístup ku kresťanskému náboženstvu sprevádzaný pochybnosťami prejavil v jeho literárnej tvorbe. Práca sa zameriava na hlavné oblasti rozdeľujúce spoločnosť, analyzujúc aspekty podrobené autorovej kritike.

Hardyho biografía s dôrazom na jeho vzťah s vierou slúži na predstavenie životných skúseností, ktoré ho viedli k zaujatiu postoja agnostika. Socio-kultúrny pohľad na druhú polovicu devätnásteho storočia čitateľovi poskytuje kontext dynamickej spoločnosti podliehajúcej zmene. Nasledujúca kapitola poskytuje obsahy vybraných diel *Ďaleko od hlučného davu*, *Tess z d'Urbervillovcov* a *Nešťastný Jude* spoločne s krátkym popisom ich prijatia v čase prvého vydania.

Štvrtá kapitola otvára praktickú časť práce a teda analýzu diel, a venuje sa spojeniu medzi náboženstvom a sexualitou. Postupne odкрýva kritiku cirkvi, ktorá je zodpovedná za tabuizovanie sexuality, Hardyho netypický prístup k motívu padlej ženy a odkrytie limitov manželstva. Základným aspektom témy je prirodzenosť emócií v opozícii s náboženskou zdržanlivosťou, v dielach prispievajúcou ku kríze viery.

Piata kapitola sa zaoberá úlohou náboženstva v existencii triedneho systému, a poukazuje na podobu s hierarchickým usporiadaním cirkvi. Taktiež sa venuje sociálnemu prejavu náboženstva, kde Hardy zdôrazňuje rozdiely medzi triedami a tak aj medzi veriacimi a kňazmi, spochybňujúc synonymický vzťah medzi morálkou a vierou. Zároveň poukazuje na praktikovanie viery v živote nižšej triedy.

V nasledujúcej kapitole je venovaná pozornosť spojitosti náboženstva a vzdelania, pričom Hardy poukazuje na charakter privilegovanosti u oboch inštitúcií. Ďalej sú autorom naznačované negatívne stránky viktoriánskej podoby vzdelávania. Zároveň je v dielach zdôraznený účinok nadobudnutia vedomostí, ktorým je frustrácia a často aj cesta k pochybnostiam v otázkach viery.

Hardy svojimi dielami vyzýval ku kritickému mysleniu a prehodnoteniu vnímania morálky a etiky, s dôrazom na individuálnu skúsenosť. Analýza diel ukazuje na komplexné dôvody vedúce ku kríze viery, zhodujúce sa v nezlučiteľnosti poznatkov a dogmatických pravidiel cirkvi.

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## **Annotation**

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### **Abstract:**

This thesis inspects the theme of religion in three selected novels written by Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. The aim of the thesis is to discuss the ways in which Hardy's critical approach toward Christianity accompanied by religious doubt manifested itself in the novels.

## **Anotácia**

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**Kľúčové slová:** Náboženstvo, cirkev, sexualita, sociálna trieda, vzdelávanie, viktoriánska doba.

### **Abstrakt:**

Táto práca sa zaoberá tematikou náboženstva v troch vybraných románoch Thomasa Hardyho: Ďaleko od hlučného davu, Tess z d'Urbervillovcov a Nešťastný Jude. Cieľom práce je popísať spôsoby, ktorými sa v dielach prejavuje Hardyho kritický postoj k náboženstvu sprevádzaný pochybnosťami.