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Thomas Hardy's Children in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*

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Contents

Introduction

James Joyce once affirmed: "Romanticism was closely associated with a kind of false and evasive idealism which is the ruin of man"[1]. However, Hermione de Almeida states that "as an aesthetic and political sensibility [Romanticism] nurtured and informed the imagination of the young Joyce"[2]. Thomas Hardy was the Victorian writer that mostly influenced James Joyce. The influence of Romantic myths is apparent in Hardy's many literary works, but it is also true that he devoted his last works to portray his contemporary society in the most realistic way. The co-existence of romantic myths and realistic, even crude representation is at the heart of one of the most important characters invented by Hardy: i.e. the figure of the child. The innocents in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, are still among his most powerful and unforgettable literary characters and the reason is to be found in the author's interest in the portrayal of the point of view of the child.

As Benziman states: "in pre-Romantic literature, children seldom speak" and yet for Romantic authors "the construction of a child's voice was indispensable"[3] just as Wordsworth and Blake demonstrate. From that moment onwards, the child became an instrument, a symbol for self-analysis. From the eighteenth century onwards, children became an extremely relevant and fascinating topic in English literature.

Thomas Hardy brought onwards the legacy of the Romantic child, transforming him and placing him in the reality of the nineteenth century. Most of all, despite the many scandals raised by his novels, he brilliantly brought his readers to truly understand the meaning of his works by creating the conditions to make them empathise with his literary children. Character identification is essential to arouse empathy in the readers

[1] Quoted in Benziman, G., *The Child's Perspective: Hardy, Joyce, and the Redefinition of Childlike Romantic Sensibilities*, in "Joyce Studies Annual", 2013, pp. 151-171, p. 151.
[2] Benziman, G., *The Child's Perspective: Hardy, Joyce, and the Redefinition of Childlike Romantic Sensibilities*, cit., p.152.
[3] Benziman, G., *The Child's Perspective: Hardy, Joyce, and the Redefinition of Childlike Romantic Sensibilities*, cit., p. 153.

and, as Keen underlines, mature readers tend to identify with literary characters of children even when "they differ from each other in all sorts of practical and obvious ways"[4]. Despite not being children anymore and despite never having lived under such hard conditions, contemporary readers nowadays cannot help sympathizing with the many children characters in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. Most importantly, Hardy's modernity and eternal narrative success consists in the portrayal of his beloved protagonists: Tess and Jude. They will always be children in adult bodies, and, in that bleak society that Hardy knew so well, their innocence is exceptional and life will never be simple for them. By placing these innocents' stories and points of view at the centre of the narrative he has managed to conquer every reader, from the nineteenth century until nowadays.

Yet, little has been written on the theme of childhood and children in the works by Thomas Hardy. Many feminist intellectuals analysed his women characters, consequently shedding light on some aspects of motherhood. A few examples can be found in Nina Auerbach's *The Rise of the Fallen Woman* or Penny Boumelha's *Thomas Hardy: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form*. There, however, the child topic is only marginally taken into consideration and never analysed in depth. Jessica Louisa Pearce is the only author to have finally brought full attention to Hardy's children in her brilliant *The Figure of the Child in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*.

Pearce's work has been a solid starting point for the present dissertation, clearly showing how Hardy used to draw from the many literary child myths to give life to, and shape the identity of, his children characters. Moreover, *The Life and Works of Thomas Hardy by Thomas Hardy*, the author's autobiography, and Ralph Pite's biography, *Thomas Hardy: the Guarded Life*, have greatly helped to delve into the writer's private life and memories. With a thorough analysis of Hardy's childhood and of his most significant relationships, many things have been understood about his literary works. They appear to be strongly intertwined to his biography and personality.

[4] Keen, S., *Empathy and the Novel*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 70.

Consequently, the aim of this dissertation is to analyse in depth the theme of childhood and the children characters in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* and in particular to understand what Hardy wanted them to symbolise. The first chapter, "*The Child is father of the Man": from the Romantic to the Victorian Child*, consists of a brief excursus regarding the development of the figure of the child in English literature from the eighteenth to nineteenth century. The second chapter, *Childhood and Children in Thomas Hardy's Life*, delves into the author's biography. It underlines some important moments of his childhood, his family bonds and his married life in order to help to understand his deep-felt affection for children and his brilliant understanding of them at the same time.

The third chapter entitled *"On a blighted star": Children in Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, focuses on the figure of Tess, the novel's heroine, but also on the figures of her siblings and of her beloved new-born Sorrow. Finally, the fourth chapter, *"Done because we're too menny": Children in Jude the Obscure*, analyses the character of little Jude, both as a child and as a grown-up, and the figures of Little Father Time and Jude and Sue's children.

Essentially, the study shows how Hardy drew on historical, scientifical and literary contexts to portray the different elements related to the figure of the child in his last novels. It clarifies how the author's life and opinions were intrinsically intertwined with his literary work and in the last two chapters, it focuses on the issue of what these literary children meant to him and what he wanted to convey through them.

Both *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* are inhabited by modern tragic heroes and the child's consciousness is the most perfect means to show how innocent and pure beings cannot survive the modern and bleak society of the late nineteenth century. In this perspective, these two novels bridged the gap between the nineteenth and the twentieth century, gifting us with the most memorable and yet tragic figure of children.

Chapter 1.

“The Child is father of the Man”: from the Romantic to the Victorian Child

1.1 The Discovery of the Figure of the Child in the 18th Century

Before the eighteenth century, childhood was not deemed a significant cultural issue, instead it merely appeared as a reference, a small element in an adult world. Initially, the figure of the child was related to the Christian tradition of the original sin, according to which human beings were thought to be born with a lack of holiness. However, in the literary world, from Rousseau onwards this idea was soon replaced by the concept of original innocence, influencing successive intellectuals.

In real life though, the employment of children on the streets or their living in workhouses, made it extremely clear that lower classes children were experiencing appalling conditions. In the eighteenth century, Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) stated how unruly these extremely young workers were, justifying the need for harsh rules. The Malthusian principle of population or "the natural tendency of the labouring classes of society to increase beyond the demand for their labour, or the means of their adequate support",[5] became undoubtedly popular among the most influencing spheres of the century. Obviously, since such children were thought to be representing a threat, the legal system became harsher and harsher against them: for instance, theft of simple articles of clothing often corresponded to many years of imprisonment or in the worst case to death by hanging. In real life, they were clearly not thought as children, nor individuals. However, as Carolyn Steedman affirms, they were going to be subjected to "a process of symbolising".[6]

This crucial process was related to all kind of children, belonging to the lower, middle or upper class. Viviana Zelizer in her *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (1985) calls it a "sacrilisation", a deep change "in the economic and

[5] Malthus, T., *An Essay on the Principle of Population,* Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1988, p. 270.
[6] Steedman, C., *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan 1860-1931,* London, Virago, 1990, p. 64.

sentimental value of children"[7]. Children not belonging to the lower classes, not working, thus usually related to the middle and upper classes, were indeed thought of as economically useless and yet emotionally priceless, thus inspiring the myth of the child. From the eighteenth century onwards, the figure of the child started to become a matter of interest, it slowly emerged as a symbol for authors such as Rousseau, William Blake and Wordsworth, Charles Dickens, Henry James and Thomas Hardy, just to name a few. The child was therefore developing into a myth, a conventional innocent. He was the germ of a future Man and a means through which to convey the intellectuals' social, industrial and existential modern concerns.

Rousseau's *Emile* and Wordsworth's *Prelude* were the first to pave the way for the Romantic child, whose birth is to be found in the middle of a conflict between Reason and Feeling. Albeit during the Enlightenment a concern for the theory of education started to emerge, as proved by Locke's *Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), the true nature of the child as child - and not as a small adult - was not considered. However, times were changing and the Cartesian "cogito ergo sum*"* was soon replaced by Rousseau's "je sens, donc je suis".

1.2 The Romantic Child: Rousseau, Blake and Wordsworth

In his *Emile, or On Education*, a treatise on both the nature of education and of Man published in 1762, Jean-Jacques Rousseau clearly shows how the concerns of education should be revolving around "the development of the original nature" of the child itself: an innocent nature. As he explains:

[7] Zelizer, V. A., *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*, quoted in Steedman, C., op. cit., p.63.

> Nature wants children to be children before they are men. If we deliberately pervert this order, we shall get premature fruits which are neither ripe nor well-flavoured, and which soon decay... Childhood has ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling peculiar to itself; nothing can be more foolish than to substitute our ways for them.[8]

In a similar way to his "noble sauvage", any wrong path taken by a child is considered as caused by a corrupted society of parents and teachers. Therefore, in his theory he firmly rejects the Christian "fallen state" typical of the previous literature, and punishment is accepted and solely bestowed upon the corruptors of children. It can be said that a "cult of the child" was born from then onwards: the philosopher supported an education committed to consider and to respect the child's nature at each stage of his childhood. Both the important notion of action, as opposed to the abstract nature of words, and the field of senses were paramount for the physical and psychological growth of the infant into a sensitive young adult. It is quite clear how Rousseau's method and theory proved to be essential in the educational school of both the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries until Freud's arrival.

William Blake's cult of children mostly derived from his own childhood and partly from his childless marriage. The figure and essence of childhood was vital to his work: the concept of "Innocence", which he loved so dearly, was symbolised by the child. Exactly as Rousseau, he was against the rationalism of the Eighteenth-century English intellectuals and he firmly believed in the power of Imagination.

After commissioning Blake to create some religious moralistic paintings, his patron Trusler complained about their focus on the fantastical nature of them all, therefore the artist defended not only himself but his most important values. In a letter to his patron dated August 23rd 1799, he clearly describes the workings of his mind:

[8] Rousseau, J. J., *Emile,* quoted in Greenleaf, B., *Children through the ages: a history of childhood,* New York, McGraw-Hill, 1978, p. 64.

> I feel that a Man may be happy in This World, and I know that This World is a World of Imagination and Vision. I see Every thing I paint In This World, but Every Body does not see alike.[9]

Moreover, it's interesting to focus on the following lines by Blake:

> I am happy to find a Great Majority of Fellow Mortals who can Elucidate My Visions, & Particularly they have been Elucidated by Children, who have taken a greater delight in contemplating my Pictures than I even hoped. Neither Youth nor Childhood is Folly or Incapacity.[10]

According to Blake, children seem to master a great gift, the Vision, through which divinity can be sensed. Consequently, it is clear how the child acquired a central position in the author's works. His *Songs of Innocence* underline the essence of life in children, their natural love and compassion for animals and their fellows as in *The Little Black Boy*.

After trying to figure out his identity and what awaits him in the afterlife, an African child understands that race is of no importance to God, everyone is equal in His eyes therefore he's inspired to profess his love for his white companion. Crucial are the last lines of the poem:

> And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,
>
> And be like him, and he will then love me.[11]

[9] Blake, W., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008, p. 702.
[10] Quoted in Preston, K., *Blake and Rossetti*, New York, Haskell House Publishers LTD, 1971, p .16.
[11] Blake, W., *The Little Black Boy*, in *Songs Of Innocence and Of Experience*, ed. A. Lincoln, London, Tate Enterprises, 2019, p. 10.

A transition occurs between *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*: the latter aim to denounce and condemn that corruptive, unhealthy and artificial society denying firstly children, and subsequently Men, the vital Imagination, a synonym for Humanity.

The Chimney Sweeper clearly conveys the message since the reality of charity-children, the misery and exploitation of the working boys were an everyday occurrence. Most of the poems were deemed to be "social poems" but *The Chimney Sweeper* goes beyond them all.

The little working child sees an angel in his dreams, who helps him to mentally overcome his appalling living conditions, spiritually saving him:

> And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
>
> He'd have God for his Father, and never want joy.[12]

Following Rousseau's theory of education, it might be said that both *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* involve education, though in a wider sense. In that regard, it is extremely interesting to observe that *The Schoolboy*, which would be more proper for the first volume, actually ends the second:

> I love to rise in a summer morning,
>
> When the birds sing on every tree;
>
> The distant huntsman winds his horn,
>
> And the skylark sings with me:
>
> O what sweet company!

[12] Blake, W., *The Chimney Sweeper*, in *Songs Of Innocence and Of Experience*, cit., p. 12.

But to go to school in a summer morn,-

O it drives all joy away!

Under a cruel eye outworn,

The little ones spend the day

In sighing and dismay.

(...)

How can the bird that is born for joy

Sit in a cage and sing?

(...)

O father and mother if buds are nipped,

And blossoms blown away

(...)

How shall the summer arise in joy,

Or the summer fruits appear?

Or how shall we gather what griefs destroy,

Or bless the mellowing year,

When the blasts of winter appear?[13]

The mystery is clearly solved after carefully reading the poem. The "bird that is born for joy", the child of the first volume, becomes eventually entrapped, in Blake's contemporary England, "in a cage", i.e. the Rousseauian concept of society. Since then, it seems to be clearer and clearer for authors and artists of the Romantic period how infancy is no longer related to concepts of an imperfect age, of a need for maturity and

[13] Blake, W., *The School Boy,* in *Songs Of Innocence and Of Experience*, cit., p. 53.

consequently advocating an adult's presence. Childhood is developing into a critique of a corrupted world, of people too easily forgetting the freshness, naturality and wisdom they once had as children. Therefore, an escape is needed, especially in the context of industrial, overcrowded and grimy urban spaces.

In Wordsworth's poetry, the myth of childhood is essential and it dominates his *Prelude.* The composition clearly shows Rousseau's influence on the poet: as in the *Emile*, in *The Prelude* as well, the Eighteenth-century intellectuals are mocked and the contemporary education is a cage, depriving the child of Nature's vital stimulus.

Further celebration of childhood and Nature appears in his well-known *My Heart Leaps Up*, composed in 1802:

(...)

The Child is father of the Man;

And I could wish my days to be

Bound each to each by natural piety.

(...)[14]

As James Fotheringham stated in his *Wordsworth's Prelude as a Study of Education*: "It is owing to the movement he so well interpreted, and in good part owing to him, that we have studied the child-nature so much, and so carefully, as we have lately been doing"[15]. Nature and child are always extremely interconnected to such an extent in Wordsworth that Nature becomes both Father and Mother to the infant.

[14] Wordsworth, W., *My Heart Leaps Up*, in *Wordsworth: Poems*, ed. P. Washington, London, Everyman's Library Pocket Poets, 1995, p. 13.
[15] Fotheringham, J., *Wordsworth's "Prelude" as a Study of Education*, 1809, London, Horace Marshall & Son, 1899, p. 23.

Similarly to what happens in Blake, in his *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* (1815), Wordsworth underlines both a strict relation between God and child as well as the child's great power of Vision:

> Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
> The Soul that rises with us, out life's Star,
> Hath had elsewhere its setting
> And cometh from afar;
> Not in entire forgetfulness,
> And not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God, who is our home:
> Heaven lies about us in our infancy![16]

And once again the prison-like reality of the nineteenth century starts to infiltrate into the visionary world: "Shades of the prison-house begin to close/ Upon the growing Boy"[17]. It is safe to say that by now, the figure of the child had become a poetic symbol thanks to the works of Blake and Wordsworth. However, from the Romantic to the Victorian period, a revolution occurred: poetry left the stage to the novel, a perfect instrument to convey deep psychological analysis of characters and a new revitalizing energy to the image of the child.

When thinking about Nineteenth-century British literature, the names of important novelists such as Austen, Dickens, George Eliot or the Brontë sisters firstly come to our mind. Nonetheless, these major writers were mainly influenced by some Romantic

[16] Wordsworth, W., *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, in *Wordsworth:Poems*, cit., p. 66.
[17] Wordsworth, W., *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, in *Wordsworth: Poems*, cit., p. 66.

aspects such as the artists' focus on the social sphere, on the awareness of the self and the awareness of the figure of the child as a mean to denounce contemporary society.

1.3 Towards the Victorian Child: Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens

While in the Romantic era the child was characterised by innocence, an ethereal nature and the closeness to God, in the early and mid-Victorian literature he became a victim due to the appalling living conditions of the time. Both Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens give truthful accounts of a child's life experience, the former being extremely accurate on a psychological level and the latter often placing children at the centre of his masterpieces.

In *Jane Eyre* (1847), the autobiographical nature of the young orphan's account makes it all more reliable. As in Dickens, a great part of Brontë's amazing writing skills derive in fact from personal experiences. Every feeling, every emotion of young Jane successfully aims to create a link with the reader:

> There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning; but since dinner (Mrs. Reed, when there was no company, dined early) the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating, that further out-door exercise was now out of the question.
>
> I was glad of it: I never liked long walks, especially on chilly afternoons: dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight, with nipped fingers and toes, and a heart saddened by the chidings of Bessie, the nurse, and humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed.[18]

[18] Brontë, C., *Jane Eyre*, ed. Bell, C., London, Penguin Popular Classics, 1994, ch.1, p. 1.

From the very first pages, a cold, claustrophobic atmosphere is being introduced, making the reader understand that this is no exceptional day for the poor and plain protagonist. She comes across as an encaged little bird, for which the mere idea of being home is "dreadful" and her extremely low degree of self-esteem, almost non-existent, is there from the very beginning. Nor fond or happy memories of childhood await Jane Eyre while at the Reed's estate.

Little Jane turns out having a strong and individual voice. She's not at all similar to a stereotyped child and the use of the first person increases the link between reader and narrator. In the end, the reader is exactly where Brontë wants him/her to be: while deeply connected with the protagonist, we undoubtedly agree with every action of hers, even since our first meeting with the rebellious and yet vulnerable young child.

Charles Dickens is no different in the description of the victimization, loneliness or isolation often felt by his main child characters as in *Oliver Twist* (1837) or *David Copperfield* (1850), *Hard Times* (1854) and *Great Expectations* (1860-1861), just to name a few.

As Peter Coveney states in his *Poor Monkey: The Child in Literature*:

> To write of the child in Dickens is not only to survey Victorian childhood; it is to write of Dickens himself, both as man and artist. The child was at the heart of his interest; at the centre of the Dickens world. There is perhaps no other major English novelist whose achievement was so closely regulated by a feeling for childhood.[19]

There is much of the previous Rousseauian tradition in his works, the corrupted world is seen from the point of view of a child therefore everything is divided into good and evil, oppressor and oppressed, innocent and guilty people. What he experienced in his own childhood is no different from what many other common children experienced.

[19] Coveney, P., *Poor Monkey: The Child in Literature*, London, Rockliff, 1957, p. 71.

His cruel contemporary society was perpetrating crimes mostly against the world of innocents and what concerned him the most were the feelings developed by them, threatening to destroy their whole lives from inside out. Dickens' children stand in the middle of the Innocence and the Experience conveyed by Blake in his poems, thus transforming the Nineteenth-century novelist into one of the most important heirs of the Romantic era, of its beliefs and moral and symbolic view once expressed by poems.

Moreover, in *The Wound and the Bow*, Edmund Wilson writes:

> [...] the works of Dickens' whole career was an attempt to digest these early shocks and hardships, to explain them to himself, to justify himself in relation to them, to give an intelligible and tolerable picture of a world in which such things could occur.[20]

After living at Portsea, London and Chatham with his family, the whole family returned to London in 1822. Financial matters were not florid at all for the Dickenses, at first, he was left at Chatham to finish his school period, however after some time he was recalled to London. His family lived in Camden Town, the house was exceptionally small and owing to economic preoccupations young Charles was neglected. The furniture of the house started to be sold and soon after also the novels he used to read.

As usual for such hard times, his parents agreed for young Charles to be employed in a blacking warehouse. The degradation typical of those places was not easily forgotten. As he himself admitted:

[20] Wilson, E., *The Wound and The Bow*, quoted in Dabney, L. M., *Edmund Wilson and The Wound and the Bow*, in "The Sewanee Review", Vol. 91, No. 1, (Winter, 1983), p. 158.

> No one had compassion enough on me, a child of singular abilities, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt, bodily or mentally, to suggest that something might have been spared, as certainly it might have been, to place me at any common school...[21]

Once an adult, he was clearly aware of the many afflictions he had to endure despite being a child. Moreover, what obviously strikes us as modern readers, not used to see children employed in hard works or mines, is his awareness of the great amount of affection he had always been deprived of. Therefore, the very need of love of his young protagonists is conveyed in the pages of Dickens's masterpieces. It is far too easy to imagine what a child must have felt, feelings and emotions are perceived at their utmost essence by children. A horrid work experience such as the one in the blacking warehouse surely had brought little Charles utter despair, helplessness and fear.

In this context, it is inevitable to give a general account of the actual living conditions of "those other children", as Marion Lochhead in *Their first ten years*: *Victorian childhood* (1956) calls them. As the author reports, according to the findings of a Parliamentary Commission on the Employment of Children back in 1842 and 1843, commissioners, parents, employers and children themselves gave true feedback of the appalling situation.

Six was the minimum age in order to be employed in the mines, sometimes younger children were taken in because low enough to pass through pits and avoid horses or asses to do so. Moreover, an account of some parents reports that their child was sent to school when he was three years old since he was supposed to start work at six. After some years and once he got used to the pit, the child was sent to night school and a concession of an hour of sleep was given. At three o' clock he had to wake up, since at four he was expected to be at the pit and then he finished working twelve hours later, finally going to bed at six. His mother reports:

[21] Quoted in Harris, R. R., *Dickens in America*, in "The Wilson Quarterly", Vol. 3, No. 4, (Autumn, 1979), p. 173.

> He will never be up more than two hours from the pit for eating, washing and playing(...). He never complains though he tells many a queer story of the pit. The pit does not hurt him, but makes him a little whither and perhaps thinner.[22]

Besides the working needs of owners or managers, the worst part of these reports is the clear apathy of parents, willing to sacrifice their children for a few shillings.

In *The Quarterly Review* of 1846, an account of the London conditions is given by Lord Shaftesbury. Lambeth and Westminster, for instance, were deemed to be the worst areas of the town since full of children, "bold and pert and dirty as London sparrows, but pale, feeble and sadly inferior to them in the plumpness of outline"[23]. However, Lord Shaftesbury denotes how the energy and playfulness typical of children was not absent at all: for instance, they met at the river-banks to look for any kind of treasures such as sticks, coal or anything useful for their games. In the meanwhile, for the most part they were naked or clad in rags and the conditions of their homes were absolutely appalling. Some of them were without drainage, some without water and not to mention the conditions of their beds, mostly made of several rags.

On Sundays, they were free from work and most of them opted for Sunday Schools, which dealt with primary knowledge. One of the startling accounts of a child is the following:

> I don't know how old I am; don't know how long I have been to work...don't know if I've got a birthday. I can't read, I can't write. I never had no schooling. I goes to Sunday School (...). There's seven of us (...).[24]

[22] Lochhead, M., *Their first ten years: Victorian childhood*, London, John Murray, 1956, p. 128.
[23] Lord Shaftesbury, *The Second Annual Report of the Ragged School Union, established for the Support of Schools for the Destitute Poor*, in "The Quarterly Review", Vol.79, London, John Murray, 1847, p. 127.
[24] Quoted in Lochhead, M., *Their First Ten Years: Victorian Childhood*, cit., p. 131.

In the mines, what was expected of children was to crawl, therefore most of the time their skin was rubbed off their backs by the upper part of the pit. As aforementioned, the most dangerous part was the moral implication of it all, the few able to survive mostly lived a diseased manhood.

Obviously, girls were not exempted from hard work. They were mostly employed in lacemaking and for instance, as stated by a mother in an interview, all of her four daughters were working, the oldest was eight years old and the youngest, aged two, had "tried and drawn a few threads out". Therefore, the only thing the "other children" knew of was waking up in the morning or night and go to work until they either died prematurely or were allowed to leave.

Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* illustrates such realities in 1837 and takes the chance to comment on the Poor Law Amendment Act of three years before. The total lack of humanity and empathy in the work-houses is clearly denounced and the most chilling detail is that the language and point of view of Oliver, a child, is employed.

Despite all, Oliver maintains his innocence and goodness. Cruelty against children comes by the hand of corrupted people belonging to a corrupted system such as Fagin and Sykes. From the very first start of the novel, the reader feels powerless just as the young protagonist:

> He was enveloped in the old calico robes which had grown yellow in the same service, he was badged and ticketed, and fell into his place at once--a parish child--the orphan of a workhouse--the humble, half-starved drudge--to be cuffed and buffeted through the world--despised by all, and pitied by none.[25]

And after some pages, the author provides us with something more, making us understand that despite his early age, Oliver is already a starving and fatigued child:

[25] Dickens, C., *Oliver Twist*, London, Collins Classics, 2010, ch.1, pp. 3-4.

> Oliver Twist's ninth birthday found him a pale thin child, somewhat diminutive in stature, and decidedly small in circumference.[26]

Isolation and desperation characterise the first stages of our little protagonist's life, marking him. Soon after, he becomes the object of the obnoxious Fagin and Sikes' cruelty.

What makes Dickens a brilliant novelist is his ability, among others, to portray the horror and hopelessness of a child, who perceives feelings as these as utter and never-ending. One of the many examples can be found in Oliver's meeting with the awful Mr. Fang:

> "Come, none of your tricks here, you young vagabond; they won't do. What's your name?" Oliver tried to reply but his tongue failed him. He was deadly pale; and the whole place seemed turning round and round.
>
> "What's your name, you hardened scoundrel?" demanded Mr. Fang. "Officer, what's his name?" This was addressed to a bluff old fellow, in a striped waistcoat, who was standing by the bar. He bent over Oliver, and repeated the inquiry; but finding him really incapable of understanding the question; and knowing that his not replying would only infuriate the magistrate the more, and add to the severity of his sentence; he hazarded a guess.[27]

As already mentioned, Dickens may opt for over-simplification in his descriptions of characters, in his conception of innocents and villains, but is it not how children normally reason?

[26] Dickens, C., *Oliver Twist*, cit., ch.2, p. 7.
[27] Dickens, C., *Oliver Twist*, cit., ch.11, pp. 87-88.

A major change occurs with this novelist: he gives voice to children in fiction, a thread never abandoned by his other colleagues from then onwards.

On a lighter tone, both Flora Thompson and Alison Uttley in their *Candleford* (1945) and *Ambush of Young Days* (1937), give us lifelike records of life in the British villages and farms during the late Victorian period which is worth remembering as an alternative to the Dickensian ones.

The primitive essence of both village and farm life is what we assume would have been the dream of those wretched and hard-working children: cottages where to lead a more frugal and yet happy life, animals to work and play with (and also a way to learn how to care for the smaller beings), an idyllic Nature whose womb of pleasure and fruits was always ready to welcome anything and anyone. Nonetheless, duties were always there in peasant life, such as following the cows at milking-times, cleaning the house or carrying the water from the well. However, everything contributed to raising children of strong constitution, far different from those working in the mines or industries.

The environment and idyllic nature of villages and farms was therefore an exception to all the Dickensian dread and misery pertaining to the cities and as a consequence it is not surprising at all to see authors such as Thomas Hardy often recreating such scenarios in most of his well-known works .

Romantic authors as Blake, Wordsworth and Dickens to some extent, saw the child as the embodiment of life and as an active symbol. It was the emblem of human potential: children's innocence and their purity had the power to fight the corrupted nature of an adult human experience. However, in the nineteenth century there is a turning point: Romantic innocence changes into Victorian innocence, a deteriorated version of the previous one. There is no more conflict between Innocence and Experience, Death enters the stage.

If once the Romantic child was a literary active symbol, he is now a victim, a moribund. In order to maintain an original innocence, the child must die. There is no wish to reach

maturity or to risk corruption in an adult world. A wish for death seems to underline some of the most important Victorian pages, as Henry James and Thomas Hardy show us respectively with little Miles and Flora, and with Tess's Sorrow and Jude's children.

The power of innocence seems then to be negated at its very root, a pure childhood must die before having the chance to reach the horror of adult corruption.

Chapter 2.

Childhood and Children in Thomas Hardy's Life

2.1 Thomas Hardy's Family and his Childhood

> Little has been written on the presentation of either children or family in the novels of Thomas Hardy. The field of criticism that touches most closely on the topic is the body of feminist writing on Hardy, seeking as it does to bring to the fore topics and characters that have previously been marginalised. Writers such as Rosemarie Morgan, Penny Boumelha, Elisabeth Bronfen and Patricia Ingham have been helpful sources in putting together this study. The focus for these critics, however, has of necessity been the women in the text. As such, children, families and the child-parent relationship appear only tangentially. While Hardy's women are mothers, daughters and sisters it is the women themselves – their characters, fate and treatment by other characters and narrator – that have been the focus of such studies. As in nineteenth-century society the children are marginalised, categorised and, on the whole, forgotten. Family relationships and connections are rejected by critics in favour of romantic bonds, and when the two collide – for example in the relationship between Jude and Sue – it is the romantic connection that takes precedence. [28]

These words by Jessica Louise Pearce, author of *The Figure of the Child in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, are essential and they brought this thesis to focus on the presence and importance of childhood and children in the life of Thomas Hardy. It is important to shed light on aspects of the author's private life in order to better understand what he thought of children and parenthood and especially what children meant to him.

The novelist gives importance to some myths connected to the child such as the empowering nature of pregnancy or the death of an innocent as "redemptive or transfiguring"[29] as in the case of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and in *Jude the Obscure*. There might be a reason for the gruesome deaths of Tess's baby and Jude's children, and it can be understood by retracing some important episodes of the novelist's difficult childhood and of his marriage.

[28] Pearce, J. L., *The Figure of the Child in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, Doctoral dissertation, University of Exeter, 2010, pp. 24-25.
[29] Pearce, J. L., *The Figure of the Child in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 4.

On 2nd June 1840, Thomas and Jemima Hardy gave birth to Thomas Hardy in Higher Bockhampton. At that time, the small village located in the south-west of England and outside Dorchester was considered at a great distance from London and therefore from its English society. Even nowadays, when travelling to Dorset, there is a difference that can be perceived from other British areas: the county is still characterised by a far-off and remote halo.

At the time of the author's birth, railways were starting to be introduced in England and they were meant to reach Dorset as well. Indeed in 1847, a Dorsetshire railway passing within two miles of Hardy's childhood house, linked Dorchester to Southampton therefore giving the opportunity to easily reach London as well. Even before the arrival of these transport systems, Dorchester was of great relevance and coaches connected it to London, Exeter or Falmouth and Plymouth. Despite being an independent reality, it was not an isolated one and every year the landed gentry moved there to reside in their country houses. The county had always been committed to preserve its vital independence, dialect and traditions but, during the nineteenth century, Dorset's links with other regions provided by the railways granted London a significant chance to exert its economic and cultural control all over the country.

Thomas Hardy himself in his *Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, refers to such a foreseeable change by describing how the "old traditional ballads" usually sung in his childhood home would be shortly coming to an end:

> The railway having been extended to Dorchester just then, and the orally transmitted ditties of centuries being slain at a stroke by the London comic songs that were introduced.[30]

Despite the modern nature of the railway mentioned by Hardy, Dorchester's economic life remained agriculturally based since it did not dispose of other natural

[30] Hardy, T., *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy by Thomas Hardy*, ed. Millgate, M., London, Macmillan, 1985, p. 25.

sources of industrial interest besides coal, tin, or china clay. However, on the other hand, many city people moved to Dorset in the hope of finding a rural, bucolic place, thus helping the county to gain a place in the modern world as a corner of paradise on Earth. Modernity, for this part of England was a controversial issue, bringing new opportunities and yet, at the same time, creating a huge disinheritance of the old traditional ways of living. This was the reality where young Thomas grew up, a boy and later on a man, whose relationships with the women of his family and with his first wife, Emma Gifford, shaped his life and inspired him in his works throughout the years.

Elizabeth Swetman, his maternal grandmother, a highly educated woman, a passionate reader of Richardson and Fielding and also familiar with works such as *Paradise Lost* and *The Pilgrim's Progress,* is a good example. In Hardy's own words:

> The traditions about Betty, Maria's daughter, were that she was 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.[31]

Without the help of her husband and father, both dead in 1822, she successfully succeeded in raising her seven children by herself. However, the loss of the family farm and therefore of any financial income in 1829, led her to rely "on the parish", thus receiving an economical support from the church community. At the time, Jemima, Thomas' mother, was barely nine.

The family's humiliation caused by the aristocrat who owned the land they used to live on for a century hit deep but nonetheless Elizabeth possessed a resilience of great power as well as a strong personality, two qualities that she had the chance to convey to a very young Jemima.

[31] Hardy, T., *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 11.

Exactly as her mother, she had a strong sense of pride in her family and at the same time she also inherited the sense of trauma of an unfair, impoverished childhood. Jemima was the most intelligent among her brothers and sisters, with a deep love for literature and education, and she was eager for her own children to have her same instruction. In this regard, a portrait by Mary Hardy, Thomas' sister, is quite telling of her passion for culture: Jemima is painted as a truly domineering figure, she is reading, with her glasses on and a firmly set mouth.

Young Thomas had a great esteem for his mother, a highly intelligent and talented person, skilful at cooking, a hard worker in London, then in Weymouth and finally at the Stinsford vicarage. Her strength as a mother and especially as a woman also led the young writer to see her and describe her as a melancholic figure as well since her reticence in speaking about some episodes of her past suggested that she had suffered greatly as a child:

> By reason of her parent's bereavement and consequent poverty during girlhood and young womanhood some very stressful experiences of which she could never speak in her mature years without pain, though she appears to have mollified her troubles by reading every book she could lay hands on.[32]

Before his death, Jemima's father was an alcoholic, therefore she had surely experienced his neglect, his violent behaviour and outbursts against her mother Elizabeth. Therefore, she had mentally grown up earlier than her sisters, which were too young to understand it all. As a consequence, after her father's death and with her mother at work, she became the only motherly figure to her siblings. Any further experience of childhood was therefore denied to Jemima.

After Jemima's marriage, despite the love and reverence that Thomas' father had for his wife, the couple grew soon apart. Jemima's traumatic experience belonging to

[32] Hardy, T., *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy by Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 12.

her childhood had always brought her to crave an ambitious life out of Higher Bockhampton, but Thomas Hardy senior had experienced a much easier life than his wife. With the chance of taking up the family's business, he also had the possibility of cultivating his love for music, a leisure Jemima had never had the chance to afford. Clearly, the difference of their mindsets soon brought the couple to have several fights: while considering him not active enough and therefore too relaxed in his work, she consequently pushed him to do more and more frequently, thus becoming exceedingly assertive and forceful.

Moreover, a miscarriage and Jemima's subsequent illness from it, contributed to transform her into an even more severe woman. Her following one month visit to her sister in London, accompanied by young Thomas, contributed to create a further distance between husband and wife. Several were the ups and downs in his parents' marriage as several were the times Jemima had thought of leaving her husband and yet she eventually came back to Thomas Hardy Senior and got once more pregnant with Thomas' brothers and sisters in the following years.

It is sad to notice that her own experiences as a child probably led her to conceal her feelings and affections not only from her husband but from her own children as well. While writing his *Life* and talking to his second wife, Hardy recalled that he used to feel a strong sense of emotional neglect, clearly because Jemima did not show enough affection for him when he was a child. Luckily, his two grandmothers provided him the emotional support and stability he needed and that he actually did not receive from his parents.

It is quite clear how Dorset, his birthplace, meant so much to young Thomas and how he clearly understood that this world of peasant culture was in the process of a great change. The Industrial Revolution divided his generation from the previous ones. From the very beginning of his life, the author was torn in-between the country world and the urban space. Such a sense of nostalgia for the rurality of Dorset is quite explicit in his works. As Ralph Pite comments in his *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life*:

> Hardy was not and could never be part of the untouched rural world he was trying to depict. And neither were his readers, however much they might have liked to pretend that they were or, perhaps, that he was. Neither, though, was Hardy comfortably separate from the fading country life.[33]

In Hardy's works there is always a clash between old and new, between a more primitive and a modern society, between rural and metropolitan values. There is essentially a fight between ancient times and modernity.

Always described as a fragile creature, Thomas Hardy was thought dead at his birth and later on, even during his childhood, his parents were not sure of his survival and growth into an adult, given his frail constitution. Against all odds, young Thomas grew up into a very sensitive and clever boy. He learned reading even before starting to walk, he was so in love with the music his father played at home that at barely four years he was moved to tears by it and used to conceal his emotions by dancing in the middle of the room.

The Boy's Own Book: A Complete Encyclopaedia of all the Diversions, Athletic, Scientific and Creative of Boyhood and Youth was the first book he bought by himself, with the money earned by playing music at popular events. As Pite highlights, the boy adored it so much that he used to stare at the bookseller's window craving to have it for himself[34]. Despite the circumstance that Jemima did not think highly of the volume, it actually promoted self-improvement by aiming to teach activities such as fencing, swimming and chess. What is clear from Thomas' love for *The Boy's Own Book* is his eagerness and ambition for something more, outside the borders of his village. Consequently, his huge appetite for knowledge was directed towards the village school of Lower Bockhampton, which he started attending when he was eight years old.

[33] Pite, R., *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life*, London, Picador, 2006, p. 19.
[34] Pite, R., *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life*, cit., p.26

Lady Julia Martin, the wife of a local landowner, was the founder of the village school, which belonged to the Church of England. She wished to help improving the conditions of life in her husband's villages to the point that Thomas' school became actually by far superior to other ordinary village schools. Moreover, since this lady had no children of her own, she soon grew fond of little Thomas as clearly described in the *Life* as well:

> She had grown passionately fond of Tommy almost from his infancy – said to have been an attractive little fellow at his time – whom she had been accustomed to take into her lap until he was quite a big child. He quite reciprocated her fondness.[35]

However, in 1849, he was sent to another school, run by Isaac Last and located in Dorchester. It was deemed to be the best in the area, but despite the evident prestige of Last's school, it is also clear how one of the main reasons for Thomas's transfer was Jemima's intolerance of Lady Julia's attention to her son. For ten years, the boy used to travel from his village to attend school in Dorchester and even though he missed Lady Julia he was constantly excelling in mathematics and geography, helping other schoolmates while they did their homework and winning several prizes.

Being so clever and precocious, he started studying Latin at the age of twelve at the Academy, another advanced school run by Last. There, he went on winning prizes for his knowledge of the Classics and for his excellent behaviour as well, while starting to learn French and German. He loved exploring the limits of his memory's extent and acquiring different sorts of skills in a wide range of subjects.

However, he did not make many friends and probably he had none. Despite being alone, he actually loved his role of an outsider and his loneliness. The other boys tried

[35] Hardy, T., *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy by Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 23.

to establish some bonds with him, but he was almost annoyed by those who tried to accompany him on his journey back to Bockhampton. His love of music, which used to bring him into a sort of trance, did not help in his feeling of being peculiar. He clung to this sensation, he revelled in it since it was part of his own world. At the same time, the only relationships he cared for were the ones with his relatives and with the people of his village, something which was starting to be more and more difficult since his talent at school was leading him away from Bockhampton and towards Dorchester:

> He could be a clever schoolboy, a helpful companion, a dutiful son and brother, a devout churchgoer (his family thought that he might make a priest in the end) and an accomplished fiddle-player. He could perform equally well in all academic subjects, and he knew town life as well as country life. By adopting this stance of the all-rounder, he avoided exposure. He pleased everybody and was committed nowhere. He could keep out of sight the question of what he might really want for himself.[36]

Young Thomas belonged to both country and town life, to everything and yet to nothing, he was constantly exhibited and yet always trying to avoid exhibition. From the very first years of his life he was meant to grow up as a divided being, consequently not really understanding what he wanted to become.

In this regard, it is interesting to observe an episode of his childhood reported in his *Life*:

> He was lying on his back in the sun, thinking how useless he was, and covered his face with his straw hat. The sun's rays streamed through the interstices of the straw, the lining having disappeared. Reflecting on his experiences of the world so far as he had got he came to the conclusion that he did not wish to grow up. Other boys were always talking of when they would be men; he did not want at all to be a man, or to possess things, but to remain as he

[36] Pite, R., *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life*, cit., p. 67.

was, in the same spot, and to know no more people than he already knew (about half a dozen).[37]

What strikes us, is a distinct lack of ambition in such a little child boy. Moreover, this wish of never growing up strongly reminds us of Hardy's little Jude in the second chapter of the novel:

> Jude went out, and, feeling more than ever his existence to be an undemanded one, he lay down upon his back on a heap of litter near the pig-sty. The fog had by this time become more translucent, and the position of the sun could be seen through it. He pulled his straw hat over his face, and peered through the interstices of the plaiting at the white brightness, vaguely reflecting. Growing up brought responsibilities, he found. Events did not rhyme quite as he had thought. Nature's logic was too horrid for him to care for. That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another sickened his sense of harmony. As you got older, and felt yourself to be at the centre of your time, and not at a point in its circumference, as you had felt when you were little, you were seized with a sort of shuddering, he perceived. All around you there seemed to be something glaring, garish, rattling, and the noises and glares hit upon the little cell called your life, and shook it, and warped it.
>
> If he could only prevent himself growing up! He did not want to be a man.[38]

Such connections between the author's life and the character of Jude will be further explored in the following chapters, however it is interesting to notice the impact of episodes of Hardy's life on his literary works: there is much of little Thomas in little Jude's fictional character.

It is also needless to say that when he declared his musings to his mother, Jemima was not pleased at all and she used to throw them back at him as a token of ingratitude whenever he would start assuming some of his father's character traits. From details

[37] Hardy, T., *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 20.
[38] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure* (1895), ed. D. Taylor, London, Penguin Classics, 1998, Part I, Ch.2, p.18.

such as this, it goes without saying that the main burden in Thomas's childhood can be found in his mother's obsession and delusions regarding their family's social position and the apprehension on maintaining it.

Jemima had always been a strong-willed person, able to raise Thomas by herself and focused on giving him the best. However, deep issues as these and the extremely high expectations Thomas was subjected to, undoubtedly marked the author for life, both in his private and in his professional life.

There are no recordings of Thomas' crushes dating back to the period in which he started to enter the adult world. From his years as a schoolboy and onwards his whole universe was made of male figures and the few women he knew belonged to his family. The only exception worthy of note dates back to 1862, when he proposed out of the blue to a local girl. Mary Waight did not love him at all, and she obviously refused him, but the interesting part lies in Thomas' unusually impulsive act. His behaviour was actually a desperate attempt to stay in Dorchester, even to the point of being husband to a woman of thirty who might have given him a semblance of maternal security. To portray the nature of Hardy's divided soul, Pite writes:

> Freedom and security were the conflicting desires Hardy always wanted to balance and the hope of combining them underlay his actual marriage years later.[39]

After his first stay in London, in 1867 Thomas went back to Dorset in order to obtain some comfort from his home country. He had experienced a negative period in London, therefore he needed to retire for a short time and to feel safe. We know how much he loved Bockhampton, it had always been the perfect idyllic place for the author. However, his five years in London had changed him and at the same time Dorset had

[39] Pite, R., *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life,* cit., p. 91.

changed as well, and he felt as a stranger and he strongly desired to be part of the rural life once more, to fit back there.

2.2 Thomas and Tryphena

Tryphena Sparks was the way. Daughter of Maria Sparks, Jemima's sister, Tryphena was Hardy's first cousin. The two had known each other since they were children and she was the youngest of her siblings. According to some family stories, the three daughters, Tryphena, Martha Mary and Rebecca were so alike and beautiful, that young Thomas was thought to be in love with all three of them. Once again, the author's biography is extremely connected to his literary works and it excludes the hypothesis of a mere coincidence. In *Jude the Obscure*, Sue is Jude's first cousin, just as Tryphena. Moreover, the three Sparks sisters remind us of the three generations of Avices in *The Well-Beloved* Jocelyn Pierston is in love with.

Lois Deacon in her *Providence & Mr Hardy* even believed that Hardy and Tryphena had a child and that the author's marriage was influenced since the very beginning by his lost love for his cousin. [40] Deacon's views are merely sensationalistic, since other authors such as Millgate or Seymour-Smith, all interested in Hardy's life did not dare to elevate Tryphena above other relationships of the author nor to imply the existence of a child born out of their union.

When Thomas came back to Bockhampton from London, the girl was sixteen years old and she worked as a teacher. Her mother's health was starting to worsen, thus both the family and the relatives wanted to help the three daughters. It would not be surprising if Jemima had asked Thomas to assist young Tryphena with the intent of finding a suitable woman for her unhappy son. Despite several authors believing that the young couple was divided by Jemima's jealousy, Ralph Pite seems to have drawn closer to

[40] Cf. Deacon, L.; Coleman, T., *Providence & Mr Hardy*, quoted in Pite, R., *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life*, cit., p. 142.

the real point: while not being overly happy of having her four children separated from herself, their mother would have actually been satisfied with being able to have most of them within her reach.

Moreover, being an extremely clever girl and similar in character both to her mother and to Jemima, Tryphena would have proved perfect to keep Hardy away from his penchant for exhaustion, exactly as Jemima had always tried to do with her husband. Most of all, the young girl would not have taken away Thomas from his mother.

Hardy thought of her as the emblem of innocence, as proven by his *Thoughts of Phena*:

> Did her gifts and compassions enray and enarch her sweet ways
>
> With an aureate nimb?[41]

Therefore, his perception of Tryphena was the opposite of a *femme fatale*, she was not a classic beauty as her sister Martha Mary but a more naïve and attractive beauty and she was an extremely bright minded girl. Moreover, the central reason of Thomas' attraction was her embodiment of the country life in Dorset: they were both born there and had a common local knowledge and several memories in common. Her kindness and innocence, along with a sexuality nor aggressive or fully repressed, made her the counterpart of London: she gave him a chance to always be connected with Dorchester. The strength of their relationship derived from what Tryphena represented to Hardy and in a difficult period of frailty they became deeply involved, especially in 1868 and 1869.

However, something changed. It is difficult to understand why their relationship did not work and it probably did not depend on Tryphena at all. The reason of their breaking up might have been the very same of Thomas' attraction. She had become too

[41] Quoted in Pite, R., *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life,* cit., p. 146.

identified with the author's aims and wishes in a very particular and difficult period of his life. Naturally, while his opinions of London changed, so did his feelings for her. Moreover, it is highly possible that his first encounter with the publishing world played an important role in this sad disillusionment. Hardy started to have a renewed faith in his writing, it could help him to set up his future and make him more suitable to high class women.

A change of heart occurred and his transfer from Bockhampton to Weymouth gave him the opportunity to grow both personally and professionally. Being more isolated, not connected to his home, he learned to be self-sufficient and he started seeing his work as a way of creating something new, something personal and not as an ideal means to defend a community such as the rural one.

It became increasingly difficult for the couple to meet, Tryphena had remained in Puddletown where she once worked as a teacher, waiting to start a college in Salisbury or London in order to become a proper teacher. At the same time, in Weymouth Thomas had started to meet people of his age, thus noticing more and more the young age of his beloved.

What was once deemed to be pure an innocent, now had become unsophisticated and almost claustrophobic against the freedom provided by his new home. Having had the chance to have more experience in the world, Thomas saw Tryphena in a different light and now she was less special than before: it was like waking up from a dream. The woman he had loved had become valueless, meaningless ad empty to the author and they inevitably drifted apart.

At the same time, Hardy had learned something about himself. There had been something similar to his Angel Clare in the author's relationship with Tryphena, he had assumed the same capricious behaviour of his character and Pite clearly explains it to us:

> Angel misjudges Tess's simplicity in the same way that Hardy had misjudged Tryphena, making her into an image of perfection and then, inevitably, being disappointed by her. Tryphena had not been either ideal or commonplace; she had been an individual in her own right and Hardy had ignored that simple truth. [42]

In 1870, the girl finally left Puddletown for London in order to attend Stockwell College and since the author was often in the city to visit some publishers, it might have been easy for the couple to know more of each other and to grow up together. However, a major change occurred.

2.3 Mr and Mrs Hardy

In the same year, Hardy had been asked to reach the locality of St Juliot, in Cornwall, to inspect a church there. Given his architectural training, he had quite the experience in the field after spending several years as an apprentice to John Hicks, an architect based in Dorchester, and having worked for Arthur Blomfield, the company who built All Saints and Windsor from 1862 to 1864, in London. Given his previous personal experiences, it is easy to understand how in this period Thomas was extremely vulnerable, frail and tired. Therefore, his meeting with Emma Gifford came as a salvation, both in personal and professional terms.

Their first meeting seems to come straight out of a novel. During the night, Hardy arrived in St Juliot after a tiresome journey and it was Emma who had opened the door of the vicarage, since the vicar was actually suffering from gout attacks. It was love at first sight: while Emma did not expect a handsome, young man such as Thomas, he was in awe in meeting an extremely clever and beautiful woman with his same literary tastes.

[42] Pite, R., *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life,* cit., p. 165.

Emma was born in Plymouth and had moved to St Juliot with her sister Helen. The two sisters were extremely close since Emma had nursed her sister back to life after a bad miscarriage. Moreover, St Juliot was utterly isolated, and in addition to this she did not possess any money of her own. Despite being extremely good in music and at singing to the point that she directed the church choir, she shared a dull, lonely life with her sister. However, she firmly believed in love and passions, still hoping to find a perfect companion for herself. It seems that both Hardy and Emma had found their perfect match in one another.

The fact that the author had the habit to throw away most of his diaries and that he had actually decided to keep the ones recording his first visits to Emma is utterly telling. Moreover, it is interesting to notice the development of Hardy's feelings for the woman as recorded by his notes:

> March 9. Drove with Mrs Holder and Miss Gifford to Boscastle, and on to Tintagel and Penpethy slate-quarries, with a view to the church roofing. [43]

The day after, he writes: "March 10th. Went with E.L.G. to Beeny Cliff. She on horseback."[44] And some hours later, in the afternoon: "E. provokingly reading as she walked."[45] In two days, Emma had changed from Miss Gifford into E. and their feelings developed just as quickly during the summer.

When he came back in August, they spent their time reading and riding together, drawing some sketches and falling in love. In the following years, from 1871 to 1873, Hardy often visited Cornwall while living in Dorset since he had the chance to easily reach London whenever he needed. However, until the day of their marriage, their official union was uncertain because of financial issues and the difference of class

[43] Hardy, T., *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy by Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 77.
[44] Hardy, T., *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy by Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 78.
[45] Hardy, T., *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy by Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 78.

between the two. Given Hardy's penchant to quickly loose interest in his partners as with Tryphena, it is remarkable to see that his love for Emma did not waver during their four years of courtship and in the end, they married in 1874.

Once again, Thomas saw his wife as an emblem of innocence and purity, not reminding him of his first serious relationship with the girl from Puddletown, but of his very first fondness, the one for Lady Julia. Moreover, the main success of their marriage was to be found in their companionship, she supported her husband like nobody else, and she shared his ambitions and goals. Thomas, absolutely aware of his tendency to be disappointed by his ideals, always feared that his love for Emma would have soon started to diminish or fade. However, after the marriage, he was pleased to see her in a better light. She went on encouraging him and helping him in his writing career and in finding a successful path. She was focused on proving to be there for him as a friend, a companion, and a lover. Whenever he was rejected by publishers, she was there. Whenever he needed to go over his works, she would be ready to discuss them with him. Given the rigid times, we might think that she was seen as a muse by Hardy, however her bright mind and intelligence meant so much more to the author than a mere source of inspiration: she proved to be a faithful and equal partner.

Throughout their whole life together, Emma showed how devoted she was to Thomas, giving all the love and affection he never received from his own family. By cherishing him and acknowledging him as intellectually superior, she also gave him a feeling of power, enabling him to grow stronger and pushing his limits as a writer. So, Hardy's most intimate relationship held friendship in the foreground and passion in the background, focusing on help and comfort in both happy and negative periods.

However, given his divided nature, things were bound to go downwards sooner or later, and Emma had readily started to sense it. Hardy's deep desire changed, he wanted to become self-confident in the social and intellectual sphere, without any aid by his newly wed wife. He started to exclude her and to grow more distant towards her,

she came to label his work as a "child all your own & none of me"[46] and she started to be excluded by his social life as well.

His strengthening sense of self and his meeting with Helen Paterson, the illustrator for *Far From the Maddening Crown,* a woman he utterly admired, became a menace for Emma to the point that years later Thomas came to admit he regretted not having married Helen. In their first years of marriage, Thomas' everlasting discomfort in London along with the doubts on where to settle down, became highly stressing for Emma. They moved to Yeovil, Sturminster Newton, back to London and then to Wimborne, to finally stop in Dorset.

Rejected by his mother for not having settled down near his family and driven by Emma's father to become a successful writer, Hardy was extremely under pressure. Moreover, his wife's briskness about his melancholic nature did not help him at all. She had always been a very active woman, a horsewoman, a cyclist and she clearly feared his newly discovered attitude to be unhealthy. Nonetheless, she always tried to be helpful and accommodating as her good nature led her to be. During their residence in Sturminster Newton, Emma thought she had the chance and the stability to finally become an all-round wife: they were close to her husband's family but not under its yoke. It was the perfect place to start thinking about having children. The following comment by Hardy dates back to that period:

> Aug.13. We hear that Jane, our late servant is soon to have a baby. Yet never sign of one is there for us.[47]

Three years had passed since their wedding and time was running for both. At those times, the approach of menopause arrived earlier than nowadays, lowering to the age of forty-five and Emma was reaching her thirty-seventh year. At the same time,

[46] Quoted in Pite, R., *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life,* cit., p.199.
[47] Hardy, T., *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy by Thomas Hardy*, cit., p.119.

giving birth was more dangerous, especially for older women. Emma was an extremely maternal woman and Thomas was someone who had always loved and wanted children, it was almost a necessity for him since his only child for the time being was his work. But unfortunately, so it was meant to be even in his future life. For all his life he always feared to have let down his ancestors and of being unworthy of his family line, a pain and a regret that nothing, not even his success as a writer could make him forget. Despite no signs of impotency or lack of sex drive, Hardy had always been a man sexually repressed and his attraction and love for Emma derived from the purity she embodied. Moreover, he despised physical contact, avoiding handshakes whenever it was possible and Emma, on the other hand, was the perfect daughter of Victorian times, having internalized her role of angel of the house without any sexual impulses.

It is easy to imagine that the couple was inclined towards a more romantic and asexual love and relationship and these elements mixed with Emma's advancement towards menopause made it extremely difficult to successfully conceive children. The lack of babies became the main reason for resentment within the couple. Emma had lost a social status since infertility was clearly stigmatized at the time and on the other hand, Hardy was to always consider his lack of children as his greatest tragedy.

As Pite writes:

> The childless woman had failed in her social as well as marital obligations. The childless man, meanwhile, was a failure in Darwinian terms. He had proved that he was not among the fittest and that he would not survive. For Hardy, not having children proved what he was always likely to fear, that he was inadequate and weak – the last, degenerate example of a race that had once been strong.[48]

In later years, the couple tried to overcome their tragedy by volunteering to look after Gordon and Lilian Gifford, Emma's nephew and niece. They hosted the children at

[48] Pite, R., *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life,* cit., p.243.

Max Gate, their London house, and raised them as adoptive children. Thomas taught them everything he could, to the point of giving Lilian access to the classical world, once mainly intended for male scholars. Even though the children grew affectionate to their uncle and aunt in a deeper way than to their biological father, nothing could have changed the grief and the deep remorse of the Hardy's. The couple started to grow apart, and Thomas found himself wishing he had married other women. His tragedy, along with its shame and embarrassment, spurred him on in his career. His success would have been his only access to immortality, and he became devoted to it, thus giving birth to children of his own.

Having discussed important episodes of Hardy's experience as a child and focused on the author's marriage and its lack of children, in the following chapters the thesis will delve into the figures of children in the novels of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. Tess and the little Jude, along with the characters of Sorrow, Sue's children and Little Father Time are Hardy's immortal literary creatures, emblems of an innocence doomed by the same tragic fate, which guided the personal life of their creator.

Chapter 3.

“On a blighted star”: Children in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*

3.1 Tess's Siblings between the Romantic and the Malthusian Child

The journey of the novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was a difficult one. Planned in the spring and summer of 1889, the novel was composed from August onwards in Dorchester. However, all the publishers rejected Hardy's work, from Tillotson's to the Murray's Magazine and to Macmillan as well. The story was too horrifying and scandalous for their standards. *Tess* waited two years before being printed in July 1891 in the *Graphic* and the reason was because Hardy had decided to censor himself to avoid further problems.

As the author himself stated: "the treatment was a complete success, and the mutilated novel was accepted"[49]. From that moment, *Tess* became an instant bestseller, transforming Hardy into a famous writer. Set in the rural landscape of the southwest of England, the tragic plot of this Wessex novel is widely known. It is a masterpiece of realist fiction portraying both a divine and a more human injustice, exploring the never-ending battle between ancient and modern times and positioning humankind at the very centre of it all.

As hinted at in chapter 2, few relevant things have been written on children in Hardy's works and the critics have mostly focused on the figures of women in his novels. Children such as Sorrow or Tess's siblings, in this case, have been kept on the margins or dismissed. When babies are born from significant relationships such as Tess and Alec's or Jude and Sue's, the nature of the main characters' relationship became the focus.

Many are the characters depicted in *Tess*, however this chapter is meant to focus on the children portrayed in the novel. More specifically, by exploring the figures of Tess's siblings, Tess herself (as 'Tess the child') and her new-born Sorrow, this unit is meant to investigate what Hardy wanted to convey through these literary children.

[49] Hardy, T., *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, cit., p.232.

> Dismissing this, however, she busied herself with sprinkling the linen dried during the day-time, in company with her nine-year-old brother Abraham, and her sister Eliza-Louisa of twelve and a half, called ‘‘Liza-Lu,’ the youngest ones being put to bed. There was an interval of four years and more between Tess and the next of the family, the two who had filled the gap having died in their infancy, and this lent her a deputy-maternal attitude when she was alone with her juniors. Next in juvenility to Abraham came two more girls, Hope and Modesty; then a boy of three, and then the baby, who had just completed his first year.[50]

This passage, in the first phase of the novel, is the reader’s first encounter with Tess’s siblings. These children vaguely remind us of Dickens’s child figures - in number and economic condition - and going ahead in the text, it becomes clear they are a parody of the Romantic child:

> All these young souls were passengers in the Durbeyfield ship—entirely dependent on the judgement of the two Durbeyfield adults for their pleasures, their necessities, their health, even their existence. If the heads of the Durbeyfield household chose to sail into difficulty, disaster, starvation, disease, degradation, death, thither were these half-dozen little captives under hatches compelled to sail with them— six helpless creatures, who had never been asked if they wished for life on any terms, much less if they wished for it on such hard conditions as were involved in being of the shiftless house of Durbeyfield.[51]

Hardy makes it clear: the six Durbeyfields move away from the innocence of the Romantic child. They don’t have an individual identity and at the same time they belong to the child figure of the Condition of England novels. Tess’s siblings depend entirely on their irresponsible parents and on their decay and “degradation” as the

[50] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891), ed. Dolin, T., London, Penguin Classics, 2003, Phase the First, Ch.3, pp. 23-24.
[51] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the First, Ch.3, p. 24.

author calls it. As Pearce states: "The corruption of their parents and the decay of their way of life are highlighted by their existence. They become unwitting agents of Tess's destruction"[52]. They were never asked to be born and especially under such "hard conditions". With these siblings, the author distances himself from the image of the Romantic innocent child and wants to portray the other side of the coin, the "unruly, threatening unknown"[53].

The aforementioned passage from the novel might sound extremely melodramatic. However, the reader must keep in mind that at that precise moment in the plot, Tess is leaving the house in search of her parents and her brother Abraham. The three of them are not in danger. Mr Durbeyfield is actually at a local inn, certainly drunk and celebrating the news about his noble ancestry. His wife, Joan Durbeyfield, has joined him and has already been caught in his dream of aristocratic heritage.

This episode is extremely important. Here the dynamics among the members of the family can be clearly observed. In the very first chapter of the novel, Parson Tringham reveals to John Durbeyfield the supposed aristocratic status of his ancestors. Such information might have been regarded as meaningless and the misadventures of Tess would have never taken place. However, the opposite happens. Durbeyfield and his wife feel they have a chance to finally escape their poverty and their anxiety to climb the social ladder obnubilates their minds. In the chapter, it also becomes clear that Tess is the real responsible figure in the family, taking care of both her parents and siblings at the same time.

However, it is that same sense of duty and responsibility that will make her the victim of her parents' nonsensical ideas, unfortunately. The couple's belief that the future holds something better for them along with Parson Tringham's revelation mark the beginning of Tess's catastrophe. There is irony in this tragedy: the family's situation has not changed at all, and they are and will always be poor. Within this scenario, not

[52] Pearce, J. L., *The Figure of the Child in the Novels of Thomas Hardy,* cit., p. 50.
[53] Pearce, J. L., *The Figure of the Child in the Novels of Thomas Hardy,* cit., p.50.

only is it easy to feel sympathy for the protagonist but for her siblings as well, held as "little captives under hatches" and doomed to follow their parents' whims.

It is also interesting to have a closer look at the composition of the family. Tess is the eldest child, the first-born, followed by Liza-Lu and Abraham. Further on in the text, Hardy refers to the siblings as follows:

> The two biggest of the younger children had gone out with their mother; the four smallest, their ages ranging from three and-a-half years to eleven, all in black frocks, were gathered round the hearth babbling their own little subjects.[54]

The excerpt is peculiar. After their very first portrayal at the beginning of the novel, the siblings are no longer distinct from one another. They are referred to as a whole unit, as a legion. Their age and gender are specified no more. It is increasingly clear that they exist to symbolize something. Pearce underlines this feature, by stating:

> These children are not individuals but rather symbols of elemental force that is the external representation or inversion of Tess's own turbulent emotional life. Tess is uniquely susceptible to the emotional force that they in turn are uniquely equipped to apply to her.[55]

Another important detail can be observed in the siblings' names. The names of most of the children are present in two occasions only: in their first presentation to the reader and later, in chapter 4, after the death of Prince, the old family horse:

> When the hole was ready, Durbeyfield and his wife tied a rope round the horse and dragged him up the path towards it, the children following in funeral train. Abraham and 'Liza-Lu

[54] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the Sixth, Ch. LI, p. 356.
[55] Pearce, J. L., *The Figure of the Child in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, cit., p.50.

> sobbed, Hope and Modesty discharged their griefs in loud blares which echoed from the walls; and when Prince was tumbled in they gathered round the grave.[56]

It is necessary to go back in the plot to notice some important details. After the aforementioned events at the inn, Mr Durbeyfield is extremely drunk. This behaviour will become a constant in the text. At this point, Tess's sense of duty becomes extremely noticeable and relevant. Once again, she takes care of her father: she will leave for the market with Abraham to let her father rest. During the journey, the two siblings fall asleep and the worst happens. A collision with a local cart kills Prince and Tess is devoured by guilt. She is fully aware that the loss of the horse will devastate her family and their financial situation.

Several elements stand out from the episode. Abraham is the eldest male sibling and yet, he has nothing of the male representative, he is the passive element. Moreover, the biblical reference makes everything more ironic. While in the *Book of Genesis* Abraham is the founding father, the powerful and honest patriarch of a great community, in Hardy's novel the child Abraham does not represent any of these characteristics and none of them belong to the Durbeyfields family.

The sisters, Hope and Modesty, have telling names as well: the virtues they take their names from are an essential component of Tess's character. Alec takes her modesty and her hope away and the Durbeyfields are ready to accept this awful event. Tess will finally have the chance to become a lady:

> There were tears also in Joan Durbeyfield's eyes as she turned to go home. But by the time she had got back to the village she was passively trusting to the favour of accident. However, in bed that night she sighed, and her husband asked her what was the matter. 'Oh, I don't know exactly,' she said. 'I was thinking that perhaps it would ha' been better if Tess had not gone.' 'Oughtn't ye to have thought of that before?' 'Well, 'tis a chance for the maid—Still,

[56] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the First, Ch. IV, p. 35.

> if 'twere the doing again, I wouldn't let her go till I had found out whether the gentleman is really a good-hearted young man and choice over her as his kinswoman.' 'Yes, you ought, perhaps, to ha' done that,' snored Sir John. Joan Durbeyfield always managed to find consolation somewhere: 'Well, as one of the genuine stock, she ought to make her way with 'en, if she plays her trump card aright. And if he don't marry her afore he will after. For that he's all afire wi' love for her any eye can see.' 'What's her trump card? Her d'Urberville blood, you mean?' 'No, stupid; her face—as 'twas mine.'[57]

The reader might think that Joan feels a genuine concern for her daughter. And she does. However, with "if he don't marry her afore he will after", it becomes clear that the mother's thoughts quickly shift from the wellbeing of her child to the family's future perspectives. Tess is clearly sacrificing herself for the others throughout the whole novel. She is the modern version of a Greek heroine as many critics have underlined. During the few moments in which she doubts her actions, it is the cries, the "loud blares" of her siblings that convince her to act.

As Pearce brilliantly states:

> The irony of these innocents driving Tess into a situation in which she loses her innocence is clear. This childish Greek chorus, however, also comes to represent the grief that Tess herself never verbally expresses. They echo what she must feel but cannot say, while also emphasising the gap between their unabashed childishness and the adult that Tess feels she must become. [58]

Tess is always controlled, shedding no tears during Prince's funeral, keeping all her emotions inside. All her siblings constitute her counterpart and their anti-Romantic characteristic can be found in their chaotic, almost threatening nature.

[57] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the First, Ch. VII, pp. 52-53.
[58] Pearce, J. L., *The Figure of the Child in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 53.

Hardy was able to convey through this group of children several essential notions. Firstly, the siblings' quantity and absence of names underlines their insignificance and reflect the social anxiety about children. They are the visual representation of what Malthus viewed as "the natural tendency of the labouring classes of society to increase beyond the demand for their labour, or the means of their adequate support"[59]. Therefore, the Durbeyfields children are non-existent as individuals, they exist as a whole unit. Their being a violent and chaotic mass truly brings them to represent the Malthusian children.

Moreover, what the author wanted to portray through these siblings is another most important feature. The Romantic child normally represented the future and commonly he also represented the idea of a positive one. However, the future holds nothing positive for Hardy and he connects the Durbeyfields siblings to a negative future.

As always, Hardy draws from contemporary discourses and as Pearce underlines:

> The narratives of progression inherent in non-Darwinian discourses of evolution also reflected the terrifying inevitability of death and decay of the individual, and potentially of the race as a whole. Gillian Beer, in an analysis of Darwin's work, charts the huge impact of the idea that "whole species had vanished and even the evidence of their existence had crumbled away…death was extended from the individual organism to the whole species". Heredity in the nineteenth century was very much a developing science. General ignorance of Mendel's theories left nineteenth-century society with only a vague scientific basis for competing theories of heredity. Speculation as to what was inherited, and how, abounded. Darwinian evolutionary theory, which rejected a meta-narrative of progress in favour of chance and natural selection, fed a cultural anxiety that the race might be not progressing but degenerating.

[59] Quoted in Moore, J. R., *Religion in Victorian Britain*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2001, p.389.

It becomes quite clear that at the time, the concept of heredity was a difficult one to understand and it created anxieties. Goldie Morgentaler wrote that "as long as the role of sperm in reproduction remained unclear, Victorian attitudes towards heredity remained a jumble of contradictions and confusions".[60] Therefore this provided a rich ground for literature and myths relating to the child.

Furthermore, the siblings are an instrument to increase sympathy for Tess. They exist to highlight the unique good nature of their eldest sister. They are the personification of the many virtues of Tess and of the opposite forces coexisting within her. A passage from Chapter VI is extremely telling about the unruly, almost threatening force of the little ones. By now, Tess has met Alec D'Urberville and once back home she finds a letter from Mrs. D'Urberville offering her a job. Tess has tried in vain to obtain other jobs closer to her family and now she is doubtful about whether to accept Mrs. D'Urberville's proposal:

> 'I don't know what to say!' answered the girl restlessly. 'It is for you to decide. I killed the old horse, and I suppose I ought to do something to get ye a new one. But—but—I don't quite like Mr d'Urberville being there!' The children, who had made use of this idea of Tess being taken up by their wealthy kinsfolk (which they imagined the other family to be) as a species of dolorifuge after the death of the horse, began to cry at Tess's reluctance, and teased and reproached her for hesitating. 'Tess won't go-o-o and be made a la-a-dy of!—no, she says she wo-o-on't!' they wailed, with square mouths. 'And we shan't have a nice new horse, and lots o' golden money to buy fairlings! And Tess won't look pretty in her best cloze no mo-o-ore!' Her mother chimed in to the same tune: a certain way she had of making her labours in the house seem heavier than they were by prolonging them indefinitely, also weighed in the argument. Her father alone preserved an attitude of neutrality. 'I will go,' said Tess at last.[61]

[60] Morgentaler, G., *Dickens and Heredity; When Like Begets Like*, New York, St Martin's Press, 2000, p.22.
[61] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the First, Ch. VI, pp. 47-48.

It is extremely clear from the excerpt what is the main problem of Tess's life. She is uncertain about leaving, her instinct tells her not to. However, it is the unrestrained emotions of her siblings – the opposite of her self-control – to overwhelm her and to convince her to go. In the end, Tess sacrifices her own innocence to save the innocence of her own siblings.

3.2 Tess: between Fallen Woman and Child

After focusing on Tess's siblings, we are now going to shift the attention to the figure of Tess, but not so much Tess as a woman, rather Tess as a child woman, just as Hardy imagined her. To do so, it is necessary to have a look at the years preceding the birth of the novel. As hinted at in chapter 2, Hardy's biography is strictly connected to his works. In 1881, the author left London and moved back to Dorchester.

As Pite suggests:

> Hardy's principal feeling in moving back home was not nostalgic, though that is what one might expect and what has usually been assumed, by both critics and biographers. Instead, he was looking forward, and putting the past behind him in order to address the realities of his situation – his time of life, his gifts and his limitations as a writer, and the prospect of never having children.[62]

In the following twelve years he created four of his best novels: *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Woodlanders*, *Tess* and *Jude*. It also becomes quite clear that the biographical aspects of Hardy's novels are not merely ornamental, they are the deep roots of his personal work. It is exactly the case of *Tess*.

[62] Pite, R., *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life,* cit., pp. 264-265.

Despite having heard no more from Tryphena, at the news of her death in 1890, he was brought to remember her and what she had meant for him. He knew that she was the woman who had inspired him to care for the virtues of rural life and in a sense the essence of it all permeates the character of Tess.

The full title of Hardy's masterpiece is "Tess of the D'Urbervilles – A pure woman faithfully presented by Thomas Hardy". The adjective "pure" is an extremely interesting choice. It refers to a woman whose innocence is not represented by her chastity but by her heart. Following this thread of thoughts, Pite beautifully connects the figure of Tess and Hardy's poem *Thoughts of Phena*:

> Hardy was imagining in Tess a woman who had no side to her and no thought of exploiting her beauty to her advantage, someone like Tryphena 'whose dreams were upbrimming with light | And with laughter her eyes'[63]

Tess represents the pure woman, capable of the selfless and genuine love which also included the sexual sphere. Sensuality permeates the masterpiece and it also derived from a turn in the author's belief.

After years of marriage and the ghost of Tryphena inspiring him, he now believed that sex was meant to be an essential part of the romantic relationship. It was no longer to be kept at distance since it was another means to convey love and deep-felt affection in the life of a couple. However, given the Victorian morality and the nature of his own marriage, it is clear how this side of married life was nearly non-existent for Hardy. Therefore, Tess is not only the emblem of a pure woman, she is also Hardy's ideal companion.

Tess is meant to represent another crucial important issue for Hardy:

[63] Quoted in Pite, R., *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life,* cit., p.317.

> Ever since I began to write – certainly ever since I wrote "Two on a Tower" in 1881 – I have felt that the doll of English fiction must be demolished, if England is to have a school of fiction at all [...] the development of a more virile type of novel is not incompatible with sound morality.[64]

With his gallery of women, not dolls but fleshy women, Hardy wanted to rescue and reform English fiction. Everything depended on the truthfulness of their portrayal and of their relations with the opposite sex. He managed to reach his purpose, and the author Margaret Oliphant intensely declared: "What solid bodies, what real existences, in contrast with the pale fiction of didactic romance"[65]. Havelock Ellis refers to Hardy's women as "undines of the earth whose charm is unique" and also adds that he had a "unique insight into the mysteries of women's hearts"[66]. The redemption of English fiction is in the hands of the author's heroines.

Post-feminist critics such as Kaja Silverman and Penny Boumelha condemned the author's gaze as typically male by stating that "all the passionate commitment to exhibiting Tess as the subject of her own experience evokes an unusually overt maleness in the narrative voice"[67]. For instance, it was suggested that the excessive focus on Tess's mouth (such as the reference to her "mobile peony mouth"[68]) in Chapter II, or the act of Alec feeding her a strawberry in Chapter V, are linked to Hardy's own desire for his character.

[64] Quoted in Pite, R., *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life,* cit., p.305.
[65] Quoted in Pykett, L., *Ruinous Bodies: Women and Sexuality in Hardy's Late Fiction*, in "Critical Survey", Vol. 5, No. 2, 1993, pp. 157-166, p. 157.
[66] Quoted in Pykett, L., *Ruinous Bodies: Women and Sexuality in Hardy's Late Fiction*, cit., p. 157.
[67] Quoted in Pykett, L., *Ruinous Bodies: Women and Sexuality in Hardy's Late Fiction*, cit., p. 158.
[68] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the First, Ch. II, p.14.

Boumelha declares:

> the narrator's erotic fantasies of penetration and engulfment enact a pursuit, violation and persecution of Tess in parallel with those she suffers at the hands of her two lovers ... [as he] seeks to enter Tess, through her eyes . . . her mouth . . . and through her flesh.[69]

However, Hardy's "onslaught on the doll", as Pykett calls it, is achieved in *Tess* in such a remarkable way that the afore-mentioned post-feminist critiques do not stand up.

As Pykett states:

> In this novel Hardy is working both within and against a discourse on sexuality in which female sexual purity denotes (and consists of) sexual passivity, chastity and asceticism. Hardy seeks to contest this dominant definition by developing a version of female sexual purity which is sensuous and active.[70]

The writer gives life to a girl - woman who goes beyond the dichotomies of passive/active and asexual/sexually active. Tess, despite being a victim, dominates the whole novel.

Two main points are essential to Tess's characterisation in the novel and they will be the focus of the following pages: her status as a fallen woman and her infantilisation. The fallen woman was a symbol, a ghostly image haunting nineteenth century literature. When this alienated character was also mother to an illegitimate child, she became automatically excluded from society. At this point the child's presence might help in her path to redemption.

[69] Quoted in Pykett, L., *Ruinous Bodies: Women and Sexuality in Hardy's Late Fiction*, cit., p. 159.
[70] Pykett, L., *Ruinous Bodies: Women and Sexuality in Hardy's Late Fiction*, cit., pp. 159-160.

It is not surprising that most of the time, Victorian authors decided to introduce the theme of the death of the child. This removal of the illegitimate child seen as a punishment would allow the fallen woman to be reintroduced into society. Obviously, reality and literature were on two different levels, but as Auerbach suggests, the fallen woman became a powerful "shared cultural mythology"[71]in literature. However, not all fallen women are the same. There is something different between Hardy's Tess and other popular characters such as Sarah Woodruff in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) or Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede* (1859).

It is interesting to briefly focus on the character of Hetty because just as Sarah Woodruff, she is an agent, she participates in her own fallen status. Once Hetty discovers she is pregnant, she abruptly leaves Adam in search of Arthur Donnithorne, the father of her child. Exhausted and ashamed she gives birth in a field and there she abandons her own child to die. Once her crime is discovered, she is condemned to death but saved at the very end by Arthur. She autonomously banishes herself from society and this is represented by her long search for Arthur. She has condemned her own child to death, and she is now a criminal. It is important to observe that it is extremely hard for the reader to sympathize with her character so much so that Eliot as well seems to judge her.

The opposite happens with Tess. She loves her Sorrow dearly and instead of being condemned, as with Hetty's murder, she is in a way redeemed by his death. Furthermore, she is herself a victim in the novel. In the following passage, from Chapter XLVII, it is interesting to notice that by now, Tess has understood her status as a victim. Alec has reappeared, he wants to convince her to go back to him since Angel is neglecting her and a furious Tess passionately slaps him. This is her following speech:

[71] Auerbach, N., *The Rise of the Fallen Woman*, in "Nineteenth-Century Fiction", Vol. 35, No. 1, (June, 1980), pp. 29-52, p.29.

> ‘Now, punish me!’ she said, turning up her eyes to him with the hopeless defiance of the sparrow’s gaze before its captor twists its neck. ‘Whip me, crush me; you need not mind those people under the rick! I shall not cry out. Once victim, always victim—that’s the law!’[72]

From the very beginning, Tess inspires so much tenderness in the reader that he is shocked at the injustices she has to face. She is no agent of her own destruction. Her whole life is dedicated to sacrifice and it lies in the hands of “the Immortals”, as Hardy calls them. The moment of her alienation is her passage to Trantridge. The innocent victim is raped, however her pregnancy does not banish her. The author is faithful to the countryside scenery he knew so well. As it happened in the reality of rural life, she is reintegrated in the society where she grew up.

Tess is too pure to be part of this world and she has always been unique from the very beginning. Hardy’s portrays her as exceptional from the very first chapters. In Chapter II, when she takes part to the May Day festivities with the other women from her village, she stands out from them all.

Angel Clare joins the village dance and yet fate doesn’t make him choose Tess. “He took almost the first that came to hand”[73] underlines the author, and he doesn’t choose Tess. However, his moment of departure is crucial. It is while leaving that he notices her. The passage is beautiful in the smallest details as a movie scene:

> He had not yet overtaken his brothers, but he paused to get breath, and looked back. He could see the white figures of the girls in the green enclosure whirling about as they had whirled when he was among them. They seemed to have quite forgotten him already. All of them, except, perhaps, one. This white shape stood apart by the hedge alone. From her position he knew it to be the pretty maiden with whom he had not danced.[74]

[72] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the Sixth, Ch. XLVII, p. 332.
[73] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the First, Ch. II, p.17.
[74] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the First, Ch. II, p.18.

In the end, it is her murder of Alec that condemns her to death. As Auerbach comments, it is only to Stonehenge that Tess feels to belong:

> she finds her ultimate "home," not in her posthumous reconciliation with Angel, but at the empty altar of Stonehenge where she waits to be arrested, receiving through this final setting architectural, historical, and divine recognition. Things give Tess an epic life, belying her recurrent humiliations [...]. By stationing her against large and grand objects, Hardy gives her a borrowed magnitude that defies human measurements of her fall.[75]

It seems that facing Tess, Hardy is renouncing the trope of the fallen woman. He cares so much for her that he underlines her victim status, her pure heart and her adherence to moral values. He puts her on an altar both metaphorically and physically.

However, by doing so, he does not give her any chance to progress or to grow up. Hardy is like a father, loving so much his creature as to unconsciously confining her to childhood. Indeed, the second essential theme linked with Tess is her infantilisation at Hardy's hands. Once again having a closer look at the original title proves to be interesting. In "Tess of the D'Urbervilles – A Pure Woman faithfully presented by Thomas Hardy", the term "woman" catches the reader's attention. During the novel, the protagonist is never seen as an adult and both the author and the other characters contribute to this. Even the absence of a Bildungsroman structure conveys the idea that 'Tess the child' never grows up. The text itself has a cyclic nature: Tess ends her journey just as powerless as she started it.

But Tess is not seen as a child only because Hardy wanted to keep her a child. He was clearly inspired by contemporary scientific discourses. Darwin himself states:

[75] Auerbach, N., *The Rise of the Fallen Woman*, cit., pp. 43-44.

> Male and female children resemble each other closely, like the young of so many other animals in which the adult sexes differ; they likewise resemble the mature female much more closely, than the mature male.[76]

And he also adds:

> Woman, owing to her maternal instincts, displays these qualities towards her infants in an eminent degree; therefore it is likely that she should often extend them towards her fellow-creatures. Man is the rival of other men; he delights in competition, and this leads to ambition which passes too easily into selfishness. These latter qualities seem to be his natural and unfortunate birth right. It is generally admitted that with woman the powers of intuition, of rapid perception, and perhaps of imitation, are more strongly marked than in man; but some, at least, of these faculties are characteristic of the lower races, and therefore of a past and lower state of civilisation.[77]

Therefore, it is not surprising that Tess appears as a child-woman in the novel. Apparently at those times, both science and society compared women and children to a "lower state of civilisation". Throughout the novel the conditions of woman and child are at risks.

The protagonist gives birth to Sorrow:

> While the children, scarcely awake, awe-stricken at her manner, their eyes growing larger and larger, remained in this position, she took the baby from her bed—a child's child—so immature as scarce to seem a sufficient personality to endow its producer with the maternal title.[78]

[76] Darwin, C., *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), ed. Bonner, J. T.; May, R. M., and Robert M. May, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981, p. 317.
[77] Darwin, C., *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, cit., pp. 326-327.
[78] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the Second, Ch. XIV, p. 94.

It becomes clear how two pure children cannot coexist within such a narrative. The moment Tess becomes a mother she is bound to grow up into an adult while Sorrow, "the child's child", takes her place as the innocent being in the story.

However, Hardy cleverly solves the situation: Tess's son dies. The girl is bound to be the child-woman until the end. It seems that Hardy's refusal to let Tess grow up is a way to protect her from the status of fallen woman, and the child myth is almost a shield.

Tess's innocence is not only part of her infantilisation. It has to be kept in mind that she belongs to the rural setting of Wessex and that she had a simple upbringing, two factors that helped to shape her innocence. The trait deriving from her infantilisation is her naïve nature. Such nature is connected to another crucial theme of the text, probably the most important: Tess is not aware of her own physical beauty. Despite being a pure and innocent being, she will be ruined by her own body, it seems that she is almost cursed by it. Tess is a living paradox. She is a child and a mother, a passionate creature, a lover of life and at the same time the essence of sacrifice and duty.

But especially, as Hardy cleverly describes:

> Phases of her childhood lurked in her aspect still. 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. Yet few knew, and still fewer considered this. A small minority, mainly 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: but to almost everybody she was a fine and picturesque country girl, and no more.[79]

[79] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the First, Ch. II, pp. 15-16.

Therefore, it is the innocence of her beauty that attracts and seduces everyone: that "twelfth year in her cheeks", the ninth year in her eyes and the fifth in the expressions of her mouth. Whenever he has the chance, Hardy highlights the childishness of her traits.

Her being naïve does not save her, Tess's own body betrays her by plunging her into the arms of Alec. As Pearce brilliantly explains:

> Hardy deliberately portrays her burgeoning sexuality as wholly unconscious to emphasise this. She therefore remains within the protective and redemptive paradigm of the Romantic child while generating the sexual and textual tension that drives the novel.[80]

3.3 Tess's Infantilisation

As already stated, infantilisation is not brought onwards by the author only, but by other characters as well. Therefore, it is interesting to analyse the role of 'Tess the child' within the context of her family and of her relationship with Alec. From the very beginning of her story, the girl is so bound to her sense of duty to become the real responsible member of the family. She is never free to be at the level of her siblings: she has responsibilities and yet she is always powerless.

After the powerful scene of Prince's death, it is the animal's funeral that claims the attention. Tess's powerlessness in her life's events is highlighted by the incident that she was asleep. It was bound to happen:

> The bread-winner had been taken away from them; what would they do? 'Is he gone to heaven?' asked Abraham, between the sobs. Then Durbeyfield began to shovel in the earth,

[80] Pearce, J. L., *The Figure of the Child in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, cit., p.93.

> and the children cried anew. All except Tess. Her face was dry and pale, as though she regarded herself in the light of a murderess.[81]

It is interesting to highlight Tess's behaviour in this situation. The protagonist is fully aware of what has happened: among all the siblings she is the only one who is not crying. The only source of income has just died, and the pallor of her face is telling. This is not a simple sense of guilt, something which every child has experienced. Tess has understood that from now on her family's future is on her shoulders.

This initial episode is crucial to the plot. It foresees in various ways what will happen in the future. "The pointed shaft" impaling Prince is a clear reference to Tess's rape and "the huge pool of blood" oozing from the horse's wound foresees the death of Alec. Most of all, the whole episode irrevocably ties the girl and her fate to her family, just as Pearce explains:

> From this point in the text it is the governing force in Tess's life, overruling at times her independent judgement. She remains part of and responsible for the family unit despite becoming mentally and often geographically increasingly distant from them.[82]

'Tess the child' has learnt that she is alone in the world, she has no one to rely on and that at the same time everyone relies on her. When she is leaving her family for Talbothays, just as a working-class child, Hardy's shows the reader how much she has understood this:

> Her kindred dwelling there would probably continue their daily lives as heretofore, with no great diminution of pleasure in their consciousness, although she would be far off, and they deprived of her smile. In a few days the children would engage in their games as merrily as

[81] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the First, Ch. IV, p. 35.
[82] Pearce, J. L., *The Figure of the Child in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, cit., p.97.

> ever, without the sense of any gap left by her departure. This leaving of the younger children she had decided to be for the best; were she to remain they would probably gain less good by her precepts than harm by her example.[83]

Furthermore, it is by thinking of her family's well-being that she makes the ultimate sacrifice. Hoping for a greater good for her siblings, she goes back to Alec and guarantees the Durbeyfield an economic stability.

Tess and Alec's relationship is probably the clearest context in which Tess's infantilisation can be observed. Within the course of the relationship, Tess understands how much powerless she is and Alec's behaviour towards her confounds her to the point that she does not know what she thinks of him. From the very first moment they meet, the girl is taken aback. Alec's appearance is not what she expected from a D'Urberville:

> He had an almost swarthy complexion, with full lips, badly moulded, though red and smooth, above which was a well-groomed black moustache with curled points, though his age could not be more than three or four-and-twenty. Despite the touches of barbarism in his contours, there was a singular force in the gentleman's face, and in his bold rolling eye. 'Well, my Beauty, what can I do for you?' said he, coming forward. And perceiving that she stood quite confounded: 'Never mind me. I am Mr d'Urberville. Have you come to see me or my mother?'[84]

As soon as they meet, Alec is fascinated by the girl and her beauty, the sensuality permeating the pages of their first encounter is quite telling. In the following excerpt, Hardy seems to warn the reader that nothing good will come from this union:

[83] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the Third, Ch. XVI, p. 101.
[84] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the First, Ch. V, p. 40.

> For a moment—only for a moment—when they were in the turning of the drive, between the tall rhododendrons and conifers, before the lodge became visible, he inclined his face towards her as if—but, no: he thought better of it, and let her go.
>
> Thus the thing began. Had she perceived this meeting's import she might have asked why she was doomed to be seen and coveted that day by the wrong man, and not by some other man, the right and desired one in all respects— as nearly as humanity can supply the right and desired; yet to him who amongst her acquaintance might have approximated to this kind, she was but a transient impression, half forgotten. In the ill-judged execution of the well-judged plan of things the call seldom produces the comer, the man to love rarely coincides with the hour for loving.[85]

There is something prophetical in that "thus the thing began". The author makes it clear: meeting Alec has been a curse, Tess has been "doomed" by their encounter and it is too late already. However, the consequent tragedy of her rape is not enough. Alec does not disappear from Tess's life and the whole plot seems a cat-and-mouse game. The presence of Angel is not enough to save her. Tess is not destined to a happy ending nor to the relief of a romantic love. Reality hits hard and it takes everything away from her.

Later in the novel, Alec reappears. He proposes to the girl, momentarily filled by feelings of guilt for his awful act. The passage is extremely interesting. If the reader has not caught it before, now Hardy clearly shows the nature of the relationship between Tess and Alec:

> 'You will not marry me, Tess, and make me a self-respecting man?' he repeated, as soon as they were over the furrows. 'I cannot.' 'But why?' 'You know I have no affection for you.' 'But you would get to feel that in time, perhaps—as soon as you really could forgive me?' 'Never!' 'Why so positive?' 'I love somebody else.' The words seemed to astonish him. 'You do?' he cried. 'Somebody else? But has not a sense of what is morally right and proper any

[85] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the First, Ch. V, p. 43.

> weight with you?' 'No, no, no—don't say that!' 'Anyhow, then, your love for this other man may be only a passing feeling which you will overcome—' 'No—no.' 'Yes, yes! Why not?' 'I cannot tell you.' 'You must in honour!' 'Well then ... I have married him.' 'Ah!' he exclaimed; and he stopped dead and gazed at her. 'I did not wish to tell—I did not mean to!' she pleaded. 'It is a secret here, or at any rate but dimly known. So will you, PLEASE will you, keep from questioning me? You must remember that we are now strangers.' 'Strangers—are we? Strangers!' [...] 'Is that man your husband?' he asked mechanically, denoting by a sign the labourer who turned the machine. 'That man!' she said proudly. 'I should think not!' 'Who, then?' 'Do not ask what I do not wish to tell!' she begged, and flashed her appeal to him from her upturned face and lash shadowed eyes.[86]

Until the very end Tess does not want to admit that she is a married woman. Alec has to extrapolate the fact from her. The conversation is made of repudiations, denials and in the end, she even begs him. The passage conveys the real nature of Alec and Tess's relationship: Alec forces her to tell him the truth. The girl holds no power in her life and especially in front of D'Urberville. Most of all, such exchange of lines reminds the reader of another relationship, something which everyone has experienced in life. The relationship between a parent and his child. After an attentive reading of the novel under this point of view, it becomes transparent that Tess behaves in the most childish way towards Alec. While he seems to be in control of everything, his emotions, every situation, she is not able to control anything at all. Tess has innocence, the child quality *par excellence*, and Alec is as sensual as conceited.

The second, crucial episode attesting the parent and child relationship between the two can be found in Phase the Sixth. Here, Alec is no longer a preacher. He has discarded the pious man's clothes, his desire for Tess has reawakened:

> 'You have been the cause of my backsliding,' he continued, stretching his arm towards her waist; 'you should be willing to share it, and leave that mule you call husband for ever.' One

[86] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the Sixth, Ch. XLVI, pp. 316-317.

> of her leather gloves, which she had taken off to eat her skimmer-cake, lay in her lap, and without the slightest warning she passionately swung the glove by the gauntlet directly in his face. It was heavy and thick as a warrior's, and it struck him flat on the mouth. Fancy might have regarded the act as the recrudescence of a trick in which her armed progenitors were not unpractised. Alec fiercely started up from his reclining position. A scarlet oozing appeared where her blow had alighted, and in a moment the blood began dropping from his mouth upon the straw. But he soon controlled himself, calmly drew his handkerchief from his pocket, and mopped his bleeding lips. She too had sprung up, but she sank down again.[87]

Tess strikes Alec as she metaphorically strikes the reader. The physical violence is her only answer to the torment inflicted upon her by this man. Moreover, she does not seem fazed by her act, she "passionately" hits him. Hardy underlines the heroic nature of Tess's act, the gauntlet is "heavy and thick as a warrior's".

She does everything in her power to rebel and to oppose to Alec but once again his response is a collected one: "he soon controlled himself", just as a parent would do in front of a whimsical child. In part though, it is understandable that Tess's violence is her only way to stand up for herself in front of D'Urberville. Tess feels entrapped and crushed as an animal and it is not surprising that her instinctual response is one of violence. This is her only way to exist in front of him and the blood oozing from his mouth in the excerpt, just as the blood oozing from Prince's wound, is foreseeing Alec's death.

Given the infantilisation of the protagonist perduring in the novel, the reader might think that Hardy would not give her a chance to escape her cage. Eventually, at the very end, Tess will grow up. She will become an adult. However, this passage to maturity is obtained at a high price. It requires blood to be spilled, just as in the best pagan fashion. At this point in the novel, Tess has given up. She has gone back to Alec, accepting his protection because desperate for Angel's continuous absence and refusal of her. However, her husband is back, he has learned to accept Tess as she is, but it is

[87] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the Sixth, Ch. XLVII, p. 331.

too late. She reveals to him what she has done and Angel leaves. A poignant passage follows: Tess is heartbroken, Alec has deceived her once again and now she confronts him. The girl, in the same angry and childish way accuses D'Urberville and from the keyhole the reader is only able to witness his last angry answer.

Then, just as the landlady, the reader knows no more until the truth comes to the surface:

> Mrs Brooks pondered on the delay, and on what probable relation the visitor who had called so early bore to the couple upstairs. In reflecting she leant back in her chair. As she did so her eyes glanced casually over the ceiling till they were arrested by a spot in the middle of its white surface which she had never noticed there before. It was about the size of a wafer when she first observed it, but it speedily grew as large as the palm of her hand, and then she could perceive that it was red. The oblong white ceiling, with this scarlet blot in the midst, had the appearance of a gigantic ace of hearts.[88]

Thus, Tess has put an end both to her oppressor and her status as a child; she has refused to sacrifice herself further. Revenge has been served and she is finally in control of her life. A change has come, and it is strikingly clear in the different way in which Hardy now portrays his beloved protagonist. Now, she will never be again the simple girl in the white dress and with the red ribbon in her hair as in the first chapters of the novel. She is "fully dressed now in the walking costume of a well-to-do young lady"[89]. The girl has become a lady, the body that had cursed her until that moment, has now acted by killing Alec.

[88] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the Seventh, Ch. LVI, p.332.
[89] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the Seventh, Ch. LVI, p. 331.

3.4 Sorrow and the Tragic Legacy of the Romantic Child

After discussing the figure of 'Tess the child' in the most important passages, it is now possible to draw a conclusion about what Hardy wanted to convey through the character of his protagonist. Fate and the curse of the D'Urbervilles is not the only component for Tess's tragedy. Here everyone oversees his/her own destiny, everyone is in between ancient and modern times. Tess (and Jude as chapter 4 will argue) is the victim of Hardy's modern tragedy. In *Tess*, Pite observes that "history is an assault – the rape and destruction of a distinct, unique culture by indifferent, outside forces. What Alec does to Tess, in other words, London is doing to Dorset".[90] This point is crucial to the meaning of Tess's nature. In the novel, the pagan Nature coexists with the "prefigurative superstitions"[91]of religious heritage. The rural world Tess and Hardy were used to, is slowly degenerating.

The author considered that "to model our conduct on Nature's apparent conduct, as Nietszche would have taught, can only bring disaster to humanity"[92]. Such conduct was a dark and dangerous force capable of creating a modern era of degradation and Alec represents such degraded modernity. As Pite suggested, the rape of Tess at Alec's hands is the result of the advance of modern times[93]. Through Tess's pain and her unfortunate life journey, Hardy is showing us something. As Villari observes, according to Hardy all the modern theories negating the centrality of pain in the human life, were totally false.[94] Tess's innate capacity to empathize for animals, to feel sympathy for them is opposed to the modern violence and indifference of Alec (and of Arabella as well, in *Jude the Obscure*). 'Tess the child' is Hardy's sweetest and most innocent victim and the readers cannot but empathise with her.

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[90] Pite, R., *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life,* cit., p.319.
[91] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the First, Ch. VI, p.44.
[92] Hardy, T., *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, cit., p.339.
[93] Pite, R., *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life,* cit., p.319.
[94] Cf. Villari, E., '*La Fatale Ostilità tra Carne e Spirito'. Paganesimo, Cristianesimo e Tragico Moderno in Tess of the D'Urbervilles e Jude the Obscure,* in Tortonese, P., ed., *Il Paganesimo nella Letteratura dell'Ottocento*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2009, pp. 205-228, p. 222.

Hardy successfully conveys his message about modern times and in the most powerful way: this new world is not worthy of good-natured people capable of humanity such as Tess. This modern heroine, this "pure woman", who loves life and everything it offers until her very end is the stark opposite of the modern and yet withered soul of modernity represented by Alec.

The last part of this chapter focuses on the character of Sorrow. Tess and Alec's child is presented to the reader in the second part of the novel, entitled "Maiden no More". It is interesting that the baby is present and lives for only one chapter, specifically in chapter XIV. The existence of this creature is ephemeral but at the same time extremely powerful.

Sorrow's presence is revealed in the most surprising way: we learn of his birth all of a sudden, by Tess's act of breastfeeding him. Hardy is extremely clear, the protagonist has undergone something shocking, her rape has changed her life forever. There is no going back: "Tess Durbeyfield, otherwise D'Urberville,' was 'somewhat changed – the same, but not the same"[95]. As already said, Hardy is inspired by the Romantic innocence of the child myth and he takes care of Tess by using Sorrow and his death to protect her. In literature the character of the dead or dying child, such as in Dickens for instance, has some religious hues in it. These innocents going to heaven, surrendering to death, are seen as angels. With his purity and death, Sorrow is the tragic heir to this legacy of Romantic innocents and he redeems his mother. It can be said that he is the real counterpart of the Durbeyfields' legion, whose existence involuntarily condemned their eldest sister to such a cruel fate.

In the chapter, mother and son are intrinsically connected. As with the character of Tess, the reader once again cannot feel anything but tenderness towards the couple. One example is the passage following the breastfeeding. Tess has gone back to work in the fields, she has momentarily stopped and what follows is Tess's interesting shift of emotions for her new-born:

[95] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the Second, Ch. XIV, p.89.

> When the infant had taken its fill the young maiden sat it upright in her lap, and looking into the far distance dandled it with a gloomy indifference that was almost dislike; then all of a sudden she fell to violently kissing it some dozens of times, as if she could never leave off, the child crying at the vehemence of an onset which strangely combined passionateness with contempt.[96]

Tess knows her own child is the fruit of a violence and that her hope has now been destroyed. Yet she cannot help loving Sorrow with all her heart, as one of the women observing the scenes comments: "She's fond of that there child, though she mid pretend not to be, and say she wishes the baby and her too were in the churchyard"[97].

After this point in the chapter, both the reader and Tess are faced with the baby's sudden illness. Lines worthy of a Greek tragedy follow the moment:

> The baby's offence against society in coming into the world was forgotten by the girl-mother; her soul 's desire was to continue that offence by preserving the life of the child. However, it soon grew clear that the hour of emancipation for that little prisoner of the flesh was to arrive earlier than her worst misgivings had conjectured. And when she had discovered this she was plunged into a misery which transcended that of the child's simple loss. Her baby had not been baptized.[98]

These lines are extremely poignant. Sorrow's existence is seen as a "offence against society". He is a "little prisoner of the flesh" and now that he is about to die, Tess is desperate both for his death and for his soul. The child has not been baptized yet.

[96] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the Second, Ch. XIV, p.90.
[97] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the Second, Ch. XIV, p.90.
[98] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the Second, Ch. XIV, p.92.

The worst thing happens. Tess's father, who has just "returned from his evening booze"[99], refuses to call a parson out of pride. It becomes clear how much awful this character is. He is part of that degraded world Hardy condemns so much. From this moment onwards, the scenes are so moving because they are dictated by Tess's despair. As Hardy brilliantly portrays, she is almost delirious in her hope of saving the new born's soul. She decides to baptize him herself:

> While the children, scarcely awake, awe-stricken at her manner, their eyes growing larger and larger, remained in this position, she took the baby from her bed – a child's child - so immature as scarce to seem a sufficient personality to endow its producer with the maternal title. Tess then stood erect with the infant on her arm beside the basin, the next sister held the Prayer-Book open before her, as the clerk at church held it before the parson; and thus, the emotional girl set about baptizing her child.
>
> Her figure looked singularly tall and imposing as she stood in her long white nightgown, a thick cable of twisted dark hair hanging straight down her back to her waist. The kindly dimness of the weak sunlight might have revealed – the stubble scratches upon her wrists, and the weariness of her eyes – her high enthusiasm having a transfiguring effect upon the face which had been her undoing, showing it as a thing of immaculate beauty, with an impress of dignity which was almost regal. The little ones kneeling round, their sleepy eyes blinking and red, awaited her preparation full of a suspended wonder which their physical heaviness at that hour would not allow to become active.[100]

The atmosphere of this powerful scene seems almost oneiric. The sacred and the profane are here united. Tess's body who doomed her existence is now infused of divine "enthusiasm" and transformed. She is "singularly tall and imposing" and Hardy highlights her powerful stance, he bows to her. Her beautiful face has "an impress of dignity which was almost regal". Tess is now a queen, a goddess. For the first time she is powerful, in control of the situation, albeit a tragic one.

[99] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cit., Phase the Second, Ch. XIV, p. 93.
[100] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Phase the Second, Ch. XIV, p. 94.

Hardy was asked to omit this scene since it was deemed to be too offensive for Victorian readers. Nonetheless, Hardy published a version of it in the *Fortnightly Review*. The title was the following: "The Midnight Baptism: A Study in Christianity".

The episode is extremely provocative, almost an attack on that church and on those times dooming both Tess and her baby and seeing them as sinners. As it has been highlighted several times in this study on the figure of children, Hardy's thoughts, opinions, and biography merge in his works. The attack is not on religion itself, of course. It is the author's perspective on a fake religion which along with contemporary society denies mercy to Tess and Sorrow.

Here, Tess is almost unifying Christianity and the paganism of her ancestors. A religion of nature, the most ancient one, with an All mother figure at its centre. During this brief and intense scene, Tess is embodying that goddess.

As Pearce comments:

> When Tess baptizes her dying child she is momentarily transformed. She and the child are no longer either marginalized or threatening. Instead, mother and child embody a symbolic function that renders them temporarily powerful. Tess's power in the scene is undeniable. Her appearance is authoritative. [...]The childish attendants and the poverty of the room render the scene more touching and infinitely more acceptable to the middle-class reader than any realist view of an illegitimate child dying in poverty and obscurity.[101]

The importance of this scene and of Sorrow's existence are intertwined with the myth of the Romantic child and its innocence. As Tess tries to protect her baby, Sorrow protects Tess. As mother to a dying and dead child, she is redeemed. And the absence of the new-born from the text contributes to keep Tess as the innocent child of the

[101] Pearce, J. L., *The Figure of the Child in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 53.

novel. Hardy does not forget that Sorrow is “a child’s child” and that Tess is a “girl-mother”.

However, Tess’s power does not last forever. This moving chapter reinforces the powerless nature of Tess in the following part of the plot. There is an opposition between this moment, her only moment of power and the rest of the novel. Despite protecting her status as innocent, with his death Sorrow takes away the power he conferred to his mother. Sorrow’s death is a crucial moment in the plot. The new-born symbolizes Tess’s sufferings, those she has gone through and those she has still to face. In a way, his death foresees hers.

Another essential element is present in chapter XIV. The act of giving her child a name and the baby’s name itself have both a powerful meaning. As Abraham, Hope and Modesty, Sorrow as well is a telling name. This baby has come to life to suffer and he will leave this world by suffering. Sorrow is the only thing left to Tess from now on. Moreover, to name somebody or something is declaring his existence, it is the first sign of identity. Tess will never forget her child but from now on, not one mention of the new-born will appear in the novel.

There is a cyclical sense to this novel. Tess was a girl, she became a mother and after the death of her child she is the innocent child once again. Sorrow is born out of suffering, he will be greatly loved by his mother, but he will die shortly after, foreseeing Tess’s sufferings in the future. At the end of the novel, Tess will lie on an altar at Stonehenge. The scene of her spiritual death, on that altar of stone, mirrors the passage of Sorrow’s baptism. The light shines on her just as it did on Sorrow, the men who came to take her away stand around her as Tess’s siblings did during the baptism at home:

> When they saw where she lay, which they had not done till then, they showed no objection, and stood watching her, as still as the pillars around. He went to the stone and bent over her, holding one poor little hand; her breathing now was quick and small, like that of a lesser

> creature than a woman. All waited in the growing light, their faces and hands, as if they were silvered, the remainder of their figures dark, the stone glistening green-gray, the Plain still a mass of shade. Soon the light was strong, and a ray shone upon her unconscious form, peering under her eyelids and waking her.[102]

Tess and Sorrow are not merely mother and child, they are two sides of the same coin. They are both innocent and condemned as sinners by an unfair, immoral society. By making her welcome death just as her baby did, once again Hardy protects this innocent.

To conclude this analysis on the figure of children in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, an answer must be given to the initial query: what do Hardy's literary children convey in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*?

By now it is clearly understandable that Hardy was inspired by several contemporary discourses and myths such as the one of the Romantic children. These literary children are a product of such myths. Tess's siblings and Sorrow represent two opposite sides of the same coin. They are all children but the Durbeyfields' legion is the counterpart of the Romantic myth represented by Sorrow. They represent the social anxieties of the nineteenth century towards heredity and mostly towards the future. While Sorrow exists for a short span of time, in Chapter XIV, the threat of a next generation representing a bleak future is always looming. Hardy will delve deeper into this concept with the figure of Little Father Time in *Jude the Obscure*.

Tess is at the very centre of this situation, intrinsically connected to her siblings and her new-born by blood and because of her status as a child throughout the whole novel. It might be argued that because of her role as a parent, Tess grows into an adult. Sadly, this is not true. She enters the novel as a child, she might come across as an adult because of her overwhelming sense of duty. However, she does not have a chance to choose. It is indeed her parents' nature and her role as eldest sister that force her to be

[102] Hardy, T., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Phase the Seventh, Ch. LVIII, pp. 395-396.

the authoritative figure within the family. She has never the chance to grow up, and Hardy does not want her to. Even her relationship with Alec highlights that she is the child and he is the parent. In the end, she will reach maturity, albeit through murder. It might seem that in Hardy's novels, ancient superstitions and the protagonists' actions participate in the tragic nature of their fate. However, the author does not judge his literary children, they are his instruments to denounce that tragic modernity ready to devour and cage his little characters.

The real tragedy of both *Tess* and *Jude* is the indifference and absence of sympathy for those who suffer, and children are used to highlight this concept. Hardy's first tragic novel started a line which was to be concluded by the second in the most graphic and awful way, the crime of Little Father Time.

Chapter 4.

“Done because we’re too menny”: Children in *Jude the Obscure*

4.1 The Scandal of *Jude the Obscure*

After *Tess of the D'Urbervilles,* the composition and publication of *Jude the Obscure* met even more obstacles. The narrative was written from August 1893 onwards and, by the end of 1894, it was ready for *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. Once again, in the *Preface* to the first volume edition Hardy indicates that "the magazine version was for various reasons abridged and modified in some degree"[103].

When the novel came out in 1896, it created a huge scandal in the literary scene due to its blunt and harsh accusations of Hardy's modern times. In *Jude* there is no more space for rural fantasies, nor more comfort to take in old-fashioned values. What is left is a harsh reality, a bleak modernity permeating the atmosphere of this last novel of Hardy. As Pite highlights: "*Tess*'s elegiac pathos had disappeared from Hardy's work before he wrote this last novel; regret for a lost past had already been supplanted by caustic indignation at contemporary society."[104]

As always, the author's life is tightly linked to his work and his last novel is no exception. Hardy's very soul and opinions keep showing from the beginning to the very end. Given their turbulent marriage, at first his anger towards the Church, State and the institution of marriage was perceived by his own wife as an attack towards everything she cared about.

However, the true nature of Hardy's anger is brilliantly explained by Pite:

> *Jude* was most of all an attack on Emma's desire to make the best of things as cheerfully as one could. To Hardy, this heartiness looked coarse, whereas to Emma Hardy's gloom appeared selfish and heartless.[105]

[103] Thomas Hardy, Preface to *Jude the Obscure*, quoted in Schwartz, B. N., *Jude the Obscure in the Age of Anxiety*, in "Studies in English Literature 1500-1900", Vol. 10, No. 4, (Autumn, 1970), pp. 793-804, p.794.
[104] Pite, R., *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life,* cit., p.347.
[105] Pite, R., *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life,* cit., p.348.

As the author expected, after its publication, the novel received much criticism. To name a few reactions, the Bishop of Wakefield threw the novel into the fire, the *Athenaeum* deemed it a "titanically bad book" which was "almost like one prolonged scolding from beginning to end"[106], and from Margaret Oliphant to Hardy's allies and closest friends even harsher responses came which shocked the author to a great extent. An example is indeed Edmund Gosse's opinion on *Jude*: "We think the fortunes, even the poorest, are more variegated with pleasures, or at least with alleviations, than Mr. Hardy chooses to admit."[107]

On the other hand, it is not surprising that *Jude* received such harsh criticisms and hostility from the public if we think of the context and the year of publication of the novel. It is to be kept in mind that in 1895, Oscar Wilde's career was destroyed after the trial for homosexuality. Therefore, as Pite brilliantly underlines:

> A revolutionary, visionary moment in English culture seemed to have come and then just as rapidly gone again. What came in its wake was narrow-mindedness and reaction. The pillars of society did not object to being teased but they would not be threatened. Decency, normalcy, and the established gender roles: all these were reaffirmed, discreetly if possible, firmly where necessary, and *Jude* was caught up in a widespread backlash against the Naughty Nineties.[108]

Despite the harsh critics, these are not the only reasons why *Jude* is Hardy's last novel. As early as in 1890, the author was already thinking of dedicating himself to poetry, as suggested in the *Life*: "While thinking of resuming 'the viewless wings of poesy' before dawn this morning, new horizons seemed to open, and worrying pettinesses to disappear".[109]

[106] Quoted in Pite, R., *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life,* cit., p.356.
[107] Gosse, E., *St James Gazette*, quoted in Pite, R., *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life,* cit., p.356.
[108] Pite, R., *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life,* cit., p. 361.
[109] Hardy, T., *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy,* cit., p. 241.

Among all the negative judgments, it is important to remember the unusual praise by W. D. Howells, in 1895, who thought that "there are many displeasing things in the book" that "make us shiver with horror and grovel with shame". And yet, "we know that they are deeply founded in the condition, if not in the nature of humanity"[110]. As it can be easily understood by now, Hardy was highly influenced by the anxieties of his own times and this "nature of humanity" was thought to be extremely close to a Darwinian truth in the novel. As Easley cleverly underlines: "like Darwin's *Origin*, *Jude* offers an uncomfortable challenge to traditional values"[111].

Both Darwin and Hardy (through his work), wanted to shed light on the true nature of human existence and at the same time, they "both wished to share their unconventional ideas with the world but also shrank from the scandal and scorn those ideas would cause"[112]. Schopenhauer's view of tragedy was another essential element to understand Hardy's point of view and his last works. Indeed, the philosopher believed that "the complete knowledge of the nature of the world, which has a quieting effect on the will, produces resignation, the surrender not merely of life, but of the very will to live"[113]. This is exactly what happens to Jude at the very end of the novel.

Consequently, it is highly remarkable to notice the influence of these thoughts on the following statement by Hardy:

> For my part, if there is any way of getting a melancholy satisfaction out of life it lies in dying, so to speak, before one is out of the flesh; by which I mean putting on the manners of ghosts, wandering in their haunts, and taking their views of surrounding things. To think of life as passing away is a sadness; to think of it as past is at least tolerable. Hence even when I enter

[110] Howells, W. D., *Review of Jude the Obscure, by Thomas Hardy*, quoted in Easley, A., *Human Evolution: a "deadly war ...between flesh and spirit"*, in "The Hardy Society Journal", Vol. 12, No. 2 (Summer 2016), pp. 23-39, p. 37.
[111] Easley, A., *Human Evolution: a "deadly war ...between flesh and spirit"*, in "The Hardy Society Journal", Vol. 12, No. 2 (Summer 2016), pp. 23-39, p.37.
[112] Easley, A., *Human Evolution: a "deadly war ...between flesh and spirit"*, cit., p.37.
[113] Schopenhauer, A., *The World as Will and Idea*, quoted in Starzyk, L. J., *The Coming Universal Wish Not to Live in Hardy's "Modern" Novels*, in "Nineteenth-Century Fiction", Vol. 26, No. 4 (Mar., 1972), pp. 419-435, p. 420.

> a room to pay a simple morning call I have unconsciously the habit of regarding the scene as if I were a spectre not solid enough to influence my environment. [114]

Jude the Obscure is Hardy's legacy to humanity. This masterpiece of realism holds within its pages the essence of the author's most intimate belief about his own times. This the reason why, in 1888, the author was already foreseeing the scandalised reactions of his readers:

> What author has not had his experience of such readers ?-the mentally and morally warped of both sexes, who will, where practicable, so twist plain and obvious meanings as to see in an honest picture of human nature an attack on religion, morals, or institutions. [115]

Jude the Obscure is not simply the story of Jude Fawley, a working-class man who dreams of becoming a scholar. It is a novel about dreams and disillusionment, about coming to terms with reality and all that goes with it. Most of all, it is Hardy's "honest picture of human nature". Many critics have tried to understand what the novel is about, and it is remarkably difficult to do so, given the many themes present in the novel. Therefore, the best option is to follow and trust Hardy's own description of his masterpiece:

> Of course, the book is all contrasts-or was meant to be in its original conception. Alas, what a miserable accomplishment it is!- e.g., Sue and her heathen gods set against Jude's reading the Greek testament; Christminister academical, Christminister in the slums; Jude the saint, Jude the sinner; Sue the Pagan, Sue the saint; marriage, no marriage; etc. etc.[116]

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[114] Thomas Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, quoted in Starzyk, L. J., *The Coming Universal Wish Not to Live in Hardy's "Modern" Novels*, cit, p. 420.
[115] Thomas Hardy, *The Profitable Reading of Fiction*, quoted in Schwartz, B. N., *Jude the Obscure in the Age of Anxiety*, cit., pp. 794-795.
[116] Thomas Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, quoted in Schwartz, B. N, *Jude the Obscure in the Age of Anxiety*, cit., p. 795.

Moreover, he states:

> Good fiction may be defined here as that kind of imaginative writing which lies nearest to the epic, dramatic or narrative masterpieces of the past. One fact is certain: in fiction there can be no intrinsically new thing at this stage of the world's history.[117]

This is the heart of the novel: *Jude the Obscure* is an epic view of man and life in Hardy's contemporary times. Jude is also the modern tragic hero. But by accepting a society that is bringing him towards his death, the protagonist is also like Priam, "who kissed the hands of the man who killed his children"[118]. As Schwartz brilliantly states by describing Hardy's novel:

> The epic carries us into the modern era, into the absurd world, and is a commentary on the discrepancy between man's aspirations and a "benign universe." Jude is the being who asks meaning of the universe and receives only silence.[119]

After this short introduction on the birth and the scandal of *Jude*, this chapter shifts its focus on the fundamental theme of this dissertation: namely the children. As previously seen in *Tess*, it is now possible to deduce that the poignant characters of little Jude and the infamous figure of Little Father Time have deep meanings and functions. Starting from their portrayal in the various parts of the text, the following pages will analyse and discuss these characters.

[117] Thomas Hardy, *Life and Art*, quoted in Schwartz, B. N, *Jude the Obscure in the Age of Anxiety*, cit., p. 795.
[118] Schwartz, B. N, *Jude the Obscure in the Age of Anxiety*, cit., p. 801.
[119] Schwartz, B. N, *Jude the Obscure in the Age of Anxiety*, cit., p. 801.

4.2 The Anti-Bildungsroman

First of all, to successfully catch the nature of Jude Fawley, it is extremely important to focus on the Bildungsroman genre, clearly invoked by the author at the beginning of the novel. This widely known narrative is a process of development from childhood to adulthood, but in *Jude the Obscure* the reader soon understands that the progression of the protagonist comes to a halt and it does so several times.

In the very first chapter, little Jude comes across as an uneducated, unexperienced, and naïve child, the perfect protagonist for a Bildungsroman. This is exactly the effect desired by Hardy. In the classical Bildungsroman, there is an opposition between the youth of the beginning and the full formed, mature adult at the end of the novel. By drawing on the genre and creating a sort of Anti-Bildungsroman, the author shows the powerlessness of Jude.

As Pearce perfectly explains:

> Hardy shows Jude mythologising elements of a childhood his class never permits him to experience and using that myth to protect his sense of self in the face of the adult reality of financial pressure and sexual desire. Jude is unable to reconcile the myth and the reality, or to locate his identity fully in relation to either. [120]

Therefore, what Thomas Hardy does, is portraying a working-class child (and later on a working-class man) as the protagonist of a novel set in his contemporary society, thus condemning the damage caused by that society in the individual.

Jerome Hamilton Buckley, in his *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, focuses on Hardy's novel as well and he highlights how it diverges from the popular form. Hardy draws on the Bildungsroman narrative to visibly underline

[120] Pearce, J. L., *The Figure of the Child in the Novels of Thomas Hardy,* cit., p.67.

that what would normally be the object of said narrative – the protagonist reaching maturity through the course of the story – in *Jude the Obscure* does not happen.

The upturning of the Bildungsroman can be seen from the very beginning as well: the role of education is extremely important in this kind of narrative, and yet Jude does not receive a proper education from Phillotson, his schoolteacher. The man departs in the very first chapter, consequently Jude tries to educate himself by himself and it does not bring to any educational success.

Therefore, *Jude the Obscure* is an Anti-Bildungsroman, as Peter Arnds perfectly explains: "Jude's pursuit of *Bildung* lies at the very root of his own and his family's dissolution. In fact, the protagonist's development leads to the exact opposite of a *Bildung*"[121].

In chapter II, little Jude appears to feel uncomfortable, out of place, in Marygreen:

> The brown surface of the field went right up towards the sky all round, where it was lost by degrees in the mist that shut out the actual verge, and accentuated the solitude. The only marks on the uniformity of the scene were a rick of last year's produce standing in the midst of the arable, the rooks that rose at his approach, and the path athwart the fallow by which he had come, trodden now by he hardly knew whom, though once by many of his own dead family. 'How ugly it is here!' he murmured.[122]

The child is extremely ambitious, he wants something more, something different for his future. While in a Bildungsroman the protagonists pursue their ambitions and grow into mature adults, Jude's fate shows an opposite destiny. In particular, analysing the Bildungsroman, Richard Salmon underlines that "the overarching trajectory of [the protagonist's] development moves from the sphere of the 'Ideal' to the 'Practical',

[121] Arnds, P., *The Boy with the Old Face: Thomas Hardy's Antibildungsroman "Jude the Obscure" and Wilhelm Raabe's Bildungsroman "Prinzessin Fisch"*, in "German Studies Review", Vol. 21, No. 2, (May, 1998), pp. 221-240, p. 224.
[122] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part I, Ch.2, p.14.

from poetic self-absorption to active engagement in public affairs".[123] This is exactly the main point of this novel and the main issue for its protagonist. Jude starts his Bildungsroman but does not reach its end, he constantly retreats in the safety of the Ideal.

The author's aim is now clear: his intentional focus on the form of the Bildungsroman is needed to highlight the detachment from it in the course of the novel. Jude will never grow up, he will remain a little boy. In this Anti-Bildungsroman, the protagonist dies alone, broken and in a state of disillusionment and disappointment.

4.3 Little Jude: the Child's Powerlessness

The choice of the detachment from the Bildungsroman is also essential to highlight another important feature related to Jude's character: his powerlessness. As it can be clearly understood by now and as it happened in *Tess of the D'Urberville*, Hardy draws from children myths to focus on the topic of identity. A child's identity is always rejected by society: to be accepted by society, the child must grow into a more mature state (he must become an adult) and so into a more powerful position than his original one. But Jude does not reach maturity, so at the end of the novel he is as powerless as he was at its beginning. This concept of powerlessness is intrinsically connected to the protagonist and clearly shows in three dimensions: Jude's status as a working-class child and his two relationships with Arabella and Sue.

Hardy already focused on the opposition of the Romantic child myth and the Malthusian child in *Tess*. However, in his last novel he takes it a step further and the two children merge. Jude's status as a working-class child clearly means having no

[123] Salmon, R., *'Farewell poetry and aerial flights': The Function of the Author and Victorian Fiction*, in "A Concise Companion to the Victorian Novel", Oxford, Blackwell, 2005, pp. 134-155, p. 138.

individuality and being powerless. This painfully emerges in the description of Jude made by his great-aunt, in Chapter II:

> 'And who's he?' asked one, comparatively a stranger, when the boy entered. 'Well ye med ask it Mrs. Williams. He's my great-nephew—come since you was last this way.' The old inhabitant who answered was a tall, gaunt woman who spoke tragically on the most trivial subject, and gave a phrase of her conversation to each auditor in turn. 'He come from Mellstock, down in South Wessex, about a year ago, worse luck for 'n, Belinda' (turning to the right) 'where his father was living, and was took wi' the shakings for death, and died in two days, as you know Caroline' (turning to the left). 'It would ha' been a blessing if Goddy-mighty had took thee too wi' thy mother and father, poor useless boy! But I've got him here to stay with me till I can see what's to be done with un, though I am obliged to let him earn any penny he can. Just now he's a-scaring of birds for Farmer Troutham. It keeps him out of mischty. Why do ye turn away, Jude?' she continued as the boy, feeling the impact of their glances like slaps upon his face, moved aside.[124]

Jude's description clearly draws on the child who seems unruly, that needs to be controlled. Moreover, his being an orphan and his status as a working-class child contribute to render him even more powerless. Just as society will do in the future, Aunt Drusilla encloses him in a category, that of the unruly side of childhood, regardless of Jude's actual identity. Indeed, a few moments later, the boy shows his real nature: there is nothing mischievous in him. In the following moving passage, we find the description of how powerful his empathy for the lesser beings is. He will lose his work at Troutham's because of it, but Hardy has the chance to show the readers the extent of this child's good nature:

> The boy stood under the rick before mentioned, and every few seconds used his clacker or rattle briskly. At each clack the rooks left off pecking, and rose and went away on their leisurely wings, burnished like tassets of mail, afterwards wheeling back and regarding him

[124] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part I, Ch. II, p. 13.

> warily, and descending to feed at a more respectful distance. He sounded the clacker till his arm ached, and at length his heart grew sympathetic with the birds' thwarted desires. They seemed, like himself, to be living in a world which did not want them. Why should he frighten them away? They took upon them more and more the aspect of gentle friends and pensioners––the only friends he could claim as being in the least degree interested in him, for his aunt had often told him that she was not. He ceased his rattling, and they alighted anew. 'Poor little dears!' said Jude, aloud. 'You shall have some dinner you shall! There is enough for us all. Farmer Troutham can afford to let you have some. Eat, then, my dear little birdies, and make a good meal!' They stayed and ate, inky spots on the nut-brown soil, and Jude enjoyed their appetite. A magic thread of fellow-feeling united his own life with theirs. Puny and sorry as those lives were, they much resembled his own. His clacker he had by this time thrown away from him, as being a mean and sordid instrument, offensive both to the birds and to himself as their friend. [125]

It is clearly his great sensitivity, his sympathy for the birds, that makes him lose his work, and not a mischievous nature. The adults around him do not see him as an individual person but place him in the category of the working-class child without further thoughts. In this regard, Benziman's interpretation of the scene shows something more. The critic believes that Jude, as an unwanted and uncared-for child, is projecting his pain and his loneliness onto natural objects and on the little birds. The world they are all living in does not want them and he decides not to scare them away.[126]

After all, there is something controversial in the perception of Jude by Marygreen's adults: despite being an orphan, he is a working child and he is expected to be part of a community of adults, not of children. He does not belong to the adult sphere and at the same time he cannot have the luxury of being a child (just as Tess before him). He is forced to behave like an adult and to stay with adults. As Pearce states, it seems that

[125] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part I, Ch. II, pp.14-15.
[126] Cf. Benziman, G., *The Child's Perspective: Hardy, Joyce, and the Redefinition of Childlike Romantic Sensibilities*, in "Joyce Studies Annual", 2013, pp. 151-171, p.157.

"Jude the child died with his parents, leaving only the premature, uncomfortable adult"[127].

The first chapter of the novel makes it extremely clear. In chapter I, Phillotson – Jude's schoolteacher - is leaving and the boy is in a company of adults, he is not part of those students who attended school during the day:

> A little boy of eleven, who had been thoughtfully assisting in the packing, joined the group of men, and as they rubbed their chins he spoke up, blushing at the sound of his own voice: 'Aunt have got a great fuel-house, and it could be put there, perhaps, till you've found a place to settle in, sir.' 'A proper good notion,' said the blacksmith. It was decided that a deputation should wait on the boy's aunt— an old maiden resident—and ask her if she would house the piano till Mr. Phillotson should send for it. The smith and the bailiff started to see the practicability of the suggested shelter, and the boy and the schoolmaster were left standing alone. 'Sorry I am going, Jude?' asked the latter kindly. Tears rose into the boy's eyes; for he was not among the regular day scholars who came unromantically close to the schoolmaster's life, but one who had attended the night school only during the present teacher's term of office. The regular scholars, if the truth must be told, stood at the present moment afar off, like certain historic disciples, indisposed to any enthusiastic volunteering of aid. The boy awkwardly opened the book he held in his hand, which Mr. Phillotson had bestowed on him as a parting gift, and admitted that he was sorry.[128]

The fondness between the two is clear, Phillotson has been Jude's only supporter until now. This very first chapter is as crucial as the schoolmaster's existence for the boy. This is the moment in which Jude's dreams take form, he starts to believe in something more, to hope in a better future, albeit distant from real life. However, the village schoolmaster leaves and from the very beginning, little Jude begins to construct his own Ideal world, a much better place than reality. The dream of entering university will fade but the desire for education will stay with Jude and will drive him until the

[127] Pearce, J. L., *The Figure of the Child in the Novels of Thomas Hardy,* cit., p.72.
[128] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part I, Ch. I, pp. 9-10.

very end. The education denied to him along with his desire to be free and be a child is highlighted by his refusal to grow up.

In one of the most famous passages of the novel, Jude tries to rebel, albeit childishly, to his growth and this also mirrors an episode of the writer's biography. From the very beginning, the boy shows his refusal to be limited and set in categories either of age or class:

> Jude went out, and, feeling more than ever his existence to be an undemanded one, he lay down upon his back on a heap of litter near the pigsty. The fog had by this time become more translucent, and the position of the sun could be seen through it. He pulled his straw hat over his face, and peered through the interstices of the plaiting at the white brightness, vaguely reflecting. Growing up brought responsibilities, he found. Events did not rhyme quite as he had thought. Nature's logic was too horrid for him to care for. That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another sickened his sense of harmony. As you got older, and felt yourself to be at the centre of your time, and not at a point in its circumference, as you had felt when you were little, you were seized with a sort of shuddering, he perceived. All around you there seemed to be something glaring, garish, rattling, and the noises and glares hit upon the little cell called your life, and shook it, and warped it. If he could only prevent himself growing up! He did not want to be a man. Then, like the natural boy, he forgot his despondency, and sprang up.[129]

Adulthood is seen as something painful, as a conforming to social demands, to a prison. It is the opposite of the freedom of thinking and building dreams, typical of childhood. The phase that Jude never experienced will stay with him for all his life. To rephrase it in Salmon's terms, while childhood is the realm of the Ideal, adulthood is the one of the Practical. As Hardy himself states, this novel is about contrasts, opposites and the most important one is between Jude the child and Jude the adult. Once again, the Bildungsroman ceases to exist, to be developed. Jude does not know who he is, what

[129] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part I, Ch. II, p. 18.

his identity is and where he belongs to. *Jude the Obscure* is truly what Hardy describes in its Preface as a "tragedy of unfulfilled aims"[130]. Jude's tension between the Ideal and the Practical is always present in the text and it shows in the clearest way in his relationships, but also in his very characterization. Jude's relationships with Arabella and later on, with Sue, clearly show his struggle to live categorized as an adult: until the very end, Jude's adult body will always be only a façade for the child within.

4.4 The Child Within

The first time the protagonist comes across Arabella is a crucial passage in the novel. In chapter VI, Jude is walking and daydreaming about Christminster, as always. At first, he thinks of becoming a bishop and of the income which would come with it, then he reflects and thinks that becoming an archdeacon would be enough and he still walks on:

> '—but I can work hard. I have staying power in abundance, thank God; and it is that which tells. . . . Yes, Christminster shall be my Alma Mater; and I'll be her beloved son, in whom she shall be well pleased.' In his deep concentration on these transactions of the future, Jude's walk had slackened, and he was now standing quite still, looking at the ground as though the future were thrown thereon by a magic lantern. On a sudden something smacked him sharply in the ear, and he became aware that a soft cold substance had been flung at him, and had fallen at his feet. A glance told him what it was—a piece of flesh, the characteristic part of a barrow-pig, which the countrymen used for greasing their boots, as it was useless for any other purpose. Pigs were rather plentiful hereabout, being bred and fattened in large numbers in certain parts of North Wessex.[131]

The piece of flesh that hits Jude is a pig's genital. The Ideal sphere he is dreaming so much about, now meets the raw existence of the Practical sphere. In particular, the

[130] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Preface, p.3.
[131] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part First, Ch. VI, pp. 37-38.

animal's penis represents the sexual desire, something Jude has never known until now. This will become Jude's greatest obstacle: the eternal battle between flesh and spirit. Moreover, the genitals are not only a symbol related to the sexual sphere, but they are also an element of country life, something "which the countrymen used for greasing their boots". Therefore, it is part of Jude's class position, highlighting once again how his real life is completely opposed to the ideal vision of Christminster and its spiritual nature.

As Hardy explicitly stated in an 1895 letter to Gosse, "the throwing of the pizzle" illustrated "the contrast between the ideal life a man wished to lead, and the squalid real life he was fated to lead"[132]. Moreover, in a letter to Lady Jeune he also added: "throwing the offal was, of course, intended to symbolize the conflict of animalism with spiritualism"[133]. The mention of a struggle between animalism and spiritualism introduces Jude and Arabella's relationship in the most perfect way.

From the first description of the woman, the reader perceives Arabella's raw sensuality and animal side:

> She whom he addressed was a fine dark-eyed girl, not exactly handsome but capable of passing as such at a little distance, despite some coarseness of skin and fibre. She had a round and prominent bosom, full lips, perfect teeth, and the rich complexion of a cochin hen's egg. She was a complete and substantial female animal—no more, no less; and Jude was almost certain that to her was attributable the enterprise of attracting his attention from dreams of the humaner letters to what was simmering in the minds around him.[134]

Arabella is a "substantial female animal", there is nothing spiritual in her. As we shall see, she is after all the exact opposite of Sue and the pleasure of the flesh she offers

[132] Hardy, T., *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, cit., p.514.
[133] Hardy, T., *Collected Letters*, Notes, quoted in Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., p.419.
[134] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part First, Ch. VI, p.39.

causes Jude to abandon his childhood dreams. It is also interesting to pay close attention to Arabella's choice of the missile, as Pearce underlines:

> The emasculation of the pig mirrors Jude's own sense of emasculation, both by his class position and by his relationships with women. As Jude and Arabella's relationship develops, she takes the traditionally male role. The severed phallus represents both Arabella's way of controlling Jude and his own feelings of inadequacy. [135]

From the beginning, Jude yields to the desire of the flesh, the main point of their union, completely opposed to that Ideal sphere that he craves so much. Indeed, at the end of chapter VI, Jude is starting to become aware that his meeting with Arabella will bring him to give up his dreams. As he reflects:

> the intentions as to reading, working, and learning which he had so precisely formulated only a few minutes earlier, were suffering a curious collapse into a corner, he knew not how.[136]

Jude's reactions to his very first encounter with the other sex and his desire for the woman, are so genuine and involuntary that in the following chapter, he cannot even focus on his beloved texts. He is already infatuated with Arabella and Hardy's perfect description highlights his genuinely animal interest in the girl:

> In short, as if materially, a compelling arm of extraordinary muscular power seized hold of him, something which had nothing in common with the spirits and influences that had moved him hitherto.[137]

[135] Pearce, J. L., *The Figure of the Child in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 77.
[136] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part First, Ch. VI, p.41.
[137] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part First, Ch. VII, p. 44.

Hardy shows his readers a boy, a barely adult Jude, in the throes of his first love. He is as naïve as a child, without anyone to give him any advice on what he is experiencing. After a short period and Arabella's manipulative nature, he decides to marry her.

However, shortly after, reality hits hard, as always for Jude Fawley: he quickly discovers that Arabella is not the natural and honest girl he thought her to be and consequently, every feeling of infatuation for her starts to fade away. Hardy's brilliant mind once again conveys every shift of Jude's emotions in a few lines and in a few chapters only. The process of Jude's disillusion starts the very evening of their marriage, with the bitter discovery of the artificial nature of her hair:

> So to the cottage he took her on the evening of the marriage, giving up his old room at his aunt's—where so much of the hard labour at Greek and Latin had been carried on. A little chill overspread him at her first unrobing. A long tail of hair, which Arabella wore twisted up in an enormous knob at the back of her head, was deliberately unfastened, stroked out, and hung upon the looking glass which he had bought her. 'What—it wasn't your own?' he said, with a sudden distaste for her. (...) Jude thought with a feeling of sickness that though this might be true to some extent, for all that he knew, many unsophisticated girls would and did go to towns and remain there for years without losing their simplicity of life and embellishments. Others, alas, had an instinct towards artificiality in their very blood, and became adepts in counterfeiting at the first glimpse of it. However perhaps there was no great sin in a woman adding to her hair, and he resolved to think no more of it.[138]

Some nights later, another shocking discovery is made. Arabella's cute dimples do not exist, she produces them artificially:

> One action of hers, however, brought him to full cognition. Her face being reflected towards him as she sat, he could perceive that she was amusing herself by artificially producing in each cheek the dimple before alluded to, a curious accomplishment of which she was mistress,

[138] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part First, Ch. IX, pp. 58-59.

> effecting it by a momentary suction. It seemed to him for the first time that the dimples were far oftener absent from her face during his intercourse with her nowadays than they had been in the earlier weeks of their acquaintance. 'Don't do that, Arabella!' he said suddenly. 'There is no harm in it, but—I don't like to see you.'[139]

Lastly, she confesses, albeit reluctantly, that she is not pregnant. There is no baby, the reason why she tricked Jude into marriage and consequently, from this point onwards, Jude starts regretting their union and the non-existent reason of it. Jude and Hardy's ideas about the institution of marriage begin to show:

> There seemed to him, vaguely and dimly, something wrong in a social ritual which made necessary a cancelling of well-formed schemes involving years of thought and labour, of forgoing a man's one opportunity of showing himself superior to the lower animals, and of contributing his units of work to the general progress of his generation, because of a momentary surprise by a new and transitory instinct which had nothing in it of the nature of vice, and could be only at the most called weakness. He was inclined to inquire what he had done, or she lost, for that matter, that he deserved to be caught in a gin which would cripple him, if not her also, for the rest of a lifetime? There was perhaps something fortunate in the fact that the immediate reason of his marriage had proved to be non-existent. But the marriage remained.[140]

The next day, Jude's Ideal self cannot face the crude reality of rural life: the killing of the pig is the turning point in Jude's marriage to Arabella. The butcher cannot come, the couple must take care of it. At first, he childishly quarrels with Arabella, he does not want to do it. In the end, Jude kills the animal in the quickest way since he does not want it to suffer. In the following passage, in chapter X, Hardy skilfully conveys Jude's struggle between flesh and spirit, now extremely evident:

[139] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part First, Ch. IX, p. 60.
[140] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part First, Ch. IX, p. 62.

> Jude felt dissatisfied with himself as a man at what he had done, though aware of his lack of common sense, and that the deed would have amounted to the same thing if carried out by deputy. The white snow, stained with the blood of his fellow mortal, wore an illogical look to him as a lover of justice, not to say a Christian.[141]

However, Jude's childish behaviour brings out Arabella's true nature and she, the Practical, throws on the floor Jude's beloved volumes, the symbol of the Ideal, smearing them with lard. As Pearce comments:

> The tomes that represent his childhood dreams, tainted with a visible reminder of the dirty, unpalatable reality that currently constitutes his daily life, force him to realise how impossible it is that these two opposing forces can ever be reconciled.[142]

Jude now fully realizes "the fundamental error of their matrimonial union"[143], based on a fleeting feeling and not on a "connection of affinities"[144]. Arabella soon leaves him for Australia and Jude understands that despite the child within, he cannot go back to the status of child anymore: he is a grown man. From a working-class child condemned to be an adult, to an adult marriage in which he only wants to retreat in his dreams, Jude once again arrests his development and always returns to the starting point: his Ideal sphere.

Jude and Sue's relationship is even more crucial for the protagonist and his inner child, than the one with Arabella. While the first wife is the embodiment of animalism, Jude's second love represents spiritualism.

[141] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part First, Ch. X, p.66.
[142] Pearce, J. L., *The Figure of the Child in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 79.
[143] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part First, Ch. XI, p.69.
[144] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part First, Ch. XI, p.69.

Hardy saw her as:

> the slight, pale 'bachelor' girl–the intellectualized, emancipated bundle of nerves that modern conditions were producing, mainly in cities as yet[145].

As always, in Hardy's works, first meetings are extremely telling. Jude sees Sue for the first time not in real life or in flesh, but in a photograph and the reader now clearly starts to see the difference between the two relationships: Sue is someone to dream about, just as Christminster. She will become the object of a religious reverence, a myth, and as Jude's Ideal city, she does not belong to the realm of real life for the protagonist.

However, after this first encounter, a problem arises. The man soon realizes that "his interest in her had shown itself to be unmistakably of a sexual kind"[146]. His desire for her cannot remain as platonic and ideal as he hoped. Once again, he is caught in the tension between spirit and flesh. Jude's inner child is always there and as Pearce underlines: "Jude's adult sexual desires are at war with his childlike yearning for a friendship that is pure, even quasi-religious and will shore up his self-constructed mythology"[147]. What can be clearly understood is that both Arabella and Sue become the object of Jude's, albeit different, sexual desire. However, the tragedy of his relationship with Sue ensues from his ideal mind and his inner child in full contrast with his adult body's earthly desires, the opposite to every intellectual dream he has ever wanted to pursue since childhood. As Elizabeth Langland observes: "Jude alternates between reflections on Sue as an "ideality" or a "divinity" – totally divorced from the coarse Arabella – and sexual longing for her"[148]. Their tragic union cannot

[145] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure* (1985), Preface, quoted in Watts, C., *Hardy's Sue Bridehead and the "New Woman"*, in "Critical Survey", Vol. 5, No. 2, 1993, pp. 152-156, p. 152.
[146] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Second, Ch. IV, p.97.
[147] Pearce, J. L., *The Figure of the Child in the Novels of Thomas Hardy,* cit., p. 82.
[148] Langland, E., *'Becoming a Man in Jude the Obscure.' The Sense of Sex, Feminist Perspectives on Hardy*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1993, p. 38.

unify Ideal and Practical, intellectual and physical passion and they are doomed to be separated.

After several events in the narrative, Sue admits that she reciprocates Jude's feelings and the two start living together, divorced, unmarried and forced to move ever so often not to arise the suspicions of their neighbours. However, in the last part of the novel, the couple is able to go back to Jude's beloved city: Christminster. Now Sue and Jude have children of their own and Little Father Time, Arabella and Jude's child, is part of their family as well. And yet, once back to his Ideal city, Jude realizes he is trapped in the Practical, real life: he is a father and yet he does not recognize his responsibilities. He is so desperate for being enclosed once again in a figurative cage, for not having the chance to live his childhood dreams anymore, that despite the bad weather, the pregnancy of Sue and having no place to stay, he follows the procession in the city in an ill frenzy:

> 'Let's go that way!' cried Jude, and though it now rained steadily he seemed not to know it, and took them round to the Theatre. Here they stood upon the straw that was laid to drown the discordant noise of wheels, where the quaint and frost-eaten stone busts encircling the building looked with pallid grimness on the proceedings, and in particular at the bedraggled Jude, Sue, and their children, as at ludicrous persons who had no business there. 'I wish I could get in!' he said to her fervidly. 'Listen—I may catch a few words of the Latin speech by staying here; the windows are open.' However, beyond the peals of the organ, and the shouts and hurrahs between each piece of oratory, Jude's standing in the wet did not bring much Latin to his intelligence more than, now and then, a sonorous word in um or ibus. 'Well—I'm an outsider to the end of my days!' he sighed after a while.[149]

[149] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Sixth, Ch. I, p.328.

This passage is incredibly important because, on a close observation, Jude's behaviour resembles that of an excited child. As a child he feels uncomfortable with his position, he is "an outsider" to the end of his days. Once again, he is brought to reality by his own children's existence and his pregnant lover. The eternal tension in his short existence between real life and dreams is always present and now with Sue it is extremely clear. In his childhood, he could not stand the position and the responsibilities imposed on him as a working-class child, now as an adult he cannot stand the responsibilities that adulthood has brought along. Until this moment, he has always tried to escape from reality but now there is no chance to escape anymore, as a parent he must act as a father and an adult.

What ensues is the most logical thing for Jude, he reverses his dreams on his children, specifically on Little Father Time. Just after welcoming his own child at home, he says:

> '(...) And Sue, darling; I have an idea! We'll educate and train him with a view to the University. 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.'[150]

However, the choice of projecting his dreams on his son does not bring anything good. Little Father Time kills Sue's children and finally, commits suicide. The death of these children represents the death of Jude's inner child, i. e. of Jude's spirit. Reality attests its presence in the most violent way.

[150] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Fifth, Ch. III, p. 278.

4.5 Little Father Time and the Ultimate Meaning of Childhood

Little Father Time is one of the most complex, ambiguous and fascinating figures of English literature. It is clear that in Hardy the figure of the child embodies both hopes and fears and in *Jude the Obscure*, for instance, this child in an adult body is the point of connection between old and new, ancient and modern times. Little Father Time is an even stronger provocation against modernity.

In Part Five, chapter III, Arabella is the first to mention the child's existence, by confessing in a letter to Jude that they have a child:

> The fact is, Jude, that, though I have never informed you before, there was a boy born of our marriage, eight months after I left you, when I was at Sydney, living with my father and mother. All that is easily provable. (...) He is now of an intelligent age, of course, and my mother and father have lately written to say that, as they have rather a hard struggle over there, and I am settled comfortably here, they don't see why they should be encumbered with the child any longer, his parents being alive.[151]

Then Arabella proceeds to explain that she has a job, she has a new husband and that she will not be the one to take care of him. She does not want him. Some lines later, Little Father Time arrives at Aldbrickham, almost as a *deus ex machina*. His first description is hard to forget and as always in Hardy's works, it is extremely telling:

[151] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Fifth, Ch. III, pp. 273-274.

> In the down train that was timed to reach Aldbrickham station about ten o'clock the next evening a small, pale child's face could be seen in the gloom of a third-class carriage. He had large frightened eyes, and wore a white woollen cravat, over which a key was suspended round his neck by a piece of common string, the key attracting attention by its occasional shine in the lamplight. In the band of his hat his half-ticket was stuck. (...) He was Age masquerading as Juvenility, and doing it so badly that his real self showed through crevices.[152]

When Jude and Sue welcome him home, they start asking him questions. It turns out that the child's name does not exist, Little Father Time is his nickname and when they inquire further the answer is quite shocking. He was never baptised: "Because, if I died in damnation, 'twould save the expense of a Christian funeral"[153], he answers. Despite promising to christen him after their marriage, they never manage to do so, and the child is called Jude by the couple. It is important to underline the absence of a baptism because by doing so, they are not recognising the child's identity. Naming someone is recognising his identity after all. Tess understood this too well with Sorrow, but in *Jude* the baptism never takes place.

While still on the train, there is something else that strikes the reader: the absence of any childish attitude in him. A lady near him holds a basket with a kitten in it and Little Father Time looks at it and he "seemed mutely to say: 'All laughing comes from misapprehension. Rightly looked at there is no laughable thing under the sun"[154]. The boy's presence and attitude are as unique and peculiar as his existence. Indeed, the line referring to the child as "Age masquerading as Juvenility" is the essence of this character but it is remarkable that even this precise essence denies him an individual identity and makes him an outsider. Just as Sue admits, "the poor child seems to be wanted by nobody"[155]. As underlined, his external description is extremely peculiar,

[152] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Fifth, Ch. III, p.276.
[153] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Fifth, Ch. IV, p. 280.
[154] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Fifth, Ch. III, p. 276.
[155] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Fifth, Ch. III, p. 274.

and this caught the attention of many critics. Richard Dellamora and Elaine Showalter even went so far to state that Little Father Time's appearance derives from syphilis, probably caught by Arabella during her pregnancy.[156] It would not be so strange given the presence of syphilitic children in novels such as *The Heavenly Twins* by Sarah Grand. There, Edith and a naval officer with syphilis have a child, described as old despite his young age. This portrayal is extremely similar to Little Father Time's. The syphilitic disease of the boy is not actually supported in *Jude*, but Dellamora and Showalter's theory might be taken into account if we think metaphorically of Little Father Time as a product of a diseased society.

Furthermore, after observing the peculiarity of his exterior appearance, there is another detail worth observing: how his interiority works. Despite what might be expected, the boy is not unemotional. The moments in which he displays his feelings are moments in which he truly seems to have the spirit of an old man in the body of a little boy. He is aware that nobody wants him, that he is different. The first moving display of this takes place on the day of his arrival at Jude and Sue's house. After a short presentation, Sue seems to be upset since the boy looks so much like Jude and Arabella as well. However, her good nature cannot prevent to sympathize with the little child, and he asks her whether he can call her mother:

> (...) Can I call you mother?' Then a yearning look came over the child and he began to cry. Sue thereupon could not refrain from instantly doing likewise, being a harp which the least wind of emotion from another's heart could make to vibrate as readily as a radical stir in her own. 'You may call me mother, if you wish to, my poor dear!' she said, bending her cheek against his to hide her tears.[157]

[156] Cf. Dellamora, R., *'Male Relations in Thomas Hardy's Jude the Obscure'*, in "New Casebooks: Jude the Obscure, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000, p. 160;
Cf. Showalter, E., *'Syphilis, Sexuality and the Fiction of the Fin de Siècle'*, in "Sex, Politics and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Novel", Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1986, p. 108.
[157] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Fifth, Ch. III, p. 279.

This sudden outburst of emotion, the proof of the great empathy he shares with his father, brings Sue to go beyond her limits and her hate for Arabella. The child's nature appears to be frail and delicate. However, Sue knows that hard as they will try, the boy's sensitivity will not allow him to feel part of this new family. It is also interesting to observe that somehow Little Father Time is a double of Jude. They both share the name and an extraordinary empathy. This concept is reinforced by Sue's exclamation: "I see you in him!"[158] and by their innate sense of being outsiders in this world.

However, as Arnds suggests, the boy might also be seen as the opposite of Jude[159], or a radicalization of features present in Jude. The protagonist has dreams, and the safety of an Ideal life to return to in times of difficulty. Instead, Little Father Time has nobody and no Ideal life to save him from this world. Even their existence as outsiders is different in intensity, while Jude is an orphan, later on welcomed by his aunt, his son is the object of two rejections, the first by his own mother and the second by his grandparents. Most of all, the main difference between Jude and Little Father Time is that despite forced to behave as an adult, little Jude has the chance to experience a few moments as a child, in his most private moments. It is this melancholy for his lost childhood to bring the child within him to survive until the very end. However, Little Father Time will never experience childhood. He is already an old man, pretending to be a child. While Jude is a child in an adult's body, his son is already an adult.

It is curious that this character recurs in one of Hardy's poems, "Midnight on the Great Western". In the poem, "the boy Time is depicted standing, wrapped in the coils of the snake of eternity (which rests its head on his shoulders) and holding a key in his hand"[160]. The physical description in the poem, is extremely similar to the one in the

[158] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Fifth, Ch. III, p. 278.
[159] Arnds, P., *The Boy with the Old Face: Thomas Hardy's Antibildungsroman "Jude the Obscure" and Wilhelm Raabe's Bildungsroman "Prinzessin Fisch"*, cit., p.228.
[160]Clipper, L. J., *"Saturn in Wessex: The Role of Little Father Time",* quoted in Arnds, P., *The Boy with the Old Face: Thomas Hardy's Antibildungsroman "Jude the Obscure" and Wilhelm Raabe's Bildungsroman "Prinzessin Fisch"*, cit., p.229.

novel. It becomes quite clear that many details bring him to be something like an allegory and that he seems to represent many things.

Classical mythology is also used in the novel to describe him. Sue thinks that "his face is like the tragic mask of Melpomene"[161] and it is remarkable that in Greek literature Melpomene was the muse of tragedy. This might be indeed a foreseeing of the tragic destiny of this character. His existence has an extremely deep meaning, especially if we think about the episode at the Agricultural Show: before the beauty of the blooming flowers, the boy cannot bring himself to enjoy their sight. Here Hardy's own thoughts seem to flow from the boy's mouth: "I should like the flowers very very much, if I didn't keep on thinking they'd be all withered in a few days!"[162] The current life, despite is beauty, is not destined to a blooming future: the modern times are looming. It is easy to understand that after the publication of the novel, the child soon became a living symbol, an allegory, as many critics have underlined. On the outside, he seems hardly human and he is the opposite of his father: he is the symbol of the bleak modernity and future times approaching.

Among the several interpretations of this character by the critics, Samantha Crain's analysis is extremely fascinating, especially if related to the children's atmosphere and myths. Crain found a curious and remarkable relation between this character and folklore tradition. As Christiansen highlights, the folk or fairy tales "are told and accepted as accounts of what has really happened and are founded on folk belief"[163]. It is widely known that in less modern times people did believe in legends and legendary characters. Hardy's life and growth in the rural life of Dorset influenced and inspired him for many of his works. As Crain describes:

[161] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Fifth, Ch. IV, p. 280.
[162] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Fifth, Ch. V, p. 297.
[163] Christiansen, R., *The Migratory Legends: A Proposed List of Types with a Systematic Catalogue of the Norwegian Variants. Folklore Fellows Communications*, Helsinki, Academia Scientarium Fenica, 1958, pp. 3–4.

> he was interested in depicting folk customs accurately and historical and anthropological evidence bears out that he did so, regardless of any assumptions by critics that he gave himself considerable leeway in either collecting or implementing his lore.[164]

He was surely aware of the many folk characters, and among them Little Father Time seems to resemble the mythical figure of the changeling. This figure, mostly known in the Western European tradition, is described as:

> an 'alien child' left in place of a healthy human child. (...) Changelings are, by definition, abnormal or unnatural, though the abnormality can take a variety of forms. In some variations on the motif, the changeling child is sickly or even mentally handicapped, while in others, the changeling shows signs of supernatural precociousness that enables the child to walk, run, or speak long before the expected age for such behaviours.[165]

Even though Hardy's child is obviously not a fairy tale character, he shares many features of the changeling. First of all, his origin is uncertain and as the legendary figure, he is abandoned as well. Indeed, the reader knows that he is Arabella's child but in her letter to Jude she reiterates many times that he is Jude's son as well, almost trying to convince him of it:

[164] Crain, S., *Little Father Time*, in "The Hardy Society Journal", Vol. 15, No. 1, (Spring 2019), Thomas Hardy Society, pp. 27-38, p. 27.
[165] Crain, S., *Little Father Time*, cit., p. 27.

> He is lawfully yours, that I solemnly swear. If anybody says he isn't, call them brimstone liars, for my sake. Whatever I may have done before or afterwards, I was honest to you from the time we were married till I went away.[166]

Gayla Steele refers to Little Father Time as a changeling as well, however she goes so far as to see him as "a tool used by Arabella to destroy her rival and her rival's children"[167]. This is not actually true, but she deduced something true, "the destructive capacity of Little Father Time"[168], which is related both to Arabella and Sue. Arabella has not succeeded in being a mother by abandoning her son and because even the child does not recognise her as his mother. When he meets her, he specifically states "You be the woman I thought wer my mother for a bit, till I found you wasn't"[169]. On the other hand, the boy recognizes Sue as his natural, although not biological, parent. However, once back at Christminster, Sue wrongly decides to admit in front of him that the children's presence and her pregnancy are a problem for their current situation. Their existence and her condition do not easily allow them to find a lodging:

> 'Father went away to give us children room, didn't he?' 'Partly.' 'It would be better to be out o' the world than in it, wouldn't it?' 'It would almost, dear.' ' 'Tis because of us children, too, isn't it, that you can't get a good lodging.' 'Well—people do object to children sometimes.' 'Then if children make so much trouble, why do people have 'em?' 'O—because it is a law of nature.' 'But we don't ask to be born?' 'No indeed.' 'And what makes it worse with me is that you are not my real mother, and you needn't have had me unless you liked. I oughtn't to have come to 'ee—that's the real truth! I troubled 'em in Australia; and I trouble folk here. I wish I hadn't been born!' 'You couldn't help it, my dear.' 'I think that whenever children be born that are not wanted they should be killed directly, before their souls come to 'em, and

[166] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Fifth, Ch. III, p. 274.
[167] Steel, G., *Sexual Tyranny in Wessex: Hardy's Witches and Demons of Folklore*, New York, Peter Lang Publishing, 1993, p. 192.
[168] Crain, S., *Little Father Time*, cit., p. 33.
[169] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Fifth, Ch. VII, p. 311.

> not allowed to grow big and walk about!' Sue did not reply. She was doubtfully pondering how to treat this too reflective child. She at last concluded that, so far as circumstances permitted, she would be honest and candid with one who entered into her difficulties like an aged friend. 'There is going to be another in our family soon,' she hesitatingly remarked.[170]

At this point, the child openly reproaches both her and his father. Nonetheless, he still refers to her as "mother", he still recognizes the bond between them. The next day, Little Father Time's act seems to connect him with the changeling's figure as an agent of chaos. He kills both his siblings and unintentionally causes the death of the one in Sue's womb. Sue's failure as a mother to Little Father Time comes to light both in giving the child too strong information for his age and in finally recognising that he is not her child. She states:

> You may say the boy wished to be out of life, or he wouldn't have done it. It was not unreasonable for him to die: it was part of his incurably sad nature, poor little fellow! But then the others—my own children and yours![171]

Crain's suggestions are already extremely remarkable, but she goes further by showing that Jude's son is not an actual agent of chaos, since he does not want to hurt other people. The reason why he acted was to help his parents, it was for their own sake and for the great love he has for them. In the end, the most essential quality he shares with the figure of the changeling is his being "an inevitable locus of instability, the interloper whose very presence creates friction"[172].

[170] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Sixth, Ch. II, p. 333.
[171] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Sixth, Ch. II, p. 339.
[172] Crain, S., *Little Father Time*, cit., p. 35.

What is clear by now is that Little Father Time is the symbol of many things: he is both the son of his parents and of modern times. If Jude and Sue are described as existing "fifty years too soon", the child's appearance suggests that he is a son of former ages and times and, at the same time, he is Hardy's vision of a bleak modernity. Whether in Jude there is still hope for humanity, in Little Father Time there is none. At the end of the novel, the murder of his siblings and his suicide are the most graphic proof of it:

> A shriek from Sue suddenly caused him to start round. He saw that the door of the room, or rather closet— which had seemed to go heavily upon its hinges as she pushed it back—was open, and that Sue had sunk to the floor just within it. Hastening forward to pick her up he turned his eyes to the little bed spread on the boards; no children were there. He looked in bewilderment round the room. At the back of the door were fixed two hooks for hanging garments, and from these the forms of the two youngest children were suspended, by a piece of box-cord round each of their necks, while from a nail a few yards off the body of little Jude was hanging in a similar manner. An overturned chair was near the elder boy, and his glazed eyes were slanted into the room; but those of the girl and the baby boy were closed.[173]

The tragedy has not ended yet. At the end of the day, after the children's burial in the cemetery, the last glimpse of hope is crushed. Even the last child, the genderless one in Sue's womb, does not survive:

> Jude waited all the evening downstairs. At a very late hour the intelligence was brought to him that a child had been prematurely born, and that it, like the others, was a corpse.[174]

[173] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Sixth, Ch. II, p. 335
[174] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Sixth, Ch. II, p. 341.

Jude and Sue's children do not have a name, nor an individuality. The last child does not even have a gender. They might remind us of Tess's siblings or Sorrow, but they are actually their final development. Their dying all together so horribly further highlights how Hardy connected the death of those children to the death of individuality. And yet, there is still a difference between Sue's children and Arabella's child. While the first ones have their eyes closed, a gesture of mercy by Little Father Time, Jude's son has his eyes wide open. Not even the mercy he has shown to his younger siblings is given to him, he is alone and an outsider even in his death.

Little Father Time and Sue's children embody the future. Their existence as children would normally signify a beacon of hope and purity able to grow up and develop in future times. However, their deaths show that kindness and pure hearted people cannot survive this world and the bleak times approaching. With the final children's deaths, Hardy wanted to convey this message and despite extremely conscious of the risk he was taking by choosing to narrate this episode, he did it. Pearce rightly states:

> The whole text has, in a sense, been building up to this moment in which the battle between the pure and the coarse, the spirit and the flesh, what is and what might be – in short the struggle between opposing forces that pull so remorselessly on both characters and text – comes to a climax.[175]

It is the eternal battle of humanity against the degradation, foreseen in *Tess of the D'Urberville*, of Sue's mind against her body, of Jude's position in the world against the categorization imposed by society. It is a climax indeed. The crude language could

[175] Pearce, J. L., *The Figure of the Child in the Novels of Thomas Hardy,* cit., p. 65.

not be avoided. The “triplet of little corpses” and the birth of a child that “like the others, was a corpse” are brutal but realistic descriptions of a dead hope.

Finally, particular attention needs to be given to the suicide note written by Little Father Time. Even this letter is the essence of this peculiar character, creating both pity and horror in the reader: “Done because we’re too menny”[176]. Little Father Time’s last sentence is his legacy to the world, and it is extremely worthy of note. As Carol Anderson believes, "we must take all the ordinary elements of the novel (landscape, characters, plot) and accept them as metaphorical equivalents of theme".[177] Therefore, the note it is not simply what it seems to be, it might have deeper meanings.

What catches the reader’s attention and what brings him to sympathize even more with this curious character is the spelling of “menny” instead of “many”. This might be related to the boy’s absence of education or his desperate state of mind at the moment of his suicide. As Gordon underlines, the word “menny” might be a ghastly joke. It might mean “like men” therefore indicating that “tragedy and grief are the lot of both children and adults because of their participation in a common humanity”[178]. Consequently, what Hardy would suggest is that even the status of child is not enough to grant protection in this world and the tragic fate does not spare the most innocent human beings.

On the other hand, following Anderson’s statement and trying to see the metaphors and symbols in the note, it is highly remarkable that “menny” might be related to the handwriting on the wall in Daniel 5:25: "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin"[179]. Its translation suggests that such sentence is actually an omen: “God has numbered the

[176] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Sixth, Ch. II, p. 336.
[177] Anderson, C. R., “*Time, Space, and Perspective in Thomas Hardy”*, quoted in Gordon, W. K., in “Nineteenth-Century Fiction”, Vol. 9, No. 3, (December, 1954), pp. 192-208, pp. 194-195.
[178] Gordon, W. K., *Father Time’s Suicide Note in Jude the Obscure*, in “Nineteenth-Century Fiction”, Vol. 22, No. 3, (December, 1967), pp. 298-300, p. 299.
[179] Quoted in Gordon, W. K., Father Time’s Suicide Note in Jude the Obscure, cit. p. 299.

days of your kingdom and brought it to an end"[180]. It might result in an over-analysing of the text, yet it is also true that Hardy loved both metaphors and portents – both in *Tess* and *Jude* – and in the light of these observations, Little Father Time's comment while witnessing the procession in Christminster is extremely telling: "It do seem like the Judgment Day!"[181].

[180] Anderson, C. R., *"Time, Space, and Perspective in Thomas Hardy"*, quoted in Gordon, W. K., *Father Time's Suicide Note in Jude the Obscure*, cit., p. 299.
[181] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Sixth, Ch. I, p. 324.

Conclusions

> Though not a novel with a purpose, I think it turns out to be a novel which "makes for" humanity – more than any other I have written: an opinion that will probably surprise you[182].

This is how, in 1895, Hardy summed up the meaning of *Jude the Obscure* in a letter to Florence Henniker. He went on to specify that the novel promoted "the inculcation of Mercy, to youth & girls who have made a bad marriage, & to animals who have to be butchered"[183]. As he shows through the character of Jude, the true key to life is not only a good nature or a great empathy but also a union of the two under the norm of Charity. Both Arabella and Sue violate this norm, the former by manipulating Jude into marriage and the latter by abandoning him in the most important moment in the end. In addition, Little Father Time violates it, by killing his little innocent brothers. However, most of all, it is society, with its educational and economic system, that violates Charity. As Taylor highlights, "suffering and mercy are Hardy's two great principles, and they stand as his great late Victorian alternatives to the Letters that Kill".[184]

The present dissertation shows that Hardy's children characters in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and in *Jude the Obscure* are victims of the tragic modernity making its way in the course of History. On one side, the author shows that sensitivity and sympathy for other beings or animals - typical traits of children and of the novels' tragic protagonists - are the real essence of humanity. On the other side, however, the

[182] Hardy, T., *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy: 1893-1901*, ed. Purdy, R. L.; Millgate, M., OUP, Oxford, 1980, pp. 94.
[183] Hardy, T., *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy: 1893-1901*, cit., p. 97.
[184] Taylor, D., Introduction to Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., p. xxxiii.

Romantic myth of the child and its innocence, the Charity typical of "Tess the child" and "Jude the child", are doomed to extinction. The two novels demonstrate Hardy's belief that there is no space for pure hearts in the nineteenth century. In the modern reality, childhood is negated and the innocent and helpless human being *par excellence*, i.e. the child, cannot survive.

As Little Father Time shows, the child's nature changes as well: from innocent victim and the Romantic myth, the figure of the child is transformed into a monstrous executioner by modernity. As Villari argues, he belongs to a generation, which is not fit to live, and this is almost a genetic trait. The future times, with their accelerated movement are exemplified in this child, who seems to be cursed by a genetic modification[185]. Little Father Time, a mysterious and merciless being, represents the ultimate meaning of childhood in modern times. His conflicting body and mind show the rapidity of time, as the doctor explains to Jude:

> (...) there are such boys springing up amongst us—boys of a sort unknown in the last generation—the outcome of new views of life. They seem to see all its terrors before they are old enough to have staying power to resist them. He says it is the beginning of the coming universal wish not to live.[186]

[185] Cf. Villari, E., *Il Vizio Moderno dell'Irrequietezza: saggio sui romanzi di Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 153.
[186] Hardy, T., *Jude the Obscure*, cit., Part Sixth, Ch. II, pp. 336-337.

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