
‘A VERY PRETTY BREW IN TAP AT THE PURE DROP’: SOCIETAL PARAMETERS IN *TESS OF THE D’URBERVILLES*

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“Every village has its idiosyncrasy, its constitution, often its own code of morality”.
(Ch. 10)

Abstract. *This paper studies Victorian society through references included in Tess of the d’Urbervilles that provide the novel with a sense of vividness and realism, to the extent that it merits consideration as a documentation of the social context within which the narrative is developed. It will examine the topography presented by Hardy, the exactitude of which lends a remarkable degree of verisimilitude to the story. It will also analyse the references to taverns and drinking houses, considering these to reflect a distinct aspect of the English society of the 19th century. Additional elements to be considered are Hardy’s portrayal of the traditional May Day dances, the allusions to schools and education, the superstitious beliefs held among the inhabitants of Marlott, and the moral laxity exhibited by the residents of Trantridge. The awareness of class divisions and the social ambitions of certain characters also merit attention, along with aspects of legislative and regulatory practice that are reflected in the work.*

Keywords: *Victorianism, Hardy, society, class, costumbrism.*

Introduction: “what everybody nowadays thinks and feels”

Books teach us; they give us the opportunity to discover and learn. A book may be viewed as a literary study of a determined period. The novel, in particular, is understood not to emerge *ex nihilo*, but to be deeply rooted in specific social coordinates — factors of time and place that define and distinguish it. Contextual parameters permeate and mould the literary work, as social critics such as Edmond Cros¹ have proposed.

An understanding of the Victorian era may be obtained through the work of academics such as R. Gilmour², while the Victorian novel itself has been examined in texts such as the work edited by Deirdre David³. Victorianism is also thoroughly depicted in the novels of Thomas Hardy⁴, with elements of “contemporaneity” illustrated through intimate details of Victorian society, as identified by Penny Boumelha⁵. These realistic contemporary details are reflected in Thomas Hardy's Note, in which he expresses his desire to convey “[...] what everybody nowadays thinks and feels”⁶. The identification, explanation, and analysis of these social and historical details is the methodology applied in this study, limited primarily to the first part of the novel (“Phase the First: The Maiden” and “Phase the Second: Maiden no More”) as well as some relevant passages from the other six phases.

Tess of the d'Urbervilles was first published in *The Graphic* between July 4th and December 16th 1891. A three-volume edition was published in November of that year by Osgood, McIlvane & Co, London. In the explanatory note to this publication, the author cites Saint Jerome: “If an offense come out of the truth, better it is that the offense come than that the truth be concealed”⁷. This quotation indicates *a priori* the high degree of realism displayed in the novel, and the refusal to render the truth more palatable or appealing for its audience through artifice.

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- 1 Cros, E. *Theory and Practice of Sociocriticism*. Translated by J. Schwartz. Foreword by J. Link and U. Link-Heer. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988. Cros, E. *Le Sujet culturel*. Paris: L'har-mattan, 2005.
 - 2 Gilmour, R. *The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1830–1901*. London: Longman, 1993.
 - 3 David, D. (ed.). *The Victorian Novel*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
 - 4 Born in rural Dorset, the son of a stonemason, Thomas Hardy first found fame with the publication of *Far from the Madding Crowd* in 1874. The novel studied here was first published in 1891. Four years later, he published *Jude the Obscure*, which caused such a scandal that the writer abandoned writing novels and dedicated himself to poetry. His legacy consists of fourteen novels, eight volumes of poetry, around forty short stories, and two dramas.
 - 5 Boumelha, P. “Introduction”. In J. Grindle and S. Gatrell (eds.), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. xiii.
 - 6 Hardy, T. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Edited by J. Grindle and S. Gatrell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 3.
 - 7 *Ibid.*

The aim of this study, therefore, is to identify and examine the reflections of rural Victorian society that appear within the text. In order to achieve this, we will explore various aspects included in the narrative. These will include the specific locations that frame the narrative, taverns and traditional customs, issues of class divisions, contemporary legislation, and references to historical figures and literature popular in the late 19th century.

1. Mapping Wessex: from Marlott to Trantridge

The beginning of the opening chapter places the action towards the end of May, as a man walks from Shaston to the village of Marlott in the Vale of Blackmoor⁸, where he lives. On his way, he encounters an “elderly parson”⁹ named Tringham, of Stagfoot Lane¹⁰, who initiates a curious conversation with the man surrounding his ancestry. John Durbeyfield, the protagonist’s father, is presented as follows in the opening lines of the novel: “a middle-aged man was walking homeward from Shaston to the village of Marlott, in the adjoining Vale of Blakemore or Blackmoor¹¹”. Thus, from the very outset, Hardy imbues the novel with a considerable degree of detail and geographical accuracy.

At the beginning of Chapter 2, the narrator gives a detailed description of Marlott, citing – among other aspects – its location four hours from London. The region is bordered to the south by the “bold chalk ridge”¹² of Hambledon Hill, Bulbarrow, Nellecombe-Tout, Dogbury High-Stoy, and Bubb-Down. The valley was formerly known as The Forest of White Hart, due to a legend dating back to the times of Henry III. The parson goes on to explain that “as a county family”, Jack Durbeyfield’s family line is no longer extant: it “had gone down – gone under”¹³. He reveals that the d’Urbervilles are buried in vaults at Kingsbere-sub-Greenhill “under Purbeck-marble canopies”¹⁴. This formerly illustrious family had once owned residences at Kingsbere, Sherton, Millpond, Lullstead, and Wellbridge, although nothing remained of their former possessions.

8 The study carried out by Angus Easson (1989, pp. 47–49) explores various geographical aspects of the novel.

9 Hardy, *supra note* 6, p. 14.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 56.

11 The reference to two similar names for a single location appears in the novel on various occasions (13, 18). Penny Boumalha (2009: xiii) interprets this as a reflection of the changing significance of words according to the period and the context, which determines meaning as well as spelling. This dual designation appears in other pairs of proper nouns, such as Bulbarrow or Bealbarrow.

12 Hardy, *supra note* 6, p. 18.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

14 *Ibid.*

In Chapter 2, the narrator presents three brothers passing through the village of Marlott on a walking tour of the vale of Blackmoor during the Whitsun holidays (Pentecost). Starting at their home town of Shaston in the north-east, Felix, Cuthbert, and Angel are walking in a south-easterly direction. The location is of undeniably relevant aesthetic value, as stated by Linda Shires¹⁵ in her study.

In a figurative manner, yet presented with terrestrial realism, when his wife and daughter bring John Durbeyfield home from the tavern, the narrator emphasises that “he was sufficiently unsteady to tilt the row of three at one moment as if they were marching to London, and at another as if they were marching to Bath”¹⁶. This apparently secondary reference conveys a sense of irony while at the same time setting the scene within a specific geographical framework between the two cities.

When Tess and her brother Abraham take the cart of beehives to market in Chapter 4, further localities are cited, such as the village of Stourcastle and the summit of Bulbarrow or Bealbarrow, the highest point in Wessex. A specific geographical point is mentioned after the Durbeyfields' horse is killed in a collision. A farmer from Stourcastle comes to their aid as they wait on the roadside with their cart loaded with the hives, taking them on to the town of Casterbridge.

At the beginning of Chapter 5, Joan proposes that her daughter should visit the wealthy Mrs d'Urberville, whose estate borders the wood known as The Chase, the objective being to appeal to her supposed relation for some advancement. The protagonist walks from Marlott to Shaston, where she takes a lift in a van travelling from there to Chaseborough and passing near the village of Trantridge. It is here that the wealthy widow has her residence known as The Slopes, a house built more for enjoyment than as a conventional working estate. Later, in Chapter 11, Tess “walked the three miles¹⁷ to Chaseborough”¹⁸. The Chase also reappears when Alec purposefully diverts the two on their journey home to Trantridge.

In Chapter 8, when Tess rides in Alec d'Urberville's cart (drawn by a boisterous mare named Tib), the young man drives extremely recklessly. He invites Tess to hold his waist and even asks her for a kiss, which she initially refuses him though she feels compelled to relent later. Tess becomes so frustrated at his behaviour that – looking for an excuse to get away from him – she throws her hat onto the road in order to get down and continue on foot: “No; I shall walk”. Alec points out in reply “’Tis five or six miles yet to Trantridge”¹⁹.

15 Shires, L. “The radical aesthetic of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*”. In L.M. Shires (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 145.

16 Hardy, *supra* note 6, p. 34.

17 The specification of distance is a device that confers realism and credibility to the narrative. It appears in many Victorian novels, for example in *Middlemarch* the narrator reveals that the rectory of Causabon, at Lowick, is five miles from the house of Mr. Brooke in Tipton Grange (Eliot, 2008, p. 25).

18 Hardy, *supra* note 6, p. 78.

19 *Ibid.*, p.64

Other contextual references reflect the natural landscape of southern England. For example, The Chase, which borders the estate belonging to the d'Urbervilles known as The Slopes, is described as an area remarkable for its ancient woodland: "[...] a truly venerable tract of forest land, one of the few remaining woodlands in England of undoubted primaevial date, wherein Druidical mistletoe was still found on aged oaks, and where enormous yew-trees, not planted by the hand of man, grew as they had grown when they were pollarded for bows."²⁰

Simon Gatrell confirms that Hardy "had begun to understand that he was the historian of a Wessex now passed, the recorder of a series of unique micro-environments, ways of life and speech, which together had formed a cultural whole"²¹. Wessex is an imaginary region developed by Hardy, which the author depicts with great verisimilitude. The name is taken from the medieval Anglo-Saxon kingdom that comprised large parts of south-western Britain.

2. The Pure Drop and Rolliver's Inn: Legislation on taverns and the consumption of alcohol

After the encounter between the parson and John Durbeyfield, the latter suggests they go on for a drink together, there being "[...] a very pretty brew in tap at The Pure Drop"²², although not as good as that "at Rolliver's"²³. The first tavern named is in Marlott and (as specified at the beginning of Chapter 4), is a fully licensed establishment located at the far end of the village.

John Durbeyfield's habit of frequenting the taverns is observed at various stages, for example when Tess' father is spotted returning home in a carriage by her friends, who exclaim: "He's got his market-nitch. Haw-haw!"²⁴. It is also implied when Joan tells her daughter: "'Twas on this account that your father rode home in the vlee; not because he'd been drinking, as people supposed"²⁵. Indeed, the opening scene of the novel brings this issue to the foreground of the narrative, as it describes Tess' father as he returns from visiting the tavern. In Chapter 10, the narrator confirms the suffering of the Durbeyfield family caused by John's alcoholism: "Tess [...] had undergone such painful experiences of this kind in her father's house"²⁶.

Rolliver's tavern stands at the opposite end of the ramshackle village to the home of the Durbeyfields. While it was not legally permitted to serve alcohol for consump-

20 Hardy, *supra* note 6, pp. 43–44.

21 Gatrell, S. "Wessex". In L. M. Shires (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 31.

22 Hardy, *supra* note 6, p. 15.

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

26 *Ibid.*

tion on the premises, the beer it produced was of such high quality that “[...] the prevalent opinion that it was better to drink with Rolliver in a corner of the housetop than with the other landlord in a wide house”²⁷.

In Chapter 3, when Tess asks after her father, her mother says: “The poor man—he felt so rafted after his uplifting by the pa’son’s news—that he went up to Rolliver’s half an hour ago”²⁸. In an interior monologue at the end of the chapter, Tess expresses the feeling that her father “ought not to be at an inn at this late hour celebrating his ancient blood”²⁹. The narrator describes the tavern as “ensnaring”, as Abraham goes there to bring back his parents only to remain there as well: “Abraham, like his parents, seemed to have been limed and caught by the ensnaring inn”³⁰. In Chapter 7, when Tess is about to leave, her father raises his head languidly “as he suspended his nap, induced by a slight excess this morning in honour of the occasion”³¹.

Certain aspects of tavern legislation are clearly reflected in the work. Rolliver’s inn was licensed only for the sale of beer but not for its consumption; meanwhile The Pure Drop had a full license for consumption on the premises. Rolliver’s “[...] could only boast of an off-licence; hence, as nobody could legally drink on the premises [...]”³², while the other tavern is presented as “The Pure Drop, the fully-licensed”³³.

In spite of this, John and his friends gather secretly at Rolliver’s to drink in a small room at the top of the house. When Joan Durbeyfield arrives in search of her husband, the owner tells her: “Oh, ’tis you, Mrs Durbeyfield—Lard—how you frightened me!—I thought it might be some gaffer sent by Gover’ment”³⁴. In an attempt to silence John Durbeyfield’s singing, which could draw unwanted attention to the establishment and lead to problems with the law, the landlady of Rolliver’s says: “Hush! Don’t ’ee sing so loud, my good man, [...] in case any member of the Gover’ment should be passing, and take away my licends”³⁵. When the Durbeyfield family is about to leave, the owner repeats: “No noise, please, if ye’ll be so good, my dears; or I mid lose my licends, and be

27 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 28. Tess’ strong views against drinking are significant, as they clearly demonstrate her lack of conformity. This attitude confirms Tess as a protagonist who renounces the drinking culture of Victorian England and the excessive consumption of alcohol. An example of this is Tess’ response regarding her father: “Get up his strength!” said Tess impetuously, the tears welling to her eyes. “O my God! Go to a public-house to get up his strength! And you as well agreed as he, mother!” (28). Later, when the narrator refers to the tavern as “ensnaring” (30) it demonstrates their negative view of the tavern and the potentially destructive consequences of frequenting such an establishment.

29 Hardy, *supra* note 6, p. 31.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

35 *Ibid.*

summons'd, and I don't know what all! 'Night t'ye!"³⁶. The repetition of the threat of government inspection and the possible loss of their licence effectively reveals that in the second half of the 19th century there was a well-established system of regulation and legislation governing the operation of taverns. The proprietor, by way of *excusatio non petita, acusatio manifesta*, exclaims whenever anyone enters the building that those already upstairs are merely "a few private friends"³⁷.

While the *pater familias* indulges in drink, his wife Joan Durbeyfield stays at home doing household chores. In Chapter 3, when Tess returns home from the club-walking she hears the rocking of a cradle on the stone floor to the tune of a popular song ("The Spotted Cow")³⁸, details that are mentioned twice. She sees her mother surrounded by children and absent-mindedly washing the laundry, a fact that is emphasized by the narrator and by Tess, who offers to help: "I'll rock the cradle for 'ee, mother. [...] Or I'll take off my best frock and help you wring up? I thought you had finished long ago"³⁹. Joan Durbeyfield's lack of interest in her household duties is highlighted when the narrator reveals that "To discover him at Rolliver's, to sit there for an hour or two by his side and dismiss all thought and care of the children during the interval, made her happy"⁴⁰.

The role of the tavern as a place of social gathering for the middle classes, of escape from the domestic sphere, of diversion and relaxation, is a specific and significant detail in this portrait of Victorian society. In Trantridge this custom also existed, as the narrator describes: "The place had also a more abiding defect; it drank hard"⁴¹; this fact is clarified beyond all doubt by the following statement:

The chief pleasure of these philosophers lay in going every Saturday night, when work was done, to Chaseborough, a decayed market-town two or three miles distant; and, returning in the small hours of the next morning, to spend Sunday in sleeping off the dyspeptic effects of the curious compounds sold to them as beer by the monopolizers of the once-independent inns⁴².

Trantridge boasts a tavern called the Flower-de-Luce; however, as this establishment closed early, many of the revellers go on to another building, a windowless and dusty barn full of peat and hay, where they dance and drink⁴³. When the group finally

36 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

39 Hardy, *supra* note 6, p. 27.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

42 *Ibid.*

43 *Ibid.*, pp. 71–72.

returns home, the effects of alcohol are plainly evident, as revealed by the following narrative, which is not without a sense of irony:

Tess soon perceived as she walked in the flock, sometimes with this one, sometimes with that, that the fresh night air was producing staggerings and serpentine courses among the men who had partaken too freely; some of the more careless women also were wandering in their gait—to wit, a dark virago, Car Darch, dubbed Queen of Spades, till lately a favourite of d'Urberville's; Nancy, her sister, nicknamed the Queen of Diamonds; and the young married woman⁴⁴ who had already tumbled down. [...] They followed the road with a sensation that they were soaring along in a supporting medium, possessed of original and profound thoughts, themselves and surrounding nature forming an organism of which all the parts harmoniously and joyously interpenetrated each other. They were as sublime as the moon and stars above them, and the moon and stars were as ardent as they⁴⁵.

This thematic aspect refers indirectly to the widespread problem of alcoholism during this period. The following narrative reflection also points to this: “Tess, however, had undergone such painful experiences of this kind in her father's house that the discovery of their condition spoils the pleasure she was beginning to feel in the moonlight journey”⁴⁶. In the second phase of the novel, when Tess' infant son is dying, the narrator reveals of John Durbeyfield that “he had just returned from his weekly booze at Rolliver's Inn”⁴⁷.

The issue of the consumption of alcohol is also evident in other novels where it is central to the plot. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*⁴⁸, Arthur Huntingdon's addiction to alcohol and debauchery affects his marriage to Helen⁴⁹ to such an extent that she is compelled to abandon him⁵⁰, taking their young son with her.

44 The young woman is described as follows on the way home: “[...] the tipling bride, as she steadied herself on the arm of her fond husband” (77). To remove all doubt, the narrator confirms at the end of Chapter 10: “Then these children of the open air, whom even excess of alcohol could scarce injure permanently [...]: and the spirit of the scene, and of the moonlight, and of Nature, seemed harmoniously to mingle with the spirit of wine” (79).

45 Hardy, *supra* note 6, p. 74.

46 Hardy, *supra* note 6, p. 74.

47 *Ibid.*, pp. 197, 216–217.

48 Brontë, A. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Edited by H. Rosengarten. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 197, 216–217.

49 Torralbo Caballero, J.D. & Janulevičienė, V. The peculiarities of a female protagonist in A. Brontë's epistolary novel. *Folia Linguistica et Litteraria. Journal of Language and Literary Studies*. 2019, 27: 25–39.

50 Torralbo Caballero, J.D. Anne Brontë's Helen and her atypical insubordination: ‘A will of her own’. *Romanian Journal of English Studies*. 2019, 16: 16–29.

3. Costumbrism: "The women's club-walking"

In Chapter 2, the narrator describes the local tradition dances – known as “club-revels” or “club-walking”⁵¹ – celebrated by the women’s club of the village of Marlott, who had been observing this May Day tradition for four hundred years. The participants of these dances or processions are exclusively female; dressed in white and carrying a willow branch in one hand and a bunch of white flowers in the other, they march in rows of two throughout the parish. The narrator suggests that the fading of these women’s groups might have been in some part the fault of their male counterparts: “but either the natural shyness of the softer sex, or a sarcastic attitude on the part of male relatives, had denuded such women’s clubs as remained (if any other did) or this their glory and consummation”⁵². The procession ends with a dance, in which the young men join them after finishing their work in the fields.

When Prince, the Durbeyfields’ horse, is killed in an accident, the narrator refers to the “knacker and tanner”⁵³ who bought the bodies of deceased animals for their meat. This incident allows the reader to glimpse another local custom; however, in the case of the proud John Durbeyfield, he prefers to dig the horse a grave in his own garden, declaring “He’ve served me well in his lifetime, and I won’t part from him now”⁵⁴.

In Chapter 5 the narrator reveals Tess’ determination “as soon as she left school, to lend a hand at haymaking or harvesting on neighbouring farms; or, by preference, at milking or butter-making processes, which she had learnt when her father had owned cows [...]”⁵⁵.

Hardy draws a contrast between mother and daughter in terms of their education: Tess had studied to “the sixth standard in the National school under a London-trained mistress”⁵⁶, a fact which is reiterated later: “and knowledge under an infinitely Revised Code”. The contrast is further emphasised through the following temporal hyperbole: “there was a gap of two hundred years as ordinarily understood”⁵⁷. Tess⁵⁸ only spoke in dialect when she became excited, while her mother always spoke in her regional tongue. The outmoded characteristics of the mother are defined in the fol-

51 Hardy, *supra note* 6, p. 19.

52 *Ibid.*

53 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

54 *Ibid.*

55 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

56 Hardy, *supra note* 6, p. 27.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

58 In Chapter 5, when Tess travels to Trantridge, the narrator once again references her education: “her judgement was dependent on the teaching of the village school, where she had held a leading place at the time of her leaving, a year or two before this date” (42). A historical explanation can be found in the study by Edward Royle (2012, pp. 409–414).

lowing way: “with her fast-perishing lumber of superstitions, folk-lore, dialect, and orally transmitted ballads”⁵⁹. These references contain an echo of the Education Act (1870), which instituted primary education throughout the country; the study by Barbara Dennis⁶⁰ has demonstrated its reflection in literature.

Hardy also references the belief in superstitions: Joan instructs her daughter to leave the *Compleat Fortune Teller* in the outhouse, as she did not allow it to remain inside the house overnight. The book is a well-known witchcraft text that was in widespread circulation at the time⁶¹. A belief in superstitions is a key feature of the inhabitants of the Vale of Blackmoor, as is further clarified at the beginning of Chapter 6⁶², when Tess is pricked on the cheek by one of the roses Alec had given her. Tess immediately interprets this as a bad sign. The fact that the narrator emphasises that it was the first of such signs that day reveals how accustomed she was to view events in terms of superstitions: “Tess was steeped in fancies and prefigurative superstitions; she thought this an ill omen—the first she had noticed that day”⁶³. At the beginning of Chapter 7, when Tess leaves home for her new position at The Slopes, the narrator alludes to a “prophetic bird”⁶⁴ singing in the wood while the other birds remain silent, “equally convinced that he is mistaken”⁶⁵. Once Tess leaves, her mother mentions that her daughter “ought to make her way with ’en, if she plays her trump card aright”⁶⁶.

4. Class: “I am one of a noble race”

The first episode of the novel reveals much about the nature of hierarchy and the social structure of Victorian Britain. The parson, Father Tringham, addresses the protagonist’s father as Sir John (and not merely as John). He replies “Then what might your meaning be in calling me ‘Sir John’ these different times, when I be plain Jack Durbeyfield, the haggler?”⁶⁷. The cleric explains “Don’t you really know, Durbeyfield, that you are the lineal representative of the ancient and knightly family of the d’Urbervilles, who derive their descent from Sir Pagan d’Urberville, that renowned knight who came from Normandy with William the Conqueror, as appears by Bat-

59 Hardy, *supra* note 6, p. 29.

60 Dennis, B. *The Victorian Novel*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 14.

61 Barrineau, N. “Explanatory Notes”. In J. Grindle and S. Gattrell (eds.), *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 424.

62 In the final part of the novel, this theme reappears with respect to the inhabitants of Marlott.

63 Hardy, *supra* note 6, p. 50.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

65 *Ibid.*

66 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

67 Hardy, *supra* note 6, p. 14.

tle Abbey Roll?"⁶⁸ He then proceeds to give a detailed description of his family tree: "Your ancestor was one of the twelve knights who assisted the Lord of Estremavilla in Normandy in his conquest of Glamorganshire"⁶⁹. Father Tringham describes their fortunes during the reigns of King Stephen and King John, referring to the Knights Hospitallers and to the great Council held during the reign of Edward II. He then explains that the line of the d'Urbervilles lost prominence during the time of Oliver Cromwell before becoming "Knights of the Royal Oak for [their] loyalty"⁷⁰ during the reign of Charles II.

The novel expresses a strong consciousness of social class⁷¹ and its impact. This is revealed when John Durbeyfield immediately begins to assimilate what the parson had told him. Sitting on the grass verge by the side of the road, he addresses a boy named Fred by way of the following imperative phrase: "Boy, take up that basket! I want 'ee to go on an errand for me"⁷², clarifying "[...] I'm one of a noble race"⁷³. Fred's reaction is the following: "Who be you, then, John Durbeyfield, to order me about and call me 'boy'? You know my name as well as I know yours!"⁷⁴. In response to the scepticism of the young boy, John hands him a shilling. He asks Fred to go straight to the tavern at Marlott and to instruct them to send a horse and carriage along with a bottle of rum; he even tells him to go on to his house to tell his wife to stop washing clothes, as he had important news for her. He also tells Fred to take the message, detailing what he would like to eat, home "—well, lamb's fry if they can get it; and if they can't, black-pot; and if they can't get that, well chitterlings will do"⁷⁵.

Meanwhile, they hear the sounds of a brass band coming from the village; John Durbeyfield decides to pass by in order to see the parade "'Tis the women's club-walking, Sir John. Why, your da'ter is one o' the members. [...] Well, vamp on to Marlott, will ye, and order that carriage, and maybe I'll drive round and inspect the club"⁷⁶. Tess, concerned by her father's strange behaviour, goes straight home after the dance. When her mother expresses a desire to tell her something, Tess anticipates "Had it anything to do with father's making such a mommet of himself in thik

68 *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

70 *Ibid.*

71 This topic also appears in other novels of the Victorian period. For example, in *Middlemarch*, when Rosamond is introduced to Lydgate by her uncle Featherstone, the young girl reflects on Lydgate's social position: "And here was Mr. Lydgate suddenly corresponding to her ideal, being altogether foreign to Middlemarch, carrying a certain air of distinction congruous with good family, and possessing connections which offered vistas of that middle-class heaven, rank [...]" (Eliot, 2008, p. 110).

72 Hardy, *supra note* 6, p. 16.

73 *Ibid.*

74 *Ibid.*

75 *Ibid.*

76 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

carriage this afternoon?”⁷⁷. Her mother tells Tess “We’ve been found to be the greatest gentlefolk in the whole county—reaching all back long before Oliver Grumble’s time [...]”⁷⁸.

The starting point of the narrative is a search for social identity by the protagonist’s family. Joan Durbeyfield wants her daughter to visit a wealthy lady living in Trantridge by the name of d’Urberville, not only to make a claim on their supposed kinship but also because “She’d be sure to win the lady—Tess would; and likely enough ’twould lead to some noble gentleman marrying her”⁷⁹. At the end of Chapter 6, the narrator confirms the mother’s obsession with finding a prosperous husband for her daughter⁸⁰: “The light-minded woman had been discovering good matches for her daughter almost from the year of her birth”⁸¹. Tess’ mother encourages her to visit Mrs d’Urberville to claim kinship in search of social advancement and potentially an advantageous marriage⁸²; as she expresses: “I’ve heard what I’ve heard, good-now.”⁸³. Tess eventually agrees to the visit, however she warns her mother that she was not going for the purposes of finding a gentleman suitor, as she considered the idea ridiculous: “And don’t go thinking about her making a match for me—it is silly”⁸⁴.

The protagonist’s mother presses her to accept a position of work at the d’Urberville estate, with the motive of achieving some form of social improvement by this means, ideally through marriage. When Tess is about to leave to start her new job, her parents – far from being saddened by their daughter’s imminent departure – discuss the possibility of selling their putative noble title in an exchange that Hardy imbues with a great deal of irony:

77 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

78 Hardy, *supra* note 6, p. 27.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

80 The story shows Tess to be capable of greater maturity than her mother; she is not influenced by her mother’s obsessions and fantasies: “Being mentally older than her mother she did not regard Mrs Durbeyfield’s matrimonial hopes for her in a serious aspect for a moment” (58).

81 Hardy, *supra* note 6, p. 58.

82 In Chapter 6, when Mrs d’Urberville’s son visits the Durbeyfields, Joan says she considers Alexander to be a very handsome young man, to which Tess responds coldly. Her mother persists: “Well, there’s your chance, whether or no; and I’m sure he wears a beautiful diamond ring!” (52). Addressing her husband, Joan repeats: “and she’s a fool if she don’t follow it up” (52). The narrator clarifies that Tess’s mother had “the nuptial Vision”. Faced with Tess’s obstinate resistance, her younger siblings begin to wail pitifully, lamenting her unwillingness to advance socially “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!” (53)

83 Hardy, *supra* note 6, p. 41.

84 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

"Not for less than a thousand pound!" cried Lady Durbeyfield.

"Tell"n – I'll take a thousand pound... Well, I'll take les, when I come to think o't. He'll adorn it better than a por lammicken feller like myself can. Tell'n he sal hae it for a hundred... But I won't stand upon trifles – tell'n he shall hae it for fifty – for twenty pound! Yes twenty pound – that's the lowest. Dammy, family honour is family honour, and I won't take a penny les!"⁸⁵.

In contrast, "Tess's eyes were too full and her voice too choked to utter the sentiments that were in her"⁸⁶. The narrator makes plain the distinction between the innocence of the Durbeyfield children (who all go outside together to say goodbye to Tess) and their mother who walks behind "[...] her mother just behind [...]; the group forming a picture of honest beauty franked by innocence, and backed by simple-souled vanity" (57).

When the group of women from the local May Day traditions pass by The Pure Drop (in Chapter 2) one of the participants tells Tess: "The Load-a-Lord! Why, Tess Durbeyfield, if there isn't thy father riding home in a carriage!" (20). Her father, John Durbeyfield, approaches in a cart driven by a young servant-girl of The Pure Drop, leaning back and waving his hand, exclaiming: "I've-got-a-gr't-family-vault-at-Kingsbere—and knighted-forefathers-in-lead-coffins-there!" (21). Tess blushes at the sight of her father's ridiculous behaviour, while the other girls in the procession begin to laugh. The narrator describes the scene as the "triumphal chariot under the conduct of the ostleress" (21). In Chapter 4, Joan Durbeyfield arrives at the tavern to hear her husband singing: "I've got a great family vault at Kingsbere-sub-Greenhill, and finer skillentons than any man in Wessex!" (32). Later, when she and Tess bring him home he begins singing again "I've got" fam-ily vault" at Kings'-bere!" (34). In this instance, his wife tries to stop him singing drunkenly in the street, telling him that there are numerous other old families in the area, such as the Anktells, the Horseys and even the Tringhams, although these had all diminished. The author makes evident the pretensions of social advancement and the ostentatious behaviour that typify it.

The manner in which Simon Stoke came to live in the south of England and adopt the new surname of d'Urberville is another example⁸⁷ of social mobility within a culture that values lineage and appearances more than authenticity and legitimacy. The narrator explains that this man of business (according to some a usurer) moved to

85 *Ibid.*, pp. 56–57.

86 Hardy, *supra* note 6, p. 57.

87 Examples of this desire for social advancement appear often in Victorian novels. One such example is found in the parodic representation of the families Lookaloft and Greenacres in Chapter 39 of *Barchester Towers* (Trollope, 2012, pp. 437–439). Another is in *Middlemarch*, in Mr Brooke's justification of the relationship between his niece Dorothea and the cleric Causabon, who he says will surely be a bishop one day. He repeats this on multiple occasions (Eliot, 2008, pp. 38, 61), in Chapters 4 and 8. Mrs. Cadwallader expresses the same opinion in Chapter 7.

the south of England, “constructing his family tree on the new basis”⁸⁸. In choosing his adopted name, he was careful to outline the intermarriages and aristocratic ties with as much moderation as possible in his invention. Through this episode and this image, which ultimately amounts to little more than a few lines on a piece of paper, the author emphasizes the artificiality of this particular lineage when the narrator expresses that Tess and her parents thought “a family name came by nature”⁸⁹.

Another aspect of class distinctions and identification is revealed in the following statement: “and we have an old seal, marked with a ramping lion on a shield, and a castle over him”⁹⁰ whereby Tess describes to Alexander d'Urberville what remains of their family possessions when they meet at his mother's home. Alec confirms that these emblems (the crest and the coat of arms) belong to the d'Urberville line. Shortly afterwards, the young man attempts to protect his hypothetical superiority, stressing to Tess the difference between the two surnames “no nonsense about ‘d'Urberville’;—‘Durbeyfield’ only, you know—quite another name”⁹¹. This encounter foreshadows the ensuing drama of the narrative through implicit and explicit references, such as the definition of Alexander as “one who stood fair to be the blood-red ray in the spectrum of her young life”⁹² and “tragic mischief”⁹³ or “the wrong man”⁹⁴ from whom “[...] sprang anxieties, disappointments, shocks, catastrophes, and passing-strange destinies.”⁹⁵.

When Tess reluctantly decides to accept the position at the d'Urberville estate, she writes to confirm her decision; Mrs d'Urberville responds that a cart would come to collect her. In fact, it appears that the letter was written by her son Alec, taking on the identity of his blind mother. Joan Durbeyfield reacts to this information with a comment that points to her newly acquired social pretensions, declaring that a cart was not at all suitable: “A cart? [...] It might have been a carriage for her own kin!”⁹⁶. The cart appears, followed by “a spick-and-span gig or dog-cart, highly varnished and equipped”⁹⁷ driven by the elegant Alec d'Urberville, at which sight Tess's mother “clapped her hands like a child”⁹⁸. The narrator adds that Tess felt suspicious of the young man and expressed her preference to travel in the cart.

88 Hardy, *supra note* 6, p. 45.

89 *Ibid.*

90 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

91 Hardy, *supra note* 6, p. 48.

92 *Ibid.*, pp. 47–48.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

94 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

96 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

97 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

98 *Ibid.*

While Tess is preparing to leave home, her mother's sole preoccupation is that she should arrive at the d'Urbervilles estate looking her very best. Ignoring Tess' protests that she is only going to work, Joan makes her daughter change her clothes and washes her hair, imagining a marriage between her daughter and the young Mr. d'Urberville. Tess points out a hole in the heel of her stocking, but her mother – more concerned about appearance than reality – replies: "Never mind holes in your stockings – they don't speak!"⁹⁹. The satisfaction that Joan obtains from her daughter is made evident at this point: "Her mother's pride in the girl's appearance led her to step back, like a painter from his easel, and survey her work as a whole"¹⁰⁰. Tess' siblings wholeheartedly believe that she is leaving in order to marry a gentleman; this becomes clear when she is about to leave and they call out: "I do want to walk a little-ways wi' Sissy, now she's going to marry our gentleman-cousin, and wear fine cloze!"¹⁰¹. This causes Tess to blush and reply that she doesn't want to hear such foolishness. Her father makes a similar observation: "Well, I hope my young friend will like such a comely sample of his own blood"¹⁰², while her mother remarks "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 [...]"¹⁰³.

Once Tess arrives at the house of Stoke-d'Urbervilles, the hierarchy of Victorian society becomes apparent; among the characters that Tess encounters are "a servant in White cap and apron"¹⁰⁴ and the estate foreman. The lady of the house is blind; sitting in an armchair, she asks Tess: "Ah, you are the young woman come to look after my birds?"¹⁰⁵.

5. Historical figures and publications of the period: "before Oliver Grumble's time"

When Joan explains to her daughter the ancient lineage of their family, she refers to both Oliver Cromwell and Charles II: "[...] before Oliver Grumble's time [...]" In Saint Charles's days we was made Knights o' the Royal Oak, our real name being d'Urberville!..."¹⁰⁶. Joan's reference to the republican leader has pejorative nuances, as a result of the negative connotations of the verb 'to grumble' in contrast to the positive semantic implications of the premodifier "Saint". These two references indicate

99 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

100 *Ibid.*

101 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

102 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

103 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

104 Hardy, *supra* note 6, p. 64.

105 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

106 *Ibid.*, p. 27

an unfavourable attitude towards the Cromwellian republic and a more positive position with regard to the monarchy of the 17th century. In Chapter 5, Alec collects a variety of strawberries known as “British Queen”¹⁰⁷, a natural image¹⁰⁸ that may also be interpreted as a reference to Queen Victoria by Hardy. The reference to Roger Ascham (1515–1568) at the end of the second phase of the novel comes from an earlier period. Ascham held the position of tutor to Elizabeth I; the reference is to an extract from his book *The Schoolmaster* (1570). Another reference from this period appears at the beginning of the second phase of the novel: a quotation from Shakespeare taken from *The Rape of Lucrece*: “The serpent hisses where the sweet birds sing”¹⁰⁹.

In addition to the kings and rulers referenced, the work is populated with other well-known historical figures. The Romantic poet William Wordsworth is mentioned through a reference to “Nature’s holy plan”¹¹⁰ with regard to the impact that parents have in determining the fortunes of their children. This reference stands contrary to widespread belief at the time in the *dictum* of the celebrated poet, demonstrating that Hardy subscribed to the concept of determinism. The range of Victorian poets that the author incorporates into the novel is significant. Writers such as Swinburne, Browning, and Tennyson¹¹¹ are referenced through quotations and verses woven into the narrative thread.

Thomas Robert Malthus (1766–1834) receives mention in Chapter 5 by way of the adjective “malthusian”, a term employed with regard to Tess and her reproachful attitude towards her mother for having had so many children. The reference to Malthus alludes to his warnings regarding the dangers of a population growth greater than the increase in food production, and his advocating of family planning through abstinence. Later, in the second phase of the novel, the narrator alludes to the cleric Robert South (1634–1716) when he says of Tess: “But so far was she from being, in the words of Robert South, ‘in love with her own ruin’”¹¹², although the quotation has

107 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

108 The scene in which the strawberries appear also shows Alec offering roses to Tess and placing them in her hat and her basket; the adornment is so striking and exuberant that at the beginning of Chapter 6, when Tess boards the van to travel from Chaseborough to Shaston, the travellers express their amazement: “Why, you be quite a posy! And such roses in early June!” (50).

109 Hardy, *supra note* 6, p. 87.

110 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

111 The broad array of references that populate the novel range from *verbatim* and indirect Biblical citations, to numerous excerpts from the plays of Shakespeare, quotations from the classical English canon including John Milton and John Bunyan, and even some lines from Walt Whitman. There are also references to the Flemish painters Denis van Alslott (1570–1626) and Anthonis Sallaert (1590–1657), to well-known preachers such as Jeremy Taylor (1613–1667), to the cleric Robert South (1634–1716), and even the organist Richard Langdon (1730–1803). There is a reference to the French essayist René Fañçois Armand Sully-Prudhomme (1839–1907), and examples of intertextuality through the Latin poets Horace and Virgil.

112 Hardy, *supra note* 6, p. 96.

not been located¹¹³. In the same chapter (Chapter 33), we also find a reference to the organist Richard Langdon (1730–1803).

The three walkers that pass through the Vale of Blackmoor (Angel, Felix, and Cuthbert, the sons of a devout cleric) carry with them a copy of *A Counterblast to Agnosticism*, as we see in Chapter 2. This reference indicates the importance of religion in Victorian times, presided over by the Church of England. In the second phase of the novel, when Tess hurriedly attempts to arrange the baptism of her infant son, the narrator reveals the opinions of the vicar with regard to Tess and her circumstances. This encounter also indirectly hints at the growing scepticism that typified the Victorian period: "Yet the dignity of the girl, the strange tenderness in her voice, combined to affect his nobler impulses—or rather those that he had left in him after ten years of endeavour to graft technical belief on actual scepticism" (109). References to the field of religion are also notable, such as the mention of the Anglican clergyman Jeremy Taylor (1613–1667) at the end of the second phase of the novel. Taylor is known for *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying*, published in the mid-17th century¹¹⁴.

The British Museum is mentioned in Chapter 5, when the narrator explains how Simon Stoke, a merchant and money-lender from the north of England, decided to settle in the south of England, adopting the more grandiose name of d'Urberville to become Stoke-d'Urberville. The process of choosing his new surname amounted to "Conning for an hour in the British Museum the pages of works devoted to extinct, half-extinct, obscured, and ruined families appertaining to the quarter of England in which he proposed to settle"¹¹⁵. This reference to the museum adds a sense of contemporaneity and verisimilitude to the narrative.

6. Conclusion

Tess of the d'Urbervilles contains elements that give insight into the location of the action in the narrative, to the distinctions of social class, to important historical and literary figures of the time, as well as references to specific books and even the laws and regulations in place during the Victorian era. This contribution analyses and gives evidence of these elements through a range of examples. Throughout the various aspects of the social prism discussed here, the social scaffolding of Victorian England stands out distinctly; the various aspirations of the characters reflecting a desire for movement along the social ladder. These parameters are developed within the fictional text with considerable verisimilitude, allowing us to define *Tess of the*

113 Barrineau, N. "Explanatory Notes". In J. Grindle and S. Gatrell (eds.), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 426.

114 Taylor's writing was well known during this period; his renown is also reflected in other novels. In *Middlemarch*, for example, Miss Dorothy Brooke knows the prelate's writings by heart, as well as those of Pascal, as the narrator explains at the beginning of the novel (Eliot, 2008, p. 8).

115 Hardy, *supra* note 6, pp. 44–45.

d'Urbervilles as a realist novel and one that is deeply credible. It stands as a faithful literary reflection of its time, almost as if it were a historical treatise *mutatis mutandis*.

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SOCIALINIŲ PARAMETRŲ ANALIZĖ T. HARDY ROMANE „TESĖ D'ERBERVILIŲ GIMINĖS“

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Santrauka. Straipsnyje gvildenamos karalienės Viktorijos laikų visuomenės problemos ir jų atspindžiai Thomo Hardy romane „Tesė d'Erbervilių giminės“, apžvelgiama naratyvo socialinio konteksto raiška, kūrinio detalėmis perteikiami gyvybingumo ir realizmo aspektai. Aptariama rašytojo dokumentiškai tiksliai įvardijama pasakojimo topografija, nuorodos į smukles bei užeišas ir jose vykstantį veiksmą kaip svarbų XIX a. pabaigos Anglijos visuomeninio gyvenimo dalyką. Straipsnyje susitelkiama į vertinamąjį romane aprašomų tradicinių gegužinių šokių (*May Day dances*) detalių pristatymą ir jų socialinių aspektų išryškinimą. Paminimi ir XIX a. pabaigos Anglijos mokyklų ugdymo proceso savitumai, nagrinėjami prietaringi kaimo gyventojų įsitikinimai bei Trantridžo vietinių gyventojų demonstruojamas moralinis tingumas. Taip pat straipsnyje analizuojama visuomenės klasių problematika, romano veikėjų socialinės ambicijos ir jų pagrįstumas, tuometės įstatymu grindžiamos aplinkos aspektai.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: britiškasis karalienės Viktorijos amžius, T. Hardy, socialiniai romano aspektai, visuomenės klasė, tradicionalizmas.

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