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Education in the Novels of Thomas Hardy

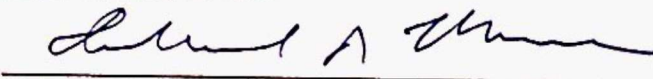
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
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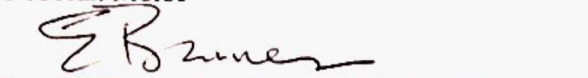
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## Introduction

I thought to myself: 'They may laugh at me for my ignorance; but that was father's fault, and none o' my making, and I must bear it. But they shall never laugh at my children, if I have any: I'll starve first!' Thank God I've been able to keep her at school at the figure of near a hundred a year; and her scholarship is such that she had stayed on as governess for a time. Let 'em laugh now if they can: Mrs. Charmond herself is not better informed than my girl Grace.

--Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders* (27)

So boasts Mr. Melbury, recounting his sad childhood memories to explain his determination in educating his daughter Grace Melbury well. In order to prevent his daughter from being humiliated for her ignorance, the timber merchant spends a fortune on his child's education. Mr. Melbury is not alone in his preoccupation with education. His concern is shared with a lot of other characters in Thomas Hardy's novels as well as with people living in the Victorian age. As Johnson noted: "the education of the poor was one of the strongest of early Victorian obsessions" (Johnson 2). From the early 1830s to the end of the nineteenth century, education for the lower-class persisted as a top concern in British society: discussions, legalization, and enforcement of policies related to extending universal elementary education to the poor never ceased. Thomas Hardy, a novelist who witnessed the reforms and social changes of the time, presented in his novels diverse characters from different classes and their various experiences with education: there are lucky students such as Clym Yeobright and Grace Melbury, who are sponsored to get an upper/middle education and an opportunity of class ascent; hard-working autodidacts such as Gabriel Oak and Jude Fawley who read extensively beyond their limited schooling in hopes of making a better living; and ambitious parents such as Mr. Melbury and Michael Henchard, who wish to cultivate their daughters into upper-class ladies through education. Every character highlights a different aspect of Hardy's

views on education, as well as an insight into the nineteenth century educational system in England.

The most comprehensive work so far in analyzing the theme of education in Hardy's novels is Jane Mattisson's book *Knowledge and Survival in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*. Examining Hardy's fourteen novels, ranging from his early works such as *Desperate Remedies* and *Under the Greenwood Tree* to the late ones *The Well-Beloved* and *Jude the Obscure*, Mattisson tackles the complexity of the multi-faced theme of education in Hardy's novels. Applying historical and sociological theories to analyzing the texts, Mattisson categorizes characters in Hardy's novels into three groups according to their social class and educational background—group one is lower-class laborers referred to as “the rustics,” group two is lower-middle class people with limited education, and group three is upper-middle class people who have a higher social position than the rest of the society because of their education and social connections (16). After Mattisson analyzes the impact of education on the three social groups in Hardy's fourteen novels, she observes the effect of education across different social groups throughout the second half of the nineteenth century:

A close examination of Hardy's novels—major as well as minor—suggests that Hardy was keenly aware of the increasing segregation of society which was to a large extent based on two kinds of knowledge discussed here, the everyday and the specialized. By the time he wrote *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy was convinced that the Wessex of the early novels was no longer available. Jude Fawley's concentration on the Classics, whose days were numbered, has a bearing on the rustics' fate at large in the modern predictive society. Jude lacks neither intelligence nor diligence [, but he lacks] guidance [from someone] who understands the demands of higher education. Outside the educational system, he persists in clinging to a dream which belongs to the past rather than to the future.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the task of adaptation had become increasingly difficult owing to the growing complexity of society. Hardy's fourteen novels suggest that it is, in Hardy's eyes at least, the social stratum which I have referred to as group two which possesses the greatest chance

of survival. This group has the education and ability to adapt which are the basic prerequisites for survival. (387)

This passage from Mattisson's conclusion, shows both the strengths and weaknesses of Mattisson's work. On the one hand, Mattisson analyzes the impact of education in Hardy's novels in the context of social development and recognizes the importance of education in people's adaptation to the modernizing world. Unlike the scholars who only focus on a couple of novels and characters from one social group, Mattisson is able to differentiate the impacts of education on different social groups and recognize the value of education, despite many educated lower-class characters' failures in Hardy's novels. On the other hand, Mattisson's categorization of characters into the three social groups is hardly clear and consistent. For instance, Mattisson categorizes Gabriel Oak, a shepherd in *Far From the Madding Crowd* and Jude Fawley, a stonemason in *Jude the Obscure*, into group two, the lower-middle class with limited education (216, 374). These two characters, although she places them in the same social group, have entirely different educational backgrounds and outcomes. Even though Jude is the better-read character in group two, Oak succeeds in surviving his social environment whereas Jude fails. When drawing the conclusion about group two's better chance of survival than the other two groups,' Mattisson has to re-define Jude as a "most tragic, rustic character"—suggesting that Jude fails to adapt and survive because he belongs to group one "the rustics" (387). The problem of Mattisson's argument is that she treats the social context of all fourteen novels as a static one: she assumes that social groups and social contexts do not change throughout the fourteen novels and puts all characters in Hardy's novels in those three roughly-defined categories.

Most other existing studies focus on one or two novels, drawing partial conclusions that may not apply to other novels of Hardy, and sometimes they contradict one another. One of the most important aspects of Hardy's exploration of education is the potential of education to bring social mobility. Focusing on Hardy's later novels *The Woodlanders* and *Jude the Obscure*, Keith Jones sees Hardy's novels as a social critique of nineteenth century liberal educational reformers' claim that education in the nineteenth century served as a means of individual improvement and social mobility. Analyzing the failure of Grace, Jude, Sue, and Phillotson in their attempts at self-improvement and class ascent through education, Jones concludes that education is useless in improving the lives of lower-class people and lifting their social status:

Education increases knowledge or perception, but does not alter character; by changing consciousness, education creates or exacerbates feelings of alienation, lifting a character out of traditional identity, but not into a new, comprehensible or practicable one.

Education fails as an agent of improvement, and of social mobility in these novels, and this failure contradicts the frequent liberal nineteenth-century claim (made, for example, by Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, and others) that education, by promoting individual improvement, could lead to overall social improvement. (17,153)

This argument accurately identifies the cultural disturbance and socio-economic disadvantages that lower-class people face when they try to lift their social standing through education. However, because Jones exclusively focuses on the two later novels, he fails to recognize the slow progress and improvement that education brings to society and lower-class people's lives, as reflected in Hardy's earlier novels, written during the decades of educational reforms.

Similarly, Sheila Corder's study has a heavy focus on Hardy's one novel *Jude the Obscure*. Her conclusion, however, differs entirely from Jones's:

[Jude] is blind to the value of his own education, but he proves more perceptive about the systems of the world because of this approach to learning. Unlike Christminster's scholars, Jude is not blind to the inequity of the educational system that reinforces the walls keeping him out. (72)

Focusing solely on *Jude the Obscure*, Corder notices the alertness of the educated lower-class people in identifying social problems and draws the conclusion that education for the lower class fosters social and intellectual development.

In order to fill the gaps created by previous studies, my study will include a comprehensive discussion of Hardy's six novels written during the educational reforms of the 1870s-1890s: *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Woodlanders*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and *Jude the Obscure*. I will analyze the successes and failures of different characters in their attempts at social ascent, and the effect of education on their survival and cultural experiences, and treat the social contexts of the novels as dynamic. I will examine the six novels in chronological order and divide them into three phases according to their publication dates—corresponding to the different stages of educational reforms in the late nineteenth century: Phase One includes the 1870s novels *Far From the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native*, written and published at the beginning of the movement for national educational reform, Phase Two includes the 1880s novels *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Woodlanders*, published in the middle of the reforms, and Phase Three includes the 1890s novels *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, written after the establishment of the national system of compulsory elementary education in England. In this way, I will trace the theme of education in Hardy's novels in the dynamic context of rapid modernization and educational reforms, observing hopes and difficulties that people face in different stages of social development.

**Phase One: Educating the Uneducable: *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Natives***

Schools and Education Policies in England, 1840s-1870s

The first two novels selected for this study, *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native*, are published in the 1870s but set in the 1840s. Both periods witnessed important developments in national educational reforms in England. Since the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century, the population and life expectancy of English people had risen dramatically by the mid-nineteenth century. As rapid urbanization triggered the rise of a working-class population in the cities along with that of their unschooled children, poverty became a major social problem and raised concerns about the education for the poor. Beginning in 1839, when the Committee of the Privy Council—the first government department with specific responsibility for education—was created, a series of education policies were enacted to build a national education system for schooling lower-class children. In 1839, the Committee began to offer national grants for building new schools. To ensure that schools funded by grants were properly functioning and providing an education of quality, the Committee also appointed inspectors to examine the quality of schools and report to the government.

National-funded schools during these period were meant to fill the gaps in the previous educational system: only 3,000 out of 12,000 parishes in 1816 had endowed schools of varying quality. Although in 1835 1.45 million out of a population of 1.75 million children attended school, the average duration of attendance was only one year (Gillard 2). Therefore, policies in the following years were targeted at building more public-funded schools and training teachers to provide mass education of better quality



and longer duration of attendance. In 1846, the Committee regulated a teacher-pupil system to train and certify teachers and headmasters: the government provided stipends for students above the age of 13 who were good at reading, writing, and elementary-level geography and history to support their apprenticeship as pupil teachers. The pupil teachers would be trained for five years and examined by inspectors annually for their reading and writing skills, grammar, geology, history, Christian scriptures, mathematics, and teaching skills. After passing all five examinations, pupil teachers would receive certifications to work as teachers in public-funded schools and become eligible to apply for public funds to build new schools (Gillard 2). This system is mentioned in *The Return of the Native*, where Clym Yeobright talks about his own plan to open a new school by studying to pass examinations first (162).

Schools of the 1840s, both old schools and new schools receiving national funds, are of various types.<sup>1</sup> Schools for lower-class education, or mass education were the most important ones built during that time. There are three main types of schools available for the lower class: Sunday schools, schools of industry, and elementary schools. Sunday schools mainly provided education for lower-class people, both children and adults, to read the Bible, while further training in reading and writing skills or teaching of other subjects was not provided. Schools of industry trained lower-class children in manual labors such as knitting, sewing, shoe-making and housework. While some schools also provided courses in reading, writing, geography, and religion, vocational training weighed significantly heavier than academics in these schools. Elementary schools were for children from all social classes, yet the high cost made it hard for most lower-class

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<sup>1</sup> Historical information about 1840s schools in this paragraph comes from Jane Mattisson's *Knowledge and Survival in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, pp. 66-74.

children to attend for more than one or two years. These schools received students from ages two to three to the age of twelve, teaching courses ranging from manual labor, to academics such as basic reading and writing, maths, Christian scriptures, history, and geography. Elementary schools were also the major institutions that trained pupil teachers after 1846. Since most elementary schools, especially in the following decade, were set up and run by university graduates, humanities and other academic courses were more emphasized than vocational training, in contrast to schools of industry. These three types of schools are what Hardy calls the “national schools” in the preface of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, where most of his lower-class characters—“laborers who could read and write”—were educated (1).

At the same time, discussion about upper-class educational reforms was another concern addressed by the Committee. The most popular public schools for the middle and upper class were grammar schools, which were secondary schools for primary school graduates of twelve or thirteen years old. Before 1840s, most grammar schools provided courses limited to English grammar, composition, Greek and Latin. In the earlier nineteenth century, educators began to feel that this education was outdated and inadequate to prepare middle and upper-class youths for the modernizing world. In 1840, the Parliament passed the Grammar School Act to modernize and broaden the curricula provided by grammar schools. By 1850, most grammar schools included various courses beyond classics such as geography, history, French, German, chemistry, carpentry, music and drawing (Gillard 2). The main goal for this Act, as reformers of the time outlined, was to provide education for “Christian gentlemen” (qtd. in Gillard 2). In Hardy’s novel, however, the result of such education is dubious. As I will discuss below, in *Far from the*

*Madding Crowd*, Sergeant Troy, a soldier who is educated in Casterbridge Grammar School, is depicted as a frivolous young man lacking a sense of responsibility, who cannot even make a living independently.

Public education for girls received much less attention than that for boys in 1840s. Beyond the basic elementary education available for the lower-class, which received children of both sexes, education for girls was, as Gillard concludes, “scanty, superficial, and incoherent” (Gillard 2). Most middle and upper class girls were instructed by ill-trained governesses. There were also some private boarding schools open for girls, offering a curriculum that included reading, writing, French, dancing, and housework. The main goal for girls’ education was for social display, and intellectual achievement was not valued in girls (*Knowledge and Survival* 72). This private-school education for girls was very costly, and therefore usually not affordable for lower-class people. As Burstyn notes, governesses and boarding schools were only affordable for upper middle class families. Even for most middle class families, the education was expensive and their girls only received a “sporadic education” at some point of their lives (22-24). As I will discuss below, educated female characters in Hardy’s 1870s novels all come from rich middle-class families.

Hardy himself started at school in 1848 at the age of eight, which was rather late compared to other children of his time because of his poor health. The first school he went to was a national school in Bockhampton, and one year later he moved Dorchester. He was schooled in a national school called Dorchester British School from 1850 to 1856. During his school years, Hardy learnt maths, drawing, Latin, French, and technical skills such as bricklaying, carpentry, plumbing, and other building trades (Millgate 48-

53). Hardy's education was not limited to his school work. Hardy was an active autodidact who read widely ranging from literature to science. His education is similar to that of Gabriel Oak, a model lower-class educated character who selected for himself a miscellany of books to read carefully and benefited from education. As I will discuss in more detail below, Oak's book list is largely drawn from Hardy's own educational experience, including *Walkingame's Arithmetic* (*Knowledge and Survival* 219).

The overall development of mass education, especially the popularization of lower-class education, was slow. As an historian summarizes, "despite the intensity of interest [in mass education during 1840s], rather little was achieved before 1870" (Johnson 4). In 1861, 2.5 million out of 2.85 children received some schooling of various quality (Gillard 2), yet only 5% of them continued schooling after the age of eleven (*Knowledge and Survival* 121). In 1870, the Elementary Education Act readdressed the issue of mass education by implementing laws and grants for compulsory national education. The Act provided elementary education to all children aged from five to thirteen in schools funded and supervised by the government and made school attendance compulsory. At the peak of new educational reforms targeted at lower-class people, Hardy revisits his memories of the beginning of mass-education attempts in the 1840s and writes novels addressing concerns of educational reforms of the time. As far as the discussion of this chapter is concerned, we only need to know that the 1870s is a historical period marked by a new round of discussion for universal elementary education which reminds Hardy to reflect on the 1840s reforms, and I will discuss more about the 1870s reforms in later chapters.

### Education in the Isolated Rural World

Published in the 1870s, shortly after the enactment of the Education Act in England, *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native* explore difficulties of the earlier stage of educational reform in the 1840s. In Hardy's novels, people living in rural areas are isolated from the civilized world, ignorant, and resistant to any change that could be possibly triggered by education or any other cultural influence. In this closed environment, class mobility is barely possible, and all characters are restrained in their native environment, with the few characters who try to move out ending up either returned or dead in their attempts. As a result, the value of education is very limited: while a well-designed lower-class education can improve the livings of people who are contented with their status as rural laborers, education does not extend to most rural laborers and cannot lift any of them out of their social status. How is it possible, then, to educate people who do not want education at all?

The historical setting of the two novels is 1840s rural England. As noted above, this period was the beginning of universal education in England. The "national schools," schools that were built and managed by certified teachers and headmasters under the 1839 Act, only taught basic reading, writing, and rudimentary arithmetic. Yet establishing even this rudimentary education was extremely hard. Reformers faced, as social scientists put it, "considerable, if inarticulate, resistance," especially among country laborers (Johnson 49).

Corresponding to this historic background, the settings of the two novels both feature rural communities that are socially and culturally isolated from cities. In the

opening chapter of *The Return of the Native*, Hardy describes Egdon Heath as a wild rural place where “civilization was its enemy”:

A person on a heath in raiment of modern cut and colours has more or less an anomalous look. We seem to want the oldest and simplest human clothing where the clothing of the earth is so primitive... Not a plough had ever disturbed a grain of that stubborn soil. In the heath's bareness to the farmer lay its fertility to the historian. There had been no obliteration, because there had been no tending. (17)

In this passage of the opening chapter, Hardy emphasizes that Egdon Heath is naturally a wild and primitive place: it does not welcome people from modern culture, and is resistant to the forces of civilization and social development from the outside world. As Mattisson notes, on Egdon Heath, rural life resists any change or progress: “life on Egdon Heath is essentially static and resistant to change. Vegetation grows and dies, people live and perish, but the Heath and its inhabitants remain essentially the same. Life changes little from generation to generation and there is little indication of progress” (*Knowledge and Survival* 240). The following plot in the novel confirms the implications of the opening depiction of Egdon Heath. The main social group in the heath is lower-class laborers, who are poorly educated and think of education as a harmful thing. Before Clym Yeobright, an urban educated man, returns to the heath from Paris, the villagers express their opinion on education in a chat during work:

“They say, too, that Clym Yeobright has become a real perusing man, with the strangest notions about things. There, that's because he went to school early, such as the school was.” “Strange notions, has he,” said the old man. “Ah, there's too much of that sending to school in these days. It only does harm.” (*The Return* 92)

In the opinion of most villagers, education, although it is something that is becoming popular, is a harmful thing, encouraging the development of strange notions.

As a result, the few inhabitants who are better educated are excluded from the main social group and find it hard to live up to the standards suggested by their newly

educated status. Clym Yeobright, an urban educated man who has worked as a jewelry manager in Paris, cannot find any way to make a living other than working as a furze-cutter, the same as the uneducated laborers in the village, on Egdon Heath. He returns with the goal to become a headmaster, but he cannot find any resource, such as money, faculty, any person or institution who can support him with capital or labor, in the community. When Clym announces his plan to open a school near his home town to educate the ignorant inhabitants, Sam and Fairway, two rural laborers immediately anticipate its failure: “He’ll never carry it out in the world”; “Tis good-hearted of the young man...but for my part, I think he had better mind his business” (144). Their prediction becomes true: Clym never manages to open a school, and his effort only results in his poor health and poverty. The heath does not welcome this educated man and the education he wants to bring to it.

Eustacia Vye is another example of an excluded educated villager. She comes from a town called Budmouth and has received an urban boarding school education. In the village, villagers call her a “witch,” “a proud girl from Budmouth” and think that she “would be better if she had less romantic nonsense in her head” (*The Return* 92). In the first passage about Eustacia, Hardy describes her as an outsider who wanders alone on the heath, and calls her “queen of the solitude” (15). Eustacia is culturally excluded from the community of Egdon Heath because of her education. Instead of embracing the difference that comes from modern civilization, the heath refuses it by assimilating its carriers or excluding them.

The story of *Far from the Madding Crowd* takes place in the village of Weatherbury, a rural community of farmers and rural laborers. Although Weatherbury is

less geographically distant from cities than Edgon Heath, it also maintains rural cultures and resists modern influence and cultivation. Similar to Clym and Eustacia in *The Return of the Natives*, characters who are educated in urban cultures and move to the village are usually assimilated into the cultural mainstream of local rural laborers, and the knowledge that they acquire from education does little to support their survival. Troy is a soldier who has received a grammar-school education in the city of Casterbridge: "... [Troy] was brought up so well, and sent to Casterbridge Grammar School for years and years. Learnt all languages while he was there; and it was said he got on so far that he could take down Chinese in short hand" (*Far* 74). With all those language skills and knowledge from years of upper-middle class schooling, Troy does not become any more than a farmer in Weatherbury, only a "farmer of a spirited and very modern school": lacking the experience and practical knowledge of farming, Troy's "farming" is just spending his farm-owner wife's inheritance on gambling (116). In the village, Troy cannot make a living on his own with the knowledge and skills obtained from his urban cultivation. Similar to Edgon Heath, Weatherbury does not support the survival of people who are cultivated in urban culture.

In this rural setting, the introduction of education and the breach of the cultural isolation of the rural areas become impossible. In *The Return*, Hardy analyzes the reasons underlying the rural countries' resistance to civilization through Clym's idealized model of education for the poor and its failure. According to Hardy, one most significant reason is the gap between the mindset of educators and that of rural laborers. In Chapter III, Volume II, Clym talks about the objectives he wants to achieve by founding a new school in rural Edgon Heath. Instead of founding a typical national school which only teaches



students to read and write, Clym aspires to “do better than giving rudimentary education to the lowest class” (162). While Hardy does not specify what kind of education Clym wants to provide in addition to a typical national-school education, he outlines some guiding principles for Clym’s ideal school. In Chapter II, Volume 2, Hardy illustrates Clym’s motivations and goals:

Yeobright loved his kind. He had a conviction that the want of most men was knowledge of a sort which brings wisdom rather than affluence. He wished to raise the class at the expense of individuals rather than individuals at the expense of the class. (145)

In this passage, Hardy explains that the kind of education that Clym envisions does not aim at lifting the lower class in terms of bettering their social-economic status, but rather in terms of intellectual and spiritual enhancement. This ideal aligns with Matthew Arnold’s educational theories, one of the popular educational theories of the time. Matthew Arnold worked as an inspector of schools, and published widely on education policy. He believed that nineteenth century England was undergoing a period of “dissolution and transformation,” wanting new “ideas” that could guide people through the transition to the industrialized modern world. According to him, education should be a means to “open the mind, soul, and imagination,” and subjects such as humanities, which “formed characters and regulated life,” were the most important (*Knowledge and Survival* 66). Sharing this belief, Clym attempts to bring a better life to lower-class people in his hometown through an education that can open their minds.

This educational ideal, however, has its fatal flaws. Hardy immediately points out the problem after introducing Clym’s educational plan:

A man who advocates aesthetic effort and deprecates social efforts is only likely to be understood by a class to which social effort has become a stale matter. To argue upon the possibility of culture before luxury to the bucolic world may be to

argue truly, but it is an attempt to disturb a sequence to which humanity has been long accustomed. (*The Return* 145)

According to Hardy, the concern about “ideas” and “open mind” outweighs the concern about material wellbeing only for people already have experience of high social status like Clym, and for lower-class people it is natural to care more about money and survival than intellectual improvement. Therefore, the education aimed at pure intellectual enhancement does not answer the needs of lower-class people. Hardy also illustrates this point through the rural inhabitants’ reaction towards Clym’s efforts in studying and bringing new education to the town. Eustacia, an educated country girl whom Clym marries in the belief that she will become an “invaluable help” for his educational plan, only marries him for the luxurious life in Paris that he has deserted. Realizing that Clym will not return to Paris, Eustacia becomes very depressed about Clym’s educational plan and tries to escape from her marriage. Other rural laborers, when talking about Clym’s deserted career as a jewelry merchant’s manager in Paris and his educational plan, all express disapproval. According to them, being a jewelry merchant’s manager is a “blazing great business,” and schooling only “does harm” by bringing “strange notions” to people (*The Return* 92). Hardy points out that Clym fails to see the gap between his own mindset and that of the lower-class people he wishes to educate: although Clym values education more than the luxurious life in Paris, for the countrymen education alone does not have any value at all if it cannot bring them advantages of survival in the rural community or the outside world. Hardy believes that education for the poor would be unrealistic without the promise of worldly well-being, and the educational ideal of Arnold and Clym does not fit lower-class people of the time.

Despite the failure of Clym's ideal educational model which aims at lifting the poor spiritually, Hardy also suggests that educational models that aim at class ascent are practically unfeasible and emotionally undesirable in this rural setting. The only character who is educated above his social class is Clym Yeobright. It is an especially rare case because Clym is fortunately sponsored by a "neighboring gentleman," presumably a wealthy man from genteel class. For most rural laborers, education above their social standing is not practically accessible.

Furthermore, well-educated characters all suffer from their education and end up in lives more tragic than those of their less educated counterparts. Their education does not lift them up the social ladder or enable them to live a happy life outside the village, nor does it help them to make a decent living within the village. Clym, although he receives higher education and has the opportunity to work in Paris, is driven back to the Heath by his cultural and emotional attachment to it. In a conversation with his mother immediately after he returns to his hometown from Paris, Clym complains about his life in Paris: "I found that I was trying to be like people who had hardly anything in common with myself. I was endeavoring to put off one sort of life for another sort of life, which was not better than the life I had known before...All this was very depressing" (*The Return* 144). In this passage, Hardy shows that Clym, although he successfully joins upper-middle class in the sense of his occupation and social standing, cannot culturally conform to his new social group. After he comes back, he cannot merge in the cultural group of the village either and finds it hard to make a living by his education. Similarly, Eustacia Vye, although educated in an expensive boarding school, fails to find a way to

escape the rural village and live a luxurious life in a city, either through marriage or work.

In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, education also has little beneficial effect on the survival of inhabitants. While Troy's education only makes him an irresponsible and unsuccessful farmer and lover, Bathsheba's education gives her more vanity than real benefit. When Gabriel Oak first proposes to marry her, she refuses because she feels that she is better educated than him: "you are better off than I. I have hardly a penny in the world—I am staying with my aunt for my bare sustenance. I am better educated than you—and I don't love you a bit: that's my side of the case" (*Far* 16). From Bathsheba's perspective, she should marry a man better than Gabriel, despite his wealth and love, because she is well-educated. As the plot reveals, Bathsheba's education does not help her either in marriage or in her career. She suffers from her marriage to Troy, and cannot manage the farm on her own without relying on Oak, who, though not as well educated, knows more about farming.

Although the rural world in the two novels is highly resistant against urban civilization and educational models aimed at class ascent, it allows for education that is targeted at the survival of rural laborers within the social environment of lower-class community. Through the case of Gabriel Oak, Hardy shows that there are possible ways for lower-class people to live a better life through an education that combines national-school education with a set of skills and moral education which are essential to survival within the rural community. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Hardy presents Gabriel Oak as the model of an educated lower-class man who thrives in rural society and beats his higher-class competitors in love. Oak is a shepherd's son. Beyond his national school

education, which only teaches reading, writing, and some basic arithmetic, Oak reads extensively. In the novel, Hardy lists the books Oak chooses for himself to read: “The Young Man’s Best Companion, The Farrier’s Sure Guide, The Veterinary Surgeon, Paradise Lost, The Pilgrim’s Progress, Robinson Crusoe, Ash’s Dictionary, and Walkingame’s Arithmetic”(Far 33). This book list, although not comprehensive, contains several important types of knowledge crucial to the survival of the lower class in rural society: there are practical books about his profession such as *The Farrier’s Sure Guide* and *The Veterinary Surgeon*, books related to social conventions and religions such as *The Young Man’s Best Companion* and *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, literary works featuring radical masculine protagonists such as *Paradise Lost* and *Robinson Crusoe*, and reference books such as *Ash’s Dictionary* and *Walkingame’s Arithmetic*. As Hardy describes, the books constitute an important core of Oak’s education because Oak “had acquired more sound information by diligent perusal than many a man of opportunities has done from a furlong of laden shelves” (33).

As a result, these books instill in Oak merits that distinguish him not only from his lower-class peers, but also from educated people of higher social standing. As one of the three suitors for Bathsheba, Oak beats his higher-class competitors, Troy and Boldwood, with his professional skills and balanced morality. As an expert shepherd and farmer, Oak is the biggest help for Bathsheba managing her farm and saving her stock: as an expert vet, Oak is the only one in the neighborhood who can save Bathsheba’s sheep when they get ill (Chapter 21), and the only one who thinks about Bathsheba’s wheat-stacks and helps her thatching in the storm (Chapter 36). The richest farmers in the neighborhood, Boldwood and Bathsheba, all rely on Oak and his expertise (Chapter 49).

In this way, the professional skills Oak obtained from his education enable him to make a good living above the average rural lower-class, and support Bathsheba's farming.

Furthermore, Oak's education instills in him a balanced morality that ensures his survival and wins Bathsheba's love over his competitors. In Oak's book collection, there are books featuring the masculine ideal that answer to the social conventions of the time: *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a Christian classic featuring traditional morality, and *Young Man's Best Companion*, a practical work containing knowledge and instructions that answer to social expectations for young men of the time. As a result, Oak has many virtues helping him survive in the face of social expectations of the time: he has a sense of responsibility, a practical ambition in line with reality and social conventions, and he has the capacity for faithful love and care for others. In the novel, Oak works hard to become the best shepherd and vet in the area, makes his own living and supports his family, helps others in his town with his expertise, and remains true to Bathsheba, loving her selflessly.

In contrast, characters who receive more formal education lack training in practical skills, and can hardly support a family without inherited wealth. Troy, for instance, is a soldier who receives his education from Casterbridge Grammar School. Grammar schools of the time, according to historical studies and also suggested by the novel, typically offer an education covering Latin and Greek classics, modern languages, arithmetic and literature (Gillard 2). Lacking a solid base of moral education and professional training, this education encourages Troy to become a frivolous young man without any sense of responsibility and means to make a living.

By presenting Oak's booklist and success, Hardy illustrates a beneficial education for the lower-class in the rural setting: an education that combines moral education and professional training, helping the lower-class to thrive in their social environment rather than fitting them into other social groups. Rural education should contain the practical skills that give the lower-class means to make a living, and the balanced moral education that instills traditional virtues as well as contemporary wisdom. It is noticeable, however, that the benefit of such education is stringently constrained within the social group of rural laborers. In other words, Oak's success, or the success of Oak's education, is heavily dependent upon the cultural resistance of the rural community which supports the survival of rural laborers. Regardless of education, Boumelha discusses Oak's success as a result of the victory of a highly protective, stable rural society over the intrusion of outside culture—"a kind of sexual pastoral, in which the unshowy virtues of the hero represent the timeless qualities of a stable rural society in the heart of nature, disrupted by the influence of city-dwellers and outsiders who bring with them inappropriate ideas, aspirations, and values threatening the survival of the locality" (130). In the case of Oak, he can only benefit from his education and survive well as long as he remains a shepherd in Weatherbury. Once he aspires to lift his social class, become someone other than a shepherd or move to a city, he would only end up in failure and misery. In fact, before Oak moves to Weatherbury, he has tried to become a farm owner, and to find a job in the city of Casterbridge, and failed in both attempts. The social and cultural environment of the rural communities, therefore, only allow for lower-class men to be educated within their social group, and any education that attempts to bring urban culture or class mobility results in failure and tragedy.

### Women's Education

As I mentioned above, educated female characters in the two novels all come from rich families who spend a fortune on their education: Bathsheba is a rich farmer's niece, and Eustacia a Captain's granddaughter schooled in Budmouth. There is no mention of women's education for the lower-class, or self-taught female characters resembling Gabriel Oak. The effect of middle-class or upper-class education on the female characters presented in the novels is more complex than on men. As Brady notes in a study about female characters in Hardy's novels in general, Hardy's heroines are all "instinct-led," belonging to "[an] instinctive and amoral primitive race" (96). As a result, female characters are uneducable in a sense in Hardy's novels. Hardy's educated heroines, usually emotional or instinct-driven, tend to look for and absorb the part of education that answers their nature or emotional needs, and education only works to reinforce their own characteristics. When Eustacia is first introduced in the novel, Hardy describes the knowledge she gains at school:

Her high gods were William the Conqueror, Strafford, and Napoleon Buonaparte, as they had appeared in the Lady's History used at the establishment in which she was educated. Had she been a mother she would have christened her boys such names as Saul or Sisera in preference to Jacob or David, neither of whom she admired. At school she had used to side with the Philistines in several battles, and had wondered if Pontius Pilate were as handsome as he was frank and fair. Thus she was a girl of some forwardness of mind, indeed, weighed in relation to her situation among the very rearward of thinkers, very original. Her instincts towards social non-conformity were at the root of this. (*The Return* 62)

In this passage, Hardy shows that because Eustacia has an instinct towards social non-conformity, she is particularly interested in and admires historical figures who are powerful yet ethically flawed in the conventional sense. Her education, therefore, does not shape her morality, it only provides materials to reinforce her natural characteristics.



Similarly, Bathsheba also chooses reading materials to answer her emotional needs. After Troy abandons Bathsheba in mourning for his former lover Fanny's death, Bathsheba discusses with her maid Liddy which books to read to "pass the heavy time away." While Liddy suggests that she should read *Maid's Tragedy*, *The Mourning Bride*, *Night Thoughts*, and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, Bathsheba refuses and chooses "*Love in a Village*, *Maid of the Mill*, and *Doctor Syntax*" (Far 138). While Liddy's list consists of tragedies that mirror Bathsheba's situation, Bathsheba refuses the list and chooses happy-ending love stories. This decision shows that Bathsheba refuses to read books that make her face the reality of her failed romance and marriage and potentially learn from it. Instead, she chooses books that help her escape the reality and rebuild her faith in love. As with Eustacia, education does not shape Bathsheba's opinion about love or marriage, only gives her materials to reinforce her own beliefs. As a result, education has little impact on the heroines' morality or judgement and fails to transform their nature.

Similar to the upper-class education received by men, women's education in the two novels does not include a professional training that can provide them with the means to survive. While the educated heroines from well-off families do not have to worry about survival, they lack the economic power to live independently without inherited capital, move to cities, and ascend to middle or higher class. Although there are ostensibly possible ways for the heroines to earn their economic independence and class ascent through education, their uncultivated nature gets in the way and makes them refuse the opportunities: Bathsheba is described by her aunt as "an excellent scholar, [who] was to become a governor once, only she was too wild" (Far 14); Eustacia refuses the opportunity to move to Budmouth and work as a rich widow's companion because of her

idleness and reluctance to work. When Eustacia is informed of this opportunity, she replies: “It is to wear myself out to please her! and I won’t go. O, if I could live in a gay town as a lady should, and go my own ways, and do my own doings, I’d give the wrinkled half of my life!” (*The Return* 82). Through these two heroines, Hardy illustrates that educated women, who are usually from well-off families, are not born with the qualities and characteristics that allow them to work as subordinates of upper-class people, which is usually the only way that they can work to lift their social standing. As a result, women’s education in Hardy’s narration cannot enable women to lift their socio-economic status independently through work.

Aside from working to make a fortune, marriage is also an important path to class ascent for women. Women’s education in the 1840s, aimed at enhancing social skills, was naturally regarded as an expensive investment in marriage to achieve class ascent (Burstyn 12). In the two novels, education is depicted as an asset when it comes to the choice of marriage: when Bathsheba and her aunt refuse Oak’s proposal, both of them raise the fact that Bathsheba is better educated than him as a reason. In their mind, education increases Bathsheba’s value in the marriage market, and Oak is unworthy of her because he is less well-educated than she is. Practically, education also increases women’s capacity of supporting their husbands, especially well-educated ones. For instance, Eustacia is regarded by Clym as a good choice for wife because her education fits in his career plan for opening a school. Yet none of the heroines succeeds in marrying out of their original social class. The most significant obstacle is the isolation and the strong assimilative power of the rural communities. In both rural settings, there are actually few men who can be classified as middle-class men both in a socio-economic

and a cultural sense. Clym Yeobright, although he receives a higher education in Paris and has worked as a jewelry dealer's manager, becomes nothing more than a laborer after he returns to the Egdon Heath. Boldwood, depicted as "the nearest approach to aristocracy" of the place, is still only a farmer whose social status is barely above Bathsheba's after she inherits her uncle's farm (*Far* 53). As a result, in a highly isolated rural community, educated women, who must be already well-off to afford their education, can hardly find men who are significantly above their social standing.

#### The Problem of Universal Education in the Early Stage

Published in the first decade after the enactment of the 1871 Education Act which first made elementary education compulsory, *The Return of the Native* and *Far From the Madding Crowd* reflect on the difficulties of the early stage of universal education in England. In Hardy's novels, the major problem at this stage is the vast, wild, isolated, and stagnant rural world. The mass ignorant rural population does not welcome urban civilization, which in fact cannot bring them many benefits for their survival, or much possibility of class ascent. The education that benefits the rural population, which gives them practical skills and balanced morality, only helps them live a better life while staying in their original social context. Well-educated people in the community only survive the environment when they conform to the rural community and give up whatever kind of life or hope was enabled by their education, including bringing education to the rural world. Despite the national effort of educating the rural world, it was still unchanged and ignorant.

**Phase Two: Barriers to Breakout: *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Woodlanders***

1870-1880s: Universal Elementary Education, Progress and Limitations

The next two novels selected for this study, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) and *The Woodlanders* (1887) were published in the mid-1880s. The two novels, as I will further discuss in the next section, are set between 1840 and 1870, yet reflect at the same time many features of 1880s England. 1840-1860s, decades immediately after the educational reforms of 1839 and 1870, witnessed the progress of mass education for the lower-class as well as its limitations. As I have discussed in Phase One, the development of the nation's first mass education attempt in 1840s was slow to yield any significant achievement. Although the population of children who attended school rose from 1.45 million to 2.5 million during the two decades after the reform in early 1840s, the quality of education they received varied and the duration of schooling was short for most children. As Robson notes, "the proportion of the nation's children who received some education in day schools jumped from 30 percent in 1818 to 60 percent in 1851; even at this later date, however, the average length of such tuition was only of around two years duration"(46). As a result, beginning in the 1860s, educators and policy makers in the nation had a new round of discussions about educational reforms. In 1861, the Royal Commission on the state of popular education in England published a six-volume report on public education in England. The Report noted that although "the proportion of children receiving instruction to the whole population [was] nearly as high as can be reasonably expected," only "one fourth of the children [received] a good education (qtd. in Gillard 2). The quality of elementary education, especially education for the lower-class, was problematic:

We have seen that less than three years ago there were in elementary day schools 2,213,694 children of the poorer classes. But of this number, 573,536 were attending private schools, which, as our evidence uniformly shows, are, for the most part, inferior as schools for the poor, and ill-calculated to give to the children an education which shall be serviceable to them in after-life. Of the 1,549,312 children whose names are on the books of public elementary day schools belonging to the religious denominations, only 19.3 per cent were in their 12th year or upwards, and only that proportion, therefore, can be regarded as educated up to the standard suited to their stations. As many as 786,202 attend for less than 100 days in the year and can therefore hardly receive a serviceable amount of education, while our evidence goes to prove that a large proportion, even of those whose attendance is more regular, fail in obtaining it on account of inefficient teaching. ... the present system has never completely met this serious difficulty in elementary teaching; that inspection looks chiefly to the upper classes and to the general condition of the school, and cannot profess to examine carefully individual scholars; and that a main object of the schools is defeated in respect of every child who, having attended for a considerable time, leaves without the power of reading, writing, and cyphering in an intelligent manner. (qtd. in Gillard 3)

In this passage, the Report points out that although elementary education has been extended to children of lower-class families, the education they receive is far from sufficient—one that can help them make a better life out of the knowledge and skills they obtain from school. Students, even those who attended schools more frequently and for more years than the average, could not always fully master basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills from the limited courses provided by most elementary schools.

As a result of this report, Parliament started to make more provisions for elementary schools in the nation through the 1870 Elementary Education Act. According to the Act, every district in England should have enough elementary schools to accommodate all children aged from five to thirteen. The Act also established school boards, consisted of elected government officials, to oversee them. The Act made provisions to ensure that schools in every district had sufficient funds to provide education to all the children by both directly funding the schools for their establishment

and operations, and by paying fees for poor families who could not afford their children's schooling.

Similar to the 1840 Act, however, it took a long time for the 1870 Act to actually come into effect. As Gillard notes in his work, the Act was “only the start of a process which would take more than twenty years to complete” (Gillard 3). The Act, although it made provisions for children's education for poor families, did not make education free for all. Moreover, although the Act empowered school boards to make elementary education in their districts compulsory, they were not required to do so. As a result, school attendance did not rise immediately, and many children from poor families still did not have education after the Act. In practice, a new Elementary Education Act in 1880 finally established universal education: school attendance for children aged from five to thirteen became compulsory, and employment of children under thirteen would be penalized. Even up to this point, however, the education received by the lower-class children was still, as noted by W.A.L. Blyth, an educator of the time, limited and inferior: “elementary schools are a whole educational process in themselves and one which is by definition limited and by implication inferior; a low plateau, rather than the foothills of a complete education” (qtd. in Gillard 3). Courses provided by the elementary schools supervised by the boards under the Acts, were still limited to basic reading, writing, and arithmetic. As the schools operated on the “monitorial system”—having a teacher supervising a large class with assistance from team of older pupils, the problem with teaching quality identified by the Royal Commission in 1861 was not fully solved. As a result, in the 1880s, although attending elementary schools had become a common thing among lower-class children, the quality of the education they received was still poor.

### The Value of Education in a Time of Change

Corresponding to the different historical context, characters in Hardy's 1880s novels show entirely different attitudes towards education compared to those in *The Return of the Native* and *Far From the Madding Crowd*. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Woodlanders*, lower-class characters recognize the value of education: they see it as a route to make a better life, respect people who are well-educated, and worry about not having enough education.

*The Mayor of Casterbridge* is a novel set in the 1840s. Although Hardy notes in Chapter 1 that the story starts "before nineteenth century has reached one-third of its span," scholars agree that the main part of the story is set in the 1840s with the social structure and features mirroring the Dorchester of Hardy's childhood memories (*The Mayor* 5). In a critical introduction to this novel, Dale Kramer discusses the setting of this novel in detail:

The novel is principally set, however, in the Casterbridge of the late 1840s, a thinly disguised re-creation of the Dorchester of Hardy's childhood...A similar complexity and resistance to categorization lie at the heart of the novel's representation of Victorian society, not only the late 1840s of its primary setting but also by implication the mid-1880s of its first publication. (xiii-xvi)

This historical setting of the novel bears significant implications in our discussion. The 1840s were a time of drastic social and cultural change, from Hardy's perspective in the 1880s. As Kramer notes, Hardy repeatedly refers to Casterbridge as an "old-fashioned" place. Casterbridge is depicted as a town isolated, traditional, and lagging behind its time. Yet unlike Egdon Heath and Weatherbury, which powerfully maintained their traditions despite the outside changing world, Casterbridge is open to changes brought about by modern influence. As Page concludes, the 1840s Casterbridge in *The*

*Mayor of Casterbridge* is Hardy's representation of a time when, and place where, modern influence is intruding and overtaking rural traditions:

Paramount for Hardy is the necessity of depicting Casterbridge as an isolated, conservative, and thoroughly traditional community, with a social organization belonging to the pre-railway age: in both rough-and-ready business methods and its superstitions and folk-customs, it is a survival from the past, and the novel depicts and dramatizes the intrusion of the modern world and the beginning of a process of radical and irresistible change. (Page 266)

Moreover, as I discussed in the last section, both the 1840s and 1880s are in the middle of educational reforms, where universal education, especially education for the poor, was an important social concern. Unlike the 1830s depicted in the 1870s novels *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native*, when the reforms were just in the minds, plans, and discussions among educators and policy makers, the 1840s and 1880s were the time that the reforms were actually under way. They witnessed the early outcomes of the first attempts at universal education: schooling became attainable for children from rural areas and poor families, and education gradually became a common thing shared by people from all classes rather than an upper/middle-class privilege. As a result, people were more open to new ideas and recognized the value of education, allowing modern influences into the traditional community. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy illustrates this phenomenon in a scene where people in Casterbridge talk about their appreciation of Farfrae, a well-educated young gentleman from Scotland, for bringing to the town new entertainment and skills in doing grain business, which their Mayor Henchard, an ill-educated countryman risen from a hay-trusser is not able to provide them:

“Mr. Henchard's rejoicings couldn't say good morn-ing to this,” said one. “A man must be a headstrong stunpoll to think folk would go up to that bleak place to-day.”



The other answered that people said it was not only in such things as those that the Mayor was wanting. “Where would his business be if it were not for this young fellow? ‘Twas verily Fortune sent him to Henchard. His accounts were like a bramblewood when Mr. Farfrae came. He used to reckon his sacks by chalk strokes all in a row like garden-palings, measure his ricks by stretching with his arms, weigh his trusses by a lift, judge his hay by a chaw, and settle the price with a curse. But now this accomplished young man does it all by ciphering and mensuration. Then the wheat—that sometimes used to taste so strong [of] mice when made into bread that people could fairly tell the breed—Farfrae has a plan for purifying, so that nobody would dream the smallest four-legged beast had walked over it once.” (*The Mayor* 93)

In this passage, Hardy illustrates how people in Casterbridge embrace the modern entertainment and technology brought by Farfrae and see it as superior to the traditional ones: they prefer Scottish dancing in a pavilion to traditional field games; they recognize the benefit brought by modern technology and knowledge, and understand that good handwriting, account-keeping, cyphering, mensuration, and purifying are crucial skills to carry out good business and make their lives better than traditional skills and methods. The people in Casterbridge are far different from the rural laborers in Egdon Heath, who think that education only “does harm” by bringing “strange notions,” and writing only enables young people to chalk bad words on gateposts and barns’ doors (*The Return* 92). Instead, people in Casterbridge recognize the value of education and embrace modern knowledge and technologies.

It is also noticeable that *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is not Hardy’s first Wessex novel to mention the fictional town of Casterbridge. In *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), Hardy refers to Casterbridge as a city near Weatherbury that is occasionally visited by his characters: the farm owners Bathsheba and Boldwood both go to markets in Casterbridge (*Far* 40); Sergeant Troy is educated in Casterbridge Grammar School (*Far* 74); Gabriel Oak, a shepherd, has been to a hiring fair in Casterbridge trying to find a job

before he goes to Weatherbury (*Far* 19). Compared to the Casterbridge in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the Casterbridge in *The Mayor* seems to be more welcoming to lower-class people from rural areas who are driven to make a better life. While Oak in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, a hard-working young man having good education and professional skills as a shepherd, cannot find a job in Casterbridge, Henchard, starting as a hay-trusser in *The Mayor*, manages to become a successful grain merchant in Casterbridge and reaches genteel status as the mayor. Different from the settings of the earlier novels, the setting of *The Mayor* is a city open to modern influence and offers opportunities of class mobility for rural laborers.

In this setting, education becomes highly valued as people recognize the crucial role it plays in class mobility and bettering their lives. People start to feel anxious about not being educated well enough. Elizabeth-Jane, a young girl raised in a sailor's family, eagerly seeks opportunities for education so that she can turn herself into a lady: "the desire—sober and repressed—of Elizabeth-Jane's heart was indeed to see, to hear and to understand. How could she become a woman of wider knowledge, higher repute—'better' as she termed it—this was her constant inquiry of her mother" (*The Mayor* 18). At this point, Elizabeth's mother has not found Henchard and made Elizabeth the mayor's step daughter, so Elizabeth is still a mere working-class girl. Nonetheless in her opinion, it seems possible and desirable for a lower-class girl to become a reputable lady by learning more and improving herself through education. Even after Henchard adopts her, giving her money to dress her like a lady of the genteel class, she still feels that she cannot be qualified as a lady as long as she lacks formal education. On the day that

Elizabeth dresses up in expensive clothes and receives admiration from everyone in town including Farfrae, the first thing that comes to her mind is worries about her education:

“There is something wrong in all this,” she mused. “If they only knew what an unfinished girl I am—that I can’t talk Italian, or use globes, or show any of the accomplishments they learn at boarding-schools, how they would despise me! Better sell all this finery and buy myself grammar books and dictionaries and a history of all the philosophies!” (*The Mayor* 69).

Through this passage, Hardy shows the strong correlation between social status and level of education. In Elizabeth’s mindset, education is as important as wealth in determining one’s social status—it is shameful for her to dress up like a lady while not having acquired a boarding-school education. For Elizabeth, and presumably for most common people in Casterbridge, education is a viable means, and a necessity, to class ascent.

The community in *The Woodlanders* shares features with that of Casterbridge. Also written in 1880s, *The Woodlanders* is a novel set in 1860s rural England, in a woodland village called Little Hintock. The novel was originally intended to be a successor to *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) with similar rural settings (*The Woodlanders* xi). Little Hintock, like Weatherbury and Egdon Heath, is an isolated rural village far from cities. In the opening chapter, Hardy introduces it by following the visit of a barber to the place:

It was one of those sequestered spots outside the gates of the world where may usually be found more meditation than action, and more listlessness than meditation: where reasoning proceeds on narrow premises, and results in inferences wildly imaginative; yet where, from time to time, dramas of a grandeur and unity truly Sophoclean are enacted in the real, by virtue of the concentrated passions and closely knit interdependence of the lives therein.

This place was the Little Hintock of the master-barber’s search. (*The Woodlanders* 7)

In this passage, Little Hintock is depicted as a rural place far from modern culture and isolated from the outside world. However, unlike Egdon Heath, which Hardy describes to

be unchangeably primitive, Little Hintock does not have the same powerful resistance against civilization: at the beginning of the story, it receives its urban visitor who actively looks for it. Similar to Casterbridge, Little Hintock is inevitably subject to the intrusion of modernity.

This feature is also illustrated by the survival of characters who are well-educated in Little Hintock. As I discussed in Phase One, Egdon Heath and Weatherbury have a strong resistance against modernity: people who are not landowners or farm owners have to work as rural laborers to make a living despite their educational or professional background, and people who are well-educated, such as Troy and Clym, cannot survive by their knowledge of Latin or arithmetic. Little Hintock, on the contrary, allows for the survival of people with professions outside rural traditions. For instance, Fitzpiers, a scientist and doctor from a city, survives among the woodlanders and retains his original way of living as an upper-middle class professional who pursues his own study and practices medicine. Although his profession is not well-understood by the majority of the woodlanders, Fitzpiers receives respect from middle-class people in the community. In a passage where the woodsmen talk about Fitzpiers, saying that he is a “strange, deep, perusing gentleman” who has “sold his soul to the wicked-one,” Mr. Melbury, a well-informed timber merchant, defends Fitzpiers, saying that he is “a gentle man fond of science, and philosophy, and poetry, and, in fact, every kind of knowledge” (*The Woodlanders* 28). Unlike Clym in *The Return*, Fitzpiers does not need to become a rural laborer to make a living, and he survives in the rural community with a higher socio-economic status. Different from the rural settings of earlier novels, Little Hintock is supportive of the survival of characters who bring urban cultures and influence to it.

This difference between Little Hintock and the rural settings of earlier novels is also illustrated by the comparison between the fates of the three suitors of Bathsheba in *Far From the Madding Crowd* and the two suitors of Grace in *The Woodlanders*. Similar to Bathsheba, Grace is a well-educated young woman from a well-off family. Bathsheba has three suitors of different educational backgrounds and professions: a rich genteel and farm owner Mr. Boldwood, a grammar school-educated young Sergeant Troy, and a national-school educated shepherd Gabriel Oak. Among the three, Gabriel Oak survives and wins Bathsheba in the end, whereas Troy and Boldwood both die in disgrace. As I analyzed in Phase One, Oak's education gives him the best morality, knowledge, and skills to survive in the closed, rural community of Weatherbury. The better-educated characters, Boldwood and Troy, do not benefit from their education in terms of survival in the farming village. Grace's suitors are Giles Winterborne, who is an honest, hard-working, faithful, and selflessly-loving woodsman similar to Gabriel Oak; and Fitzpiers, a gentleman and upper-class educated professional, who is well-off but faithless, combining characteristics of Boldwood and Troy. However, in contrast to *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Woodlanders* presents the rural woodland as an environment where characters representing modernity survive, and rural traditions die. In a passage where Mr. Melbury finds out that Fitzpiers, whom his daughter Grace has already married, has had an affair with Mrs. Charmond, another well educated woman in town, Hardy explicitly points out the victory of modernity:

In the simple life he had led it had scarcely occurred to him that after marriage a man might be faithless. That he could sweep to the heights of Mrs. Charmond's position, lift the Veil of Isis, so to speak, would have amazed Melbury by its audacity if he had not suspected encouragement from that quarter. What could he and his simple Grace do to countervail the passions of those two sophisticated beings, versed in the world's ways, armed with every apparatus for victory? In

such an encounter the homely timber-dealer felt as inferior as a savage with his bow and arrows to the precise weapons of modern warfare. (*The Woodlanders* 193)

Mr. Melbury, a traditional timber merchant, cannot even protect his daughter on his own ground, for he feels threatened, if not defeated, by people who are cultivated in modern cultures. By comparing Mr. Melbury to “a savage with his bow and arrows [inferior] to the precise weapons of modern warfare,” Hardy points out that Mr. Melbury’s disadvantage lies in the inevitable trend of modernity overtaking rural, traditional culture. Unlike the rural settings in Phase I novels, Little Hintock in *The Woodlanders* is a village open to the influence of modern culture, which overpowers its rural traditions.

In a community where better-educated people overpower the ill-educated ones, characters in *The Woodlanders* show a similar anxiety about education to those in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Seeing himself disadvantaged in the modernizing world due to his lack of formal education, Mr. Melbury is determined to cultivate his daughter into a refined lady by sending her to an upper-class school. When Mr. Melbury talks about this, he relates his childhood experience:

I heard you wondering why I’ve kept my daughter so long at boarding-school” ...“When I was a boy another boy—the pa’son’s son along with a lot of others—asked me ‘Who dragged Whom round the walls of What?’ and I said, ‘Sam Barret, who dragged his wife in a wheeled chair round the tower when she went to be churched.’ They laughed at me so much that I went home and couldn’t sleep for shame; and I cried that night till my pillow was wet: till I thought to myself: “they may laugh at me for my ignorance; but that was father’s fault, and none o’ my own making, and I must bear it. But they shall never laugh at my children, if I have any: I’ll starve first!” (*The Woodlanders* 27)

In this passage, Hardy again shows a rural community entirely different from that in *The Return of the Native* or *Far From the Madding Crowd*. As the editor of *The Woodlanders* notes, the question that the children ask little Melbury is an allusion to Book 22 of *Iliad*,

where Achilles drags the body of Hector around walls of Troy (344). In Mr. Melbury's childhood, most children are educated to know the plot of the *Iliad*, and the one who is not as well educated is one of the few to be laughed at. In this community, education is respected and ignorance is a shame. People not only care about their own education, but also feel compelled to send their children to schools for their future.

### Barriers to Breakout

Hardy presents in *The Mayor* and *The Woodlanders* an inevitably modernizing world where people, whether in cities or remote rural areas, start to recognize the importance of education and the life-changing opportunities it may offer. However, he also reveals the barriers people face when they try to climb the social ladder through education. In entirely closed rural communities that are resistant to modern influence like Egdon Heath, rural laborers can, through national elementary education and some level of self-learning, become experts in a rural trade and make a better living than their less-educated counterparts, and sometimes even than better educated ones. When modernity starts to permeate and dominate the society, as in *Casterbridge* and *Little Hintock*, people coming from rural lower-class families are disadvantaged despite the new educational opportunities available to them.

The first immediate drawback is the limitation and inferiority of the elementary education available to lower-class people. As I discussed in the first section of this chapter, from 1840 to the mid-1880s, the elementary school education available to lower-class children only provided a limited curriculum with reading, writing, and arithmetic, and most children attending elementary schools left without fully mastering those skills

because of poor teaching and short duration of schooling. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy shows the limitations of such education through the failure of Henchard. In the novel, although Hardy does not specify Henchard's educational background, there are clues that Henchard has received some education equivalent to the elementary-school education of the time. Henchard can read and write. In Chapter 10 where Henchard first finds the wife and daughter whom he has deserted, he writes a short letter:

Meet me at eight o'clock this evening, if you can, at the Ring on the Budmouth road. The place is easy to find. I can say no more now. The news upsets me almost. The girl seems to be in ignorance. Keep her so till I have seen you.

M.H.

(*The Mayor* 66)

Through this short letter written by Henchard, Hardy shows that Henchard has received some level of training in reading and writing: the language that Henchard uses is not dialect, and there are no misspelled words or grammar mistakes in the letter. In Chapter 20 when Henchard starts living with his step-daughter Elizabeth-Jane, a country girl trying to become a genteel-mannered lady, he finds fault with her use of dialect words:

[Elizabeth-Jane] happened to say when [Henchard] was rising from table, wishing to show him something, "If you'll bide where you be a minute, Father, I'll get it." "Bide where you be," he echoed sharply, "Good God, are you only fit to carry wash to a pig-trough, that ye use such words as those?" (121)

Although Hardy describes Henchard to be "uncultivated himself, the bitterest critic" (121), Henchard, nonetheless, is able to tell the difference between rural dialect and the standard English used in genteel society and wants to avoid using rural dialect. Knowing the meaning of the dialect words, Henchard never uses them himself in any part of the novel. Beyond literacy, however, Henchard does not seem to have acquired any other skills or knowledge from schooling. He is able to count, but he is not able to do arithmetic: as a person attending Farfrae's ball says, Henchard "reckon[s] his sacks by



chalk strokes all in a row like garden-palings” (93). Originally a hay-trusser who can read and write but does not know either math or science, Henchard, from Hardy’s description, shares an educational and socio-economic background with lower-class children attending elementary schools in mid-nineteenth century England.

This kind of education, as Hardy shows in the novel, is not sufficient for people to survive in the modernizing world in competition with their middle/upper-class educated counterparts. Donald Farfrae, a well-educated Scottish gentleman who knows math, account-keeping, sciences, and technologies, easily beats Henchard in the grain business and establishes a good reputation in Casterbridge: Farfrae keeps accurate measurement of grains and clear account books and introduces technologies to purify grains and sowing machines. Lacking all those modern knowledge and skills, Henchard can only rely on old, primitive, and superstitious methods that inevitably lead to his failure. Aside from losing to Farfrae in popularity among people in Casterbridge due to his “lackings” that people talk about at Farfrae’s ball, Henchard’s dependence on superstition leads to the fatal failure in his grain business: he believes the misleading forecast of the rural weather-caster, and spends a fortune on grains which later bring him a huge loss (136). In every aspect, Henchard’s limited education makes him unable to succeed in professions dominated by well-educated people who possess modern knowledge—nearly all professions other than basic manual labor in the rapidly modernizing world. When Henchard becomes a mere hay-trusser again after this failure, Hardy analyzes the reason for Henchard’s failure in his attempt at class ascent:

And thus Henchard found himself again on the precise standing which he had occupied a quarter of a century before. Externally there was nothing to hinder his making another start on the upward slope, and by his new lights achieving higher things than his soul in its half-formed state had been able to accomplish. But the

ingenious machinery contrived by the Gods for reducing human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum—which arranges that wisdom to do shall come *pari passu* with the departure of zest for doing—stood in the way of all that. (232)

In this passage, Hardy implies that the reason underlying Henchard's failure in his former attempt at class ascent is a lack of "wisdom to do" it; but now Henchard, with more wisdom gained from experience, will not try to climb the social ladder again for he has lost the "zest for doing" it. Seemingly drawing a purely fatalist explanation for Henchard's failure to secure a position in the upper class, Hardy describes it as "the ingenious machinery contrived by Gods": not human nature, or the power of fate. Hardy suggests an inevitable, powerful, external force brought by superior intellectuals' "machinery"—modernization. Apart from fate, therefore, Henchard's inevitable failure lies in the fact that his limited education and his allegiance to tradition make him unable to survive in the modernizing world, which intellectually overpowers him and eventually casts him out.

Aside from the intellectual barrier created by the limitations of elementary school education, a cultural barrier persists in the way of social ascent for people who can afford upper-class education. In *The Woodlanders*, Mr. Melbury, a middle-class rural timber merchant who hopes to achieve social ascent, buys an expensive boarding school education for his daughter, Grace Melbury. Although Grace's costly upper-class schooling successfully transforms her from a country girl into a well-mannered and intellectual lady, she remains emotionally attached to her original cultural group of the woodlanders and feels pain at being educated out of it. In the misery caused by this transition, Grace blames her father for sending her to an upper-class school:

"I have never got any happiness outside Hintock that I know of, and I have suffered many a heartache at being sent away. Oh the misery of those January

days when I got back to school, and left you all here in the wood so happy. I used to wonder why I had to bear it. And I was always a little despised by the other girls at school, because they knew where I came from, and that my parents were not in so good a station as theirs” (201)

Grace does not feel happy to be forced away from the social group she was born into and cannot find a comfortable place in upper-class society. Hardy points out the cultural disturbance resulted from her education by describing her as an “impressionable creature, who combined modern nerves with primitive feelings, and was doomed by such co-existence to be numbered among the distressed, and to take her scourgings to their exquisite extremity” (267). In this sense, Grace’s attempt at social ascent through education only results in a miserable sense of dislocation from the social group to which she culturally belongs and is emotionally attached. Without sharing the cultural background and socio-economic status of other girls at the boarding school, Grace is not able to find her place in upper-class society and become part of it.

#### Problems in the Middle of Reforms of Universal Education

The 1880s is a period when the idea of universal education comes closer to actuality: elementary education, although of low quality, is successfully extended to lower classes. The novels published in this period, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Woodlanders* reflect on its progress and limitations. On the one hand, characters in Hardy’s novels recognize the value of education and seek the opportunities it offers to make a better living; on the other hand, as mass education opens up the modern world to the lower-class, it also accelerates the pace of modernization, making it even harder for the ill-educated lower-class to break the barriers in their way to class ascent. The main challenge at this stage presented in Hardy’s novels, therefore, is the conflict between the

urge to class ascent through education and the unbreakable material and cultural barriers that hinder it.

**Phase Three: Crisis in The Face of the Civilized, Modern World**

## 1880-1890s: Improving Universal Education for Emerging Lower-Class Scholars

During the early years of educational reforms targeted at extending elementary education to the poor, one big problem, as I discussed in the last two Phases, was that even when elementary education was attainable at low cost, lower-class people were not motivated to keep their children in school. As a result, even though the decades between 1840 and 1880 witnessed an increase in the total population of children, especially children from lower-class families, who received some formal education, yet the average duration of schooling and frequency of attendance among those children were low. In 1862, the Committee of Council on Education first introduced a Revised Code, based on the old tutor-pupil system, to tackle the problem: roughly from age seven to twelve, children in elementary schools could take exams on reading, writing, and arithmetic according to one of the “six standards” –from Standard I to VI for each year of schooling, and all the students who passed the exam each year received a national grant for continued schooling. This policy, although it did not promote school attendance among lower-class children immediately, became effective after the 1880 Act made elementary education compulsory and penalized child labor. As the population of children who remained in schools up to or over the age of 13 increased, a seventh standard was added in 1882.

As an historian studying the period concludes, “in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century there was much debate about the extent to which elementary schools could provide an adequate education for the more able children” (qtd. in Gillard 3). As more children received elementary education for extended years, some of them showed

talents for and interest in levels of education beyond the rudimentary education provided by elementary schools. For young people who passed Standard VII and wanted more education, “higher grade schools” were created in 1880s. These higher grade schools received young people of 15-16 years old, usually children of farmers and manual workers, and provided a wider range of curricular offerings such as Latin, science, mathematics, and drawing. Secondary schools, established in earlier decades for middle/upper-class children, also began to accept students from the lower-classes. According to the Crowther Report by Her Majesty’s Stationery Office in 1959, a survey conducted in 1894 of secondary schools in seven counties of England showed that a quarter of students in secondary schools graduated from public elementary schools (qtd. in Gillard 3). Yet, this figure does not mean that it was easy for a lower-class student graduating from elementary school to get into a secondary school, given the huge population of public-school students. As also shown in the survey, only four or five in 1,000 public schools students could pass on to secondary schools (qtd. in Gillard 3). As for higher education, the chance for public-school graduates to get into a university is even slighter. According to the survey, of all 4,200 undergraduate students in Cambridge and Oxford in 1894, only 2% had studied in public elementary schools. As Crowther comments, the “door was not closed on a poor boy of talent, but it was not open very far” (qtd. in Gillard 3). The 1890s, when the last two novels *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1892) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895) were written and published, is a time marked by a well-established universal elementary education system and the emergence of a group of educated lower-class young people seeking opportunities for higher education and other things that were once not thinkable for their class.

Lower-class scholars in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*

Corresponding to progress in the development of the universal elementary education system, lower-class characters in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* are better educated, having more educational resources to learn and know about the modern world. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the protagonist Tess is an educated girl coming from a poor peasant family, whereas in earlier novels, the educated female characters all come from rich middle-class families who have paid for their expensive education or supported their self-study: Eustacia is a granddaughter of a captain who sends her to a boarding school, Bathsheba a farm owner's heir, Elizabeth-Jane the step-daughter of the genteel grain-merchant and mayor, and Grace a well-off timber merchant's daughter. These female characters are economically dependent on their familial wealth and capital, and the education they receive aims to cultivate them into fine ladies rather than giving them the means to make a living on their own. Before the late 1870s, women's education largely served this purpose. As more girls from lower-class families attended elementary school and got compulsory, free education for more years after 1880, Hardy finally included an independent, educated heroine from a lower-class family in his novel.

Tess is educated in a public elementary school after 1862. As Hardy introduces her at the beginning of the novel: she has in her mind "trained National teachings and Standard knowledge under an infinitely Revised Code" (*Tess* 17). Later when Tess talks about her earlier experience to Clare, she also mentions her education: "I was in the Sixth Standard when I left school, and they said I had great aptness, and should make a good teacher, so it was settled that I should be one. But there was trouble in my family; father

was not very industrious, and he drank a little” (*Tess* 186). According to these two passages and the history of nineteenth century education, Tess goes to an elementary school after the implementation of the Revised Code of 1862: she passes exams, takes grants, makes it through Sixth Standard, and has the opportunity of becoming a pupil teacher if she can stay in school for more training. In the setting of *Tess*, the established national education system gives lower-class women a new opportunity of making a living out of their education by becoming teachers. At the same time, however, Hardy also points out that even though the educational system of the time paves a new career path for educated lower-class women, their socio-economic background still gets in the way of their intellectual advancement. As Tess explains, “there [is] trouble in [her] family”: because the child labor law penalized employment of children below 13 years of age, many elementary school students from poor families were compelled to leave school at Sixth Standard—when most of them reached 13 years old—and started working to support their family.

Although Tess does not manage to grasp the opportunity of becoming a teacher, her education nonetheless has an important impact on her life, distinguishing her from both uneducated lower-class laborers and boarding-school educated ladies. Hardy shows the difference between Tess and the ignorant peasants of her time through the comparison between Tess and her uneducated parents. When Hardy first introduces Tess, he immediately points out that Tess thinks and acts differently from her parents because of her education:

Between [Tess’s] mother, with her fast-perishing lumber of superstitions, folklore, dialect, and the daughter [Tess], with her trained National teachings and Standard knowledge under an infinitely Revised Code, there was a gap of two



hundred years as ordinarily understood. When they were together the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed. (*Tess* 17)

In this passage, Hardy highlights the fact that Tess's education has created a gap between her mindset and her mother's. This gap is further illustrated by their different opinions when Tess makes decisions for herself and her family in face of difficulties. When Tess's father gets drunk and is unable to deliver the beehives to the market, Tess and her mother have a discussion about what to do:

Mrs. Durbeyfield looked unequal to the emergency. "Some young feller, perhaps, would go? One of them who were much after dance with [you] yesterday," she presently suggested.

"O no—I wouldn't have it for the world!" declared Tess proudly. "And letting everybody know the reason—such a thing to be ashamed of! I think *I* could go if Abraham could go with me to kip me company."(24)

In this passage, Hardy shows that when facing emergency, the first solution that comes into Mrs. Durbeyfield's mind is to look for help from men, utilizing Tess's sexual attractiveness. For Mrs. Durbeyfield, there is nothing wrong in having her beautiful daughter ask a man for help, whereas Tess feels ashamed at her mother's suggestion and chooses to rely on herself to tackle the problem. Tess's distinct consciousness of shame and rumors, as well as her sense of self-reliance which her uneducated parents do not understand, comes up again after the family loses the horse Prince—their only source of income. While Mrs. Durbeyfield suggests Tess go to a rich lady, Mrs. D'Urberville, to claim kinship with her and ask for her help, Tess says "I'd rather try to get work" (*Tess* 30).

Even with this consciousness and sense of self-reliance, however, Tess is unable to do everything demanded by her family on her own. Having refused to ask for help from the young men who danced with her, Tess fails to deliver the hives to the market

and causes the death of Prince on her way—which is the onset of her misfortune. The guilt over this failure pushes Tess to comply with her parents' wish and go to Mrs. D'Urberville's mansion for help, against her better judgement, leading her to Alec, who later rapes her and ruins her life. Through these two episodes in Tess's life, Hardy shows that although Tess has a sense of self-reliance and better judgement than her uneducated parents, she does not possess the power to act upon them. Education for the lower-class, therefore, has a good impact on lower-class people's lives in that it helps them make better judgment, motivates them to become self-dependent, and gives them opportunities to escape manual labor by training them into teachers. Yet the socio-economic background and other disadvantages of these lower-class scholars—poor families to feed, arduous labor, ignorant and unsupportive relatives—all make it hard and unlikely for them to capitalize on the advantages and opportunities offered by their education.

This same problem for the educated lower-class is also presented in *Jude the Obscure*, where Jude Fawley, a hard-working autodidact aspiring to become a scholar, faces innumerable barriers to higher education because of his working-class status. The novel starts when Phillotson, the local school master and the only teacher, leaves the village and Jude, a studious child, loses his only provider of formal education. It can be inferred that by the time Phillotson leaves the village, Jude has already completed some level of elementary education—he is capable of reading, writing, and doing math, and ready for an education equivalent to that provided in higher grade schools or secondary schools. After Phillotson leaves the village, Jude asks him for Greek and Latin grammar books—knowledge that is beyond the elementary school curriculum. Hardy also describes Jude's thoughts upon receiving the books:

Ever since his first ecstasy or vision of Christminster and its possibilities, Jude had meditated much and curiously on the probable sort of process that was involved in turning the expressions of one language into those of another. He concluded that a grammar of the required tongue would contain, primarily, a rule, prescription, or clue of the nature of a secret cipher, which, once known, would enable him, by merely applying it, to change at will all words of his own speech into those of the foreign one. His childish idea was, in fact, a pushing to the extremity of mathematical precision what is everywhere known as Grimm's Law--an aggrandizement of rough rules to ideal completeness. (*Jude* 27)

From this passage, it can be deduced that Jude knows how to read and write in English, so that he believes Latin and Greek are easy based on the assumption that there is a rule for transforming English into Latin and Greek. Jude has also learnt math, given his ability to think in the logic of “pushing to the extremity of mathematical precision.” Therefore it is reasonable to assume that Jude has completed elementary education by the time Phillotson leaves the town. Jude’s early education, though it is not described in the novel, serves as the foundation of his dream and plan for becoming a scholar: he learns from Phillotson the plan for becoming a University graduate and gets from him knowledge about higher-level study and grammar books for self-learning. Unlike Gabriel Oak, another autodidact in Hardy’s earlier novel *Far From the Madding Crowd*, who only extends his elementary study to reading books that suit his profession as a shepherd, Jude has an elementary education that opens for him the door to aspire to a higher level of education and possibilities beyond his class and social standing.

This extended knowledge and possibilities, however, do not guarantee a viable path of success for Jude. Instead, despite the effort Jude puts in studying on his own and the level of scholarship he achieves through those efforts, his social standing, lack of money, and lack of formal secondary education make it impossible for him to ever get into a university. After ten years of study, Jude, by this time a stonemason and an

autodidact at his spare time, finally sends letters to several colleges in Christminster asking for advice and help to get into the university, and only receives one brief reply:

Sir,— I have read your letter with interest; and, judging from your description of yourself as a working-man, I venture to think that you will have a much better chance of success in life by remaining in your own sphere and sticking to your trade than by adopting any other course. That, therefore, is what I advise you to do. (*Jude* 99)

In this brief letter, the College Master does not mention anything regarding Jude's educational background or his current academic standing, but simply judges Jude by his social standing—"a working man," and concludes that Jude cannot succeed in becoming a scholar. Through this letter, Hardy points out that the fact that Jude is a working-class man itself makes success impossible, despite the education he has obtained. In other words, even though education for the lower-class can be improved so that they are equipped with more knowledge and skills—sometimes even to a point equivalent to that of their higher-class counterparts, the fact that they are poor, living on manual labor, and lacking all the social and economic resources possessed by upper-classmen determines their failure in pursuing middle/upper-class professions.

### Entering the Modern World

As I discussed in the former two phases, the world presented in Hardy's novels saw modern influences gradually overtaking traditional rural society. While Phase I novels feature the resistance of rural society against modernization and in Phase II, we saw modernity overpowering traditions in the closed rural communities, in Hardy's 1890s novels, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, the influence of modernity and civilization is no longer peripheral to the lives of lower-class characters. Instead, as urban

influences penetrate rural communities and universal education progresses, lower-class people gradually approach the center of the modern world.

Sexual immorality, as Hardy shows in characters such as Troy and Fitzpiers, persists as an aspect of modernity and becomes a common characteristic of the emerging urban middle-class of the time. In *Tess*, Hardy presents Alec D'Urberville-Stoke as a typical example. Alec is the son of a tradesman who moves and settles his family in a rural county trying to lead a genteel life. Hardy presents Alec's family when first introducing him to readers:

When old Mr. Simon Stoke, latterly deceased, had made his fortune as an honest merchant (some said money-lender) in the North, he decided to settle as a county man in the South of England, out of hail of his business district; and in doing this he felt the necessity of recommencing with a name that would not too readily identify him with the smart tradesman of the past, and that would be less commonplace than the original, stark words. (*Tess* 32)

Through this passage, Hardy describes Alec as the son of a wealthy tradesman who, lacking gentility, seeks to elevate his social standing by moving to a rural county and changing his last name. Belonging to this social group, Alec has the money and economic power of a middle/upper-class man, but he lacks morality and cultivation. These features make him highly dangerous to lower-class girls like Tess. Alec takes advantage of Tess's naivety, rapes her, and abuses his economic power to manipulate her in their relationship. In a passage where Alec comes to Tess, knowing her family are being forced to leave their house in poverty, Alec's abuse of power in this relationship is illustrated:

“Come to this cottage of mine. We'll get up a regular colony of fowls, and your mother can attend to them excellently; and the children can go to school.”  
[After Tess refuses this proposal, Alec continues:] “Please just tell your mother,” he said, in emphatic tones. “It is her business to judge—not yours. I shall get the house swept out the whitened tomorrow morning, and fires lit, and it will be dry by the evening, so that you can come straight there. Now mind, I shall expect you.” (359)

By mentioning Tess's mother, who always wants Tess to marry for money, Alec reminds Tess of her economic responsibility for her family and forces her to comply with his wish against her own will and judgment. As a result, Tess resumes her relationship with Alec, which leads to her murder of Alec and death.

This sexual immorality is also presented as a common threat to lower-class girls in *Jude*. When Arabella talks to her friends about her plan to seduce Jude, one of the girls warns her to pick a rural laborer in case men from towns will take advantage of her: "A countryman that's honorable and serious-minded such as he; God forbid that I should say a [soldier], or sailor, or commercial gent from the towns, or any of them that be slippery with poor women!" (*Jude* 44). Like Alec, soldiers, sailors, and businessmen are described as a product of modern urban culture, lacking sexual morality and harmful to women from the lower class.

Aside from the sexual immorality coming from the rising middle-class, the strict moral code created by social conventions is another important aspect of the modern society depicted in Hardy's novels that threatens the survival of the lower class. In both *Tess* and *Jude*, Hardy more than once criticizes social convention for its inhumanity and harshness. Hardy gives a very sympathetic account when describing Tess's decision to accept Clare's proposal of marriage without telling him about her history with Alec:

She had consented. She might as well have agreed at first. The "appetite for joy" which pervades all creation, that tremendous force which sways humanity to its purpose, as the tide sways the helpless weed, was not to be controlled by vague lucubrations over the social rubric. (*Tess* 190)

In this passage, Hardy illustrates that it is human nature, a natural tendency, which Tess follows to make her decision against the demands of "social rubric," which is, as Hardy

implies, inhumane. In *Jude*, Hardy criticizes social convention even more explicitly. In that novel, social convention deprives Jude, Sue, and Phillotson of their jobs, children, and everything for their love and kind nature. After Sue and Jude's children die, Sue's husband Phillotson, also in poverty for letting Sue leave him, decides to have Sue come back to him:

To indulge one's instinctive and uncontrolled sense of justice and right, was not, he had found, permitted with impunity in an old civilization like ours. It was necessary to act under an acquired and cultivated sense of the same, if you wished to enjoy an average share of comfort and honor; and to let crude loving-kindness take care of itself. (*Jude* 291)

In this passage, Hardy analyses the incompatibility between urban civilization and the virtues of human nature. Phillotson, as well as Jude and Sue, only follow their natural kindness and sense of justice when making the decisions that later get them punished by the civilized society. Social conventions resulting from civilization therefore hurt people who are not deeply cultivated in modern civilization and who tend to follow their natural instincts.

In this scenario, as lower-class people become better educated, and able to have occupational opportunities beyond rural labors, they become more vulnerable to the harms of modern civilization. Entering the modern civilized world, lower-class people are not equipped with knowledge or experience about the modern culture, convention, and society. This knowledge and experience, as Hardy points out in the novels, are fatal things that universal education fails to offer to the lower-class people, especially those who come from rural areas. Similar to Mr. Melbury, who cannot possibly imagine a man having an affair after marriage, Tess and Jude know very little of what can happen in a

modern society. In a passage describing Tess's first visit to Stoke-d'Urbervilles' mansion, Hardy points out Tess's lack of experience and information:

Much less had she been far outside the valley. Every contour of the surrounding hills was as personal to her as that of her relatives' faces; but for what lay beyond, 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.  
(*Tess* 31)

In this passage, Hardy highlights that the valley where Tess lives is a closed rural place where knowledge of the outside world comes only from her elementary-school education. Although Tess has been the smartest, best educated of her peers at the national elementary school, her knowledge of the modern society outside the village is still limited. After Alec rapes Tess, Tess accuses her mother of not warning her beforehand for she had no idea such a thing could ever happen:

“How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house four months ago. Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn't you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o'learning in that way, and you did not help me!” (81)

In this passage, Hardy points out, through the words of Tess, that lower-class education lacks the teaching about the modern world and culture. Tess's poverty also does not allow her the leisure that belongs to upper-class women who can learn about the modern world through reading novels in their spare time.

This naivety, or ignorance, of the modern world also becomes a problem for Jude as he enters the modern world. Like Tess, Jude has no idea of Arabella's tricks which later trap him into a miserable marriage, the fact that his social standing will not allow him to enter a college, or that a musician who writes a beautiful religious song can be just a poor man struggling for a living. In Jude, Hardy highlights this point by repeatedly



referring Jude as a simple young man. For instance, after Jude marries Arabella, people in town all call Jude “a simple fool young Fawley” and say “all his reading had only come to this” (*Jude* 50). Although Jude has taught himself a lot of Latin and Greek classics, he does not gain any knowledge of the modern society through elementary school education or his autodidactic efforts. In this way, Hardy shows that although universal education can potentially lift lower-class students out of their class and allow them to academically emulate their upper-class counterparts, their education has a fatal limitation in that it does not equip them with knowledge of the modern world which is crucial to their survival in the modernized society.

#### Generational Change, Progress, and Hope

Many previous studies of education in Hardy’s novels tend to see Hardy’s novels, especially *Jude the Obscure*, as giving a very pessimistic message about education for the lower class. Jane Mattisson, for instance, writes in her essay “Education and Social Class”: “The view of education offered in Hardy’s novels is consistently dark: both access to and the quality of the education received are determined by one’s social class and not by merit, placing the working or artisan classes at a disadvantage” (“Education” 188). As I examined in previous sections, lower-class characters in Hardy’s novels do suffer from the disadvantages that Mattisson suggests. Yet those problems alone do not paint a “consistently dark” picture of education. As I analyzed in previous phases, the problems facing the lower-class characters change as the social contexts in Hardy’s novels develop. While lower-class characters in Phase One novels are completely trapped in ignorance and unaware of the modern world and lives beyond theirs, lower-class

characters in *Tess* and *Jude* are educated and eager to explore opportunities in the modern world. Hardy recognizes this social development through his novels written across decades, and suggests future hopes in *Tess* and *Jude*. The comparison between Tess and her ignorant mother signifies the generational progress that leads to future hopes of education for the poor. As Hardy puts it, Tess is “mentally older” than her mother (*Tess* 43), and she could have avoided her misfortune if she had followed her own judgement rather than complying with her parents’ requests. Through Tess and her mother, Hardy highlights a generational progress that bears future hopes, because the new generation of educated lower-class people are more sensible, knowledgeable, and experienced. Furthermore, Hardy observes the growth of educational opportunities for the lower class. In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy mentions the groups that Jude joins to promote education opportunities for the lower class:

Fawley had still a pretty zeal in the cause of education, and, as was natural with his experiences, he was active in furthering "equality of opportunity" by any humble means open to him. He had joined an Artizans's Mutual Improvement Society established in the town about the time of his arrival there; its members being young men of all creeds and denominations, including Churchmen, Congregationalists, Baptists, Unitarians, Positivists, and others—Agnostics had scarcely been heard of at this time—their one common wish to enlarge their minds forming a sufficiently close bond of union. The subscription was small, and the room homely; and Jude's activity, uncustomary acquirements, and, above all, singular intuition on what to read and how to set about it—begotten of his years of struggle against malignant stars—had led to his being placed on the committee. (*Jude* 247)

In this passage, Hardy shows the ongoing social change that potentially opens more educational opportunities to the lower-class. Therefore, although Hardy presents a lot of problems that seem to make high-quality education for the lower-class impossible, Hardy also suggests that this situation is not stagnant and class barriers in the educational system are not forever unbreakable. Instead, hope exists in the potential brought by the

knowledge and experience of these elementary-school educated lower-class people, who may not be able to obtain higher education themselves but are able to bring hopes for future generations.

Another hopeful message about education in *Tess* and *Jude* is the change it brings to modern civilization. Although it is true that Hardy's lower-class characters seeking class ascent through education all end up in either failure or misery as Mattisson argues, Hardy does not blame education for this result. As I discussed earlier, the failure of happy class ascent for lower-class people lies not so much in their education as in the overwhelming difficulties posed by their socio-economic status and their maladjustment to modern civilization despite their education. As for the misery and pains of cultural disturbance caused by successful class ascent, the problem is more about the incompatibility between modern culture and rural traditions than about lower-class education itself. In *Tess*, Hardy shows the potential for the educational reforms to achieve cultural reconciliation between the modern urban culture and rural traditions in both upper and lower class through conversations between Tess and Clare, the former a national school educated country girl and the latter an upper-class educated man who struggles to escape conventions and embrace emerging new ideas of the time. Educated in different cultures and classes, Clare and Tess find common ground in their thinking which Clare values:

He was surprised to find this young woman—who though but a milkmaid had just that touch of rarity about her which might make her the envied of her housemates—shaping such sad imaginings. She was expressing in her own native phrases—assisted a little by her Sixth Standard training—feelings which might almost have been called those of the age—the ache of modernism. The perception arrested him less when he reflected that what are called advanced ideas are really in great part but the latest fashion in definition—a more accurate expression, by

words in *logy* and *ism*, of sensations which men and women have vaguely grasped for centuries. (*Tess* 122)

In this passage, Hardy shows that Clare finds empathy with Tess through her words, and recognizes that her thinking, resulting from a village-school education, mirrors the advanced ideas of modern culture. Although Clare's early conventional education makes him unable to accept Tess's past or love her despite the fact that she has been raped, Clare finally becomes impressed by Tess's love, forgives her, loves her and protects her until the end. Through this ending, Hardy shows a possible reconciliation between modern culture and rural traditions: the cultivated rural mind can grasp the emerging new ideas of modernity, and shapes modernity to accept it and support its survival. In this way, Hardy suggests that the educational reform helps the lower-class to better survive, if not shape, modern civilization.

### Conclusion

Moving from Phase One to Phase Three, we see the continuity and changes in Hardy's representation of the education of his time: different problems facing educational reformers and constituents arose at different stages of national educational reform, lower-class people struggled hard to secure a place in the modernizing world with their limited education, yet hope also survived for generational progress and increased opportunities for the lower class. From this study we get a glimpse of how social development and policy reforms shaped people's lives as represented in literature, in this specific case how nineteenth century educational reforms affected Hardy's representation of education and lower-class people's lives in his six novels.

We must bear in mind, however, that this relationship between social development and literature, as well as Hardy's representation of education in the nineteenth century, is highly subjective—it is no more than a personal reflection on the time during which Hardy lived constrained by his experience, knowledge, and class. Many scholars have commented on this subjectivity, yet they have not reached any comprehensive conclusion about it. Sheila Cordner, for instance, suggests that Hardy's lack of formal higher education enables him to view the educational system as an outsider, offering insights that distinguish him from Oxbridge-educated authors and educators:

The shortcomings within Jude, Stephen, and Angel reflect British society's intolerance of their educational path. Hardy's self-education helped him question from an outsider's perspective pedagogical practices that went unchallenged by many educational reformers. At a crucial moment in the history of education in Britain, he explores what it would mean for British society to 'do without Cambridge.' (Cordner 79)

While Cordner sees Hardy's lack of college experience as an advantage which gives him a valuable insight into the nineteenth-century educational system, other scholars believe that Hardy's educational experience also makes him emotionally biased in judging the system. In *Thomas Hardy, A Biography Revisited*, Millgate notes that Hardy's experience of self-education leaves him a long-term grudge:

That process of self-education, determinedly pursued for several years at the cost of long hours of wearisomely invested and ultimately sterile labor, would have a certain long-term value for Hardy as a writer, but its specific goals remained unfulfilled and he never quite lost the sense of inferiority and resentment stemming from the incompleteness of his schooling, especially as signaled by the lack of a university degree. Nor did he ever forget the humiliation of sitting in Stinsford Church at his mother's side in that early summer of 1856 while the Reverend Shirley preached against the presumption shown by one of Hardy's class in seeking to rise, through architecture, into the ranks of professional men. (Millgate 56)

The sad episodes in Hardy's life shaped much of the tragic ending of *Jude*, despite the fact that in the 1890s, many higher education institutions, such as London University, welcomed working-class students to learn sciences and cultivate them into professional men (*Knowledge and Survival* 384). Although *Jude the Obscure* was written and set in the 1890s, Hardy chose to ignore the educational progress in order to write in the novel about his personal resentment against the educational system of his youth. As Mattisson notes, "Hardy himself knew, as he later admitted to his friend and mentor Horace Moule, that the 1860s to '70s was a period when it was almost impossible for poor men to enter the university" (380). It would be interesting, therefore, to explore to what extent Hardy's own experience affected his representation of education in his novels. Do all the novels reflect the historical periods in which they are set or written? How do Hardy's personal background and experience influence his writing and his representation of education? While Hardy himself is a product of his time, future studies exploring the relationship between Hardy's own educational experience and the theme of education in his novels will shed light on questions that are not fully answered by this study and explore from a different angle the effect of social development on literature.

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