

# Thomas Hardy's Critique of the Victorian Era as Reflected in His Novels

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## **ABSTRAKT**

Cílem této práce je zkoumání třech děl anglického spisovatele Thomase Hardyho v závislosti na kritice viktoriánské společnosti. Jedná se o Wessexská díla: *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Tess of the d'Urberville* and *Jude the Obscure*. Důkladná četba a následná analýza potvrzuje Hardyho kritiku v mnoha aspektech. První dvě kapitoly se zabývají stručným popisem Viktoriánské Anglie a taktéž životopisem Thomase Hardyho i jeho děl. Hlavní část práce se zabývá analýzou již zmíněných děl, ve které jsou popsána hlavní témata, která Hardy kritizuje.

Klíčová slova: Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Jude the Obscure*, Viktoriánská éra, Wessex, Industrializace, Kapitalismus, Společnost, Vzdělání, Nerovnost pohlaví, Nábožentství, Sociální normy, Sexualita

## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this thesis is to examine the three novels written by the English novelist and poet Thomas Hardy with regard to his criticism of the Victorian society. The three Wessex novels are: *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Tess of the d'Urberville* and *Jude the Obscure*. Thorough reading and subsequent analysis confirms Hardy's critique from many aspects. The first two chapters deal with a brief description of Victorian England, as well as Thomas Hardy's biography and works. The main part of the thesis presents the analysis of the above-mentioned works, which describes the main themes that Hardy criticizes.

Keywords: Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Jude the Obscure*, Victorian Era, Wessex, Industrialization, Capitalism, Society, Education, Gender Inequality, Religion, Social norms, Sexuality

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## INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate how Thomas Hardy, one of the most famous writers of his time, criticized Victorian England, the era of scientific and technological progress. This thesis will focus on what the author finds fault with in Victorian society. For this purpose, his three novels will be analysed from various perspectives. The novels are: *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*.

The first part of the thesis takes the opportunity to introduce basic information about Victorian England, especially the class system, capitalism, education system, religion and the role of women at that time. Most topics that are described appear in Hardy's work and are also analysed in the three last chapters.

As Thomas Hardy put his own experiences and beliefs into his novels, it is essential to insert a brief biography of this author, and this will concern the second part together with his writing style as a naturalist. I will also refer to the novels he wrote during his life and which circumstances influenced his work.

The last part will cover the analysis of selected works as mentioned in the first paragraph. In addition to the analysis, the book's impact on critics will be described here as well. The novels will be sorted by year of release and also by increasing criticism which later led Hardy to abandon his career as a novelist. This thesis will be analysed from many angles: marriage, women and related gender inequality, sexuality, class system, society's narrow-minded norms and conventions, religion and also environmental pollution as portrayed in Hardy's novel.

The first novel to be interpreted is *Far from the Madding Crowd*. It is a story about the main heroine Bathsheba, who inherited a farm and land, becomes an independent woman and also has to choose between three suitors. The second novel is called *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and again there is a main female character, and she has to fight all her life with fate. The last Hardy's novel, *Jude the Obscure*, describes the injustice of the social system through the main character of the book who opposes to this system and tries to change his life. Despite all the defiance, Jude ends, like the previous story, tragically.

All the arguments will be based on the examples from the analysed novels. The conclusion of this bachelor thesis will be a summary of all the facts obtained.

## 1 VICTORIAN ERA

The Victorian era is considered as a time during Queen Victoria's reign, which is a period from 1837 to 1901. Some people, however, let it begin with the First Reform Bill 1831/32.<sup>1</sup> It was the age of changes in technological knowledge, medicine, science but also in population growth and people took years to adapt. No major war or natural disasters occurred during these almost sixty-five years. However, this era did not bring only positive changes. Huge social inequality, child labour and also environmental pollution are negative side-effects that appeared in economically prosperous England.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1 Working Class and Capitalism

Before the steam-engine inventions, people from the working class were able to live in better conditions, and their wages were also higher. The gradual increase in population together with an increase in demand made a perfect environment where there was no unemployment (Until 1830, when the economic crisis peaked. The factories closed, unemployment grew and wages dropped). Moreover, these workers had also more free time because they did not need to work for an inhumane amount of time as was necessary during the industrialization.<sup>3</sup>

With the advancing industrialism and inventions of machines like the (steam-powered) Spinning Jenny, there was no need to employ so many people because the machines were able to do the work in shorter time and with the same or even better quality. The most significant advantage of machines replacing human labour is undoubtedly the fact that single capitalists could sell their product cheaper (without paying wages). According to the lower costs, there was the possibility to conquer foreign markets and increase the national wealth.<sup>4</sup>

Since 1759 canals had been built all over the country, mainly by private individuals and companies. Another invention of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was undoubtedly the steamboat. Also, in 1830 the first passenger railway was opened and later on the railways connected the biggest cities in England.<sup>5</sup> The opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway became a significant milestone because until then the rural workshops were isolated and the raw

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Ferguson, "The Birmingham Political Union and the Government 1831-32," *Victorian Studies* 3, no. 3 (1960): 261, accessed January 25, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3825499>.

<sup>2</sup> G. M. Trevelyan, *Jak žila Anglie* (Prague: Práce, 1945), 632.

<sup>3</sup> A. L. Morton, *Dějiny Anglie* (Prague: Svoboda, 1950), 288.

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 113-24.

<sup>5</sup> Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 140-41.

materials were transported very slowly. The innovations and working class are those factors creating economic growth of the country.<sup>6</sup>

As the number of machines increased, the number of workers who moved to larger cities for work was also getting higher. England's population continued to grow especially among the working class, which means that only one-fourth of the population was the lower middle class (e.g. small shopkeepers). Later on, the lower middle class was decimated, because small employers could not resist the great facilities of the capitalists and this resulted in the creation of a huge gap which separated two large counterparts, the workers and the capitalists. The creation of this gap took the workers any hope for better lives and rising into the lower middle class which did not longer exist. The manufacture became centralized, and workers were forced to build their own villages near the factory they worked in. While the new establishments were being set up and wages were falling, even more workers moved to these villages and transformed them into big cities.<sup>7</sup>

A large number of these workers were women (sometimes more than 60%) and also children whose wages were very small but needed for the upkeep of the family. Moreover, in factory cities, there were often no schools for children until 1870.<sup>8</sup> With no government regulations until The Factory Act of 1833, children began work at five years and often worked more than fourteen hours per day.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, the high increase of workers from villages caused inhospitable conditions: housing was concentrated in the polluted centre of the city (with no government regulation, there was a danger of acid rains), poor sanitation dwellings were tiny and could be shared by up to twelve people. Due to all these shortcomings, there is no doubt that this environment was ideal for spreading diseases. On the other hand, the owners of the factories lived in large houses with gardens far from the polluted core centre, because they could afford carriages to transport them. Regarding the city of Manchester, the average death age for the working class was seventeen and for an upper-class member thirty-eight.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Herbert L. Sussman, *Victorian Technology: Invention, Innovation, and the Rise of the Machine* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger Publishers, 2009), 30-1.

<sup>7</sup> Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 143-55.

<sup>8</sup> Sussman, *Victorian Technology*, 36.

<sup>9</sup> Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 101-108.

<sup>10</sup> Sussman, *Victorian Technology*, 98-100.

## 1.2 Class System

During the Queen Victoria's reign, England was separated into three main status-groups containing working class, middle class and upper class. They differ in level of education, wages and also in the social status they belonged to. Manual workers (working class) were not respected as the others, even though they were skilled in their field.<sup>11</sup>

In terms of education, public school were only for middle and upper classes, lawyers or doctors. This resulted in the fact that these classes were even more removed from the others. Public schools were expensive (higher costs) and this led to the middle and upper class having fewer children than the working class. Girls were denied an education because parents preferred their sons to be educated.<sup>12</sup> Most of the children were educated at home, and it was a role of the mothers to teach them. Unlike the boys, who were taught at home to the age of seven, the girls were not allowed to go to school. This meant that boys were also allowed to socialise earlier than the girls, who stay at home (assuming that they did not need to make money) until they got married.<sup>13</sup>

During the Victorian era it was common for families to have a servant. Only wealthy people could afford male servants. Those who did not have enough money hired a charwoman or even workhouse child to come and do the hard work. Having a servant meant that the family belongs to the middle class and determined the status of the family. In the middle of the nineteenth century, one out of six women was a servant, and in 1871 the number of servants was 1.19 million.<sup>14</sup>

## 1.3 Religion

The major religious belief in England was Anglicanism and Evangelical Sub-religions. Queen Victoria was Head of the Church of England. The new laws passed between 1836-1840 reduced the differences between the poor and the rich clergy. The wealth of the clergy was diminished, and it was divided amongst parishes and chaplains.<sup>15</sup> As already mentioned, the society was divided into classes, but the clergy did not belong to any of them. In "private

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<sup>11</sup> Hugh McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), 2-13.

<sup>12</sup> Trevelyan, *Jak žila Anglie*, 646-47.

<sup>13</sup> Judith Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 84-89.

<sup>14</sup> Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home*, 63-94.

<sup>15</sup> Trevelyan, *Jak žila Anglie*, 637.

‘man’s’ world (...) gambling, heavy drinking, improper language and recourse to prostitutes were accepted and regarded as normal.”<sup>16</sup>

As stated in the preface of McLeod Hugh book called *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City*, every individual had a choice of which faith they prefer, but on the other hand, due to social conventions they had no choice at all and had to subdue. Class played a large role in terms of religion, and since poverty was high the poor had the idea of a better place to be after they passed away, and this motivated them to live and believe in God.<sup>17</sup>

However, new inventions and advances in science, together with the ideas of Charles Darwin, played a crucial role in challenging religious beliefs towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The result was a conflict between religion and science. Among those who dealt with the questioning of the evangelisms were also writers including liberal Christians, Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins.<sup>18</sup> Hardy himself was impressed by Darwin's work.<sup>19</sup> His *Origin of Species* and *Essay and Reviews* published 1859–1860 had a great impact on their readers who started questioning what they had so far believed in.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, the Church had enormous power over the whole country, which made it impossible for the authors to write about these topics without being criticized.<sup>21</sup>

## 1.4 Gender Inequality

Men needed to be husbands, and husbands needed wives. It was the wife, family and house which showed the world how successful and prosperous the life of a man turned out to be. Women were dressed in tight corsets and heavy fabrics to emphasize the fact that they did not go to work but instead cared for the house.<sup>22</sup>

Women's purpose on this planet was to get married. According to Victorian thoughts marriage meant success in life. If not, a woman failed as a woman. She was considered (even if she was independent and made a living for herself) as incomplete without a husband. When

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<sup>16</sup> McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City*, 105.

<sup>17</sup> McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City*, xi.

<sup>18</sup> Carolyn Outlon, *Literature and religion in mid-Victorian England: from Dickens to Eliot* (Houndmills, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 1.

<sup>19</sup> Bernard Lightman, "Victorian Sciences and Religions: Discordant Harmonies." *Osiris* 16 (2001): 343-66, accessed December 28, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/301992>.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 76.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth S. Inglis, *Studies in Social History: Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (London: Routledge, 2006), 32-34.

<sup>22</sup> "Ideals of Womanhood in Victorian Britain," History Trails: Victorian Britain, last modified August 9, 2001, accessed September 25, 2017, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/trail/victorian\\_britain/women\\_home/ideals\\_womanhood\\_03.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/trail/victorian_britain/women_home/ideals_womanhood_03.shtml).

a woman married a man, she took over the same status as her husband, even though she married a man from the lower social class.<sup>23</sup> According to the English writer Beatrix Potter, "marriage was a business transaction: a man got a housekeeper/companion, and in exchange, a woman got a household and children". Moreover, during Queen Victoria's reign women were not allowed to vote. The argument for this was at that time that women had to concentrate on raising their children, and politics was entirely restricted to men. Working-class women had to manage raising children, making clothes, cooking and earning a livelihood.<sup>24</sup> They were considered as a source of cheap labour, especially in the textile, pottery or clothing industry, and many households were dependent on their wages.<sup>25</sup> In literature, writers "both reflected and 'confirmed' the conventional account of women as essentially different from men and inferior to them."<sup>26</sup>

Until 1857, with approval of the Divorce Act, it was not possible that the married couples could be divorced without an Act of Parliament. Since then, married women have had more rights, including the right to dispose their own property, approved in 1882, which led to minor differences in the equality of men and women.<sup>27</sup>

As far as sexuality is concern, people were not educated. This topic was not discussed both in public and at home; sexuality remained a controversial topic.<sup>28</sup> Women married so they could have and raise children, not because of sexual satisfaction or emotional feelings; women were denied any sexual feelings. Having an illegitimate child was considered as immoral and against the society's values. "For the Victorians, virtue and virginity were synonymous. A woman who lost her virginity outside of marriage—regardless of the circumstances surrounding that loss--was ruined."<sup>29</sup> Men should stay chaste before getting married. However, they often did not and resorted to using prostitutes. On the other hand, women were not allowed to even have a conversation with other men until marriage.<sup>30</sup> Also

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<sup>23</sup> Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home*. 137-85.

<sup>24</sup> "What 19th-century women really did," University of Cambridge, last modified March 8, 2014, accessed November 7, 2017, <http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/what-19th-century-women-really-did>.

<sup>25</sup> "Women's Work," History Trails, last modified March 29, 2011, accessed November 9, 2017, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/womens\\_work\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/womens_work_01.shtml).

<sup>26</sup> Patricia Ingham, *Thomas Hardy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 129.

<sup>27</sup> Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home*, 233.

<sup>28</sup> "Sex and sexuality in the 19<sup>th</sup> century," Victoria and Albert Museum, last modified 2016, accessed January 15, 2018, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/s/sex-and-sexuality-19th-century/>.

<sup>29</sup> "'You Ain't Ruined': How Thomas Hardy Took On Victorian-Era Purity Culture," The Atlantic, last modified May 28, 2013, accessed January 15, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2013/05/you-aint-ruined-how-thomas-hardy-took-on-victorian-era-purity-culture/276289/>.

<sup>30</sup> "Gender roles in the 19th century," British Library, last modified May 15, 2014, accessed January 15, 2018, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gender-roles-in-the-19th-century#authorBlock1>.

flirting with the men was considered as immoral and inappropriate.<sup>31</sup> In terms of extramarital children, they were morally unacceptable. Single mothers took their descendants to the Founding Hospital, rather than face public disgrace.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home*, 227.

<sup>32</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, "Sex and sexuality in the 19<sup>th</sup> century."

## 2 THOMAS HARDY

Hardy is considered as one of the most admired novelists and poets of Victorian England. This well-known writer set most of his novels in a fictional world called Wessex, which is a historical region in the South of England that no longer exists by that name. In this way, Hardy creates his own fictional microcosm, separated from the rest of the world. Despite the fact that he was a popular author in the second half of the 19th century, people criticized his work for being immoral and obscene. The reason was that he was not afraid to point out the problems and issues of his time and put them in the plot without adornment.<sup>33</sup>

### 2.1 Biography

Thomas Hardy was born in 1840 in Dorset to a father who worked as a builder. He went to school in Dorchester and studied architecture. At that time, Dorchester began to thrive, not only because of faster transport but also because of people such as Benjamin Ferrey who designed churches, manor-houses and also the new Town Hall. For Hardy's father, a builder, it was a great time, and he started to earn money. This time was also profitable for young Hardy. Dorchester offered him a variety of schools, new libraries, books, bookshops or magazines like *The History of the Wars*, which was perfect for self-studying, for example, the Napoleonic Wars he was interested in.<sup>34</sup> Hardy was a gifted student, but the fact that he was originally from a lower social class limited him to be more educated.<sup>35</sup> When he was sixteen, Hardy started his career as an architect.<sup>36</sup> He also admired nature inspired by his father who always carried a telescope whenever they went for a walk and was taking a bird's eye view of the landscape.<sup>37</sup>

In 1862 Hardy moved to London where stayed for five years and then moved back to Dorchester, because of his health issues and the fact that London (the noisy and dirty in contrast to Dorset) was not his dream place. He wrote about his memories experienced in this particular period of time when he could discover the art and science of the big city, especially art galleries and operas in the Opera House, or the Royal Italian Opera House. He was amazed because in a small town like Dorchester he did not have the opportunity to visit such places. Hardy's cousin was also in London at that time, and Hardy fell in love with her.

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<sup>33</sup> Joelle Herr, *Thomas Hardy: The Complete Novels in One Sitting* (New York: Running Press, 2013), 6-15.

<sup>34</sup> Gittings. *Young Thomas Hardy*, 40-41.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Hardy and Amy M. King, *Jude the obscure* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003), 12.

<sup>36</sup> Colin Temblett-Wood, *Far from the madding crowd by Thomas Hardy* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), 2.

<sup>37</sup> Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy*, 37.



Moreover, she was from the same social class, which meant a welcome change in the city full of upper-class people. But London also had its rough side. He, as a villager, was shocked by street prostitution, drunk clergymen in Covent Garden and also by the huge gap between the rich and poor people, which was more visible than in the countryside. As a witness, Hardy saw hard-working people from the lower class with calluses on their hands and described their features as less human.<sup>38</sup>

He was married twice. His first wife Emma Gifford died in 1912 and their marriage was not happy and fulfilling and later on, they did not even live together as a married couple. After her death, he married her friend Florence Dugdale. Hardy, in his best works, built on his own experiences he had gained during his life (village Dorset, playing, dancing or wandering around with his parents, school in Dorchester, known as Casterbridge in his novels).<sup>39</sup>

Thomas Hardy died on January 11, 1928. At the end of his life, Hardy himself admitted that he wanted to be an architect in a small town if he could choose.<sup>40</sup> His heart was buried next to Emma, and his body was interred in Westminster Abbey's Poet's Corner, where also famous authors like Charles Dickens are buried. In his life, he wrote fourteen novels, two plays and over nine hundred poems.<sup>41</sup>

## 2.2 Hardy as Naturalist Author

Naturalism is a 19<sup>th</sup>-century literary movement with its origin in France. Emile Zola is considered as the main protagonist of this movement which draws important ideas from evolutionary theory. It tries to portray people's real life. The main feature of naturalism is believing that everything a person does is determined by his environment or his/her heritage, or both.<sup>42</sup> The authors want to describe the real world and the truth; they do not try to evoke pleasant feelings in their readers.<sup>43</sup> Main characters often suffer, struggle to survive and try to resist their fate, which is usually unjust and unpredictable.<sup>44</sup> Naturalist beliefs are the right

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<sup>38</sup> Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy*, 86-101.

<sup>39</sup> Herr, *Thomas Hardy*, 14-15.

<sup>40</sup> Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy*, 86.

<sup>41</sup> Herr, *Thomas Hardy*, 16-17.

<sup>42</sup> "Naturalism and realism," Bitesize, last modified 2018, accessed January 12, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/education/guides/zxn4mp3/revision/3>.

<sup>43</sup> James Bissett, *Naturalism* (New Haven: Yale University, 1939), 2-3.

<sup>44</sup> Martin Schütze, "The Services of Naturalism to Life and Literature," *The Sewanee Review* 11, no. 4 (1903): 425-43, accessed March 3, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27530580>.

opposite of Romanticism (from the 18th to the 19<sup>th</sup> century) where the characters were idealized and were sometimes supposed to have even supernatural abilities.<sup>45</sup>

Hardy focuses on ordinary people, especially from the working and the middle class. These people are less responsible for their actions, and the characters are determined by laws, heredity or environment, forces beyond people's control.<sup>46</sup> Hardy's novels contain strong criticism of English society and the relations between social classes, where the middle and upper class sees the working class as inferior. He creates a cruel world in which his often naive and inexperienced characters struggle and fight.<sup>47</sup> With an ongoing story, they are becoming more mature and resilient but, in the end, repeating the same mistakes again. Nevertheless, they still do not give up, even assuming a tragic ending. Another naturalistic feature that Hardy uses is milieu, Wessex and its surroundings to be more precise.<sup>48</sup> In the novels, there is an extensive description of nature, slightly affected by modern technologies. The extensive description of nature helps the reader to better understand how beautiful it is. View of the landscape changes the emotions of the characters in Hardy's novel:

The evening sun was now ugly to her, like a great inflamed wound  
in the sky. Only a solitary cracked-voiced reed-sparrow greeted her (...) in a sad,  
machine-made tone.<sup>49</sup>

The example is taken from *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* when the main protagonist is sad and because of her mood suddenly nature becomes ugly, sad and depressing, while at other times nature is described in detail as beautiful and full of warning sun.<sup>50</sup>

### 2.3 Hardy's Works

In 1865, Hardy published his first novel called *How I Built Myself a House*. Then he started to write poems, and, later on, his most famous novels.<sup>51</sup> The novel called *Far from the Madding Crowd* was written in 1874 and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* in 1891. Both of them were very successful. On the other hand, the novel *Jude the Obscure* written in 1895 was

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<sup>45</sup> "Romanticism," Encyclopædia Britannica, last modified December 6, 2017, accessed January 4, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Romanticism>.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Huntington Fletcher, *A History of English Literature* (Boston: R.G. Badger, 1919), 444-45.

<sup>47</sup> Louis I. Bredvold, *Literatura období restaurace a osmnáctého století* (Prague: Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury a umění, 1963), 243-44.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Carpenter, *Thomas Hardy* (London: MacMillan Press, 1976), 28-30.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (London: HarperPress, 2010), 161.

<sup>50</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 9-10.

<sup>51</sup> Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy*, 115.

criticized which led him to stop writing novels. Hardy's latest works are more concerned with the problems and issues of the Victorian era. He was also forced to edit some of the books before they were released. Based on these revisions he is sometimes considered as a critical realist.<sup>52</sup>

Thomas Hardy's work is greatly influenced by his experiences in addition to his personal life, whether it is the economic situation, religious and political changes, parents and their customs, the home where he grew up in, or songs which were sung to him at a young age.<sup>53</sup> There is no doubt that Hardy's novels contain dramatic and even morbid scenes. This could refer to his parents who told him stories of savage events. One of them was about suicide, another about the execution of four men. The five-year visit to London where Hardy saw people sleeping outside in the dirt motivated him to write a satire on these issues called *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. His grandmother died in 1857, and it influenced his work especially in poetry when he wrote a poem called *One We Know* for her. Her death was probably the reason why he started to write. In the plot Hardy put also autobiographical elements.<sup>54</sup> The most visible example is the main protagonist in the *Jude the Obscure*. Both are in love with their cousin, love music, animals and nature and both of them work as architects.

As far as religion is concern, Hardy was not a supporter of the orthodox religion and his disagreement is reflected in his novels.<sup>55</sup> Hardy abandoned his faith in God but before that he even considered entering the clergy.<sup>56</sup> He also claims: "I have been looking for God fifty years, and I think that if he had existed I should have discovered him."<sup>57</sup>

Hardy's works are written in a time when rural decline and people move to big cities, mostly for work.<sup>58</sup> "The characters are enmeshed in situations compounded out of their own weaknesses and the fell clutch of circumstance but retain their individuality and force."<sup>59</sup> The main theme of his novels is to criticize what prevents the free development of human personality. It could be thought that Hardy writes in a pessimistic spirit, but the truth is that he only pessimistically described the conditions that prevented people from living happily

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<sup>52</sup> Herr, *Thomas Hardy*, 75-236.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 7-8.

<sup>54</sup> Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy*, 70-93.

<sup>55</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Victorian Age in Literature* (Cornwall: House of Stratus, 2014), 138.

<sup>56</sup> Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy*, 78-82.

<sup>57</sup> Clive Holland, *Thomas Hardy, O.M. The Man, His Works and the Land of Wessex* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1966), 125.

<sup>58</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Dějiny Británie* (Prague: Lidové noviny, 1999), 421.

<sup>59</sup> Carpenter, *Thomas Hardy*, 80.

and dignified; anyone who wants to resist the system ends up tragically. According to Hardy, the Victorian society is humiliating people's lives and does not allow them to follow their dreams. His main heroes and heroines are a reflection of his admiration of them as ordinary people.<sup>60</sup> His female characters Sue and Bathsheba represent the "New woman". The term describes the women who are interested in higher education, wanted the right to vote, be employed and "(...) accept(s) views of femininity and female sexuality".<sup>61</sup> "Hardy wanted to make [society] see the tragedy brought about by social law not grounded in the necessity of things. Therefore he intercepted them with the tragedies of Tess, Jude and Sue."<sup>62</sup>

## 2.4 Hardy's Wessex

As already mentioned, Hardy was born in Dorset which is located on the south coast of England. This area is the inspiration for the Wessex in his novels which is the historical name of his native land (one of the kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon Britain). Hardy himself admitted that the Wessex and its historical monuments are named by a real name (Bulbarrow, High-Stoy, River Frome)<sup>63</sup> The first of the Wessex novels was a novel called *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), followed by *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Return of the Native* (1878), and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), which was his masterpiece and very successful with his readers.<sup>64</sup> "Wessex is represented as a disordered society in its hierarchical organization and in the controlling limits it imposes on the lives of those who find themselves at the bottom of the social heap."<sup>65</sup>

Wessex in *Far from the Madding Crowd* is described with less landscape description and focuses more on what was created by man, including buildings like the farm, Oak's shepherd's hut or the Boldwood's house. Hardy also focuses only on the lower-class people who perfectly fit this tightly restricted environment. Everyday life of the local people, meaning farming and hard work, is described in detail.<sup>66</sup>

Wessex, as presented in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, is more open to the new technologies and the modern age. Through these technologies and openness to the new ideas and

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Neblahý Juda* (Prague: Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury a umění, 1963), 375-79.

<sup>61</sup> Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham, *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism, and International Consumer Culture, 1880-1930* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

<sup>62</sup> Fred Reid, *Thomas Hardy and History* (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 201.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess z d'Urbervillů* (Prague: Odeon, 1975), 13.

<sup>64</sup> Hardy, *Tess z d'Urbervillů*, 431.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, ed. Patricia Ingham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 111.

<sup>66</sup> R.G. Cox, *Thomas Hardy the Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1979), 31.

questions, Wessex opens its roads to the world people are able to leave and get rid of old troubles that they have been struggling with. However, it does not mean that Hardy's Wessex is not described as a burden. Through the history of thousand years, Wessex creates various obstacles for its inhabitants.<sup>67</sup>

*Jude the Obscure* focuses mainly on the limits of the agricultural region in the north; the area around Oxford and Christminster.<sup>68</sup> Of all analysed novel, *Jude the Obscure* offers more description of the large and modern cities like Melchester, Aldbrickham or Christminster. In spite of this, in the novel there are also extensive and realistic descriptions of the landscapes, and beautiful nature.

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<sup>67</sup> Hardy, *Tess z d'Urbervillů*, 431-35.

<sup>68</sup> Carpenter, *Thomas Hardy*, 29.

### 3 FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD

Of all the analysed novels, *Far from the Madding Crowd* is considered as the most optimistic and positive one.<sup>69</sup> The fourth of Hardy's novels written in 1874 originally appeared in *Cornhill Magazine* in serial form. This novel is the author's first success as a novelist.<sup>70</sup>

The story is set in south-western England and describes untouched nature with comparison to the city.<sup>71</sup> The novelist is referring to the description of an idyllic life before the Industrial Revolution. "*Far from the Madding Crowd* is built around erotic rivalry, as three very different men are captivated by the beautiful but capricious Bathsheba Everdene."<sup>72</sup> The novel also tells the story of the strong independent woman named Bathsheba and Hardy admits that she is based on a real person, Hardy's aunt to be more precise.<sup>73</sup>

#### 3.1 Main Characters

Bathsheba Everdene is one of Hardy's most prominent female heroes. She is a beautiful, young and independent woman, who inherits the farm and runs it by herself. In the book, she is described as an intelligent, self-confident and wilful person.

In the novel appear three main male characters, and each of them has a different personality. One of the three characters is Gabriel Oak. He is best described as a loyal, caring and patient countryman. He shows this attitude to Bathsheba several times in the book. "I shall do one thing in this life—one thing certain—that is, love you, and long for you, and keep wanting you till I die."<sup>74</sup> Through the story Gabriel rescues Bathsheba whenever she needs it; he is always there for her and tries to help. "Gabriel Oak represents the stoical endurance of a man who has learnt to work with the unpredictability of nature, the volatility of women, and to discipline his own feelings and conduct."<sup>75</sup> Another male protagonist is Willian Boldwood. He falls in love for the first time even though he is over forty. In the novel, he represents madness caused by unrequited love. When Bathsheba sends him the Valentine card, he becomes obsessed with her. The last male character, Frank Troy, is an

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<sup>69</sup> Merryn Williams, *Thomas Hardy and Rural England* (London: Plgrave Macmillian, 1972), 130.

<sup>70</sup> Herr, *Thomas Hardy*, 75-76.

<sup>71</sup> James Eli Adams, *A history of Victorian literature* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 320.

<sup>72</sup> Adams, *A history of Victorian literature*, 319.

<sup>73</sup> Millgate, *Thomas Hardy*, 47.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (London: HarperPress, 2010), 31.

<sup>75</sup> Geoffrey Harvey, *The Complete Critical Guide to English Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2003),

educated sergeant and the main villain of the story. With the marriage to Bathsheba, he gradually starts to destroy her life. He wants to run the farm by himself, he is also a gambler and loses the money they have earned on the farm. In the end, he is killed by Boldwood.<sup>76</sup>

### 3.2 Analysis of *Far from the Madding Crowd*

Hardy is concerned on sexual love passion which later on leads to grief. The main theme of the novel is also criticism of the gender inequality represented by the main heroine who shows her strength, independence and wilfulness. Unlike the following novels (*Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*), this story is set in the country, where people are relatively happy and satisfied. However, the author also put in the plot negative elements that stifle the lives of the Wessex inhabitants; loss of Oak's farm, the death of Fanny and her child.<sup>77</sup>

#### 3.2.1 Gender Inequality and Sexuality

"That Hardy was far more candid in his treatment of sexual matters than his Victorian contemporaries has long been acknowledged."<sup>78</sup> Unlike Jane Austen rejecting her heroines any sexual instincts, Hardy focuses on woman's sexuality in more detail and puts strong and independent female characters into the plot. "Troy's sexual awakening of Bathsheba is achieved in the famous scene of his sword drill (which Hardy researched), with its erotic symbolism of penetration (...) as he fascinates and dominates her, enforcing his sexual mastery."<sup>79</sup> She succumbs to his physical presence. In the forest scene "Bathsheba knows for the first time, through this surrogate experience, the sense of the dominant male force that she really desires beneath her cloak of Victorian respectability."<sup>80</sup> In the scene Troy is pretending to stab her and Bathsheba is impressed:

All was as quick as electricity. "Oh!" she cried out in affright, pressing her hand to her side. "Have you run me through?—no, you have not! Whatever have you done!"<sup>81</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Herr, *Thomas Hardy*, 78-92.

<sup>77</sup> Herr, *Thomas Hardy*, 80-86.

<sup>78</sup> Judith Bryant Wittenberg, "Angels of Vision and Questions of Gender in 'Far from the Madding Crowd,'" *The Centennial Review* 30, no. 1 (1986): 28, accessed January 6, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23738611>.

<sup>79</sup> Harvey, *The Complete Critical Guide to English Literature*, 62.

<sup>80</sup> Carpenter, *Thomas Hardy*, 89.

<sup>81</sup> Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 196.

Also, the characteristics Hardy uses to describe a woman are very rare, used only among male characters before. Hardy wants to highlight his acceptance of gender equivalence through the main protagonist. Bathsheba is, as was stated in the description of the main characters, a strong and independent woman. Men offer her land, expensive clothes and money, but she rejects them and justifies it by having everything already. The irony is that Bathsheba (the female character) inherits the farm unlike Gabriel (the male character), who loses his sheep farm and loses his power and later even works for the female farmer. It could be said that the roles of opposite sexes turn. Bathsheba as a landowner has men who work for her, which means a disgrace to them and in one scene they also compare her to a dog: "A head-strong maid—that's what she is—and won't listen to no advice at all. Pride and vanity have ruined many a cobbler's dog."<sup>82</sup> Moreover, from the novel, it could be noticed that Bathsheba is doing well as an owner of the farm which must be even more degrading for her male workers:

Oak walked on to the village, still astonished at the encounter with Bathsheba (...) and perplexed at the rapidity with which the unpractised girl of Norcombe had developed into the supervising and cool woman here.<sup>83</sup>

As was already stated above, women in Victorian England were considered as inferior and subordinate to men. The opposite is the main character, Bathsheba. She is behaving "in a strikingly unconventional manner on the horse, when riding it like a man."<sup>84</sup> Bathsheba reveals the idea of the opposing stereotypical role of Victorian women by showing modern and untypical behaviour. She claims: "I can ride on the other [saddle]: trust me."<sup>85</sup> For a woman, it is considered as a scandalous behaviour. By all these actions, Bathsheba represents the "New Woman". Hardy tries to criticise the oppressive society through the main heroine, who does not behave according to the narrow-minded norms, but has her voice and stands from the crowd and as stated above, she is doing well with managing the farm.

On the other hand, Bathsheba blames God for making her a woman who highlighted the rough life of female during the Victorian era: "I shall never forgive God for making me a woman, and dearly am I beginning to pay for the honour of owning a pretty face."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 111.

<sup>83</sup> Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 52.

<sup>84</sup> Wittenberg, "Angels of Vision and Questions of Gender in 'Far from the Madding Crowd,'" 28.

<sup>85</sup> Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 14.

<sup>86</sup> Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 211.



### 3.2.2 Class System and Values

Hardy in his novels often criticises marriage. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, he writes that by marriage woman becomes the husband's property, but if the woman wants to be married she has to accept it:

Baldwood as means to marriage was unexceptionable; she esteemed and liked him: yet she did not want him. It appears that ordinary men take wives because possession is not possible without marriage, and that ordinary women accept husbands because marriage is not possible without possession.<sup>87</sup>

However, Bathsheba is different and she does not want to be someone's property. "Hardy describes her as a woman whose independence of men is necessary to her sense of identity, and who regards marriage as literally a degrading sacrifice of self. However, ultimately it is her passion for Troy which leads her to marry him."<sup>88</sup> As a punishment for her flirtations and "having trifled with Boldwood's and Gabriel's feelings, she finds herself tied to Troy who is incapable of loving her or indeed anyone else."<sup>89</sup> In the marriage she realizes who her husband really is; he loses and spends all her money, does not care about the farm. Troy also admits that he does not love Bathsheba in the scene where he sees the dead body of Fanny and claims: "(...) is more to me ... than ever you were, are, or can be."<sup>90</sup>

The sergeant Troy represents the disturbing character in the agricultural region. He comes from the modern and industrialized world and appears in the story, set in nature untouched by the innovations, he does not belong there. Troy does not understand the rural life (not even interested in it), is unable to integrate and also "has no feeling either for the rhythms of nature". The combination of all the aspects, he becomes the one who disappoints Bathsheba and hurts her.<sup>91</sup>

As was already stated above, Wessex as presented in *Far from the Madding Crowd* focuses on the daily day life of the working class people. The environment is untouched by the industrialization and modern life. As the title testifies, it has its meaning. The "Madding Crowd" represents the big cities, with thousands of people living in them. "It (...) celebrates

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<sup>87</sup> Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd* Chapter, 137.

<sup>88</sup> Harvey, *The Complete Critical Guide to English Literature*, 62.

<sup>89</sup> Williams, *Thomas Hardy and Rural England*, 132.

<sup>90</sup> Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 281.

<sup>91</sup> Harvey, *Complete Critical Guide to Thomas Hardy*, 62.

the removed rural life."<sup>92</sup> The novel was published in 1874. It is a time of mass migration to cities like Liverpool or Manchester. As was stated above, the rise of the mass society causes terrible conditions, hard work, environmental pollution and also illnesses. On the other hand, in *Far from the Madding Crowd* appears only untouched nature described in detail as is the case of naturalist author Thomas Hardy.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Harvey, *Complete Critical Guide to Thomas Hardy*, 61.

<sup>93</sup> Cox, *Thomas Hardy the Critical Heritage*, 31.

## 4 TESS OF THE U'RBERVILLES

The story is set in the northern area of Wessex and people are no longer dependent on nature or their professions like the characters in previous novels (*Far from the Madding Crowd*, 1874 or *The Return of the Native*, 1878).<sup>94</sup> As already mentioned, Hardy's previous novel was successful and accepted positively, but this statement does not concern *Tess d'Urberville*. The novel was criticized and rejected by several publishers. Eventually, it was published and became a success, with the exception of several critics who found this novel immoral. The main heroine of this story is destroyed by social conventions, her past and circumstances. The novel portrays the negative experiences with the system, tested by a young woman.<sup>95</sup>

### 4.1 Main Characters

In the book, Tess is described as a young, honest, nice girl with big eyes and peony lips.<sup>96</sup> She is courageous and sensitive at the same time. This character is also resilient to all the obstacles that her fate has set (rape, the death of her child). She became the victim of social prejudices and moral conventions. Tess has experienced so much suffering that it would have devastating consequences for other women, but not for her.<sup>97</sup>

Angel is from the middle class but despises people from this layer. Primarily, he does not support the material differences between the social classes and does not support social norms and conventions. When he is described for the first time in the book, he is dressed as a milk-farmer. Instead of a new, clean, fancy suit as expected by his social status, he wears a white pinafore, and his boots are dirty from working on a farm. In spite of this, it is clear that he does not belong into this environment.<sup>98</sup>

Alec represents the higher social class. His money is 'new' money, made in the north, although he pretends to be an aristocrat. In the novel, he is a man in his twenties. He cannot accept if he does not get what he wants; he always takes it. This character is obsessed with social class related to power and money. He is dishonest and lies to Tess several times.

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<sup>94</sup> Hardy, *Tess z d'Urbervillů*, 8-11.

<sup>95</sup> Carpenter, *Thomas Hardy*, 124-25.

<sup>96</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urberville*, 12.

<sup>97</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 434.

<sup>98</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 134-40.

## 4.2 Analysis of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

In this novel, Hardy reflects the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution which influenced the structure of social and private relationships.<sup>99</sup> The author himself wrote about *Tess* that this novel is based on real events. It was received generously, and the writer himself was surprised because he admitted that he wrote about what was against the social conventions.<sup>100</sup> The two main themes that are portrayed are gender inequality and class system. The author wrote in the preface to the first edition:

I will just add that the story is sent out in all sincerity of purpose, as an attempt to give artistic form to a true sequence of things; and in respect of the book's opinions and sentiments, I would ask any too genteel reader, who cannot endure to have said what everybody nowadays thinks and feels, to remember a well-worn sentence of St. Jerome's: If an offense come out of the truth, better it is that the offense come than that the truth be concealed. T.H November 1891.<sup>101</sup>

However, he also met people who despised and rejected his work both from a moral and aesthetic point of view. Editor and critics have asked for the novel to be edited, as stated in the book called *Thomas Hardy* by Richard Carpenter:

For example, [he was] asked by his editor to change the episode in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* where Angel Clare carries the dairymaids over a large puddle. Arthur Locke, the editor of *The Graphic*, suggested that "since *The Graphic* was intended for family reading . . . it would be better if the girls were transported in a wheelbarrow,"<sup>102</sup>

Most people disagreed with the slight punishment of the main heroine and criticized her for being immoral. The very opposite is the writer who worships and admires her character. Another criticism was related to religion or the excessive use of vulgar expressions.<sup>103</sup>

### 4.2.1 Environmental Pollution

The novel does not mention the new innovations of the industrialized era, with the exception of the train, threshing machine and a reaping-machine. Hardy uses the steam-machines as a

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<sup>99</sup> Hardy, *Neblahý Juda*, 376.

<sup>100</sup> Hardy, *Tess z d'Urbervillů*, 9-10.

<sup>101</sup> Harold Orel, *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings: Prefaces, Literary Opinions, Reminiscences* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 27.

<sup>102</sup> Carpenter, *Thomas Hardy*, 24.

<sup>103</sup> Hardy, *Tess z d'Urbervillů*. 10-4.

replacement of the handheld tools which the workers prefer. The reaping-machine is used in a negative context in chapter fourteen:

Rabbits, hares, snakes, rats, mice, retreated inwards as into a fastness, unaware of the ephemeral nature of their refuge, and of the doom that awaited them later in the day (...) they were huddled together, friends and foes, till the last few yards of upright wheat fell also under the teeth of the unerring reaper, and they were every one put to death by the sticks and stones of the harvesters.<sup>104</sup>

When the reaping-machine is introduced for the first time in the novel, it is noticeable that Hardy described it as a disturbing element that appears in nature, more specifically as "brightest" or most striking.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, the unerring reaper is used as a symbol of the Wheel of Fortune pointing to life's unpredictability. Hardy's Wheel of Fortune suggests that the events and personalities are not influenced by morality and reason, because these laws are non-existing in his novels.<sup>106</sup>

At Flintcomb-Ash farm appear two object which distort the untouched beauty of the countryside: the threshing machine described as "the red tyrant"<sup>107</sup> and the steam engine. Next to the engine stands a man called engineman who is in the countryside but like those machines, does not belong there; does not talk to anyone, has a strange accent and a lack of interest in the surrounding environment and its inhabitants.<sup>108</sup> The steam engine represents the tireless machine for which the workers do not have time to rest.

The inexorable wheels continuing to spin, and the penetrating hum of the thresher to thrill to very marrow all who were near the revolving wire-cage.<sup>109</sup>

Tess who is denied rest, regrets that she came here to work and other workers recall the old times when these machines did not exist. Moreover, the fact that with the arrival of modern technology (even before) the life of the main protagonist becomes arduous, symbolizes a simpler, happier and easier life without these machines. Although the steam engine has

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<sup>104</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 105.

<sup>105</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 104-105.

<sup>106</sup> Shuji Awano, *Paradox and post-Christianity: Hardy's engagements with religious tradition and the bible* (Yokohama: Shumpûsha, 1999), 78-9, accessed January 5, 2018, Google Books.

<sup>107</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 385.

<sup>108</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 386.

<sup>109</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 387.

increased productivity (which was great for farm owner), it has upset the workers and also disrupt the harmony that has hitherto prevailed.<sup>110</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Religion

The decline of the faith is mentioned many times in the book. For instance, Mr Angel Clare, considered as "the earnestest man in all Wessex,"<sup>111</sup> refused to send Angel to school, because he did not want to be a priest. The father argues that any other education that does not concern the priesthood is unnecessary. Focusing more on the religious teaching instead of understanding his son's wishes, Hardy wants to demonstrate the values that are the opposite of what should be.<sup>112</sup> In the novel, several statements about religion in a negative context, are written. It could be noticed in the sentence spoken by Angel: "It's a curious story; it carries us back to the medieval times, when faith was a living thing!"<sup>113</sup>

The death of Tess's descendant points to criticism of religion, specifically, the part of the book when the child becomes ill and suddenly passes away. The vicar does not allow Christian burial and Tess is forced to bury her child by herself.<sup>114</sup>

#### 4.2.3 Social System and Values

The Victorian society strictly adheres to the rules and breaking them causes punishment. Tess is (by her actions) guilty according those rules and therefore lost her purity. Hardy chose as the subtitle of the novel as a "pure woman" to highlight his disapproval with this system. He claims her purity by the fact that she was raped by Alec and therefore does it involuntarily.<sup>115</sup>

The situation, when Tess gives birth to the child is inconsistent with the norms of Victorian England (extramarital child) and Hardy wants to demonstrate the worst possible consequences of discrimination in moral standards; the fear of being shamed causes the child not being baptized, and after the child's death, Tess has to bury him without a proper burial in the garden.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 387.

<sup>111</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 139.

<sup>112</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 139.

<sup>113</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 134.

<sup>114</sup> Ingham, *Thomas Hardy*, 146.

<sup>115</sup> Ingham, *Thomas Hardy*, 110.

<sup>116</sup> Cox, *Thomas Hardy the Critical Heritage*, 198.

As was already stated above, social classes differed a lot from each other. Hardy mentions those differences between the lower and middle classes several times. For instance, the scene with the dancing girls from the lower class in the second chapter where a conversation between three brothers (from middle class) takes place and one of them refuses to go dancing with the girls because someone might see them with poor girls from a small village: "Dancing in public with a troop of country hoydens – suppose we should be seen!"<sup>117</sup> He judges the girls to be inferior without knowing them.

The differences are also visible in Hardy's description of the characters. People from lower class often wear workwear or old, dirty and ordinary clothes. On the other hand, characters from a middle class wear expensive and clean suits.

Angel has a different point of view. He experiences the characters of women from both middle and lower classes and finds out that on the inside the women are the same, irrespective of what social layers they come from. He only argues that differences between women are based on the general characterization of a person not on the social class:<sup>118</sup>

... had taught him how much less was the intrinsic difference between the good and wise woman of one social stratum and the good and wise woman of another social stratum, than between the good and bad, the wise and the foolish, of the same stratum or class.<sup>119</sup>

The following part of the book shows that Angel is influenced by the social system and its values and therefore acts differently, to his and Tess's detriment. He realizes his mistake only when he travels to Brazil and gets rid of society's narrow-minded norms and conventions, but it is too late.<sup>120</sup>

With all his attempted independence of judgments this advanced and well-meaning young man, a sample product of the last five-and-twenty years, was yet the slave to custom and conventionality when surprised back into his early teachings. (...) In considering what Tess was not, he overlooked what she was, and forgot that the defective can be more than the entire.<sup>121</sup>

Freeing himself from Victorian England and its narrow-minded norms, Angel mentally thrives and starts to think about them: "What arrested him now as of value in life was less

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<sup>117</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 28.

<sup>118</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 198-99.

<sup>119</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 199.

<sup>120</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 199.

<sup>121</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 316.

its beauty than its pathos. Having long discredited the old systems of mysticism, he now began to discredit the old appraisements of morality. He thought they wanted readjusting. Who was the moral man? Still more pertinently, who was the moral woman? The beauty or ugliness of a character lay not only in its achievements, but in its aims and impulses; its true history lay, not among things done, but among things willed."<sup>122</sup>

Interesting is also how the main male characters in Hardy's novels are described. In his stories, rich people from upper and middle classes are mostly dishonest and evil, whereas poor representatives from working class are above all honest and humble. In other words, characters from higher class have primarily negative characteristics while the one from working class has positive ones. It can be noticed that Alec D'Urberville, representative of the higher class, is the main villain in the story and most affected by industrialized time at the same time. Tess has a choice between two suitors: but she chooses Angel instead of Alec.<sup>123</sup> Angel is not a man from working class however, he refused to be a priest and went to the countryside to learn work manually.

An example of negative changes which concern the working class is the description of the agricultural population, small tenants to be more precise, who instead of being lifetime tenants (as they previously used to be), have now become industrialized workers without permanent work, who often do not even have a home and are hiring irregularly. They have no certainty and change their poorly paid jobs continuously. The most visible example is Tess who changed the places where she worked a few times. She worked in Trantridge, on Talbothays dairy farm, in Flintcom-Ash and also in Sandbourne.<sup>124</sup> With the progressive industrialization, workers are forced to work overtime and without any rest. A description of how people have to move to larger cities is described in the book as follows:

The increasing migration from farm to farm were on the increase here. (...) A depopulation was also going on. (...) Cottagers who were not directly employed on the land were looked upon with disfavor, and the banishment of some starved the trade of others, who were thus obliged to follow. These families (...) had to

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<sup>122</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 402.

<sup>123</sup> William Lyon Phelps, "The Novels of Thomas Hardy," *The North American Review* 190, no. 647 (1909): 510-11, accessed January 5, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25106482>.

<sup>124</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 416-17.



seek refuge in the large centres; the process (...) being really the tendency of water to flow uphill when forced by machinery.<sup>125</sup>

The sentence: "A depopulation was also going on", reflects the forced migration of the working class; less workers in the rural areas meaning less offered goods and services for the local people.<sup>126</sup>

The most obvious criticism of the class system lies in the relationship between two main characters: Alec d'Urberville and Tess. He is a wealthy man with power and knows that he can manipulate Tess through his money because he is aware of the fact that Tess feels guilty about killing Prince. Alec wants his "reward" after he has bought another horse for her. In chapter eleven he tells Tess about buying a new horse to her father almost immediately before he rapes her. Through this relationship, Hardy wanted to point out the unfair treatment the lower class suffered on account of the higher class. Moreover, every time Tess meets a representative from the upper class, she suffers.<sup>127</sup>

#### 4.2.4 Gender Inequality and Sexuality

Tess, the main heroin of the story, marks an important moment in the representation of a woman in a sexual relationship. She lives in a male-dominated world, and she suffers whenever a man enters her life. She represents a symbolic injustice that appears in Victorian society and Hardy uses two main characters (Alec and Tess) to point it out. Disputes between Tess and Alec concern both the gender and the class system. Alec is a wealthy man from a higher social class, has property and everything he desires, except for Tess, who resists him. On the other hand, Tess is the right opposite. She is from a poor family, has many siblings and her father is an alcoholic. Alec uses his power as a man from an upper class to oppress emotionally and physically a woman from a weaker class. Tess, as a woman, is an easy target and has to fight with it through the story.<sup>128</sup>

After the marriage of Angel and Tess, he learns all her secrets and sees her as a real woman, not the symbol of perfection and innocence as he had seen Tess before. Angel despises her and refuses to live with her, although their actions, which they admitted, are very similar and Angel committed even a worse moral act; he had sexual intercourse of his

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<sup>125</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 416-17.

<sup>126</sup> Ingham, *Thomas Hardy*, 109.

<sup>127</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 84.

<sup>128</sup> Herr, *Thomas Hardy*, 226-232.

own accord, while Tess was forced to do so. But morally, the behaviour of Tess as a woman is unacceptable. After separation, Tess lives in poverty, works hard, and also faces the persecution of Alec, because of her pride to ask for help.<sup>129</sup>

Throughout the story, women are always working hard on the field and are the more significant part of the workforce. Hardy mentions it several times in the book. In chapter thirteen, when the reaping-machine is introduced, the binders on the field are mainly women. It refers to the fact that the women's workforce was cheaper at that time and several chapters later Hardy mentions this issue more accurately when he writes: "Female field-labour was seldom offered now, and its cheapness made it profitable for tasks which women could perform as readily as men."<sup>130</sup> In chapter forty-three Marian talks to Tess about how hard reed-drawing for women is:

“...reed-drawing is fearful hard work – worse than swede-hacking. I can stand it because I’m stout; but you be slimmer than I. I can’t think why maister should have set ‘ee at it.”<sup>131</sup>

As was already stated above, Tess is required to work over her limits and it is increasing when landowner Groby brings the machine and she is forced to do the male work until she is exhausted:

She was the only woman whose place was upon the machine (...). The incessant quivering (...) had thrown her into a stupefied reverie in which her arms worked on independently of her consciousness. She hardly knew where she was.<sup>132</sup>

Another topic that is criticised in the story is the sexuality and how it was interpreted in the Victorian era. Hardy tries to point out that insufficient awareness of this topic could lead to terrible consequences. As was already mentioned, Tess is raped by Alec, and when she tells it to her mother, she cries and asks her mother why she did not tell her on what to be careful about:

“How could I be expected to know? (...) Why didn’t you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had a chance o’ learning in that way, and you did not help me!”<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Cox, *Thomas Hardy the Critical Heritage*, 201.

<sup>130</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 338.

<sup>131</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 344.

<sup>132</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 395.

<sup>133</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 99.

To summarize, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is a story about destroying a young good woman by society and its norms. According to the novelist and publicist Clementina Black, the novel's "essence lies in the perception that a woman's moral worth is measurable not by any one deed, but by the whole aim and tendency of her life and nature."<sup>134</sup> She adds that Thomas Hardy is one of few who admitted this statement.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Cox, *Thomas Hardy the Critical Heritage*, 202.

<sup>135</sup> Cox, *Thomas Hardy the Critical Heritage*, 202.

## 5 JUDE THE OBSCURE

*Jude the Obscure*, the last novel written by Thomas Hardy was published in 1895. The novel caused even more debate than the previous *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. The Victorian public criticized this novel for its controversial treatment of sex, religion and marriage. As mentioned in the postscript of the book, one bishop even burned it to express his disapproval. Hardy had to adjust several parts to fit unique requirements for publishing it in *Harper's Magazine* in 1894. After the controversy that the novel stirred among Victorian society, he decided that he would only deal with poetry and stop writing novels. In defending himself and disagreeing with the criticism, Thomas Hardy wrote in the preface:

[The novel] attempts to deal unaffectedly with the fret and fever, derision and disaster, that may press in the wake of the strongest passion known to humanity; to tell, without a mincing of words, a deadly war waged between flesh and spirit. (...) I am not aware that there is anything in the handling to which exception can be taken.<sup>136</sup>

### 5.1 Main Characters

The main character of the novel Jude Fawley, a boy from a poor family, longs to be educated but finds it almost impossible for people of his social class. He is enthusiastic and has high hopes but like most of the Hardy's main characters, Jude is also condemned to a tragic ending. Jude's characteristics are similar to Hardy's life experiences; the novel contains autobiographical elements presented through the main character Jude.<sup>137</sup>

Sue Bridehead represents a modern woman, whose central privilege is not being married as the rest of the women.<sup>138</sup> She is also a free thinker and an atheist, denies the existence of the God and questions Christianity. This character also tries to fight with her faith and have control over it. Sue Bridehead represents, by her behaviour, the "New Woman". Another main female character, Arabella, is Jude's wife who forces Jude to marry her. In the novel, Jude describes her as "an erring, careless, unreflecting fellow creature".<sup>139</sup>

### 5.2 Analysis of *Jude the Obscure*

This novel tells the story about a poor boy whose dream is a university education and also getting a good job. The difference from other works is the frequent migration of the main

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<sup>136</sup> Orel, *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings*, 32.

<sup>137</sup> F.B. Pinion, "Jude the Obscure: Origins in Life and Literature," in *Thomas Hardy Annual* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1986), 148.

<sup>138</sup> Hardy, *Neblahý Juda*, 10.

<sup>139</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 255.

protagonist, a phenomenon which previously did not appear in other books written by Hardy. The heroes mainly stayed in the same place throughout the whole story. The characters are stuck in a vicious circle, as can also be seen from the heading of the chapters; the second chapter is named Christminster, and the last one carries the same title. This story describes differences between social classes and their injustice, together with issues of an unhappy marriage. Another topic that Hardy criticizes is the taboo of sexuality. There was no discussion about this topic in the Victorian era, both in public and at home.<sup>140</sup> Thomas Hardy in this work attacks also Orthodoxy and the Anglican Church, and related hypocrisy. The main protagonists oppose social conventions, but their determination is not enough and a tragic fate awaits them.<sup>141</sup>

Jude is experiencing more events during the story and meets more people who only bring trouble and sadness to his life. It is Arabella, for instance, who lied to him about pregnancy, and he is forced to marry her. Also living with divorced Sue, and raising children together without being married, which is totally unacceptable for the society at that time which later on, leads to the negative consequences.

### 5.2.1 Gender Inequality and Sexuality

In the Victorian era, the woman is considered as a property to her husband. This issue Hardy highlights in the letter send by Sue to Jude. She compares women to the domestic animals:

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.<sup>142</sup>

As already stated above, Women in the Victorian period are not well educated; male offspring are preferred. In *Jude the Obscure* a male character admits the superiority of a woman by being more educated than he is. It is a situation where Phillotson says: "(...) I can't answer her arguments—she has read ten times as much as I. Her intellect sparkles like diamonds, while mine smoulders like brown paper ... She's one too many for me!"<sup>143</sup>

Another example of gender inequality is seen in the following extract from the novel. It shows how women were treated; as a weaker gender, subordinate to men.

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<sup>140</sup> Hardy, *Neblahý Juda*, 378.

<sup>141</sup> Hardy, *Neblahý Juda*, 376-79.

<sup>142</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 163.

<sup>143</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 221.

... they all lay in their cubicles, their tender feminine faces upturned to the flaring gas-jets (...), every face bearing the legend The Weaker upon it, as the penalty of the sex wherein they were moulded, which by no possible exertion of their willing hearts and abilities could be made strong while the inexorable laws of nature remain what they are. They formed a pretty, suggestive, pathetic sight, of whose pathos and beauty they were themselves unconscious, and would not discover till, amid the storms and strains of after-years, with their injustice, loneliness, child-bearing, and bereavement, their minds would revert to this experience as to something which had been allowed to slip past them insufficiently regarded.<sup>144</sup>

### 5.2.2 Religion

Sue is an atheist, she is questioning the religious beliefs, but when her children die she starts to believe in God. She claims that God must exist, because of the punishment sent to her; the death of her children not raised in marriage.<sup>145</sup> Therefore, she decides to return back to Phillotson, "as a means of expiation".<sup>146</sup> On the other hand, Jude is pious and reads theological books but under the influence of Sue he starts lose his fate: "I'll never care about my doctrines or my religion any more! Let them go!"<sup>147</sup> As a proof, he burns all his theological books.

As stated in *Thomas Hardy* by Patricia Ingham: "The novel finally seems to assert not only that Christianity is a myth or a crutch but so too is the idea that by discarding it a life of natural joy becomes possible. The strongest statement it makes is that the random cruelty of life is made worse by the social machinery of a community supposedly based on a Christian religion of love."<sup>148</sup>

### 5.2.3 Social System and Values

The main thought of female writers during the Victorian era was that marriage is the best that could happen to them; "happy ending" for each woman.<sup>149</sup> The right opposite is Thomas Hardy, who wrote about the darker side of marriage. His novel, as others, is based on his own experiences. As stated in his biography, he lived separated with his wife for a

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<sup>144</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 134-35.

<sup>145</sup> Ingham, *Thomas Hardy*, 188.

<sup>146</sup> Carpenter, *Thomas Hardy*, 140.

<sup>147</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 206.

<sup>148</sup> Ingham, *Thomas Hardy*, 190.

<sup>149</sup> Fred Reid, *Thomas Hardy and History*, 5.

longer period of time. This experience could be an impulse to his criticism to marriage and the associated divorce.

The questioning of the sanctity of marriage is one of the main topics criticized in Hardy's novel. Hardy depicts the negative side of marriage, including adultery and divorces. According to his beliefs "(...) marriage is an institution in which, for many people, personality becomes stultified and distorted, and 'love' only a mockery of that which gave the marriage its original meaning".<sup>150</sup> As mentioned in *Jude the Obscure's* postscript: "The Marriage laws are being used in great part as the tragic machinery of the tale (...) [and] in Diderot's words, the civil law should be only the enunciation of the law of nature."<sup>151</sup> Hardy is of the opinion that if the marriage is not working, it should be divorced.<sup>152</sup> Margareth Oliphant (Scottish writer) even named Hardy in *Blackwood's* as a leader in "The Anti-Marriage League."<sup>153</sup>

In *Jude the Obscure*, there is no happy marriage. Whether it is Sue (already divorced once) and Phillotson, or Jude and Arabella. Arabella tricks Jude to marry her and in the end, she leaves him. Due to the marriage with Arabella, dreaming of education at the university falls apart. Sue marries Phillotson even though she does not love him. In Sue's marriage with Phillotson, she is not capable of physical love. It can cause the fact that she does not love him as a husband and also her beliefs and conviction about marriage as a disruptor of a true love.<sup>154</sup> It could be said that the marriage is "too literally a tie that binds; it refers the free association of man and woman in a domestic prison that withers the soul."<sup>155</sup> In the extract from the novel, Hardy points out that the marriage of Jude and Arabella is bounded only by the law and not because they love each other and live like one person:

However there was only one thing now to be done, and that was to play a straightforward part, the law being the law, and the woman between whom and himself there was no more unity than between east and west being in the eye of the Church one person with him.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Orel, *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings*, 141.

<sup>151</sup> Orel, *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings*, 34.

<sup>152</sup> Hardy, *Neblahý Juda*, 9.

<sup>153</sup> Robert C. Slack, "The Text of Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 11, no. 4 (1957): 261-2, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/3044455?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/3044455?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents).

<sup>154</sup> Carpenter, *Thomas Hardy*, 140.

<sup>155</sup> Carpenter, *Thomas Hardy*, 141.

<sup>156</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 174-5.

Jude himself says that he must give up his dreams because of his marriage: "There seemed to him, vaguely and dimly, something wrong in a social ritual which made necessary the cancelling of well-formed schemes involving years of thought and labour."<sup>157</sup>

Sue also claims it is difficult to be divorced, (as was already stated above until 1857, it was not possible for married couples to be divorced) and therefore people must suffer a longer period of time: "It is none of the natural tragedies of love that's love's usual tragedy in civilized life, but a tragedy artificially manufactured for people who in a natural state would find relief in parting!"<sup>158</sup>

When having a conversation with Jude, Sue admits the dissatisfaction in marriage with Phillotson: "(...) I like Mr. Phillotson as a friend, I don't like him—it is a torture to me to live with him as a husband!"<sup>159</sup> and continues: "a repugnance on my part, for a reason I cannot disclose, and what would not be admitted as one by the world in general!"<sup>160</sup> She is afraid to confess to the world, how she really feels in her marriage and how difficult is to stay with the man she does not love.

Jude and Sue are an unmarried couple living together and having kids together (when they see all the couples in the church who do not really love each other, they decide that this is not what they actually want). In the eyes of the Victorian society, they are not living in what is considered as ideal Christian lifestyle. On defence, Sue argues that she does nothing wrong:

“What is the use of thinking of laws and ordinances (...) if they make you miserable when you know you are committing no sin?”<sup>161</sup>

Moreover, even though the couple is not married, in chapter five Hardy writes "that the twain were happy – between their times of sadness – was indubitable."<sup>162</sup> The absurdity of the Victorian norms is obvious when Sue talks about what will people think about them in the future: "When people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times that we have the unhappiness to live in, what will they say!"<sup>163</sup> Sue is not alone. Even Jude questions the narrow-minded norms set by the society: "Is it (...) that the women

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<sup>157</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 56.

<sup>158</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 206.

<sup>159</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 203.

<sup>160</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 204.

<sup>161</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 214.

<sup>162</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 278.

<sup>163</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 206.



are to blame; or is it the artificial system of things, under which the normal sex-impulses are turned into devilish domestic gins and springes to noose and hold back those who want to progress?"<sup>164</sup>

All these statements highlight Hardy's disapproval of the system of his time, especially connected with the marriage. He also claims that the women should not blame the men because they behave the way they are expected according to the Victorian norms:

“(I)nstead of protesting against the conditions they protest against the man, the other victim; just as a woman in a crowd will abuse the man who crushes against her, when he is only the helpless transmitter of the pressure put upon him.”<sup>165</sup>

However, society turns against Sue and Jude because of breaking the ideal behaviour and the couple ends up tragically. Phillotson is also punished. By helping Sue, and with consent to the divorce he is forced to leave his work position: "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."<sup>166</sup>

The most disturbing moment of the novel is undoubtedly the death of three children. When Little Father Time hangs himself and also his two siblings because they “are too many”, Sue turns her atheist's attitude into a fanatic one because she now believes they live in sin and tries to return to Phillotson; the real husband according to the law.<sup>167</sup> It is not only the marriage which according to Hardy destroys the life of the main characters.

Another significant theme of the novel is the critique of a system that does not allow the education of lower social classes, even if they have certain aspirations. If people did not have the money, courage or patronage by an influential person, the possibility of education was virtually non-existent. As an example, Hardy uses the main character Jude Fawley, who struggles with this issue his whole life. Unlike Jude's aunt, who knows her place as a woman from a lower class, Jude himself wants to break out of this social stratum through education. In the book, Jude tries to find out how much it costs to "buy himself in" and it would take fifteen years to pay for testimonials and matriculation examination.<sup>168</sup> Jude statement: "Only a wall—but what a wall!"<sup>169</sup> represents both the physical wall and boundaries made of money

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<sup>164</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 209.

<sup>165</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 277.

<sup>166</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 238.

<sup>167</sup> Carpenter, *Thomas Hardy*, 140.

<sup>168</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 108.

<sup>169</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 80.

and class system which does not allow him to fulfil his dreams. Because of the prejudices, Jude is not allowed to be educated. In the letter of rejection sent by Mr. Tetuphenay, the latter's contempt of the working class is obvious:

I have read your letter with interest; and, judging from your description of yourself as a working-man, I venture to think that you will have a much better chance of success in life by remaining in your own sphere and sticking to your trade than by adopting any other course. That, therefore, is what I advise you to do.<sup>170</sup>

Hardy tries to point this out through Jude, the main hero, who wants to be educated and has all the aspirations, but due to the already mentioned system is not allowed to study at Christminster. He is still stuck in a vicious circle and can never fulfil his dream. In the end and spite of his efforts he is defeated.<sup>171</sup>

To summarize the criticism of the Victorian norms and conventions, Phillotson finds that:

To indulge one's instinctive and uncontrolled sense of justice and right, was not, he had found, permitted with impunity in an old civilization like ours. It was necessary to act under an acquired and cultivated sense of the same, if you wished to enjoy an average share of comfort and honour; and to let crude loving-kindness take care of itself.<sup>172</sup>

The meaning of the extract is the same as in other tragic novels by Hardy; one needs to succumb to the system if people want to live a peaceful life without being despised and rejected by society. Otherwise, if the people rebel and stand out in a crowd, they find remorse, ridicule, disdain and in the end the tragic ending and the destruction of their personality.

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<sup>170</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 110.

<sup>171</sup> Hardy, *Neblahý Juda*, 376-9.

<sup>172</sup> Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 347.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis is to analyse Thomas Hardy's novels (*Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*) and the way he criticized the Victorian era in these books.

Firstly, it was essential to introduce Victorian England as a whole and then, the thesis follows up with a short biography of Thomas Hardy and description of him as a naturalist author. These two chapters are followed by the analysis of the chosen novels.

The thesis argues that the Victorian period (the growth of the English economy and new inventions) also had its mistakes. The society consisted of the class system and gender hierarchy. Thomas Hardy, a naturalist and realist author, wanted to point out what (according to his beliefs) was not right in society and what the consequences could be. As the author himself mentioned, he only wanted to tell the truth.

When writing the novels, Hardy draws on his own experience, which he also puts into the plot, together with the autobiographical elements represented mainly by Jude, the main protagonist of *Jude the Obscure*, who has similar work as an architect, enjoys reading books and is also in love with his cousin. Cities, villages and their surroundings are also similar to those where Hardy grew up.

All the novels are set in the rural area, located in west England, called Wessex, which is a region similar to Dorchester where the author grew up. As a naturalistic author, Hardy put in his plot extensive descriptions of landscapes, and nature plays a significant role in his novels.

The novel *Far from the Madding Crowd* concentrates especially on gender inequality, and Hardy highlights the power of women and tries to point out their equality to men and not inferiority as presented in the Victorian norms. From the analysis, the focus on the injustice and the treatment of the working class and women in *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is evident. In *Jude the Obscure*, another vital criticism concerns the educational system; the working class people have no choice to be educated unless they have money or patronage by an influential person. Even for Jude, who dreams about Christminster and tries hard to learn Greek and Latin, the university education is, in the end, impossible to reach and he never fulfils his dreams.

In Victorian England, women did not have as many opportunities as men, but in Hardy's novels, women are strong and independent, whether it is Bathsheba, who owns land and men are working for her, or Tess' bravery resisting her fate. All the female protagonists

have a significant characteristic. Hardy writes about women's strength and intelligence. The author also describes the marriage as a destruction of real love, and no one is happy in marriage as is shown by the analysed novels. Women as Bathsheba or Sue are not even interested in being married and representing the "New Women".

Every time the characters want to fight the Victorian beliefs and norms, they are knocked to their knees by the forces of the outside world. Their effort is in vain and ends up tragically. These are the consequences when an individual turns out from the row and does not want to obey.

When Hardy started to write, his novels were criticized positively. For example, the novel *Far from the Madding Crowd* was treated as a successful novel. But from the analysis, it is evident that his criticism of the Victorian norms and conventions was not so intense. On the other hand, publishing *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and his later novels as *Jude the Obscure* caused massive criticism. He went further in his critique of class alienation and gender inequality. The criticism he had to face is the proof for Hardy not being afraid to demonstrate his opinion on where he saw deficiencies and what should be improved.

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