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**And Yet to Every Bad There is a Worse:
Tragic Themes in Selected Novels of Thomas Hardy**

Diplomová Práce

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Introduction

Reading novels written by Thomas Hardy is seldom a pleasant experience. However, their impact on precipitating the transition from outdated views to more modern thinking is remarkable. He sacrificed his characters for a great cause—every failure, suffering and death was enlightenment for the nineteenth century reader. Through his writings, he encouraged people to abandon practices that harmed their lives and embrace those that brought them joy.

The aim of this thesis is to discuss issues such as social inequality, gender inequality and religion, which are responsible for the tragic themes in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *Jude the Obscure* and *The Return of the Native*. I would specifically like to explore how Hardy, through the tragedies of his characters, represented the above-mentioned issues, raised awareness of these topics and demanded social change.

Owing to the fact that Hardy personally experienced rigid societal and religious rules, two initial chapters comprising of Thomas Hardy's biography and historical background elucidate his choice of his subject matter. The short biography of Hardy serves the intention to explain the source of his compassionate nature, his respect for women and his reasons for siding with the poor. The chapter on historical background presents some of the society's problems which irritated him the most.

The third chapter is entirely dedicated to society and class issues. Hardy condemned the iron division between social classes and detested the fact that the lower classes were deprived of opportunities. This chapter depicts the sufferings caused by the hypocrisy of the higher classes.

Hardy's three major novels analysed in this thesis reflect his resentment on gender discrimination. The three following chapters deal with gender inequality. Unequal marital relationships and discriminatory marital laws are discussed in the fourth chapter. The fifth chapter argues about Hardy's indignation with double standards in the divorce laws. There follows a chapter on sexual mores, which mirrors Hardy's views on the topic as opposed to the views of society.

The last chapter explores Hardy's struggles with some religious practices of the Victorian Christianity. He encouraged his reader to choose between good

and bad practices of Christianity and other religions. Also, he depicted the destructive effects of some of these religious practices. Each of these chapters includes three subchapters reserved for the separately analysed novels.

Finally, a brief conclusion provides explanations and the findings for the arguments raised and summarizes Hardy's efforts to encourage the society to change.

1. Thomas Hardy's Biography

Hardy's biography is an inseparable part of his literary career. His family, his upbringing, and the environment which surrounded him, are deeply rooted in his literary work. His experiences, his frustrations, and the way he perceived life in Victorian England, are mirrored in his literary work, both in prose and poetry. Hardy's biography in this thesis is mostly drawn from Hardy's autobiography, which was written by him and his wife Florence, and edited by his biographer Michael Millgate. *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* opens beautifully by announcing Hardy's birth and the setting where it happened:

It was in a lonely and silent spot between woodland and heathland that Thomas Hardy was born, about eight o'clock on Tuesday morning the 2nd of June 1840, the place of his birth being the seven-roomed rambling house that stands easternmost of the few scattered dwellings called Higher Bockhampton, in the parish of Stinsford, Dorset.¹

The reader is informed about the exact date of birth and the location in which is situated Hardy's big house, filled with inhabitants. The best description of his childhood home and neighbourhood is found in Hardy's first poem "Domicilium."

The family, on Hardy's paternal side, like all the Hardys of the south-west, was derived from the Jersey le Hardys who had sailed across to Dorset for centuries. Hardy often thought about restoring the "le" to his name and call himself "Thomas le Hardy"; but he never did so. The Hardys of Dorset were traditionally said to be descendants of Clement le Hardy, Bailly of Jersey, whose son John settled on this spot in the fifteenth century. Some of the Hardy's family ancestors included Elizabethan Thomas Hardy, who bestowed the Dorchester Grammar School, Thomas Hardy, captain of the *Victory* at Trafalgar, Thomas Hardy of Chaldon, Thomas Hardy an influential resident of Wareham and others. The plaque honouring the first-mentioned stood in St. Peter's Church, Dorchester, though transferred from its original location in the "Hardy Chapel." After his

1. Thomas Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Michael Millgate (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1984), 7, Kindle.

father's death, Thomas Hardy, the author, was the only Hardy left in Dorchester who inherited a small farmhouse at Talbothays.

On the maternal side, descended from the Childs, Chiles, or Childses, and Swetmans, both families of north-west Dorset, who were small landlords there in the reign of Charles the First. These families were punished for being absent from home at the time, and did not help the Monmouth Rebellion in 1685, a fact which have helped to dim the family prospects of the maternal line of Hardy's origin. Hardy's maternal grandmother, Elizabeth was a remarkable woman. Millgate further in his book describes her as "tall, handsome, had thirty gowns, was an omnivorous reader, and one who owned a stock of books of exceptional extent for a yeoman's daughter living in a remote place." ²

These attributes were rare among women that did not belong to the upper-classes. Millgate further states: "Among Elizabeth's children there was one, a girl, of unusual ability and judgment, and an energy that might have carried her to incalculable issues. This was the child, Jemima, the mother of Thomas Hardy."³

After being dispossessed and poor, the family went through difficult times. Hardy's mother, Jemima, endured a very rough girlhood. To appease her pain, caused by poverty and loss of the social status, she occupied herself with reading, a habit that she inherited from her mother Elizabeth.

Jemima, besides reading, had many skills—one of them was cooking. She planned to be a cook in a London clubhouse, but her plans were ended as soon as she turned twenty-five, when she met her future husband, the author's father.

The author's father, who was also named Thomas Hardy, was a stonemason and a dedicated violinist in the Stinsford church choir. Among his parents, Hardy attained all the interests that later emerged in his novels: a love for literature, architecture, and music, and a curiosity in the existences and the lives of the country folk. In Hardy's biography, Millgate wrote about little Thomas:

Though healthy, he was fragile, and precocious to a degree, being able to read almost before he could walk, and to tune a violin when of quite tender years. He was of ecstatic temperament, extraordinarily sensitive to music,

2. Hardy, *The Life and Work*, 11.

3. Hardy, *The Life and Work*, 12.

and among the endless jigs, hornpipes, reels, waltzes, and country-dances that his father played of an evening in his early married years, and to which the boy danced a *pas seul* in the middle of the room, there were three or four that always moved the child to tears, though he strenuously tried to hide them.⁴

Millgate describes the author as an extremely gifted and sensitive child, who in his early years showed indications that someday he is going to be a great artist.

Hardy attended school when he was eight years old. However, most of his education came from books. He learned Latin, French and German. At twelve he attended the old Eton grammar. Millgate further describes Hardy:

Though extraordinarily quick in acquisition he was undoubtedly rather an idle schoolboy; and in respect of the grammar having, like so many thousands of schoolboys before him, been worried by the ‘*Propria quae maribus*,’ he devised a plan for saving himself trouble in learning the genders by colouring the nouns in three tints respectively.⁵

Apparently, Hardy was a very smart and practical young man. He is portrayed by Millgate as a person who does not work hard, but the one who works smart. Even though Millgate calls him “an idle schoolboy,”⁶ the fact that Hardy read extensively and knew three foreign languages was quite exceptional among his coeval.

Though practical with his Latin, Hardy was very unpractical with girls. He fell in love at the first sight with several girls and he never saw them again. For such a sensitive young man these experiences were heart-breaking.

He was apprenticed to a well-known architect and church-restorer, John Hicks when he was only 16. Despite the fact that Hardy was a bookworm, he agreed to work for Hicks. In 1862, Thomas Hardy went to London, to pursue the art and science of architecture on a higher level. He began to work as an assistant-architect in Arthur Blomfield’s drawing-office. Blomfield, a graduate of Trinity

4. Hardy, *The Life and Work*, 19.

5. Hardy, *The Life and Work*, 27.

6. Hardy, *The Life and Work*, 27.

College, Cambridge, was an eminent church-designer and restorer in London. Millgate informs further the reader that “during his residence in London he had entered himself at King’s College for the French classes, where he studied the tongue through a term or two under Professor Stievenard.”⁷ This shows that Hardy, although an architect-assistant at a prestigious firm, never left aside his passion for languages and books in general. In London, Hardy began writing poetry that idealized country life, but could not find a publisher. Hardy left London in 1867. He entered into a temporary engagement with Tryphena Sparks, his 16-year-old kinswoman.

Growing up in a picturesque environment, he was influenced by the cultural atmosphere and the conventional lifestyle. Through his family and the country people, he nurtured virtues of carefulness, compassion and selflessness. Since childhood Hardy had formed a kind of thought and attitude of love for nature as well as for his country folk. His home was the soil for the making of an artist.

Hardy was brought up strictly as a Christian and later sympathized with Evangelicalism. However, Hardy never had to align himself with a single church party, since at some point during his mid-twenties “he began to question Christian orthodoxy.”⁸ This came as a result of the scientific discoveries, especially Darwin, which he read extensively.

Among other facts, Millgate wrote about Hardy’s health as well. He states:

He had been accustomed to shut himself up in his rooms at Westbourne Park Villas every evening from six to twelve reading incessantly, instead of getting out for air after the day’s confinement, Hardy’s health had become much weakened. He used to say that on sitting down to begin drawing in the morning he had scarcely physical power left him to hold the pencil and square.⁹

7. Hardy, *The Life and Work*, 52.

8. Keith Wilson, ed., *A Companion to Thomas Hardy* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 73, Kindle.

9. Hardy, *The Life and Work*, 54.

His poor health must have been one of the central reasons that Hardy returned to his countryside. But he was also a man who lacked the ambition of climbing the ladder of the London high society. After a few weeks in his own country, he returned at his old habit of walking which repaired him completely.

Equipped with contrasting experiences in London and Dorchester, he had now enough material in order to start writing his first novel, which was titled *The Poor Man and the Lady; By the Poor Man*. From the beginning he faced resistance from publishers, they thought that Hardy's novel was very aggressive and demanded rewriting. Alexander Macmillan, the most prominent publisher of that time said that the novel "meant mischief."¹⁰

Although Hardy faced being declined and harshly criticized, he managed to publish his books in serial form in weekly magazines such as *New Quarterly Magazine*, *Belgravia*, and later in *Harper's Weekly* in the United States. Hardy's popular reputation had reached a peak with *Far from the Madding Crowd* and then somewhat retreated. But he had continued to be firmly productive.

While Hardy was experiencing his highs and lows in his literary career, it was then when he met his first wife, Emma Gifford, in 1870 in Cornwall. He was enchanted by both—her and Cornwall, the countryside where she lived. Some controversy dimed her methods in obtaining his hand in marriage. The rumours said that she amplified her connection to a local farmer in the hopes of persuading Hardy into a proposal. The proposal finally came, and the two were married on September 17, 1874. They were both thirty years old, though she had lied about her age, saying that she was much younger.

Although, the first years of their marriage were quite happy, conflicts affected their marriage deeply. Quarrels over whether to make their home in London or Dorchester, their failure to have children, tensions between Hardy's mother and Emma, and Hardy's entanglements with other women, completely ruined this union. They were obviously ill-suited for one another. Hardy withdrew into himself and became involved in emotional relationships with other women like Florence Henniker and Rosamund Tomson. He never apparently complained about his unhappy marriage, but just dealt with it in his own way.

10. Hardy, *The Life and Work*, 64.

He met his second wife Florence in 1906 and she was received as part of their household by 1909. In a way, Florence and Emma were friends. Emma became mentally disturbed and eventually died in 1912. Ironically, Hardy buried her next to his mother in the family plot. Although Emma troubled him, criticised harshly his work, and Hardy seemed not in love with her, he composed some of his greatest love poems for her after her death. He married Florence in 1914. She was 35 and he was 74. She was his companion, housekeeper, secretary, and a nurse, but she was also unhappy most of the time. She also suffered from many diseases. She died of cancer in 1937.

Millgate in his other book dedicated to the author, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited* argues about his second marriage:

The developing relationship with Florence Dugdale reawakened—or perhaps simply reinforced—Hardy’s old susceptibility to feminine companionship and caused him to fret anew at the restrictions placed upon him by his own marriage. Those restrictions were partly legal but more importantly moral...¹¹

Hardy’s personal philosophy on marriage was progressive for his time. He felt that the institution of marriage through laws of Victorian era, which meant to protect, was harmed instead. He felt that it was illogical to force two people to promise to love each other forever, and even if that did not happen, the couple was socially required to stay together.

Amid a most troublesome time for Hardy, his poetry flourished. Hardy’s novels became increasingly bleaker, reflecting his pessimism at nature’s spitefulness and the tragedy of human life. The negative criticism of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and the excessive uproar against *Jude the Obscure* moved Hardy to stop writing novels and return to poetry. He was writing poetry profusely and was honoured with several prizes for his work. He was active until the end. Millgate further in Hardy’s biography says that he wrote until “He Resolves to Say No More”, the final poem of his posthumous final volume, but Florence, “after her husband’s death, denied that the poem should be regarded as his final statement

11. Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 416, Kindle.

and insisted that he had in fact experienced a great outburst of creativity late in 1927 and felt that he could have gone on writing almost indefinitely.”¹² She stated that before his death, he had written over 800 poems, many of them published while he was in his 80s.

Hardy defied many of the religious, sexual, and social conventions of the Victorian age. Although his fiction was admired, many critics and readers found his work appalling, especially *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. By the last two decades of his life, Hardy had attained as great a reputation as Charles Dickens. Hardy died on January 11, 1928, at the age of 87. His ashes were buried in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

12. Millgate, *A Biography Revisited*, 528.

2. Historical Background

In order to analyse Hardy's novels, it is of crucial importance to describe the economic, religious, gender and class situation of the era because it has a huge impact on his characters' development and his work in general. Victorian England saw an extremely rapid increase in the economic sphere. An income tax was introduced, and the import obligations were abolished, which added to the economic growth. Moreover, a huge number of diverse discoveries were made at the time. The opening of the first railway from Manchester to Liverpool in 1825 also had a huge impact on the economic growth of England. Rich people became even richer. The Victorian Era provided a very successful time period for the middle-class as well. Some jobs for middle-class citizens during Victorian England were teachers and doctors. Other people in the middle class owned large businesses and became extremely rich. The middle class before the start of the Victorian Era was a very small class, and over the time period of the Victorian Era it grew to be enormous.

Although, all these facts are valid in most parts of Britain, there were places that lived in totally different conditions. While Britain underwent the Industrial Revolution, Irish people died of starvation. Jaroslav Peprník in his guide of Britain and USA eloquently explains:

The Great Exhibition of 1851 in Hyde Park was a display of increased middle-class prosperity. It did not reflect the famine that broke out in Ireland in 1845-50, after the potato crops there failed. Hundreds of thousands in Ireland died of starvation and a million more emigrated to America...¹³

Ireland was not the only part to be neglected. The South-West of England was untouched by industrialization as well and therefore its character remained different from the North. Hardy was too often criticized for displaying his country as old-fashioned and obsolete, without knowing that Hardy's 'Wessex', as he liked to call his country, was one of the poorest parts of England and therefore

13. Jaroslav Peprník, *Británie a USA* (Olomouc: Nakladatelství Olomouc, 2004), 57.

was behind and undeveloped. This part of England lived from agriculture and there were also several traditional crafts remaining, which were disappearing as well. Throughout the century, the wages in Dorchester were the lowest in the country, approximately thirty-seven percent lower than elsewhere. Merryn Williams in her book *Thomas Hardy and Rural England* explains the way how people lived in those parts:

At the date represented in the various narratives, things were like that in ‘Wessex’: the inhabitants lived in certain ways, engaged in certain occupations, kept alive certain customs, just as they are shown doing in these pages... We have it on his own assurance that the ‘Wessex’ of the novels and poems is practically identical with the Wessex of history, and includes the counties of Berkshire, Wilts, Somerset, Hampshire, Dorset and Devon- either wholly or in part. The immediate relationship was summarised accurately by his friend Hermann Lea.¹⁴

Although, Hardy liked to recall his country’s past, the fact that this part of England was underdeveloped is undeniable, as poverty goes hand in hand with stagnation. Therefore, people in these parts lived like in old times, respecting old customs and believing in old superstitions. Hardy in his essay “The Dorsetshire Labourer” describes the stereotypical farm-labourer as a pitiable person and calls him ‘Hodge.’ He says:

This supposed real but highly conventional Hodge is a degraded being of uncouth manner and aspect, stolid understanding, and snail-like movement. His speech is such a chaotic corruption of regular language that few persons of progressive aims consider it worthwhile to enquire what views, if any, of life, of nature, or of society are conveyed in these utterances. Hodge hangs his head or looks sheepish when spoken to, and thinks Lunnon a place paved with gold. Misery and fever lurk in his cottage, while, to paraphrase the words of a recent writer on the labouring classes, in his future there are only the workhouse and the grave. He

14. Merryn Williams, *Thomas Hardy and Rural England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1972), 104, Kindle.

hardly dares to think at all. He has few thoughts of joy, and little hope of rest. His life slopes into a darkness not 'quieted by hope.'¹⁵

According to Hardy, the farm-labourer of his Dorsetshire was a man without dreams. His senses were numbed by poverty and he had resigned. But, in his novels he did not choose this resigned man as his character. He chose his characters from a small group in Dorsetshire who saw a gleam at the end of the tunnel. These people were rare in those parts of England, but they had dreams and they aimed for a better future for themselves. All of them tried to fight with their singular means to ascend the ladder of social class and live a better life. They refused to be 'Hodges.'

In Victorian society, the primary organizing principles were religion, class and gender. The single belief that characterized the Victorian era was Christian belief. The other beliefs that existed in England were unimportant. Religion affected strongly the social and political life. Yet this was also a period of major scientific advancement and discovery. Darwin's *Origin of Species* and other discoveries and approaches undermined faith in the Bible. These developments led towards the 'secularization' and 'dechristianization' in the mass of the English urban population.

The Victorian upper class, which consisted of approximately seven-thousand people, were the most powerful and rich of all. They owned four fifths of the entire land and lived in extremely different conditions than the rest of the population.¹⁶ There were a number of these upper-class people who ran large industries like the mining or shipping industry.

As for the middle-class citizens, the Industrial Revolution greatly changed their way of life. Many more job opportunities for the lower and middle class were opened, so one could make a decent amount of money and have a decent life. This also meant an opportunity to improve their social status. Money enabled movement from one class to another.

15. Harold Orel, ed., *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings* (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1966), 169, Kindle.

16. "Life in Victorian Era," The Schoolrun, accessed September 19, 2020, <https://www.theschoolrun.com/homework-help/life-victorian-era>.

The lower class was the worst affected class in the Victorian Era. Immigration in England had produced a lack of job opportunities for this class and therefore as a result, wages decreased substantially, which meant that people of lower classes could barely support themselves. If the father of the family died, the family would mostly be without a house, since women could not inherit anything. In the best cases they would have to move into a public housing area, but often were forced to live on the streets. The above-mentioned conditions had a very negative impact in their life in general.

Another organizing principle was undoubtedly gender. Men and women held a completely different status. Men were considered physically strong and independent while women were considered weak and dependent. While for men sex was significant, for women, reproduction was significant. Mackay and Thane in one of the chapters of *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920*, a book edited by Robert Colls and Phillip Dodd, point out the differences between the Englishman and the Englishwoman:

The classic English man of the period was held to combine certain qualities, including leadership, courage, justice and honour, which were defined as distinctively 'English'. He has no exact female equivalent. The qualities of the perfect Englishwoman were publicly discussed, but they were not generally perceived as being specifically English. Rather they were those qualities – essentially domestic and maternal – believed to be universal in Woman. The ideal Englishwoman's special quality was that she practised these virtues in a fashion superior to women of other countries; but Englishwomen, it seemed, had difficulty in living up to that ideal. Not only were they trained and cajoled from their earliest years to recognize the primacy of domesticity, but throughout life faced criticism for the inadequacy of their performance, even in comparison with women of other countries.”¹⁷

English women not only were disadvantaged socially in relation to men, they were also scorned and ridiculed for their conduct and appearance. Their husbands

17. Robert Colls and Philip Dodd, ed., *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 376, Kindle.

seldom paid them respect or compliments, it was not a custom. But on the other hand, these women could afford many luxuries that came from their husband's pockets. The wardrobe of a man's wife showed his wealth, but also her dependence.

However, this was not the fate of all Englishwomen. Different rules applied to different classes where these women belonged. While the upper-class woman could be idle, women from lower classes had to work in order to feed and provide shelter for themselves. They worked either in domestic service or factories which was a brutal job six days a week. Working-class women had many jobs, but they were not paid the same wages as their male co-workers.

Victorians considered that the function of a woman was to marry, have children and run a household. Women who needed to work were considered unworthy and spoiled. Even jobs, like a governess or shop assistant, which were reserved for middle class women, were stigmatized.

Victorians considered that a chaste and naïve woman who stayed at home was respectable. She existed only to fulfil her duty and this duty was to serve the man. Her intellectual capacity was thought to be less than the intellectual capacity of a man, therefore she was 'spared' of a burden of thinking for something more, apart from her household. She was also considered incapable of feeling and passion. The only feeling that she was capable of, was the love for her children and her husband. As an asexual human being, intercourse was her duty towards her husband and a means of reproduction, not a need or pleasure. Her psychological and physiological liberty was completely denied. On the other hand, men were considered highly intelligent in comparison with women. Men were also considered highly passionate, therefore they were allowed to have sexual urges.

Penelope Ann Boumelha in her dissertation entitled "Female Sexuality, Marriage and Divorce in the Fiction of Thomas Hardy" argues about the bias of science of the time. "The attempt to isolate biologically determined and innately differing male and female natures gave a spurious scientific underpinning to the double standard of sexual morality."¹⁸

18. Penelope Ann Boumelha, "Female Sexuality, Marriage and Divorce in the Fiction of Thomas Hardy" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1981), 23.

According to science, men were somehow genetically endowed with propensity for promiscuity, therefore they were not held responsible for their actions. Men and women were different, so consequently they acted differently.

Education in Victorian society was very diverse, it depended on several factors such as sex, religion, social class, and the parents' financial situation. Male children were more privileged than female children, therefore they were more often sent to school. Girls were left at home and were taught skills that would benefit them when they got married. Furthermore, according to religion, every father had the right to choose how to raise his children, therefore the compulsory schooling of English children was postponed.

James Murphy in his essay "Religion, the State, and Education in England" informs the reader that:

Free elementary education for all children in England was not decreed until the Education Act of 1870 or made compulsory until 1880. Existing schools came in a variety of types—charity schools, independent schools run by religious dissidents from outside the Church of England and a few old grammar schools dating from the sixteenth century and supported by the Church of England.¹⁹

Religion, allowing the father to decide for everything, in a way was slowing down compulsory education, but was helping as well. The church provided free education for those who could not afford to pay for their children's education. These schools had a religious and charity character. Apart from some typical school subjects, children were also taught various skills, that they would need later on their lives. Apart from charity schools, Murphy mentions other schools as well. These were schools that only upper-class families could afford. They could also afford the best tutors to prepare their children for the finest universities in Britain.

19. James Murphy, "Religion, the State, and Education in England," *History of Education Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1968): 3–34, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/366984>.

The improvement of the circumstances of middle-class citizens had a very positive impact on the education of middle-class children. People with enough money to support their families, they no longer needed their children to work. In addition, they were able to buy an education for them.

In the worst position were the lower classes. They could not afford to educate their children. The lack of education of these children meant that their fates were sealed before they even became adults.

Although some boys were trained for various future careers, all the girls were trained for a matrimony “career.” Girls were pressed to enter into engagements which were arranged previously by their fathers. They were not supposed to fall in love until being engaged, although after that, they had to start loving, miraculously. They were not allowed to have sexual desires, they had to suppress them. So, when a woman got married, she went from one patriarch to the other, from her father to her husband. She was expected to fulfil her slightly altered duties and to obey.

Heather Lea Nelson in her dissertation entitled “The Law and the Lady: Consent and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century British Literature” among others explains the hardship of a divorce in Victorian society:

The Matrimonial Causes Act 1857 granted the populace its first widespread access to divorce but maintained a sexual double standard. Husbands could file based on adultery, but wives could only file based on adultery and at least one other offense: bestiality, bigamy, cruelty, incest, rape of a third party, sodomy, or two-year desertion. Husbands could no longer automatically receive custody of children, and wives could ask that their finances and property be kept from deserting husbands. Largely because divorces were expensive, were reported in the press, and took away social status (all as before), wives filed fewer than half of the divorce suits throughout the rest of the Victorian period.²⁰

20. Heather Lea Nelson, “The Law and the Lady: Consent and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century British Literature” (PhD diss., Purdue University, 2005), 13.

Hence, not only were women underprivileged by law on all issues, including divorce, but they also had to face public humiliations. Even if they had money to pay for divorce expenses, they could not use it because husbands were in charge of their finances. Consequently, they were forced to obey.

Not being part of the mainstream society was disadvantageous, but it also had its benefits. Country folk, especially poor people who diverged from the societal codes never stood the chance of being publicly humiliated in the press and they never risked descending the social ladder. They were already at the bottom. A poor father was glad if his daughter married well, but if she could not find a husband, she had to go to work. Although, girls who took a job were considered unworthy and spoiled by society, the poor father did not have the luxury to keep his daughter at home. He would have turned a deaf ear for some pennies more. Although the social codes were a bit milder for country folk, they could not escape them altogether. If someone broke a rule, the person was haunted by this mistake forever. Rumours spread easily from village to village and no one could escape them.

The reality in Victorian England is more tragic than optimistic. This harsh reality was responsible for Hardy's tragic consciousness which accompanied him from *Far from the Madding Crowd* to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* until *Jude the Obscure*.

3. Society and Class Issues in Hardy's Selected Novels

Hardy's obsession with the social class is clearly mirrored in almost every piece of writing that he wrote. Being born neither to the upper class, or the lower one, Hardy felt that he did not belong to either of them. Being somewhere in the middle, he could not afford to only do things that he was passionate about, like reading and writing. He had to work as an architecture assistant in order to secure a place in the society. Hardy managed both his occupations, architecture and writing, for twenty years. When he finally established himself, he could afford to dedicate himself completely to his writing career.

Living in Dorchester and London and having a double career, enabled him to encounter the two different worlds that existed in England. He had many friends in the upper classes, but he found this world very cold. He was very compassionate with the lower classes, in contrast, as they lacked opportunities to cultivate their talents.

Rosemary Jenn, in her essay "Hardy's Rustics and the Construction of Class" argues about the reasons that pushed Hardy to side with the lower classes, and the function of his characters as follows:

His rustic characters function as agents of class rivalry, but more specifically in the ways their characteristic behaviors help to define by contrast the kinds of subjectivity that justify the higher social positions of the more central characters. Hardy's characteristic combination of this strategy with the more conventional one for advancing bourgeois values in the Victorian novel – by exposing the unworthiness of gentry and aristocrats – can be linked to his insecurities about his own class identity and the repressions involved in maintaining it.²¹

Hardy skilfully exposed the class division, and the hardship to ascend and maintain the status. This explains why, despite the fact that Hardy was very

21. Rosemary Jann, "Hardy's Rustics and the Construction of Class," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 28, no. 2 (October 2000): 411–425, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25058527>.

talented and passably educated, his roots prevented him from elevating himself to the desirable height. Although he succeeded as a writer, his roots slowed him down, obstructed and made his path to success much longer and harder.

In most of his novels, he projected himself into the main protagonists. His own struggles are reflected in Clym Yeobright's struggles in *The Return of the Native*, in Jude's struggles in *Jude the Obscure*, and others as well.

3.1. Social Class Issues in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

Tess of the D'Urbervilles and all the turmoil about this novel began when Parson Tringham bids John Durbeyfield goodnight by addressing him as Sir John. Tess's father is surprised and asks the parson why he is calling him Sir. The parson answers:

It was on account of a discovery I made some little time ago, whilst I was hunting up pedigrees for the new county history. I am Parson Tringham, the antiquary, of Stagfoot Lane. Don't you really know, Durbeyfield, that you are the lineal representative of the ancient and knightly family of the d'Urbervilles, who derive their descent from Sir Pagan d'Urberville, that renowned knight who came from Normandy with William the Conqueror, as appears by Battle Abbey Roll?²²

The importance of a title and a social position in general was tremendous at the time. Although, Durbeyfield had never heard about this story before and now is informed that he is the last d'Urberville with no wealth left, he refuses to walk home, he hires a carriage instead. This is conduct that an hour earlier would have been unimaginable.

William Greenslade in his essay "The Lure of Pedigree in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*" describes this phenomenon as follows:

22. Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 4.

The Durbeyfields transform this useless knowledge connecting them with the dead, into serviceable information by which they hope to make a better life. Of course, for them, pedigree is a lure, precisely because the family is so vulnerable to fecklessness and poverty.²³

Tess's family is devastated from poverty and they are ready to take any chance to change their circumstances. After being informed, they try to regain their lost family name and to do so, her mother arranges "a grand projick!"²⁴ She plans to achieve this through Tess's marriage. They want to use her looks and her surname to ascend on the social class ladder. Tess is more interested, however, in feeding her family's mouths than climbing this ladder, but later is forced to cooperate as well.

Alec d'Urberville and Angel Clare, in contrast, are both characters, representative of their social classes. Angel's family initially ignores his marriage to a country girl, although they might be more agreeable to learn that Tess is a d'Urberville. This family is presented as religious and charitable, but Hardy uncovers the hypocrisy infused by social codes of Victorianism even to the pious.

Alec is not even a true d'Urberville as his rich father has bought the old family name to enter the ranks of the nobility. Alec, empowered by his new name and status, acts ruthlessly towards the lower classes, especially women. Through Alec's character, Hardy criticizes harshly the sexual and social hypocrisy found in English society at time.

When the railroad came to the area of southwest England, where Tess lived, people here led a secluded, almost medieval life. The railroad helped in many ways. Large dairies such as Talbothays, where Tess worked as a milkmaid, could prosper because the speedy trains allowed transport of fresh milk to densely populated towns.

Tess is amazed by the fact that "Londoners will drink it at their breakfasts tomorrow...Strange people that we have never seen...Noble men and noble

23. William Greenslade, "The Lure of Pedigree in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*," *Thomas Hardy Journal* 7, no. 3 (October 1991): 103–115, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45274054>.

24. Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 26.

women, ambassadors and centurions, ladies and tradeswomen, and babies who have never seen a cow.’²⁵ Hardy points out the impact of the railway, which brought two different worlds closer, and the huge difference of people from one end of the railway to the other.

In the 1870, England entered an agricultural depression. Country folk unable to find jobs, left the country and went to bigger cities, therefore the number of population doubled in the cities. Smaller farms could not survive, so they were bought by larger ones who owned machinery, consequently less workers were needed. The large farms and their new landowners felt no obligation towards the families who lived on their land, so they did not renew the leases; hence many families were left on the streets. The same thing happens to Tess’s family. Hardy condemns extensively this practice in his essay “The Dorsetshire Labourer” and feels sorry for these people. “They are, what the regular labourer is not, out of sight of patronage; and to be out of sight is to be out of mind when misfortune arises...”²⁶ He is frustrated about the fact that, these people are left in the streets without help, completely forgotten. He tried to become their voice in his essay, the voice that is heard in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* as well.

3.2. Social Class Issues in *Jude the Obscure*

Jude the Obscure was the most vilified Hardy novel. Critics of his day attacked Hardy on his treatment of religion and marriage, although the novel’s primary aim is to attack social injustice in Victorian England. Hardy in this novel again addresses the ill treatment of the lower classes. The first issue to be touched on by him is child labour which was common in England.

Instead of going to school, Jude is sent to work as a human scarecrow for farmer Troutham. His aunt Drusilla wants to keep him out of “mischty” and also

25. Hardy, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, 225.

26. Orel, *Hardy’s Personal Writings*, 172.

to “earn any penny he can.”²⁷ Jude is hungry for education, however, occasionally attends the night school and receives some poor, informal learning. This kind of arrangement was frequently found in the mid-nineteenth century among lower-class boys whose labour was of more importance to the survival of their families than was their education.

Another issue touched on by Hardy is the fact that only upper classes had access to universities like Cambridge and Oxford, because only they could receive the necessary training in order to enter these universities. Aside from lack of training, Jude’s low-class status prevents him from attending a university like Christminster, Hardy’s fictional name for Oxford.

James Caufield, who wrote an extended review on *Jude the Obscure* states:

Oxford and Cambridge universities besides the fact that were too expensive for middle-and lower-class students, they also stayed closed to dissenters and Roman Catholics until the reform of the Test Acts in 1871. This reform removed the religious impediment, but class barriers remained in attendance at Oxford and Cambridge.²⁸

Other universities, however, would have been more realistic options for Jude, but Hardy stubbornly wants to point out this practice.

When Jude writes to several deans to ask them to be admitted to the university, only one of them takes the trouble to reply to him. “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 own trade than by adopting any other course”²⁹ This reply is not only a refusal letter, but also an insulting message. It clearly states that Jude does not belong in the university sphere.

On the other hand, Sue, positioned a bit higher than Jude in the social ladder, is admitted to the training school which is the very model of Victorian social assimilation. There are restrictive rules and a curriculum designed to teach women their place in society. In spite of all this, Sue who has a non-conformist

27. Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (1895. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959), 32.

28. James Caufield, “Jude the Obscure,” Encyclopedia, accessed November 5, 2020, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/culture-magazines/jude-obscure-0>.

29. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 149.

nature challenges school's restrictive rules. She questions the moral code of Victorianism, and even the importance of the religion. While she stays overnight with Jude, she does not have sex with him. This may be considered as an innocent act today, but in Hardy's time this would have been utterly indecent behaviour for a young, middle-class woman. Her disobedience is punished severely. Everyone who tried to cross the boundaries of class or gender has to face the consequences.

Hardy drew very clear lines which were not to be crossed between classes. Jude and Sue are destined never to cross them; to the contrary, on their return to Christminster they take lodgings in Mildew Lane, "a narrow lane close to the back of a college but having no communication with it." The houses here are "darkened to gloom by the high collegiate buildings," definitive sign of class separation and repression. Within these walls, "life was so far removed from that of the people in the lane as if it had been on opposite sides of the globe," and yet "only a thickness of wall divided them."³⁰

Although this division was clear, and Sue and Jude never received the opportunity to be on the other side of the wall, they never stop dreaming and attempting. When Jude loses his hope for himself, he still hopes for his son. "What I couldn't accomplish in my own person perhaps I can carry out through him? They are making it easier for poor students now, you know."³¹ Jude never gives up his dream on demonstrating the worthiness of poor people.

Arabella is the only one who is truly comfortable in her class. She accepts the fact where she belongs and tries to use her position as best as she can. Flirtatious and not a submissive woman, she finds a way within her class boundaries to live a more carefree life. She is the only one who breaks the rules and escapes the punishment. All of this is possible for Arabella, because she is positioned at the bottom of the social ladder. As a result, she does not become a subject of scrutiny and therefore escapes social punishment. The unimportance of her position benefits her. Being a member of the lowest class does not prevent her from enjoying little luxuries of life as she perceives them.

30. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 387.

31. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 330.

3.3. Social Class Issues in *The Return of the Native*

Whereas in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* characters try to climb the social ladder, in *The Return of the Native* the same social ladder is questioned. In Victorian society, leaving the country and agriculture for a bigger city and 'better' employment was considered a step ahead, but some characters in *The Return of the Native* do not agree with it. Clym Yeobright, leaves his established life of a jeweller in Paris, which he finds unfulfilling, and returns to Egdon Heath with the intention of becoming a teacher for poor children of the heath. Clym's intention is very progressive for the time and therefore faces strong opposition from his mother and wife. His mother is 'astonished' by his decision. "How can you want to do better than you've been doing?"³²—she asks her son. "After all the trouble that has been taken to give you a start, and when there is nothing to do but to keep straight on towards affluence, you say you will be a poor man's schoolmaster."³³ Clym's mother is clearly a typical Victorian woman, who respects every Victorian code forced upon her. She even asks Clym "why can't you do it as well as others?"³⁴ She is unprepared for such progressive ideas, similarly to some readers and critics of Hardy.

The same thing happens with his wife Eustacia. Clym's idea of not returning to Paris seems 'dreadful' to her. "you a man who have lived about the world, and speak French, and know the classics, and who are fit for what is so much better than this."³⁵ Clym's idea of the social ladder is different from others. What is high and low for Victorians, is not for Clym. Clym ignores the verticality of this ladder, he wants to add branches to it, possibilities to go right and left, as one chooses. He is the first one to decide what is good and bad for himself, not letting society decide for him.

Diggory Venn acts in a similar way. Having given up dairy farming, for the trade of reddleman, represents a conscious rejection of the Victorian 'noble' occupation. Although Hardy paints Venn with this red and ugly appearance, he tells the reader that nobility does not lie in occupations. Venn is very noble in his

32. Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (1878. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 172.

33. Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 172.

34. Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 173.

35. Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 243.

conduct. Rosemary Jenn, further in her essay describes Venn as follows: “despite his bizarre appearance, he possesses an ‘acuteness’ that sets him apart from his fellows. He demonstrates a ‘delicacy’ of feeling lacking in the other heathfolk.”³⁶ Thus, Hardy tries to reveal the right values that people should respect, not those that are wrongly imposed by society.

Eustacia who has lived a good life in the city of Budmouth, after her father’s death, is brought to Egdon Heath to live with her grandfather. She does not perceive this fact as a decline in her status, her status remains intact even in the heath, but she feels entrapped. She longs for balls and adventures that only cities can provide. She is bored in Egdon Heath. She tries to appease this boredom with her flirtatious and rebellious conduct, which clashes with the nature of women in Egdon Heath. Acting differently, she is called ‘a witch’ by the heathfolks. Although of a non-conformist nature, she is aware that the only way to restore her social position is through marriage, and she forces herself into it. When she fails to achieve her goal of living a decent life as a lady in a civilized place, she is willing to take more drastic steps. She chooses to rather end her life than live as a furze-cutters wife.

Tomasin, who has lived all her life in Egdon Heath, although not poor, is very comfortable with her living. “I am not fit for town life—so very rural and silly as I always have been. Do not you yourself notice my countrified ways?”³⁷ Tomasin does not care to climb the social ladder, she would rather go lower for the sake of love.

In *The Return of the Native*, unlike other novels, characters fight for their own choices, not for what society imposes as a choice. They decide themselves what is noble and valuable for them, they do not leave that to society. The lack of opportunities for Hardy’s characters and their struggle to use every small chance, often results in tragedy. Their dreams and sometimes their lives are crushed by societal rules.

Hardy was far ahead of his time in many of his views—implying that members of the working class should be treated equally, should be educated, accepted at universities, should be able to decide how to live their life without letting the harsh societal code interfere—but Hardy’s society was not ready for

36. Jann, “Hardy’s Rustics and the Construction of Class,” 414–425.

37. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 378.

such advanced ideas. The repercussion against *Jude the Obscure* was so cruel that Hardy gave up writing novels altogether.

4. Hardy and Marriage

Marriage was a kind of accord and honour to those people who obeyed the socio-traditional ideas. It did not permit any notion of rebellion, otherwise it would be regarded as immoral. Many women entered matrimony at a young age either to ascend the social ladder or to attain financial security in a wealthy husband. Matrimony was rather a union of benefits than a union of love. This union from the beginning was unequal. This meant that as soon as a woman entered a marriage, she was dominated by a husband who controlled almost everything, including finances, inheritance and property.

Hardy was against the matrimonial union of a male and female with a lawful contract without considering love. He attacked English matrimonial law almost in every novel.

4.1. Marriage in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Hardy exposes his heroine to different kinds of matrimony: natural and social matrimony. Tess in fact, never entirely enters either of them. After being 'deflowered' by Alec d'Urberville, she escapes from him. Although, intercourse served as a natural bond at time, Tess loathes it because she did not enter it quite willingly. Thus, she escapes the social matrimony. By escaping and hiding her pregnancy, Tess destroys the plans her mother made for her— ascending the social class system and attaining financial security for her family.

Her marriage to Angle Clare starts as something completely natural. They fell in love with each other. Tess is in love with Clare, and Clare is in love with Tess's apparent characteristics; beauty, sex appeal, passion, farming skills, intelligence and above all her purity. Clare is willing to disregard the fact that Tess is from the lower classes, but when on the wedding night Tess tells him that she had sex with Alec, Clare retreats. Clare's retreatment changes their matrimony state; from natural to social matrimony—married only by the law.

The love between these two was not reciprocal after all, and on the wedding night Tess realises it. Tess, surprised by Angel's alternation says to him:

I thought, Angel, that you loved me-me, my very self! If it is I you do love, o how can it be that you look and speak so? It frightens me! Having begun to love you, I love you forever-in all changes, in all disgraces, because you are yourself. I ask no more..³⁸

Clare who is considered non-conventional by his family and rebels against social rules of the time, obviously is not ready to embrace marriage as a union between equals. Although he admits his impurity—plunging “into eight-and-forty hours dissipation with a stranger,”³⁹ he is not able to accept Tess's ‘impurity.’ Tola Odubajo and Dayo Odubajo in their paper “Gender Prejudice in the Victorian Era” argue about inequality between Tess and Clare:

Tess at this point fails to realise that even though while she was merely a victim and not an offender, and yet Angel as an offender, societal laws were stringent only for a select group. Particularly, men and women were not judged or governed by the same yardstick. Angel, true to type, in exposing his chauvinistic side, vehemently and adamantly rejected Tess.⁴⁰

According to Odubajos, Tess forgives Clare, but she is not forgiven. The same sin seems more impure on woman. Hardy uncovers the double standard that existed at

38. Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 275.

39. Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 268.

40. Tola Odubajo and Dayo Odubajo, “Gender Prejudice in the Victorian Era: An Elucidation of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*,” *Gender and Behaviour* 15, no. 2 (July 2017): 9231.

time. Hardy through his heroine, also introduces this 'new woman' who prioritizes the natural matrimony based on love and understanding against the social one, but unfortunately, she is introduced too early. Clare is not ready for this transition yet.

4.2. Marriage in *Jude the Obscure*

In the *Jude the Obscure*, Sue forces herself to respect the social codes by marrying Phillotson. She experiences the lawful matrimony. She signs the contract and makes herself Phillotson's property. She even asks Jude to give her away although she hates this act.

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.⁴¹

Being someone's property is the worst thing for Sue, but she is tired of fighting and she is willing to give it a chance, to be part of the society. Asking Jude to give her away means that she accepts the fact that she was a man's property all along. Sue feels entrapped after being for some time in this marriage. She asks for divorce, but the law is not on her side. She says that "Domestic laws should be made according to temperaments, which should be classified. If people are at all peculiar in character they have to suffer from the very rules that produce comfort in others!"⁴²

She knows that she is not like other women, she is a free spirit. That is why she cannot be in that marriage any longer. So, she walks away, creating disaster everywhere, putting herself and Phillotson before the societal judgement.

41. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 207.

42. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 268.

Furthermore, Sue refuses to enter into lawful matrimony with Jude. She prefers a natural one. She is afraid that as soon as they will be married legally, they will lose the love and respect that they enjoyed in their natural marriage. As soon as Sue consents to marry, she will become Jude's property. She is afraid of the impact of the marriage certificate upon her relationship with Jude.

Sue is an independent woman, and her independence is central to her. When she decides to live with Jude without marrying him, she quotes J. S. Mill: "She, or he, who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation."⁴³ She considers that everyone should choose how to live their life, and she is not going to be a sheep that obeys and stays with her flock again.

Hardy through Sue's character expresses the damaging effect that the matrimonial law had in marriages. He presents the harshness of the institution and the unequal terms of the parties. When his characters step into matrimony, they are aware of these inequalities.

The damaging effect of matrimonial law is also expressed through Arabella. She is a prey of the social institution of marriage as well. Knowing that the easiest way to survive in her cruel world is by marrying someone, and the only means for doing it is her own sexuality, she is obliged to use her animalistic part of herself. She achieves her goal by faking pregnancy. Her marriage with Jude from the beginning is based on lies and sexual impulses. During their wedding ceremony, Arabella and Jude vow to keep something they already do not have.

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 the fact that nobody seemed at all surprised at what they swore.⁴⁴

A man is tricked into marriage by a woman, so the same woman to be entrapped in that marriage. This was ironical but also very common in Victorian society. As

43. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 269.

44. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 82.

soon as the couple had the governmental stamp in their certificate of holy matrimony, Victorians were satisfied. It did not matter if the couple is satisfied, they had to obey that stamp in order to be respected.

4.3. Marriage in *The Return of the Native*

In *The Return of the Native*, Eustacia, same as Arabella, knows that in order to live her life as she wants to live it, the easiest way is through marriage. She wants to live a ladylike life in the city, but there has to be a man on her side. When she hears that Clym Yeobright is coming to Egdon Heath for Christmas, she forces herself to fall in love with him, without knowing him in the first place.

During the greater part of the afternoon she had been entrancing herself by imagining the fascination which must attend a man come direct from beautiful Paris—laden with its atmosphere, familiar with its charms.⁴⁵

In Eustacia's mind, Clym is the perfect match and catch for her. He is her ticket to Paris and through him, she could have her dream life filled with adventure, balls, dresses and jewellery. Although Eustacia is not an obedient woman who accepts rules of the society, she is also aware that marriage is the only way to fulfil her desires.

Hardy is sympathetically aware of the economic, legal and social aspects that limited women's lives. He has highlighted the social restrictions on women's desires and aspirations, that is why he exposes his heroine to difficult choices. Although Eustacia thinks that she might find the way to fulfil her prospects, and marries Clym, Clym is determined not to return to Paris. This decision is out of Eustacia's domain. She is not allowed to decide where should they live. The sense of powerlessness devastates her.

45. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 115.

Sara A. Malton in her journal article “The Woman Shall Bear Her Iniquity: Death as Social Discipline in Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*” explains Clym’s return as follows:

Clym rejects her wish to go to Paris. Although his association with Paris may mark Clym as a figure of enlightenment, his ‘return’ to his native Egdon represents his regression to its strictly codified patriarchal morality.⁴⁶

Although in the earlier chapter Clym’s return and his plans to become a schoolmaster might seem noble, Malton here gives another possibility. A possibility that Clym could not embrace the modern life of Paris completely. He feels more comfortable living by English social rules, which are in favour of men. Same as Angel Clare in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, Clym rejects the strict social rules but only to some extent. Malton further in her article states:

While judgment of Eustacia is delivered initially by the women of Egdon, it culminates in Clym’s unequivocal condemnation of her upon discovering her actions on the day of his mother’s death: “May all murderesses get the torment they deserve.”⁴⁷

Both, Angel Clare and Clym Yeobright are very progressive characters, but as soon as woman’s ‘purity’ is compromised or ‘the angel has fallen,’ they both retreat and hide themselves under the Victorian umbrella. Their wives are not allowed to make mistakes. Forgiveness for ‘purity’ matters is not an act undertaken by a husband. Unable to forgive Eustacia, Clym destroys their marriage.

Tomasin’s marriage with Wildeve is flawed from the beginning. When they fail to marry in their first attempt, Tomasin is the only one to face the consequences. She suddenly becomes a ‘fallen’ woman, while Wildeve lives his

46. Sara A. Milton, “The Woman Shall Bear Her Iniquity: Death as Social Discipline in Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*,” *Studies in the Novel* 32, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 147-164, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29533388>.

47. Milton, “The Woman Shall Bear Her Iniquity,” 147–164.

life normally. For the same sin, judgement befalls only upon Tomasin. Tomasin represents the typical obedient Victorian wife who is cheated, mistreated and completely dependent. Even her money that she inherited is taken from her by her husband.

Hardy displays the marriage of Tomasin and Wildeve as a typical Victorian matrimony. In the contrast, the marriage between Clym and Eustacia is presented as a union based on love and understanding which will crack later due to their unequal partnership. Damages created by the marital law and flaws of the institution of marriage itself, eventually come to the surface. Marriage, being the only option for a woman to be respected, and the unequal rights of partners in this union, often result in destruction. This was the hypocrisy that Hardy revealed through marriages of his characters; People marrying each other because society requires so.

Hardy's attack on this institution was very bad received. Victorian society was not ripe enough to agree with Hardy's ideas, therefore he was counter attacked harshly by critics.

5. Hardy and Divorce

If a Victorian woman filed for divorce, she could not divorce her husband for the same reason that her husband could divorce her. The court of Justice dissolved marriages under legal double standard which said:

It shall be lawful for any Husband to present a Petition to the said Court, praying that his Marriage may be dissolved, on the Ground that his Wife has since the Celebration thereof been guilty of Adultery; and it shall be lawful for any Wife to present a Petition to the said Court, praying that her Marriage may be dissolved, on the Ground that since the Celebration thereof her Husband has been guilty of incestuous Adultery, or of Rape, or of Sodomy or Bestiality, or of Adultery coupled with such Cruelty as

without Adultery would have entitled her to a Divorce a Mensa et Thoro, or of Adultery coupled with Desertion, without reasonable Excuse, for Two Years or Upwards.⁴⁸

Adultery was sufficient evidence to divorce a woman, but to divorce a man, he should have been proven to be a complete degenerate, otherwise the woman could not be free.

Hardy not only did not like this double standard, he also despised the fact that this legal double standard pushed people to create false accusations and involve themselves into illegal and deceitful behaviour.

In his novels, Hardy reveals some of the malpractices linked with divorce. He puts his characters in difficult marriages in order to introduce co-habiting as an acceptable alternative. In Hardy's time, there were many couples that escaped their marriages and lived with their lovers. They had to pretend that they are married with their lovers in order to escape the harsh judgement of the society. Hardy in his novels appeals for alternatives to traditional marriages in order to avoid painful divorces.

5.1. Divorce in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, when Angel Clare refuses to forgive Tess and decides to leave her, Tess proposes a divorce. Angel knowing the laws of the time refuses Tess's proposition:

‘Good heavens—how can you be so simple! How can I divorce you?’

‘Can't you—now I have told you? I thought my confession would give you grounds for that.’

48. William A. Davis Jr., “Hardy, Sir Frances Jeune and Divorce by ‘False Pretences’ in *Jude the Obscure*,” *Thomas Hardy Journal* 9, no. 1 (February 1993): 62–74, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45274092>.

‘O Tess—you are too, too—childish—unformed—crude, I suppose! I don’t know what you are. You don’t understand the law—you don’t understand!’

‘What—you cannot?’

‘Indeed I cannot.’⁴⁹

Tess did not commit adultery in her marriage, she was ‘raped’ years ago, that is why Clare could not divorce her. Feeling deceived, Clare could not accept living with an impure woman any longer. Further, Tess is obliged to continue to live as a married woman, but without a husband and his support. In addition, she could not divorce him, because divorcing Clare meant charging him with adultery and other immoral behaviour—as law required.

After several years of suffering and hard work at Flintcombe-Ash, Tess puts aside her pride to enter the co-habitation with Alec d’Urberville. Although not married with him, she presented herself as Mrs. D’Urberville in order to avoid further societal judgement.

Hardy points out that this kind of arrangement between partners is very practical. Partners could live together and also could walk away any time they choose.

5.2. Divorce in *Jude the Obscure*

In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy touches again the question of divorce. Sue after forcing herself into a lawful marriage with Phillotson, and constantly feeling unhappy, she resolves to untie this liaison. The easiest way for Sue to walk from this marriage is to be accused of adultery. Phillotson agrees to file for divorce believing that Sue and Jude have consummated their relationship, which was not the case. Sue attains her freedom in exchange of her respectability—as an adulteress. She continues to feel unhappy knowing that she attained her freedom

49. Hardy, *Tess of the D’Urberville*, 285–286.

under false pretences—she did not commit adultery. On the other hand, Phillotson is condemned for letting her free. “They have requested me to send in my resignation on account of my scandalous conduct in giving my tortured wife her liberty—or, as they call it, condoning her adultery”⁵⁰ complains Phillotson. It was considered scandalous behaviour for a husband to let his wife free. Hardy not only questioned related Victorian values, but he also pointed out the fact, that people had to create false pretences and lies to deceive the Court of law.

Similarly, Arabella is liberated from her marriage with Jude. Obviously, she asks Jude to accuse her of adultery “in kindness for her,” so she could marry again. Jude agrees and files for divorce. “If she wants to start afresh I have only too obvious reasons for not hindering her.”⁵¹

William A. Davis in his essay “Hardy, Sir Francis Jeune and Divorce by ‘False Pretences’ in *Jude the Obscure*” explains how actually these kinds of divorces took place in England:

Hardy’s characters do what a number of unhappily married couples did in Victorian England. The actions of the characters in *Jude the Obscure*, though illegal, would not have been surprising to a Victorian reader, since collusion in divorce had become something of a norm by the end of the century. Even so, one of the greatest ironies surrounding the divorces in *Jude the Obscure* is that the characters must go around the law in order to obtain legal divorces.⁵²

Owing to awful laws that existed in England, people were forced to create their unwritten rules in order to solve their problems. Hardy detested the fact that people were forced to take such illegal measures.

50. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 295.

51. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 285.

52. Davis Jr., “Hardy, Sir Francis Jeune and Divorce,” 62-74.

5.3. Divorce in *The Return of the Native*

In *The Return of the Native*, Hardy does not include the question of divorce. Marriages of Clym and Eustacia and Tomasín and Wildeve are ended in their early stage by death.

Dixie Larson in her article “Eustacia Vye’s Drowning: Defiance Versus Convention,” states: “For Eustacia, drowning is more the means of ending an enforced compromise with life than anything else.”⁵³

Hardy uncovers the destructive capacity of the society. Eustacia’s life becomes so unbearable from the harsh social judgement that she avoids other turmoil and ends her life. Her death is a clear message. Hardy’s ‘new woman’ rather chooses death than submission. By exposing the destructive effect of divorce, he tried to raise awareness and called for a reform of the law.

6. Sexual Mores

In Victorian Britain, virginity and innocence were important virtues. Women and girls were considered properties, first belonging to their fathers and later to their husbands. Their social significance could drop radically if they behaved in an unrefined way. Being alone with a man was unacceptable, therefore women, especially rich women were accompanied all the time. Being constantly supervised, there was a minimum chance for these women to have sexual relationships before their marriage.

Violet Fenn in her book *Sex and Sexuality in Victorian England* explains the unwritten rules of Victorian conduct, she also states that “Girls were still expected to ‘save’ themselves for marriage, though it is unlikely that everyone

53. Dixie Lee Larson, “Eustacia Vye’s Drowning: Defiance Versus Convention,” *Thomas Hardy Journal* 9, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 62.

kept to this rule. The important thing was less about abstaining completely and more about simply not getting caught.”⁵⁴

If a girl got caught, the only salvation was to marry immediately. Her chastity and her status were in men’s hands. A man could rescue her also if she got pregnant.

Fenn further explains:

A pregnant, unmarried woman was very vulnerable indeed. But, even then, she could be saved, if the man responsible agreed to marriage, thus ‘making an honest woman’ of her. It’s likely that some marriages were based on nothing more than pragmatic convenience. The husband didn’t necessarily have to be the father of the child, so long as he either believed he was, or was happy to go along with the conceit; possibly in return for a handsome payment from the girl’s own (presumably very relieved) father.⁵⁵

Hardy was against damaging matrimony and divorce laws. He was also against these unwritten rules which were damaging as well. Women not only continued to enter into sexual relationships, they also had to lie and deceive in order to maintain their status.

On the other hand, these rules did not apply to men. Not only they were free to have sexual relationships, they were also encouraged not to suppress their urges. The unwritten rules had a double standard—this was unacceptable for Hardy.

Rosemarie Morgan in her book *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* describes Hardy’s heroines as follows:

In an age that placed a high value on reticence, self-restraint, and certain ‘feminine’ qualities such as delicacy of health, a retiring disposition, a physical and intellectual timidity, and so forth, Hardy’s women, with their admixture of qualities—transcending the stereotypes of madonna and

54. Violet Fenn, *Sex and Sexuality in the Victorian England* (London: Penn and Sword, 2020), 77, Kindle.

55. Fenn, *Sex and Sexuality*, 78.

whore—must have confused many readers caught with mixed feelings of admiration and alarm.⁵⁶

Hardy recognized female emotions and urges. He treated women in the same way that he treated men. His heroines experienced their own sexuality so sincerely. Nevertheless, this sincerity made his critics tremble.

6.1. Sexual Mores in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

In *Tess of the D'Urberville*, Tess is introduced as a goddess of beauty. Hardy uncovers every detail in her appearance and her emotion as follows:

As she walked along to-day, for all her bouncing handsome womanliness, you could sometimes see her twelfth year in her cheeks, or her ninth sparkling from her eyes; and even her fifth would flit over the curves of her mouth now and then...strangers, would look long at her in casually passing by, and grow momentarily fascinated by her freshness, and wonder if they would ever see her again.⁵⁷

Tess was introduced as a beautiful woman of flesh and blood unlike the heroines of other Victorian writers. Even the smallest of her emotion is revealed truthfully by Hardy.

When Alec d'Urberville asks Tess right before The Chase incident “Mayn't I treat you as a lover?”⁵⁸ Tess does not refuse. She knows that she is not in love with Alec, but her sexual urges do not allow her to push him away altogether. When Alec returns after finding the way out from the woods, he finds Tess lying on the ground where he left her. “She was sleeping soundly, and upon

56. Rosemarie Morgan, *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall Inc., 1988), 14, Kindle.

57. Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 13.

58. Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 83.

her eyelashes there lingered tears.”⁵⁹ Here Hardy enfoldes Tess’s sexual surrender with sleep. Tess, throughout the story is portrayed as a strong female, who starts work earlier than others and finishes it after anyone else. It is not convincing enough that she falls asleep and knows anything what is happening to her. She feels weak in front of Alec as any normal female would feel in her age in front of a potential partner. Her mind wants to go home, but her body refuses and surrenders.

On her wedding night she confesses implicitly to her husband. “She said things that would have been better left to silence. Angel!—Angel! I was a child—a child when it happened! I knew nothing of men.”⁶⁰

She does not say that she was asleep or unconscious. She says that she was a child, unreasonable and admits that she had committed a sin.

In the same way Tess’s sexual urges are displayed in the garden scene. She hears the melody of Clare’s harp and she is drawn toward him.

To speak absolutely, both instrument and execution were poor; but the relative is all, and as she listened Tess, like a fascinated bird, could not leave the spot. Far from leaving she drew up towards the performer,..she undulated upon the thin notes of the second-hand harp, and their harmonies passed like breezes through her, bringing tears into her eyes.⁶¹

Tess here experiences again some kind of sexual ecstasy, therefore her eyes are filled with tears. When Angel asks her whether she is afraid to approach him. She replies:

‘Oh no, sir ... not of outdoor things’ she replies.

‘But you have your indoor fears—eh?’

‘Well—yes, sir.’

‘What of?’

‘I couldn’t quite say.’⁶²

59. Hardy, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, 86.

60. Hardy, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, 278

61. Hardy, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, 146–147.

62. Hardy, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, 148.

Tess is afraid to approach him because the same emotions she is experiencing now, led her once to her deflowering. This time she is more cautious but also sad because she thinks that she had lost her chance to love, together with her virginity. Morgan Further, in her book explains eloquently the symbolism that Hardy used in this scene:

The seductive moment for Tess, as she moves gradually closer to Angel, moves Hardy to hyphenate the world of nature that it might lean closer to her as she now assimilates her surroundings to her own consciousness. ‘-Milk’, ‘-spittle’, ‘-slime’, ‘sticky blights’—the mucosa and emissions of biological sex—‘rub off’ upon Tess as much from the objects in nature which wet and stain her person, as from Hardy’s linguistic hyphenations. With ‘damp and rank...juicy grass’, bursting pollen at a touch, and upward thrusting ‘tall blooming weeds emitting offensive smells’, there is no sense of a fastidious, antiseptic, deodorised sexuality in Tess’s world.⁶³

Tess’s feelings here are paralleled with nature. Morgan here describes the way which Hardy used to disclose his heroine as a part of nature. A living thing, filled with emotions, who fights against her nature. Exited to the point of tears, Tess appears as ‘pure’ as wild nature itself—which she is in complete harmony with. Hardy here again attacks the rules of the society that meddled with the laws of nature.

6.2. Sexual Mores in *Jude the Obscure*

In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy’s heroine is different from Tess. She is more ‘mature’ and knows how to suppress her emotions according to Victorian rules. Although superficially sexless, she resonates her inner sexuality. Jude perceives her “so ethereal a creature that her spirit could be seen trembling through her

63. Morgan. *Women and Sexuality*, 62.

limbs.”⁶⁴ He is so infatuated with her that he thinks that for every failure of men, women are to blame. “The normal sex-impulses are turned into devilish domestic gins and springes to noose and hold back those who want to progress”⁶⁵ In Jude’s case this is true. He postpones his academic ambitions for women.

Sue’s first sexual relationship is with her husband Phillotson. Like other Victorian women, Sue experiences it in her marriage. She is very concerned by the fact that she needs to fulfil her duty as a wife. As soon as sex becomes a duty for Sue, she loses her interest.

Saleh and Abbasi in their article “Ideological Questions of Marriage in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*” argue that “sexual incompatibility between Sue and Phillotson is one of the main reasons that their marriage falls apart.”⁶⁶ This has to be true because Sue same as Hardy, believes that once something is required by law it loses its originality. Owing to this ‘iron contacts,’ accompanied by duties, Sue refuses to marry Jude—the father of her children who are the only evidence of their sexual activity. Although Sue tries to obey the Victorian rules in the beginning, regardless of her personal views on them, she ends up breaking these rules because of her non-conformist nature. After her divorce with Phillotson, she enjoys her relationship with Jude as she pleases; as an equal to her partner—including sexuality.

In contrast, Arabella’s sexuality is not suppressed at all. She uses it whenever she needs to achieve something. She disarms Jude with her sex appeal and tricks him to marry her. Their marriage is based only on sexual instincts. Being a baseless marriage, it ends as soon as Arabella decides. Jude is not the only one to be intimidated by Arabella, there are other men and Sue as well. Without knowing her, Sue recognizes her when she sees her for the first time.

She wouldn’t give her name. But I know who she was—I think I do! It was Arabella! ‘Heaven save us! What should Arabella come for? What

64. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 226.

65. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 261.

66. Salman N. Saleh and P. Abbasi, “Ideological Questions of Marriage in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*,” *Kata* 17, no. 2 (December 2015): 49–57, <http://kata.petra.ac.id/index.php/ing/article/view/18943>.

made you think it was she?’ ‘O, I can hardly tell. But I know it was! I feel perfectly certain it was—by the light in her eyes as she looked at me.’⁶⁷

The light in Arabella’s eyes told Sue that she is Jude’s previous lover. The way she talks about him, and her confident manner of addressing him, frightens Sue. Arabella acts like she owns Jude. This is not because of their marriage contract or love, but because of her confident sex appeal.

Anita Sandlin in her dissertation entitled “Fear and Fascination: A Study of Thomas Hardy and the New Woman” compares Arabella to Alec d’Urberville:

Arabella, like Alec, is the seducer. With her greater sexual experience, she is able to engineer the circumstances in which the inexperienced and innocent Jude must inevitably submit to her charms.⁶⁸

Arabella is not only well equipped and alluring, but also very experienced in sexual matters. Jude ‘the innocent’ could never resist her. “She was a complete and substantial female animal.”⁶⁹ Hardy intentionally changes gender roles and dehumanizes Arabella in order to tell society that women are not sexless, and they do have their animalistic side same as men do. They can be in charge of a relationship as well.

6.3. Sexual Mores in *The Return of the Native*

In *The Return of The Native*, Eustacia Vye possesses man’s strength combined with woman’s beauty. Like her surroundings, Eustacia is wild, fierce and dark. Her relationship with the Egdon Heath expresses her masculine qualities. Eustacia wants to escape from the place that prevents her to attain her independence. Hardy creates this non-conventional woman, alienated by the

67. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 311–312.

68. Anita Sandlin, “Fear and Fascination: A Study of Thomas Hardy and the New Woman” (PhD diss., Georgia Southern University, 2011), 184, <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/184>.

69. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 61.

desires of fervent love and the freedom of a male. Eustacia's sexual urges are not hidden or suppressed, they are manifested in a huge fire that she lit to lure Wildeve—her lover. Hardy explains her desires as follows:

To be loved to madness—such was her great desire. Love was to her the one cordial which could drive away the eating loneliness of her days. And she seemed to long for the abstraction called passionate love more than any particular lover.⁷⁰

For Eustacia love is more important than the lover himself. She chooses Clym over Wildeve because she believes that Clym is capable to give her not only the desired love but also her independence. Clym and life in Paris is all she wants. Same as Arabella, Eustacia uses her beauty and her sex appeal to attain her goals. However, Eustacia's conduct is more ladylike. Her marriage with Clym eventually does not fulfil her desires. She remains in the heath and their love is not that fiery after all. When she realizes it, she says to Clym:

Nothing can ensure the continuance of love. It will evaporate like a spirit, and so I feel full of fears...

You have seen more than I, and have been into cities and among people that I have only heard of, and have lived more years than I; but yet I am older at this than you. I loved another man once, and now I love you.⁷¹

Hardy through Eustacia introduces again his 'new woman.' Eustacia views are progressive, she believes that love is not exclusive. She has loved twice, she could love again.

In her analysis of *The Return of the native* Morgan further argues:

So too Eustacia, whose erotic longings to be loved-to-madness, and moreover loved-to-madness not by one man but by many, have led critics to trivialise her as adolescent and puerile.⁷²

70. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 69.

71. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 193.

72. Morgan. *Women and Sexuality*, 89.

Feeling that her marriage has failed, Eustacia starts longing for her former lover again. This fact has nothing to do with adolescence, but with Eustacia's independence and her own sexual yearning. "O, if I could live in a gay town as a lady should, and go my own ways, and do my own doings, I'd give the wrinkled half of my life!"⁷³ She is ready to renounce half of her life, in order to live the other half in her way—doing everything she desires. Realizing that her wishes are not to be fulfilled, she chooses to end her life. For Eustacia death is more acceptable than submissive life.

None of Hardy's heroines is able to fulfil their desires. Tess and Eustacia end up dead, Sue goes back to submission and Arabella continues to fight. However, these heroines were among the first female characters sincere about their sexuality. Hardy through them dismissed differences between male and female sexuality. All of them are representatives of the growing intellectual and sexual freedom, which several reformers like John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor Mill and Hardy himself, tried to advance through literature of that time.

7. Hardy and Religion

Hardy was once a devout Christian. However, later in his life, Hardy's faith in Christianity was shaken by the experiences and learning from the new scientific advancements of the century. He became an agnostic; however, he continued his quest for the purpose of human existence. He wished to discover God, but his agreement with scientific theories, like Darwin's, exhausted his faith. Hardy felt that if there was a God, he could only be "vengeful and indifferent to the pain and struggle of mankind."⁷⁴ He was marked by critics as an atheist, evangelist or positivist, but it is almost impossible to label him exactly. Darwin, Carlyle, Hegel, Kant and others affected and transformed his beliefs constantly. He incorporated in his works all his beliefs: from ancient religion of Greece and

73. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 92.

74. Thomas Hardy, *Wessex Poems* (1898. London: Macmillan & Co, 1919), 7.

Paganism to Christianity, which he never abandoned completely. More importantly, he searched for a faith which is more human and non-discriminating; for the good of all humans.

7.1. Religion in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* Hardy portrays Tess as Persephone, a Greek goddess of fertility, agriculture, spring and nature. Persephone was also called Kore, which in Greek means “the maiden.” Tess’s first appearance in the novel is in the fertility ritual of May Day. She is portrayed as a “pretty maiden” who was “so modest, so expressive, she had looked so soft in her thin white gown.”⁷⁵ Tess is introduced as a part of unspoilt nature.

Persephone became a queen of the underworld after being abducted by Hades, king of the underworld. Similarly, Tess is considered “fallen” after being ‘raped’ by Alec in The Chase. “The Chase—a truly venerable tract of forest land, one of the few remaining woodlands in England of undoubted primaeval date.”⁷⁶ While the rape of the Goddess caused winters, the rape of Tess caused her ‘Sorrow.’ Hardy parallels Tess’s vulnerability to the vulnerability of Persephone. Women’s position in this world was vulnerable from the antiquity, even if that woman was a Goddess.

Tess’s other role is the role of sacrificial victim, which is a figure associated with both Christianity and paganism. Like Jesus, Tess is punished for her sins and also for the sins of Alec d’Urberville. When the police come to arrest her for Alec’s murder, she is lying asleep at Stonehenge, like a sacrifice on an altar. Stonehenge was thought at Hardy’s time to be a pagan temple. Marie Panter in her article entitled “Paganism in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*: The Possibility of Faith and Ethics in a Darwinian World” states:

75. Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 16.

76. Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 40.

Hardy turns Stonehenge, a quintessentially English place, into the cradle of a renewed civilization, based on Greek pagan virtue. Tess's stoic death may thus be read as a defence of her heathen experience with Angel, as she dies with no remorse.⁷⁷

This explains that Hardy tried to find a religion in which her heroine is not condemned. He turns Tess into a pagan sacrifice, but he cannot rescue her altogether.

Hardy further points out the unequal Christian punishment. Alec's repentance and his sudden conversion to Christianity brings him pardon and forgiveness of sin. In contrast, Tess is condemned.

Like all village girls, she was well grounded in the Holy Scriptures, and had dutifully studied the histories of Aholah and Aholibah and knew the inferences to be drawn therefrom. But when the same question arose with regard to the baby, it had a very different colour. Her darling was about to die, and no salvation.⁷⁸

Tess is considered as impure as a prostitute and her child is condemned to hell. Sorrow, being born out of wedlock could not be baptized, therefore, could not enjoy eternal life in God's presence. Tess baptizes her child at home by herself. She accepts to be condemned, but she does not accept this condemnation to fall upon her innocent child.

For Hardy these inequalities were unacceptable. He identified them and tried to find logical solutions for them. Tess after baptizing her child ask the parson:

'will it be just the same for him as if you had baptized him?'

The man and the ecclesiastic fought within him, and the victory fell to the man. 'My dear girl,' he said, "it will be just the same."⁷⁹

77. Marie Panter, "Paganism in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*: The Possibility of Faith and Ethics in a Darwinian World," *Cahiers Victoriens & Edouardiens* 80, (Autumn 2014): 21, <https://doi.org/10.4000/cve.1490>.

78. Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 111.

79. Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 115.

Hardy here elevates the humanity above the church. He identifies the cruel practices of the church and demands for change. These cruel practices are the main reason that pushed Hardy to search for consolation in other religions.

7.2. Religion in *Jude the Obscure*

In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy criticizes Christianity in the bitterest way. The novel is filled with symbols of several religions, but the sharpest arrows are directed toward Christianity of the Victorian era.

Religion is a crucial part in Jude's life. Being an orphan, Jude perceives religion as an anchorage for himself. Meanwhile, he hopes to join the clergy as part of his intellectual pursuits. In contrast, Sue is portrayed as a pagan who buys statues of Venus and Apollo and prefers Corinthian architecture to Gothic. Later in the novel, Jude renounces his religion which makes his relationship with Sue a sinful one. He refuses to worship something that is against love. In contrast, Sue believes that her sinful life is a cause of her children's death, therefore she embraces Christianity with "despairing self-suppression."⁸⁰ However, her self-sacrifice of remarrying Phillotson is futile. Sue's turn towards Christianity at the end of the novel is considered to be rather a tragedy than a positive experience of conversion. Hardy in this novel depicts Christianity as life-denying, self-sacrificing and against love.

Another strong symbol against Christianity is the "crucifixion" of Little Father Time. Little Father Time, similar to Christ, hangs himself for sins of others. "For the rashness of those parents he had groaned, for their ill-assortment he had quaked, and for the misfortunes of these he had died."⁸¹ By killing his siblings, and then killing himself, Little Father Time wants to appease his parents' life. He thinks that children are taking the essentials from and making life so difficult for their parents. "Done because we are too menny."⁸² He leaves them a

80. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 421.

81. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 395.

82. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 394.

note. However, Little Father Time's sacrifice serves no purpose. On the contrary, it precipitates the complete downfall of his parents. Norman Holland Jr. in his essay "*Jude the Obscure*: Hardy's Symbolic Indictment of Christianity," noted:

Hardy uses images and symbols derived from the evolution of Christianity to criticize the so-called Christian society he knew in late nineteenth-century England and to criticize the Christian ideal of self-sacrifice.⁸³

Hardy identified the uselessness of self-sacrifice and ridiculed the martyrdom of Christ. He suggested that love should be the ideal to make life more endurable.

In *Jude the Obscure*, Jude's profession is among numerous symbols that Hardy used to attack Victorian religion. Jude works mainly as a restorer of gothic churches. Through Jude's work, Hardy tried to tell the Victorian reader that their church needed a reformation; religion needed to adapt to the changing Victorian society.

7.3. Religion in *The Return of the Native*

In *The Return of the Native*, Christianity is to be found only in marriages and death. "The day was Sunday; but as going to church, except to be married or buried, was exceptional at Egdon, this made little difference."⁸⁴ explains the narrator. People of Egdon Heath retained the druidical paganism of their ancestors. On the heath, Nature is God. Hardy endowed it with an absolute authority. "The place became full of a watchful intentness now; for when other things sank blooding to sleep the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen."⁸⁵ Unlike the Nature in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, which is indifferent to human consciousness, in *The Return of the Native*, Nature plays a significant role. It's oppressiveness and wilderness, determines people's fates. "'Tis my cross, my

83. Norman Holland Jr., "*Jude the Obscure*: Hardy's Symbolic Indictment of Christianity," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 9, no. 1 (June 1954): 50–60, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3044291>.

84. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 86.

85. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 9.

shame, and will be my death!” complains Eustacia, who feels its power in her bones.

By the end of the novel, “There is to be a village picnic—a gipsying,”⁸⁶ a highly charged dancing at East Egdon, which is to be defined as a revival of paganism: “For the time Paganism was revived in their hearts, the pride of life was all in all, and they adored none other than themselves.”⁸⁷ Hardy tried to represent these joyful festivals in order to bring pleasure in people’s lives. He presents dancing as an alternative to a church service.

In addition, superstition is part of the heath-folk lives. They all are superstitious, although some of them do not admit it. “There, I don’t believe in old superstitions, but I’ll do it.” Mrs Yeobright “threw a slipper at the retreating figure of the girl, who turned, smiled, and went on again.”⁸⁸ Moreover, Susan Nunsuch’s practice includes sticking Eustacia with needles and performing voodoo. Clym is the only non-superstitious person among them; he is too advanced for his time and place. However, by the end of the novel Hardy transforms Clym to an ‘unorthodox priest’ or preacher whose job is to help people endure their daily suffering. John Paterson in his article “*The Return of the Native* as Antichristian Document” noted:

In the Christian apotheosis of Clym Yeobright, *The Return of the Native* commemorates, in an elegiac if not tragic mood, the defeat of pagan consciousness and the triumph of Christian conscience.⁸⁹

This statement is very debatable because Clym’s preaching is on “morally unimpeachable subjects”⁹⁰ not in religion, and his open-air venue points out his rejection of the church. He promises to deliver lectures every Sunday, which means keeping people far from the church.

Hardy sets rural paganism against orthodox Christianity for an essentially thematic reason. This suggests that the above-mentioned pagan principles are

86. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 248.

87. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 248.

88. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 156.

89. John Paterson, “*The Return of the Native* as Antichristian Document,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 14, no. 2 (September 1959): 111–127, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3044163>.

90. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 389.

more tolerant and thus more embraced by the rustic community, since the church is rarely attended unless when someone is to get married or buried.

Hardy uses mixed religious practices and points out their outcomes which are left to the reader to evaluate them. He also reveals the futility of some of religious practices and the unfair treatment of women. His skilful approach to raise awareness and call for church reform is incredible. Unfortunately, his readership was not ready yet for his progressive view.

Conclusion

Reading Hardy's novels, leads the reader to believe that living in the nineteenth century was not a pleasant experience. This thesis is an attempt to show through an elucidation of Hardy's upbringing and his background, the tragedies caused by social inequality, gender inequality, double standard laws and religion in the nineteenth century England.

The social background which exposes the social inequality, experienced by Hardy himself, led the writer to reveal the devastating impact of inequality in several spheres of the Victorian life. By exposing the hypocrisy of the higher classes and the struggles of the lower ones, he argued for equal opportunities for all. Through Jude's character in *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy demanded education for the poor and better job's for women like Tess in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, as well as opportunities for everyone else. Through Clym Yeobright in *The Return of the Native*, Hardy questioned the Victorian values and advised his reader that they should be able to decide for themselves. Everyone is entitled to choose what is right or wrong for them, without letting the society interfere.

Hardy's biography helps the reader to understand his compassionate nature. Being encircled and loved by many women, from his grandmother to his second wife, Hardy felt that the rules which governed women's position in society were harsh and needed to be challenged. He was convinced that women's intellectual and emotional capacity is the very same as men's—he experienced it personally. He was surrounded by well-read women his entire life. In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy uses Sue to tell the reader that women can be intellectuals. They also have feelings like Tess, and they can be good actors like Eustacia.

The findings in this thesis demonstrate the damaging effects of matrimonial and divorce laws. The rigid laws of the time entrapped Sue, Tess and Eustacia in their failed marriages. The only way to escape this entrapment, for Tess and Eustacia is death, while for Sue the only option is submission and self-sacrifice. To avoid tragedies caused by bad marriages, Hardy wanted to give other choices to women; one of them is co-habitation, introduced in *Jude the Obscure*.

Having an immense knowledge of women's feelings and sexuality, Hardy uses Tess, Eustacia and Arabella's fiery temperaments to tell Victorians that women should be allowed to experience their sexuality without suppression. They

should choose their way of life by themselves, without the fear of being marked as fallen 'whores.' All in all, they should be treated in the same way as men.

The ultimate part of this thesis deals with religion. The analysed novels depict practices from several religions. The outcome of these religious practices, whether pagan or Christian, often is tragic. Hardy uses this tactic as an expose. In particular, *Jude the Obscure* clarifies Hardy's aggressive attitudes towards the religion of his time. He encourages his reader to recognise the damaging practices of the Victorian Church. These practices were outdated, therefore, could not be applied to the rapidly changing society. This was Hardy's way of pleading for religious reformation.

Hardy discussed both positive and negative aspects of the traditional and the upcoming modern society, but was harshly criticised because his readership was not ready for such progressive ideas. He boldly discussed topics that were considered taboo. He was severely criticized for recognizing the potency of physical desire in women, their intelligence, the hypocrisy of respectability and the shortcomings of religion. Having an oversensitive temperament, he could not bear the critics' attack upon him, therefore he quit writing novels.

Apparently, Hardy was not much appreciated by critics of his time, however, today he is considered the torchbearer of modernism. His voice belongs among the first who called for equality between men and women and for equal opportunities between classes. A writer fifty years ahead of his time. His novels as a product of personal temperament and experience were enlightenment for generations to come.

Resumé

Romány Thomase Hardyho měly výrazný dopad na tehdy přicházející proměny myšlení, na přechod ze zastaralých hodnotových systémů k modernímu uvažování. Jeho postavy měly velmi významnou agendu – každé selhání, utrpení a smrt byly pro čtenáře devatenáctého století osvícenské.

Cílem této práce je rozebrat různé problematiky jako je sociální nerovnost, genderová nerovnost či náboženství a církev, což jsou fenomény, ze kterých ústí tragické motivy v románech *Tess z d'Urbervillů*, *Neblahý Juda* a *Rodákův návrat*. Práce analyzuje způsob, kterým Hardy skrze tragické situace, do kterých jsou uvedeny postavy symbolizující výše zmíněné problematiky, zvyšoval povědomí o těchto problémech a napomáhal společenským změnám.

Krátký Hardyho životopis přibližuje čtenáři původ jeho empatie, úcty k ženám i důvody k souznění s chudými lidmi. Uvedení do historického kontextu zase představí společenské problémy, které Hardyho trápily nejvíce.

Celá třetí kapitola se věnuje společnosti a třídním nerovnostem. Hardy opovrhoval příkopem mezi společenskými vrstvami a faktem, že níže postavení lidé neměli rovnocenný přístup k příležitostem. Zpochybňoval viktoriánskou morálku a doporučoval svým čtenářům kritické myšlení a rozvoj vlastní vůle. Je na každém, aby si zvolil, co považuje za správné či špatné, nehledě na společenská očekávání.

Následující kapitoly se zabývají nevyváženými manželskými svazky a rozvodovým právem. Hardy byl obklopen a milován mnohými ženami, cítil však, že pravidla, která určovala úlohy tehdejších žen, byla krutá a bylo na místě je začít přehodnocovat. Tahle práce studuje škodlivé dopady zákonů rodinného práva o manželství či rozvodu.

Další kapitola se zabývá zvyklostmi v oblasti sexuality, které výrazně reflektují Hardyho společensky nekonformní postoje. Byl přesvědčen, že ženy jsou stejně intelektuálně a emočně rozvinuté jako muži, čehož byl sám svědkem, neboť byl obklopen sečtělými ženami po celý svůj život. Tvrdil, že by ženy měly mít možnost bez jakéhokoliv potlačování prožívat svou sexualitu. Mělo by jim být umožněno zvolit si vlastní životní cestu beze strachu z odmítnutí zbytku společnosti, která považovala podobné ženy za padlé a nectné. Ve zkratce by se tedy dle autora mělo k ženám přistupovat stejně jako k mužům.

Poslední část práce se zabývá náboženstvím. Analyzované romány popisují náboženské rituály různých náboženských společenství. Hardy vybízí čtenáře k vnímání škodlivých praktik viktoriánské církve, jejíž postupy byly zastaralé a neaplikovatelné na rychle se měnící společnost. Tímto způsobem se Hardy snažil o církevní reformaci.

Hardy sklízel výraznou kritiku za poukazování na ženské sexuální potřeby, jejich inteligenci, na pokrytectví společnosti a nedokonalosti církve. Hardyho romány, které jsou produktem jeho výrazné osobnosti se zajímavou životní zkušeností, se staly osvícenskou směrnicí i pro následující generace.

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Annotation

Name: Tringa Gjurgjeala

Department: Department of English and American Studies

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Abstract:

This thesis explores tragic themes in three novels written by Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *Jude the Obscure* and *The Return of the Native*. The aim of this thesis is to analyse how Hardy uses these tragic themes and the underlying purpose of their usage.

Anotace:

Autor: Tringa Gjurgjeala

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Název práce: A přece, vŝecko zlé mŝže bŝt horŝt: Tragické motivy ve vybranŝch románech Thomase Hardyho

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Klíčová slova: sociální třída, rod, ženy, manželství, rozvod, nerovnost, náboženství.

Abstrakt:

Tato práce se zabývá tragickými motivy ve třech románech Thomase Hardyho: *Tess z d'Urbervillŝ*, *Neblahý Juda* a *Rodákŝv návrat*. Cílem práce je analyzovat způsob, kterým Hardy s tragickými motivy pracuje, a odhalit skryté významy, které skrz ně vyjadřuje.