Social Darwinism in Thomas Hardy's Jude the Obscure and Tess of the d’Urbervilles

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Supervisor
Prof. dr. Marysa Demoor

English Literature Department
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List of Abbreviations

I will use the following abbreviations when referring to Thomas Hardy’s novels:

\[ \text{JO} = \text{Hardy, Thomas. } Jude the Obscure. \text{ London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1994.} \]

\[ \text{TOD} = \text{Hardy, Thomas. } Tess of the d’Urbervilles. \text{ London: David Campbell Publishes Ltd., 1984.} \]

Other abbreviations:

\[ \text{NA} = \text{The Norton Anthology of English Literature} \]

\[ \text{OED} = \text{The Oxford English Dictionary Online} \]
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Wehrschmidt, D.A. *Tess asleep at Stonehenge, with Angel Clare, during the final hours of her freedom*. (1891). Illustration for the London “Graphic’s” 1891 serialization of “Tess of the d’Urbervilles”.


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1. Introduction

Next to English literature, evolutionary biology and especially Charles Darwin’s evolutionary principles of the ‘struggle for survival’ and ‘survival of the fittest’ have always fascinated me. As I was attending a course on evolutionary linguistics, it occurred to me that, perhaps, I could combine my two interests in my master thesis by exploring aspects of the theory of Social Darwinism in Thomas Hardy’s novels. Although Social Darwinism is a social theory, based on evolutionary principles and therefore not usually applied to literature, I found it a challenge to investigate to what extent Thomas Hardy could have been influenced by contemporary prominent social Darwinists such as Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, among others. To the best of my knowledge, so far no studies have been published which investigate Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* and his *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* from a social Darwinist perspective in particular. By taking such an approach in this dissertation, I hope to make a valuable contribution to studies which investigate the influence of Victorian evolutionary thinking on Thomas Hardy’s literature.

The main objective of this dissertation is thus to analyze these novels as such to illustrate whether Hardy can be considered a social Darwinist or not. I have chosen Hardy’s novels in particular because, as a Victorian naturalist, Hardy truthfully portrayed his impressions of everyday low-class life in Victorian society. The novels I selected offer, indeed, a clear image of the continuous struggle of the protagonists in a Victorian jungle, marked by social limitations and ruled by prejudice and conventions which put a constant pressure on the individuals and which contributes to their social downfall or even to their death. I chose *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* in particular, since these were the novels most rejected by Victorian society for the protagonists’ immoral and socially unacceptable behaviour (Ingham 1991). Thus, from a Social Darwinist perspective, I want to understand and interpret what causes the protagonists’ social downfall or success, and hence what external factors or character traits separate the weak and unfit from the strong survivors.

Since Charles Darwin’s theories prove to be one of the major influences on Hardy’s life and work, I will provide a first chapter dedicated to Hardy’s experience of reading Charles Darwin’s
evolutionary theories (see chapter 2). Chapter 3, then, is dedicated to a brief overview of Darwin’s evolutionary principles, as to exemplify the influence of Darwin’s evolutionary mechanisms on the development of social Darwinist ideas. Although Herbert Spencer had already formulated his social Darwinist theory prior to the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, Darwin did nevertheless influence post-Origin, social Darwinist thinking (see chapter 4.4). Furthermore I will dedicate an extensive theoretical chapter to the theory of Social Darwinism as to provide a theoretical frame to the analysis of Hardy’s novels (chapter 4). First of all, the aim of the first theoretical sub-chapter is to familiarize readers with the origin and definition of the concept of social Darwinism, followed by a second sub-chapter in which I will compare and contrast different attitudes towards the theory, since there are supporters as well as opponents of this theory. In the third sub-chapter then, I will distinguish between Social Darwinism and related issues such as Darwinism and Sociobiology. Despite the fact that these terms are frequently used in similar contexts, there are important differences to be considered, which I will explain in chapter 4.3. Next, in the fourth and most extensive sub-chapter entitled *Prominent Social Darwinists*, I intend to familiarize readers with the different types and contexts of Social Darwinism by presenting prominent pioneers of this theory and their most influential ideas. Then, I will end the theoretical part of this dissertation by providing a brief introduction to the Victorian class-based society and to the Victorian feminine and masculine ideal, to sketch a social background to Hardy’s novels.

After this theoretical part, I will pass on to the analysis of two of Hardy’s novels, which has as its central question whether the characters are ‘fit’ or not in social Darwinist terms. I will investigate the struggle in which the characters are involved and also the causes of these struggles, that is, the internal and/or external factors which determine the characters’ social downfall or success. Throughout the analysis, then, I intend to focus on two evolutionary principles in particular, that is, on the principles of natural selection and group selection. Finally, I will tie my perspectives together in the conclusion, where I will explain whether or not my analysis has proven that, in my opinion, Thomas Hardy can or cannot be considered a social Darwinist.
2. Hardy reads Darwin

Born in 1840 in Upper Buckhampton, a Dorset hamlet in the English countryside, Hardy grew up as the oldest of four children of a stonemason and a former maidservant. Like his mother, Hardy was a voracious reader and autodidact, studying classical languages and the Bible. Although he showed intellectual potential it was impossible to afford a university education for the eldest son for a working class family as his. So when Hardy had finished his education in Dorchester at the age of sixteen, he was apprenticed to an architect and later on he managed to enrol at Kings College in London. Hardy practised architecture for nearly twenty years but his continued passion for literature and current scientific theories led him to explore evolutionary works, such as Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871), alongside theories by Spencer and Huxley. According to Bailey (1945) it is difficult to determine when exactly Hardy first lay eyes on Darwin’s evolutionary theories, however, he argues that “it was certainly early in the 1860s, when Hardy was in his early twenties” (665).

Darwin’s *Origin* especially impacted on the Victorian frame of mind. Some readers of *The Origin*, “like Tennyson, modified their belief in the existence of God and the special destiny of humanity. Others, like Thomas Hardy, were left feeling defrauded” (Alexander 2007, 198). Nonetheless, although Hardy lost his absolute Faith in God, in his autobiography he called himself “amongst the earliest acclamers of the Origin of Species” (Hardy 1928, 198). Hardy is known to have attended Darwin’s funeral in Westminster Abbey and he proclaimed that Darwin’s views were a major influence on his literary work (Hardy 1928). Some scholars, such as Irvine (1959) argue that these Darwinian theories had a rather negative influence on Hardy, labelling him as “almost the classic case of the evolutionary pessimist”, since he, as Irvine (1959) poses, “found no consolation in evolution or

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1 Next to those sources explicitly referred to, the basic biographical information about Thomas Hardy provided in this section is based on a combination of four main sources: (1) *The early life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1891, compiled largely from contemporary notes, letters, diaries, and biographical memoranda, as well as from oral information in conversations extending over many years*, by Florence Emily Hardy (New York: 1928). (2) *The later years of Thomas Hardy, 1892-1928*, by Florence Emily Hardy (New York: 1930). (3) *The Life of Thomas Hardy: 1840-1928*, by Florence Emily Hardy (London: 1962). (4) *Thomas Hardy in Context*. ed. Philip Mallett (Cambridge: 2013).
progress” (625). Hardy however, regarded himself as an evolutionary “meliorist (not a pessimist as they say),” claiming that he “think[s] better of the world” (Hardy 1930, 190). In the concluding part I will discuss whether in my opinion, Hardy can indeed be considered a pessimist, or rather a meliorist as he claims himself to be. Whatever that may be, his notebooks demonstrate that Hardy frequently contemplated Darwin’s evolutionary views. One of these notebooks includes, for example, correspondence dated in 1888 between Rev. Dr. A.B. Grosart and Hardy, the former asking him : “[...] how to reconcile these [horrors of human and animal life] with the absolute goodness and non-limitation of God” (Hardy 1928, 269). Upon this, Hardy replied : “Perhaps Dr. Grosart might be helped to a provisional view of the universe by the recently published Life of Darwin, and the works of Herbert Spencer and other agnostics” (Hardy 1928, 269). Thus, as a newly converted agnostic, that is, as “a person who believes that nothing is known or can be known of the existence or nature of God”, Hardy had become a supporter of Darwin’s theories and other evolutionary views. However, Hardy never completely turned away from the Church, rather as Schweik (1999) states “[Hardy] remained emotionally involved with the Church” (55). Hardy had once aspired a clerical career and readers of Tess of the d’Urbervilles and of Jude the Obscure, will acknowledge that these novels are packed with religious references which illustrate Hardy’s exceptional knowledge of the Bible.

The effect of his evolutionary readings upon Hardy’s writings, is undeniable, as will be demonstrated later on in the literary analysis part. Nonetheless, it is important to note that, although Hardy was a well-read intellectual, he was not a biologist nor a sociologist, which implies that he will have interpreted and applied Darwin’s theories rather from the perspective of a layman. Moreover, as Schweik (1999) notes, Hardy was “usually sceptical [sic] and hesitant to embrace wholeheartedly any of the various systems of ideas current in his days” (54). Accordingly, Leatherdale (1983) poses that one must keep in mind that “it is rare for writers to take their Darwinism au naturel” and he continues that,

[...] when literature adopts Darwinian ideas it also adapts them. This adaptation involves selectivity, modification, even distortion, and is further complicated by the blending of ideas

2 “Agnostic” according to the OED Online (a).
from a variety of sources. All is grist to the mill of the writer’s personal bias and individual artistic intention. (1-2)

In Hardy’s autobiography, there is in fact a passage that confirms what Schweik (1999) and Leatherdale (1983) argue when they state that writers do not entirely accept ranging theories, but rather adapt, and modify them to their own benefit:

The doctrines of Darwin require readjusting largely; for instance the survival of the fittest in the struggle for life. There is an altruism and coalescence between cells [organisms] as well as an antagonism. Certain cells destroy certain cells; but others assist and combine. Well, I can’t say. (Hardy 1930, 25)

Hence, in the literary analysis of this dissertation, the main objective will be to ascertain the extent to which Darwin’s theories, and accordingly, Social Darwinist perspectives, have influenced Hardy’s writings. How has Hardy interpreted, and consequently, agreed with or deviated from these theories? As will be demonstrated later on, Social Darwinism is a rather vague concept, defined and applied in various ways, hence, this dissertation will study to what extent, and in what way Hardy can be regarded as a social Darwinist.

3. Darwin’s Evolution Theory.3

As will be demonstrated in the following chapters on the origin and the pioneers of Social Darwinism to what extent Darwin’s namesake and theories are related to the concept of Social Darwinism, it seems only natural to introduce a chapter on Charles Darwin’s contribution to evolutionary theory.

Born in 1809 in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, the young Charles Darwin grew up to be a fervent collector of insects, minerals, bird’s eggs and nests which he collected on his many solitary walks through the forests surrounding Shrewsbury. Later on, as a gentleman naturalist, his collections took on larger proportions, especially during his five years’ expedition on the HMS Beagle (1831-1836) to

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South America. Interesting to note, is that Darwin was not a qualified naturalist. Rather, as his father wanted his son to follow in his footsteps, Darwin had started his studies as a medical student. However, soon enough he turned away from Medical School and enrolled at Christ College, Cambridge, to pursue a career as a clergymen. Although he graduated as such, it soon became evident that his interests lay elsewhere. At Cambridge, he preferred to attend scientific courses such as botany, in lieu of his compulsory theological courses. Darwin’s insatiable interest in botanical research eventually led his Professor of Botany, John Stevens Henslow to become his mentor. When Darwin graduated as a theologist, it was Henslow who encouraged him to travel and experience the world. Soon enough, at the age of twenty-two, Darwin was accepted on the HMS Beagle as the ship’s naturalist. Each time the crew set ashore, Hardy would make notes and drawings of plant and animal species which had hardly been observed with such scrutiny before. These observations would produce an undeniable amount of evidence to back up his evolutionary theories. Almost twenty-five years later, in 1859, Darwin published these observations in one of the most well-known and ground-breaking works of the Victorian century, entitled in full: *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured races in the Struggle for Life.* This volume proved to be an enormous success, as even on the first day of its publication all 1200 copies were sold (Avery 2012). Although he was certainly not the only scholar, or even, the first scholar to propose such evolutionary theories, “[i]t was Darwin, however, with his monumental marshaling of evidence,” who could firmly “establish his theory of natural selection” (NA 2006, 1538). This way, Darwin “finally brought the topic fully into the open,” which induced “the public, as well as the experts, [...] [to take] sides” (NA 2006, 1538). As a voracious reader, Darwin had been influenced by a number of important works, which already hinted at evolutionary principles regarding heredity of favourable characteristics, and the struggle for existence through natural selection. One of Darwin’s most influential examples was reverend Robert Malthus, an English economist whose *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1826) undeniably impacted Darwin’s evolutionary mindset. Moreover, and with regard to Social Darwinism, Robert Young (cited in Crook, 1994) adds that, [t]he line from Malthus to Darwin and on to so-called ‘Social Darwinism’ is unbroken... The use of natural law as the basis for a given view of
society became a commonplace in social, political, and economic theory, and the theory of evolution was employed as a new, more powerful, justification for industrial capitalism. (210)

The following of Malthus’ most influential arguments already puts a major emphasis on the struggle for existence in particular, which Darwin elaborated in his *Origin*:

[...] on the one hand humans have a tendency to increase in number geometrically, on the other hand, food supplies can be increased at best only arithmetically; but because a geometric progression outstrips an arithmetic progression, there will inevitably be a “struggle for existence”, with the weakest going to the wall. (cited in Ruse 1980, 24)

This statement implies that, as the multiplication of humans tends to occur rather geometrically (i.e. 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, etc.), and the increase of food supplies, on the other hand, does so on an arithmetical base (more slowly that is: 2, 4, 6, 8, 10), there will inevitably be a crisis of food supplies during which the strongest will win over the weak (Bloy 2003). However, Malthus (cited in Bloy 2003) also affirms that certain factors can reduce the human population and consequently, also the potential outbreak of a food crisis. On the one hand, these factors can be referred to as “preventative checks”, which “reduce the birth rate”, such as: “moral restraint, vice and birth control” (Bloy 2003). “Positive checks” on the other hand, “increase the death rate” through “famine, misery, plague and war”. This argument clearly inspired Darwin’s theories on natural selection and on the progress and creation of variations through the inheritance of favourable characteristics. Ruse (1980) even argues that “[Darwin] started with the familiar Malthusian premises, and [...] applied them back to the whole organic world” (*my emphasis*, 28). As Darwin (1958) himself argued in his autobiography:

In October 1838, fifteen months after I had begun my systematic inquiry, I happened to read for amusement Malthus on *Population*, and being prepared to appreciate the

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5 *Ivi.*

6 *Ivi.*

7 *Ivi.*
struggle for existence which everywhere goes on, from long-continued observation of
the habits of animals and plants, it at once struck me that under these circumstances
favourable variations would tend to be preserved, and unfavourable ones to be
destroyed. The result would be the formation of a new species.(42-43)

Furthermore, on his travels to South America, Darwin also read Principles on Geology (1830)
by Charles Lyell, one of his closest friends. In this volume Lyell argued about “biological evolution
and the distribution of animals and plants” (Howard 2001, 4). As to Lyell’s influence Darwin notes
later on: “I always feel as if my books came half out of Lyell’s brain, and that I never acknowledge
this sufficiently [...]” (qtd. in Howard 2001, 4).

Also Lamarck has been accepted as influential to Darwin’s thought. Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, a
French naturalist (1744-1829), proposed that “acquired characteristics by an organism [during its
lifetime] could be inherited by its progeny (qtd. in Dickens 2000, 7). Although Darwin had initially
been averse to Lamarck’s theory, “[f]rom the fifth edition [of The Origin onwards] he [...] even
allowed a limited role for the inheritance of acquired characters” (Hawkins 1997, 26).

As mentioned earlier, Darwin was certainly not the only one who formulated a theory of
evolution by natural selection. Alfred Russell Wallace (1823-1913), a contemporary of Darwin has
now generally been accepted as the co-discoverer of the evolutionary principle of natural selection.
The following notebook fragment illustrates Wallace’s affinity to Darwin’s evolutionary thinking:

Then it suddenly flashed upon me that this self-acting process would necessarily improve the
race, because in every generation the inferior would inevitably be killed off and the superior
would remain- that is, the fittest would survive. (qtd. in Elfstrom 2013, 59)

As soon as Darwin had been informed of Wallace’s theories as identical to his own, he constrained
himself to advance the publication of The Origin. Consequently, although Wallace during his research
in the Malay Archipelago had indeed independently discovered the same evolutionary theory on
natural selection as Darwin, he has always been studied in the shadow of the latter. “Perhaps”, as
Dickens (2000) argues, this was the case “because he [Wallace] was socially less well connected, and
because he spent much of his time doing research in Amazonia and Malaya” (10). Elfstrom (2013) also adds that, in contrast, “[t]he journals Darwin kept while voyaging on the Beagle were published before he returned to England, and they made his fame long before he again set foot ashore his native land” (58). Also, Darwin had some fierce supporters such as T.H. Huxley, who paved the way for Darwin. Huxley even nominated himself as “Darwin’s Bulldog” (Grigg 2009, 39).

As mentioned previously, Darwin, in his work, elaborated the evolutionary principle of “struggle for existence” and introduced it to a wider public. However, what does this principle exactly stand for? Darwin himself nuanced his own use of this term as follows:

I should premise that I use this term *in a large and metaphorical sense*, including dependence of one being on another, and including (which is more important), not only the life of the individual, but success in leaving progeny. Two canine animals, in a time of death, may be truly said to struggle with each other which shall get food and live. But a plant on the edge of the desert is said to struggle for life against the drought […]. As the mistletoe is disseminated by birds, its existence depends on them; and it may methodically be said to struggle with other fruit-bearing plants, in tempting the birds to devour and thus disseminate the seeds. In these several senses, which pass into each other, I use for convenience’ sake the general term of Struggle for Existence. (*my emphasis*, qtd. in Francis 2007, 141)

Hence, in *The Origin*, the struggle for existence seems to be based primarily on competition for food supplies to secure survival and on progeny to secure the continuation of the species. However, as Darwin mentions above, the struggle for existence does not only imply selfish competition; it also includes a certain degree of altruism in helping the other to survive, and to support the preservation of a group, race or species. Consequently, this struggle for life can be projected on an individual level, as on a group level. Darwin specifically terms this group effort for collective benefit, “group selection” (Radick 2009). “Groups with altruists grow faster than those with no altruists,” however these altruistic efforts do not come without a cost as the “altruists tend to disappear within the group because of their lower fitness” (Darwin, cited in Radick 2009, 293). When a meerkat, for instance, sounds a
predator-alarm to warn his tribe, he will be able to increase the survival chances of the other members of the tribe, but in doing so, he will make himself conspicuous to the predator, diminishing this way his own chance for survival. Other examples are reciprocal grooming, commonly performed by apes, body warmth or food sharing practices. Hence, altruistic individuals are necessary for successful group survival.

According to Darwin, this struggle for existence, then, can occur on the basis of three distinct mechanisms: through group selection, as discussed above, natural selection and sexual selection (Darwin, 1869). Initially Darwin primarily focused on the mechanism of natural selection, which he made the touchstone of *The Origin*. Only from the 1860s onwards, Darwin also recognized and motivated the importance of sexual selection as a second mechanism in the survival of organisms, including men, and to which he dedicated his second volume entitled *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871(a)). In *The Descent* Darwin also mentioned the principle of group selection, though only briefly, to explain for the sympathetic and altruistic behaviour of organisms.

The mechanism of natural selection, then, is clarified by Darwin (1869) as follows: “[t]his preservation of favourable variations, and the destruction of injurious variations, I call Natural Selection, or the Survival of the Fittest” (92). Later on in *The Origin* Darwin (1869) also adds that “natural selection acts by life and death, – by the survival of the fittest, and by the destruction of the less well-fitted individuals” (239). As can be deduced from the quotations above, Darwin equates the phrase “natural selection” to “survival of the fittest”. However, what does Darwin mean by “well-fitted”, “fittest” and “fitness”? What exactly are the necessary criteria according to Darwin which induce this “fitness”? There seems to be much confusion and hardly any real consensus among scholars on what Darwin exactly intended by the term “fitness”. In their essay *The Confusions of Fitness* Ariew and Lewontin (2004) assume that the Darwinian notion of fitness “arose from his view of organism and environment (438). More particularly, Ariew and Lewontin (2004) argue that by “fit”, Darwin rather intended “[...] a metaphorical extension of its everyday English meaning as the degree to which an object (the organism) matches a pattern that is pre-existent and independently determined
Others such as Malina (1998), however, focus less on the relationship between an organism and its environment, as she argues that “Darwinian fitness refers to reproductive efficiency and fertility” (166). With regard to the human race, Malina (1998) also enumerates the various “components of Darwinian fitness”, such as “mate selection, mating success, social status, age at marriage, fecundity, longevity, rate of reproduction and progeny survival to maturity” (166). A crucial component that Malina (1998) did not mention, but on which Spencer (cited in Claeys, 2000) put a major emphasis, is the component of intelligence. Claeys (2000) argues that in the years building up to the publication of *The Descent of Man* (1871 (a)), there has been a “shift in the definition of ‘fitness’ in the human species from fecundity to intelligence”, which was even acknowledged by Darwin himself (Claeys 2000, 237). This is not such an illogical shift. For example, only those chimpanzees that understand how a small stick allows them to reach for insects in a tree trunk, will have more chance for survival than a chimpanzee who does not reach a similar understanding. Also with regard to humans, intelligence can be vital. Those tribes, for instance, that were at a more superior intellectual level than other tribes, were able to set up a hunting or attack strategy and organize their members as such. Consequently, these tribes were able to live from the hunt, or win over hostile tribes, whereas tribes that were less intellectually gifted, were less able to survive. In conclusion, it appears that various scholars have different interpretations of the Darwinian notion of “fitness”. Some focus on the successful adaptation of the organism to its environment, whereas others interpret Darwinian fitness as based on reproduction success or on intelligence. Whichever the correct interpretation of the term, I believe that all these interpretations are equally important and provide a useful framework for a better understanding of the term.

A third important mechanism that Darwin proposed was the theory of sexual selection. Although he had already referred to this mechanism in *The Origin*, albeit very briefly, Darwin decided to dedicate an entire volume to the subject, which he adequately titled *The Descent of Man, and Selection in relation to Sex* (1871 (a)). “Sexual selection” as Andersson (1994) puts it, “is the mechanism that Darwin arrived at when he tried to understand a conspicuous class of traits that defied explanation by ordinary natural selection for improved survival” (xv). Indeed, the presence of some of these features or “traits”, as Andersson (1994) mentioned above, such as “greater size, strength and
pugnacity of the male, [...], his gaudy coloring and various ornaments, his power of song and other such characters” could only be explained by the theory of sexual selection and not by the mechanism of natural selection, since some of these characteristics would even endanger the organism and limit its chance for survival (Darwin 1871 (a), 246). The colourful but enormous and conspicuous tail feathers of the peacock, for instance, certainly complicate a successful escape from an interested predator. So the only reason why this species was able to pass on its genes, was in that his colourful feathers were found attractive by female peacocks.

Furthermore, Darwin also supports that the female organism rules the animal kingdom as she has free choice to pick whomever male she finds most attractive to procreate with (Darwin, 1871 (a)). Consequently, males will combat to show their superiority in strength, beauty or stamina. The females are usually less beautiful than their male counterparts (Darwin, 1871 (a)). However, Darwin also adds that “[w]hen the female is as beautifully colored as the male, which is not rarely the case with birds and butterflies, the cause simply lies in the colors acquired through sexual selection having been transmitted to both sexes, instead of to the males alone” (Darwin 1869, 247). Nonetheless, other sexual differences will proof attractive to females and will help them to choose their mate. In conclusion one can deduce that the theories of natural selection and sexual selection are, in fact, complementary in justifying Darwin’s perspective on the struggle for survival.

Although of less importance to Social Darwinism in particular, but perhaps even more revolutionary than the Darwinian principles of natural and sexual selection, is Darwin’s defence of the controversial claim regarding the animal descent of human beings. Therefore I only briefly mention that in the Descent of Man Darwin popularized T.H Huxley’s view on the possibility that “man is descended from some ape-like creature” (Darwin 1871 (a), 124). Darwin was, indeed, not the first one to propose the ape-like descent of the human race, but he did provide the necessary amount of evidence to support this thesis and was therefore notoriously acknowledged as its main promoter.

To summarize the main concepts of Darwin’s thought, it appears that the most important Darwinian issues regard the struggle for existence through natural selection on the one hand,
synonymous to survival of the fittest, and through sexual selection on the other hand. Others topics which are closely interlinked with these mechanisms are heredity (of favourable characteristics), reproduction, adaptation of the organism to its environment and finally, the animal descent of man. In this dissertation I will focus on the principle of natural selection only in this dissertation, as it is the main principle on which the social Darwinist theories are constructed.

4. Social Darwinism: a theoretical perspective

4.1 Origin and definition of the concept

Social Darwinism is a term that is used in various disciplines, ranging from biology, sociology and eugenics to economy, philosophy and politics. This widespread application of the term, indicates that it has different implications, depending on the context in which it is used, or sometimes even abused, as will be demonstrated later on. As the term covers various disciplines, reaching a consensus on one single definition of the term, has proven to be highly problematic. Therefore, I will rely on Halliday’s (1971) definition of the term, since he defines the concept of social Darwinism rather broadly as “that enterprise or ideology, founded in the nineteenth century, which holds social evolution to depend upon the operation of the law of natural selection of favourable heritable variants” (389). Hence, the concept of social Darwinism seems to be based primarily on the Darwinian laws of ‘natural selection’ and heredity of favourable characteristics, although later on, some scholars also consider the doctrine of ‘sexual selection’ to be falling within realm of social Darwinism as well (cfr. infra). According to Sermonti (qtd. in Nelson 2009) who also suggests the more accurate term of “differential survival” lieu of natural selection, this Darwinian doctrine “chiefly eliminates the abnormal, the marginal, the out-of-bounds, and keeps natural populations within the norm” (149). Although there seem to be as many interpretations and uses of social Darwinism as there are scholars who wrote about the concept, it appears that the main principle of natural selection is often linked to social competition as the key mechanism for social evolution. Accordingly, Claeys (2000) states that, at least, “[w]hat unites the various forms of Social Darwinism [is] the application of the idea of evolution to a higher social type on the basis of social competition between ‘fit’ and ‘unfit’ groups and
individuals’, whose ‘fitness’ or ‘value’ to society can be defined in a number of ways” (my emphasis, 230). Hence, only those individuals that are most “fit”, or most “valuable” to society, will survive the competition and consequently, will enhance the quality of the human race. The notion of “fit” in this case is defined rather broadly in terms of value or quality to the benefit of society and can therefore be interpreted differently, indicating intellectual quality or rather implying a valuable workforce, the ability to procreate, etc.

Ever since the concept of social Darwinism was introduced in the early 1880’s, it has aroused much controversy, and even on the origin of the term contesting views seem to circulate. At least, one can ascertain that, ironically, it was not Charles Darwin himself who coined the term (Allchin 2007). Moreover, some scientists, such as Allchin (2007), argue that Darwin cannot even be considered a social Darwinist himself, as Darwin’s evolutionary theories were primarily constructed upon biological theories and did not extend to the area of social sciences. Darwin, indeed, did not attempt to produce a social theory based on his scientific writings (Hawkins 1997). Nonetheless, as will be demonstrated in the chapter entitled ‘Prominent Social Darwinists’ it will become evident that Darwin was indeed a Social Darwinist since his Origin and The Descent of Man, as well as his letters and notebooks include some interesting social views in relation to his evolutionary principles.

The term, then, was first described by adversaries of the application of biological laws to human society. More specifically, the first appearance of the term is often attributed to Oscar Schmidt, a German zoologist, when he criticized the use of Darwinian theories as political ammunition in an 1879 issue of the American journal Popular Science (Crook 2007). Others, then, such as Ernst Mayr (1982) attribute the coining of the term ‘social Darwinism’ to Herbert Spencer, which is not an illogical claim as Spencer is widely regarded as one of the key figures in the development of the concept of Social Darwinism. Mayr (1982) also denominates Spencer as the “intellectual father of the concept”, and he even argues for a change of terminology into “social Spencerism” (883). A contemporary of Darwin, Herbert Spencer was a biologist, sociologist and also one of the most important philosophers of the Victorian age. Influenced by Malthus’ Essay on Population (1798) in which the latter points out how “humankind is doomed to its present state of struggle, want, disease,
hunger and death”, Spencer had already developed a theory on evolutionary struggle in human society even before the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859) (cited in Ruse 1980, 24). Later on, in *The Principles of Sociology* Spencer drew an analogy between society and a living organism, as both determined by the principle of natural selection (Spencer 2002). Moreover, it is generally acknowledged that not Darwin, but Spencer coined the phrase “survival of the fittest” which he did in an article on population theory in 1852 (Claeys 2000). Only later on, Darwin was convinced by Russel Wallace to apply this phrase in his own writings. Hence, it is not a coincidence that Spencer has often been considered a ‘social Darwinist’ *avant la lettre* (Angenot cited in Raser, 2002). Subsequently, if Spencer had already developed his social theory on struggle, competition and strife in human existence towards progress, then why is this social theory called ‘social Darwinism’ and not ‘social Spencerism’, as Mayr (1982) suggested? Even more so, if Spencer had been influenced by Malthus’ theories, why is the application of evolutionary theories on social sciences not called social Malthusianism instead? This leaves another question still unresolved, namely, why is the term social Darwinism still in use?

### 4.2 Social Darwinism: fame or shame?

Even today Social Darwinism is a hot topic, however, how come Darwin has left his mark on the term? Firstly, although Malthus and Spencer were as popular as Darwin at the time, Darwin’s biological evolutionary theories have proven to be more accessible and consequently, more influential than Malthus and Spencer’s social theories (Dickens 2000). Darwin had, in fact, deliberately written *The Origin* in understandable terminology, as he had had “a non-specialist readership in mind” (Dickens 2000, 11). Secondly, as his theories contradicted the Church’s doctrine on the origin of man and the evolution of life, Darwin prompted theological debates, making him famous, or rather notorious, overnight. Also the fact that Darwin’s evolutionary theories were constructed upon an undeniable amount of evidence, gathered on his voyages on the HMS Beagle, procured those a huge credibility. Moreover, and of large importance with regard to the concept of social Darwinism, Dickens argues (2000) that, “the book’s *[The Origin of Species]* popularity was also due to the fact that it was a theory which had been socially constructed”, affirming that “there remain in the book
distinct traces of its social origins” (11). So Dickens actually directly links the popularity of Darwin’s theories to its potential social readings. Moreover, it is not a coincidence that Darwin’s theories were applied to the area of sociology, as “[i]n Victorian England, scientists took for granted that biological facts mattered for social theory and policy” (Paul 2009, 229). Also Karl Marx recognized the importance of The Origin in one of his letters, affirming that “it is wonderful how Darwin has rediscovered English society in the plant and animal world”. 8 He even added that The Origin can be regarded as “a basis in natural science for the class struggle in history”. 9 The popularity of the term social Darwinism, then, was boosted increasingly by Richard Hofstadter when he introduced the term in America since “the competitive American society of the latter half of the nineteenth century saw its own image in the tooth-and-claw version of Darwin's theory of natural selection” (cited in Rogers 1972, 266). Hofstadter (cited in Rogers, 1972) hereby affirms that simply, “the time was ripe for Darwinism to become a social theory” (266). Thus, summing up these perspectives, it is no coincidence that Darwin’s theories became adapted to the area of social sciences and that the term “Social Darwinism” has been coined as such.

Although I will stick to and discuss the Social Darwinist principles in the novels, I feel that, for completeness’ sake, I must provide an indication of some deviating and adversarial voices on the concept as well. Soon after its first use by Oscar Schwartz, the term ‘social Darwinism’ was picked up by Emile Gautier in his pamphlet entitled Le Darwinisme social (1880), in which he criticized how Darwin’s evolutionary theories on “struggle” and “competition” were applied to society in a very conservative manner by intellectuals as Herbert Spencer (cited in La Vergata 2009). Especially Spencer’s “extreme individualism” and “free-for-all competition” were attacked by Gautier, as he argued that the “true social Darwinism” implied “not the struggle for life, but the help for life” (cited in La Vergata 2009, 334). So one can deduce from this quote that Gautier appears to argue for a different interpretation of the concept, based on altruism rather than on egoism.

8 As quoted from a letter from Karl Marx to Engels, dated June 18, 1862 (Sherman, 1976 : 35).
9 As quoted from a letter from Karl Marx to Engels, dated December 19, 1860 (Sherman, 1976 : 35).
Others simply argued against the mere application of Social Darwinism onto the social sciences and in this fashion, the term was attacked most frequently. Dennett (qtd. in Paul 2009) even states that social Darwinism is “an odious misapplication of Darwinian thinking” (219). Bannister (qtd. in Leonard 2009), then, calls social Darwinism “a Bad Thing” (38). Generally speaking, adversaries of social Darwinism claim that “all uses of Darwin’s theory to justify particular social, political, or economic principles ‘have one fundamental flaw: thy use a purely scientific theory for a completely unscientific purpose’”.

Tying these perspectives together it seems that the application of Darwin’s name and theories to other areas than biology, is both to the pleasure and displeasure of various scholars. However, as I intend to analyze Hardy’s social Darwinist thinking in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and in *Jude the Obscure*, I will stick to the perspectives of acknowledged social Darwinists.

### 4.3 Social Darwinism versus Darwinism and Sociobiology

Some scholars consider Darwinism and Social Darwinism to be fairly synonymous, others formulate clear distinctions between these concepts. Notable among the latter is Hawkins (1997) as he defines Darwinism as “a biological theory about how new species are formed and existing ones can become extinct” (24). Hence, Darwinists focus on Darwin’s evolutionary theories form a biological point of view, whereas social Darwinists on the other hand, seek to apply biological evolution theories onto the social sciences. However, others such as Dickens (2000) declare that “Darwinism can be seen as what is now called by many sociologists a ‘social construction’”, clearly emphasizing the social dimension of the Darwinian doctrines (13). Also “in the heyday of racial theories, it was by no means entirely clear where biological Darwinism ended, and social Darwinism began” as, for instance, a dark skin colour was often associated with the ‘inferior’ African race (Mazrui 1969, 75). This fine line between both concepts has been studied by Young (1985) in his essay entitled *Darwinism is Social*. So again,

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terminology can be somewhat confusing if it comes to distinguishing both concepts. In scientific literature, both terms seem to imply the application of Darwinian evolutionary laws onto the social sciences.

Another concept, or discipline that can be linked to and which is often confused with Social Darwinism, is Sociobiology. Wilson (1978) defines the term as “the systematic study of the biological basis of all forms of social behaviour, including sexual and parental behaviour, in all kinds of organisms, including man” (10). Covering both biology and sociology, the discipline of sociobiology seems to be closely related to the study area of social Darwinism, which is no coincidence, since “[m]odern-day sociobiology has developed from social Darwinism” (Rust and Golombok 1999, 24). Tännsjö (1990) even states that “[t]oday, social Darwinism is passé”, affirming that “[s]ociobiology is the modern term for this [social Darwinism] phenomenon” (15). Furthermore, it appears that history seems to repeat itself since also the theory of sociobiology has both fierce supporters and opponents. For neo-Darwinians on the one hand, sociobiology is the cornerstone of their theories, whereas the majority of social scientists, on the other hand, reject the theory in its entirety (Corning, 2010). In this thesis, then, I will focus on the concept of Social Darwinism for I want to preserve the focus on Darwin’s evolutionary theory as the basis for Social Darwinism.

4.4 Prominent Social Darwinists

As mentioned earlier, Social Darwinism is a flexible term that has often been appropriated to justify social, political or economic motivations, ranging from the class struggle and the laissez-faire principle of free-market economy, to eugenics, imperialism and even to Holocaust-related racism. In the following paragraphs I will introduce the various interpretations and contributions of the most influential pioneers of Social Darwinism. Naturally, the most important issues that will be discussed throughout the chapter will be related to the evolutionary mechanisms of natural, sexual and group selection, although the latter two principles less extensively, next to interrelated issues such as the question of struggle, human progress and heredity. Not all Social Darwinists lay equal emphasis on each of these topics, but they can all be discussed within the realm of Social Darwinism. Then,
although some scholars, such as Malthus, Darwin and Spencer have already been treated earlier in this
dissertation (cf. chapters on ‘The origin of the concept’ and ‘Darwin’s evolutionary theory’), this
chapter, will elaborate their viewpoints on a deeper level with exclusive focus on human society,
 hence, from a social Darwinist viewpoint. This way, I will construct a framework of Social Darwinist
ideas to which I can mirror Hardy’s novels in order to decide to what extent Thomas Hardy can be
regarded as a Social Darwinist, or not.

4.4.1 (Thomas Malthus) (1766-1834)

First and foremost, I want to start by elaborating on Robert Malthus’ viewpoints on human society.
Although Malthus has provided crucial insights into the social-evolutionary thinking, I cannot regard
him as a true social Darwinist since he was, as Ruse (1980) indicates, only “the precursor of Social
Darwinism [though] (over and above being an influence on real Social Darwinians)”, hence the
brackets in the title of this sub-chapter (24). Nevertheless, I still prefer to focus the attention on
Malthus’ contribution to the development of Social Darwinist thinking as well since, as
mentioned before, Malthus has been of major importance to many Social Darwinists, among which
Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. Malthus views have been considered crucial for the
development of social Darwinist studies because he was one of the first scholars who formulated “his
premises about humanity by analogy, or perhaps more precisely by extension, from premises and
arguments about what goes on in the animal world” (Ruse 1980, 24).

Consequently, several important Malthusian viewpoints should be discussed in relation to
Social Darwinism. The first one, regarding the tendency for an imbalance between population growth
and increase of food supplies, has already been introduced in the chapter on Darwin’s evolutionary
theory. This imbalance inevitably creates, as Malthus formulates it, a “struggle for room and food”
(Malthus 1826, 95). Only by means of preventative or positive checks, such as natural disasters, war,
disease, birth control etc., can population growth be tempered and a food crisis be avoided (Malthus,
Furthermore, Malthus explains that the cause of this Malthusian imbalance is due to the “Original sin, in the form of sexual desire” (cited in Claeys 2000, 230). These “lower, animal passions” are acted upon by “the poor in particular” as they “breed too much”, which is, according to Malthus, “the principal cause of their poverty” (cited in Claeys 2000, 230). Malthus (qtd. in Ryan 2001) even goes a step further by claiming that “pauperism should be regarded as a crime, and should be stamped out, like the cattle-disease, by harsh legislative measures” (132). Consequently Malthus (1826) argues that a poor man should not produce a large family if his children would inevitably be condemned to poverty as well.

Accordingly, and with regard to human progress in particular, Malthus feared that by multiplying at a higher rate than middle - and upper-class members, especially the poor lower-and under-classes people would jeopardize the progress of society and this way, of humankind (cited in Claeys 2000). Even more so, according to Hawkins (1997), Malthus argued that a strong population growth in the lower classes, “made human progress impossible” all together (50). Therefore Malthus opted that those at the bottom of the social scale should not be helped and should rather be left to their fate for the benefit of human society (cited in Hawkins 1997). Consequently, Malthus was also strongly opposed to actions of charity that benefitted the poor, such as those ordained by the Poor Laws since these interventions would hamper the “natural and necessary course of nature” (cited in Claeys 2000, 231). This claim, as Ryan (2001) adds, partly explains why Malthus’ theory became this popular: “because it seemed to relieve the rich from any responsibility for the sufferings of the poor, and from any obligation to contribute to their support” (132).

Accordingly, Malthus even claims rather harshly that,

[a] man who is born into a world already possessed, if he cannot get subsistence from his parents on whom he has a just demand, and if the society do not want his labour, has no business to be where he is. At nature’s mighty feast there is no vacant for him. She tells him to

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be gone, and will quickly execute her own orders, if he does not work upon the compassion of some of her guests. (qtd. in Claeys 2000, 230)

This statement implies that without parental support, nor employment that benefits society in some way, you are doomed to perish in poverty, unless you find support in a compassionate corner. In the worst case, as Malthus argues above, it is to the benefit of the human society and to the progress of the human race that you simply disappear. This statement brings us to the idea of suicide. Although suicide in early Victorian England was generally regarded as a “moral crime” and as a “sin against God”, by the second half of the Victorian age, “a secular view of suicide gained support, explaining suicide either as a result of mental illness or as a rational choice based on socio-economic circumstances” (Jalland 1996, 71). Drawing on the work of Darwin and Spencer, scholars such as William Westcott (1885) and Henry Morselli (1881) made a direct link between suicide, or self-destruction and Social Darwinism. In his work Suicide: An Essay on Comparative Moral Statistics (1881), Morselli argued that his statistics proved how, “suicide is an effect of the struggle for existence and of human selection, which works according to the laws of evolution among civilized people” (emphasis in original, 354). Hence, Morselli (cited in Gates, 2009) indicates that, “weaker individuals who cannot cope with the stresses of civilized life are the ones who commit suicide” (n.p.). According to this “sad law of necessity” the weak were eliminated to the benefit of the strong (Gates 2009, n.p.). Then, also abortion and infanticide were common practices and since forensic investigation was not as advanced as it is today, regarding infanticide, it was hard to determine the exact cause of death, as many other factors could have been responsible for a child’s death, such as disease, malnutrition, dehydration, etc. (Strange 2005). Hence, unsurprisingly, in some cases, people took control of their own destinies to reduce or escape from their socio-economic problems.

A final Malthusian premise ties in with the previous statement, as Malthus “distinguished between people who benefitted society (as defined in terms of productivity) and those who did not” (Claeys 2000, 232). Consequently, those who did in fact benefit society, were regarded as more “fit” than those who were less successful (Claeys 2000). To conclude Malthus evolutionary mindset, it appears that he has a rather pessimistic view on the progressive future of the human race as he believes
that the positive and preventive checks will not suffice to keep the population growth of the lower classes in check and, consequently, to stop the degeneration of the human race (Hawkins 1997).

4.4.2 Charles Darwin (1809-1882)

However strange this may sound, I believe Charles Darwin himself should be discussed as a Social Darwinist. Although Darwin was “a relative latecomer to a debate which crossed social theory as well as biology, geology, and a number of other disciplines”, and although he did not, as Hawkins (1997) argues, produce any social theory himself, Darwin did provide some interesting social views based on the evolutionary principles he theorized (Claeys 2000, 227). Indeed, as Desmond and More (1991) note:

‘Social Darwinism’ is often taken to be something extraneous, an ugly concretion added to the pure Darwinian corpus after the event, tarnishing Darwin’s image. But [Darwin’s] notebooks make plain that competition, free trade, imperialism, racial extermination, and sexual inequality were written into the equation from the start – Darwinism was always intended to explain society. (xix)

Darwin’s reading of Malthus’ overpopulation theory, as well as the experience of his first observation of the savages on the South American archipelago Tierra del Fuego must have had an enormous impact on Darwin’s social thinking (NA 2006, 1538). Especially the latter event was, as The Norton Anthology (2006) notes, “probably one of the factors that caused him to speculate about social behaviours and systems in evolutionary terms” (1538). In his theorization of the evolutionary principle of natural selection in The Origin, Darwin deliberately avoided to incorporate any evolutionary or social views on man (Hawkins 1997). However, as noted earlier regarding the influence of Darwin’s namesake on the concept, many scholars such as Marx already saw the potential social implications of the work as he expresses in one of his letters that it is “wonderful how Darwin has rediscovered English society in the plant and animal world.” 12 Marx even regards The Origin as “a basis in natural

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12 Quoted from a letter from Karl Marx to Engels, dated June 18, 1862 (Sherman 1976, 35).
science for the class struggle in history.”¹³ A decade later, in *The Descent of Man* (1871 (b), vol.2), Darwin himself, drew a parallel between the animal world and that of men when he focuses on the biological and social evolution of man:

Man, like every other animal, has no doubt advanced to his present high condition through a struggle for existence consequent on his rapid multiplication, and if he is to advance still higher, it is to be feared that he must remain subject to a severer struggle. Otherwise, we would sink into indolence and the more gifted men would not be more successful in the battle for life than the less gifted. (403)

At the same time, Darwin also pronounces a concern, namely that human progress could be hampered if the struggle for life does not increase in severity anymore. According to Ruse (1980), Darwin feared that the Victorian society was not promoting human progress anymore, but “a possible biological degeneration of man” instead, due to “the advance of culture (especially medicine)” (36). An additional, Malthusian reason for this lurking human degeneration according to Darwin, is explained as follows:

[there will be a] “degeneration of a domestic race,” because the human species allowed its worst members, “the very poor and reckless,” to breed so wantonly and injuriously, “whilst the careful and frugal who are generally otherwise virtuous, marry later in life,” with a consequent “retrograde” effect on human progress! (Claeys 2000, 237)

Consequently, Darwin also argued that those who could not escape from poverty, should not leave any progeny (Paul, 2009). Interesting to note is that, in referring to the “domestic race”, Darwin’s “language of class is not far removed from that of race” as he regards the lower and underclass as genetically belonging to a separate, weaker race that should be overruled and eliminated by the more superior “races” or “classes” (Claeys 2000, 237).

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¹³ Quoted from a letter from Karl Marx to Engels, dated December 19, 1860 (Sherman 1976, 35).
Next, not only the ‘dog-eat-dog’ – or ‘red in tooth and claw’ – principle of natural selection can be applied to the human society. Also human altruistic behaviour and group selection have been studied by Darwin from a Social Darwinist perspective. Darwin especially links altruism, the basic principle for group selection, to the development of human morality, or as Gould (2002) formulates it:

Darwin thought of altruism and morality as a kind of “reciprocal altruism”. As humans became conscious beings, probably they were especially sensitive to the “praise and blame” of their fellows. This reciprocal altruism could be a cultural selection which favours altruistic traits within group selection. Altruism survived – and even grew – through the struggle between more altruistic oriented groups versus more egoistic groups. (134)

As can be derived from one of his notebook fragments, Hardy was clearly influenced by Darwin’s theory on altruistic behaviour:

The discovery of the law of evolution, which revealed that all organic creatures are of one family, shifted the center of altruism from humanity to the whole conscious world collectively”. (Hardy 1930, 138)

Also in the analysis of the novels I will demonstrate instances of altruistic behaviour.

Furthermore, regarding Darwin’s social Darwinist perspectives, a letter of Darwin was discovered in 1993, dated July 26, 1872, that touches upon social Darwinist issues. This letter indicates that “Darwin was not averse to making social and economic applications of his theory” (Weikart 1995, 611). The following excerpt of this letter to Heinrich Fick, a law Professor at the University of Zurich, exemplifies that Darwin “linked economic success with selective fitness and [that he] thought his theory supported individualist economic competition” (Weikart 1995, 611):

I [Charles Darwin] much wish that you [Heinrich Fick] would sometimes take occasion to discuss an allied point, if it holds good on the continent,—namely the rule insisted on by all our Trades-Unions, that all workmen,— the good and bad, the strong and weak,— sh[oul]d all work for the same number of hours and receive the same wages. The unions are also opposed
to piece-work,—in short to all competition. I fear that Cooperative Societies, which many look at as the main hope for the future, likewise exclude competition. This seems to me a great evil for the future progress of mankind. — Nevertheless under any system, temperate and frugal workmen will have an advantage and leave more offspring than the drunken and reckless (611).

Also the Darwinian principle of sexual selection can be regarded as a Social Darwinist principle, although this has not always been the case (Hawkins 1997). Despite the fact that both doctrines are usually considered rather complementary to the explanation of evolutionary selection, the majority of the definitions on Social Darwinism demonstrate that only the theory of natural selection seems to be fundamental for the concept of social Darwinism. However, according to Hawkins (1997), the doctrine of “sexual selection has been assigned prominence in Social Darwinism”(264). Moreover, as Lyon and Montgomerie (2012) argue: “Darwin’s distinction between natural and sexual selection has been useful, but recent confusion about the limits of sexual selection, suggests that some traits are not easily categorized as naturally or sexually selected” (2266). Therefore they draw on the term “social selection”, defined by West-Eberhard (cited in Lyon and Montgomerie 2012) as follows: “social selection is a distinct form of natural selection where the underlying processes that influence selection include any form of intraspecific social competition, both sexual and non-sexual” (2267). This way Lyon and Montgomerie (2012) want to provide a solution to the sometimes blurry distinction between the two doctrines. Consequently both Darwinian laws can be discussed within the realm of social Darwinism, but I prefer to discuss them separately instead of uniting them in terms of ‘social selection’. Then, to recapitulate the principle of sexual selection as theorized in The Descent of Man, Darwin, according to Paul (2009) argues that, “[m]ales selected females for physical beauty and emotional qualities, while females selected males for their strength, intellect and status” (228). However, this was not always the case in Victorian society. As Paul (2009) continues: “Men who were stupid and vicious had no trouble finding mates, as long as they were rich. Women were forced by social circumstances to choose men who could support them, however inferior their personal qualities” (231). In conclusion, then, to Darwin’s social applications of biological evolutionary principles, I
agree with Dickens (2000) when he states that, especially after writing *The Descent of Man*, Darwin can indeed be regarded as a social Darwinist. In my analysis then, I will not draw on the principle of sexual selection since it has only recently been added to the realm of Social Darwinism by only a few scholars, as mentioned in Hawkins (1997). Therefore I prefer to focus primarily on the principles of natural selection or survival of the fittest and on the principle of group selection, but the latter to a lesser extent.

4.4.3 *Herbert Spencer (1820-1903)*

Sherman (1976) then, argues that “Hardy’s interest in Darwin led him to read Spencer’s *First Principles and Principles of Biology* (1862)” (408). Herbert Spencer is often referred to as the ‘arch-social Darwinist’ or the ‘father of Social Darwinism’ (Mayr 1982). Hardy had also met Spencer, as they were members of the same Savile Club. As mentioned earlier, strongly influenced by Malthus, Spencer had already formulated social Darwinist views before the publication of Darwin’s *Origin* (1859) in an essay entitled *Progress: Its Law and Cause* (1857). Later on he elaborated these evolutionary ideas in *First Principles of a New System of Philosophy* (1862). Unlike Malthus’ rather pessimistic view on human evolution, Spencer “had no Malthusian fear of overpopulation, believing that humans have the capacity to adapt to environmental and social change” (Ritzer 2004, 729). Consequently, Spencer did not regard the increase of population as injurious to human progress either, on the contrary, Spencer was convinced that “the very cause of progress is the population pressure demonstrated by Malthus!” (Ruse 1980, 27). To Spencer, this struggle for survival is vital for human progress as it filters out the strong from the weak in a process of severe selection and elimination (Hawkins 1997).

Accordingly, as I noted earlier, Spencer also coined the phrase “survival of the fittest” which was adapted by Darwin later on as synonymous to his principle of natural selection. According to Spencer the “fittest” were the most “intelligent” individuals (cited in Claeys 2000, 237). However, Spencer’s interpretation of “fitness” also implied the organism’s adaptation to its ever changing environment (Hawkins 1997). The notion of ‘struggle’ implies for Spencer, the struggle of an
individual to “maintain this equilibrium between itself and its environment” (Hawkins 1997, 84). In the following excerpt, taken from Spencer’s *First Principles* (1865), he explicitly emphasizes the importance of this equilibrium:

> For, as we have already seen, the *adaptation* of man’s nature to the conditions of his existence, cannot cease until the internal forces which we know as feelings are in equilibrium with the external forces they encounter. And in the establishment of this equilibrium, is the arrival at a state of human nature and social organization, such that the individual has no desires but those which may be satisfied *without exceeding his proper sphere of action*, while society maintains no restraints but those which the individual voluntarily respects. (*my emphasis*, 470)

In this quote, Spencer (1865) is referring to the Victorian class system, in which each individual should accept his or her social position, “without exceeding his [or her] proper sphere of action”, and this way conform to the ruling “social organization” (470). Consequently, Spencer (cited in Hawkins 1997) concluded that “those families and races which failed to adapt to this pressure, were liable to extinction” (85). Similar to Malthus’ disapproval of charity for the poor, Spencer was opposed to the “encouragement of the unworthy” (Hawkins 1997, 85). Hawkins (1997) even adds that according to Spencer, the “survival of the *unfit*” represented an evolutionary blasphemy by removing nature’s punishment for those too idle or improvident to adapt” (95). Accordingly, the following statement about those unfortunate ones is rather cruel, and quite similar to Malthus’ viewpoint on the lowest of the lowest in society: “[t]he whole effect of nature is to get rid of such, to clear the world of them, and make room for the better ... If they are not sufficiently complete to live, they die, and it is best that they should die” (qtd. in Jones 1982, 423).

Moreover, Spencer also believed that this “struggle [for existence] was coming to an end!” (Ruse 1980, 35). Spencer (qtd. in Karier 1986), as illustrated in the next quote, was convinced that the current phase in the human development was, indeed, only a temporary phase of transition towards the ideal super human, as the outcome of a successful adaptation to the social environment on the one hand, and the inheritance of useful acquired characteristics (or Lamarckism) on the other hand:
The ultimate development of the ideal man is logically certain – as certain as any conclusion in which we place the most implicit faith; for instance that all men will die... Progress, therefore, is not an accident, but a necessity. Instead of nature; all of a piece with the development of the embryo or the unfolding of a flower. (105)

This statement implies that Spencer is more optimistic than Darwin and Malthus as he regards progress as a positive necessity and as a process towards an end. This interpretation of human evolution as teological also includes that, according to Spencer, progress is simply inevitable. Note that in contrast, Malthus concluded that the pressure of overpopulation would inevitably crush human progress (Hawkins 1997).

Furthermore, the Spencerian zero-tolerance attitude towards help through intervention, laid the fundamentals for the economic laissez-faire or free-market ideology, which is another context in which the term Social Darwinism is often employed (Hawkins 1997). Spencer, a true liberalist, was strongly opposed to state intervention in business regulation, rather, he preferred an individualist attitude (Hawkins 1997). As Steger (2005) notes: “[f]or Spencer, free-market economies constitute the most civilised form of human competition [for resources and capital], in which the ‘fittest’ would naturally rise to the top” (10). Consequently, as Spencer was opposed to public welfare and publicly funded education, he also “denounced socialism, trade unions, and even rudimentary forms of social regulation such as factory safety laws” which he regarded “as examples of ‘overregulation’ inimical to rational progress and individual freedom” (Steger 2005, 10). This attitude was based on the conviction “that working as individuals, people will do more good for their fellows than they would were the state in complete control” (Ruse 1980, 35). Consequently, Spencer (cited in Hawkins 1997) also wanted to “put a limit to the powers of parliament” and let nature’s course prevail (98). Then, Spencer’s viewpoints on natural selection and struggle for existence were also translated in his oppositional attitude towards Communism and Socialism, which support state intervention based on the principle of equality of all men. In particular, on the “machinery of communism”, Spencer (cited in Hawkins 1997) argues that “it has to be framed out of human nature” (97). Spencer was convinced that only “capitalism and free enterprise were consistent with the laws of nature” (cited in Barrett 2009, n.p.).
4.4.4 William Graham Sumner (1840-1910)

Spencer’s American equal, was William Graham Sumner, a professor of political economy at the University of Yale and a “potent enemy of social reform and socialism” (Jones 1982, 243). Like Spencer, he was a supporter of Malthus’ population theory, and supported the same views on ‘the survival of the fittest’ principle in a free-market economy and of a non-interventionist state (Hawkins 1997). Sumner also shared the same typically harsh social Darwinist attitude towards the poor individuals in society:

The sociologist is often asked if he wants to kill off certain classes of troublesome and bewildered persons. No such inference follows from any sound sociological doctrine, but it is allowed to infer, as to a great many persons and classes, that it would have been better for society and would have involved no pain to them, if they had never been born. (Sumner 1963, 25)

Since the poor will inevitably suffer due to their miserable life conditions, the quote above illustrates how Sumner reasoned that it would have been to the benefit of both society and these individuals, if they would have never been born in the first place.

Although Spencer and Sumner connected on various points, there are some differences as well. Educated in a public school, Sumner (2007), for instance, supported the idea of public education because of the following reason: “[t]he one thing which justifies popular education for all children is the immense value of men of genius to the society” (628). Thus, Sumner argued that by popular education, also the more talented working-class children would be given a chance to develop their intellect, and this to the benefit of society.

Furthermore, “Sumner’s Social Darwinism”, as Finkelman (2006) argues, “was a defence of the wealthy, whom he believed to be biologically and culturally superior to all other humans” (6). Accordingly, Sumner (1902) stated that “[m]illionaires are the products of natural selection, acting on the whole body of men to pick out those who can meet the requirement of certain work to be done” (n.p.). Sumner (qtd. in Finkelman 2006) defends this statement as follows: “The rich are rich because
they are smarter and stronger and deserve it, and such the rich are virtually exclusively of European
descent, it must follow that Europeans are superior” (6). First of all, this claim is somewhat in contrast
to his ‘public education for everyone (including the poor)’- plead, as in this statement, he seems to
exclude the poor entirely. Secondly, this quote includes two important aspects of his social Darwinist
thinking. On the one hand, Sumner argues that the rich are naturally selected on the basis of their
intelligence and their strength, in contrast to the poor who are utterly inferior in that they are lazy and
less intellectually gifted than the rich. On the other hand, Sumner also formulates a somewhat
imperialist view on the superiority of white Europeans over inferior non-Europeans. This imperialist,
racist context is another context in which Social Darwinism was often applied, primarily as a
justification for the domination of superior races over inferior ones in the context of colonisation. John
Lubbock was one of the first Social Darwinists who connected Darwinian laws to a theory of race
(Dickens 2000). He poses that “[t]he whole history of man shows how the stronger and progressive,
increase in numbers and drive out the weaker and lower races” (Lubbock 2005, 3). Especially the
“European and White American superiority over Africans, Native Americans, Asians and Latin
Americans”, was often justified by Social Darwinist laws as “to prove the merits of capitalism,
imperialism and slavery” (Dennis 1995, 245).

Furthermore, in contrast to Spencer, Sumner also made a contrast between two types of
human ‘struggle’. As mentioned by Hawkins (1997), Sumner distinguished between a ‘struggle for
existence’ on the one hand, and a ‘competition for life’ on the other hand. The first one refers to a
person’s relationship with nature, described by Spencer as “the struggle of individuals to win the
means of subsistence from nature” (Hawkins 1997, 110). The second facet of Sumner’s interpretation
of human struggle, regards “the competition of man with man in the effort to win a limited supply”
(Hawkins 1997, 110).

A final important issue in Sumner’s theory regards his Calvinistic, deterministic attitude
towards a predestined position in society, ordained by Fate and from which one cannot escape
(Hofstadter, in Camfield 2005). As Hofstadter (cited in Camfield 2005) formulates it, Sumner
tried to convince men that confidence in their ability to will and plan their destinies was unwarranted by history or biology or any of the facts of experience – that the best they could do was to bow to natural forces. Like some latter-day Calvin, he came to preach the predestination of the social order and the salvation of the economically elect through the survival of the fittest. (61)

Hence, only the elect, that is, the wealthiest in Sumner’s eyes, deserved to be ‘saved’. The less fortunate ones simply had to “bow to natural forces”, accept and adapt to their fates (Spencer, in Hofstadter, cited in Camfield 2005, 61).

4.4.5 Francis Galton (1822-1911)

Francis Galton, then, was another prominent Social Darwinist, and not coincidentally also Charles Darwin’s cousin. Galton is regarded as ‘the father of eugenics’, a theory he coined in 1883 and which is centred around the idea of “the manipulation of biology to create the perfect human race” (Dickens 2000, 3). Not coincidentally, Galton coined this theory of selective breeding as such, since the syllable eu in ‘eugenics’ means ‘good’ in Greek, and gene ‘born’, so united, this term refers to “good in birth” or “noble in heredity” (Kevles 1985, ix). Accordingly, influenced by Darwin’s theory on the survival of the fittest, “[t]he eugenist programma [prescribed] to breed the ‘fit’ and to sterilize or to limit the breeding of the unfit” in order to provide a successful development of humanity (Halliday 1971, 398).

In this viewpoint Darwin, Spencer and Malthus can be regarded as eugenicists as they all promoted the idea that human progress was only possible if the fit ones in society were able to leave progeny. Not coincidentally, scholars such as Halliday (1971), argued that the term eugenics could even be used as a synonym of Social Darwinism. Others, then, regard the eugenics movement rather as an “offshoot of Social Darwinism” (Adams and Sydie 2001, 86). However, it appears that some components of this eugenics programme of selective breeding were entirely opposed to the Lamarckian viewpoint on the inheritance of favourable characters, which was supported by Darwin and Spencer. To eugenicists, environmental influence was of no importance to the genetic make-up of an organism, whereas Lamarckists promoted the inheritance of acquired favourable characteristics,
that is, characteristics which are the result of the organism’s environment (Halliday 1971). Hence, not all facets of the eugenics theory conform to Social Darwinist views.

Other prominent Social Darwinists were Charles Brace (1826-1890), Walter Bagehot (1826-1877), T.H. Huxley (1825-1895), Ernest Haeckel (1834-1919), John Fiske (1842-1901) and Benjamin Kidd (1858-1916). As these scholars were all strongly influenced by various aspects of Malthus, Spencer, Darwin and Sumner’s evolutionary ideas, I will not elaborate on their theories.

Furthermore, interesting to note is that Hitler during the 1930s and 1940s also reasoned in Darwinian terms and can therefore be regarded as a practicing Social Darwinist. He adopted the ‘survival of the fittest’ theory and spoke in terms of ‘inferior’ and ‘superior race’, in his desire to prevent “the ‘inferior races’ from mixing with those judged superior, in order to reduce contamination of the latter’s gene pool” (Bergman 1999, 101). Some scholars even argue that “the primary reason that Nazism reached to the extent of the holocaust was the widespread acceptance of Social Darwinism by the scientific and academic community” (Bergman 1999, 101). This appropriation of the term closely ties in with the concept of eugenics as Hitler chose to eliminate the ‘inferior race’ of the Jews to prevent them from passing on their ‘bad’ genes (Leonard 2009).

Finally, although as noted before, some scholars such Tännsjö (1990) are in favour of the more recent term ‘Sociobiology’, claiming that “social Darwinism is passé” (15), even today, the term Social Darwinism is still in use. Running for his second term as President of the United States, Barack Obama accused his opponent Mitt Romney on April 3rd, 2012 of supporting “thinly veiled social Darwinism” as the Republicans’ reduction plan would imply severe cuts in public spending on college scholarships, justice and medical research, but would offer sharp tax-reductions for the benefit of millionaires. Hence, even in politics social Darwinism can still be used as ammunition.

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14 All these scholars are discussed as social Darwinists by Mike Hawkins in his book entitled Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

4.4.6 Conclusion

Ultimately, it appears that the term “social Darwinism” is a very flexible one which can be applied in various domains. This flexibility probably contributed to the term’s popularity to this day. To summarize the main issues that are discussed by Social Darwinists, a first important point of discussion regards the evolution of the human race towards progress. It seems that not all scholars agree that this process is still at work or that it will continue to exist. Malthus (1826), for example, argued that overpopulation would eventually destroy human progress. This is a theory which was supported by Darwin (cited in Ruse, 1980) as well, as he adds that the mechanism of natural selection is not at work anymore since the weak are saved and not left to perish. Others such as Spencer (in Karier 1986), believed that the current human condition is only a temporary stage towards the creation of the perfect human being. Human progress is still possible and is the objective of the entire human existence, rendering the notions of ‘evolution’ and ‘progress’ virtually synonymous (Spencer, in Hawkins 1997). However, Spencer also supported the idea that the poor should not profit by charity (in Hawkins 1997). This is a another issue discussed by social Darwinists. The weak should be left to die and as a result they would not be able to pass on their ‘weak’ genes (Hawkins 1997). Next, Spencer (1865) also believed that each individual should remain within his or her own “sphere” and keep his or her desires and ambitions in check as appropriate to the individual’s social environment. Furthermore, it appears that the evolutionary principle of natural selection is also applied to the socio-economic domain, regarding a free-market economy, as well as to a political context, or related to purity and superiority of one race over another. Then, as illustrated above, also the principle of sexual selection can be discussed as part of the Social Darwinist paradigm, but since the principle has only recently been added to the realm of social Darwinism, it still requires additional investigation. Therefore, I will not investigate the principle of sexual selection in Hardy’s novels. Finally, and importantly, one needs to be aware of the fact that some Social Darwinists, like Charles Darwin, do not solely support selfish behaviour, they also emphasize the usefulness of group effort and altruism, related to the principle of group selection. So, in conclusion it appears that Social Darwinism encompasses various perspectives in different disciplines and areas of study. Consequently, as will be
demonstrated in the analysis part, not all social Darwinist perspectives discussed in this theoretical part can be applied onto the literary analysis of Hardy’s novels. Especially Spencer and Darwin’s viewpoints on, respectively, social adaptation and selfish or altruistic behavior, are the main social Darwinist perspectives that will be discussed in relation to Tess and Jude. Also some of Sumner’s perspectives will be discussed, but to a lesser extent. I am aware that this is a rather limited scope, especially since the realm of Social Darwinism encompasses a broad area of study. However, my purpose was to investigate to what extent a non-literary theory like social Darwinism can be applied onto a fictional Victorian world in order to analyze whether Hardy can be considered a social Darwinist or not. Apparently Spencer, Darwin and Sumner’s theories offer the best possibilities to introduce a social Darwinist perspective on Hardy’s literature.

5. The Victorian Society: Class and the Victorian Ideal

5.1 Social stratification in the Victorian Age

Both Jude the Obscure and Tess of the d’Urbervilles are class-conscious novels. Therefore, as I will analyze to what extent Hardy can be nominated a social Darwinist, it is important to take a closer look at the social backdrop sketched in Tess of the D’Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure. In this chapter then, I will provide a brief overview of the social stratification system in the Victorian age.

During the Victorian era, people were extremely class conscious and “classes”, as David Cody (2002) argues, “are the more or less distinct social groupings which at any given historical period, taken as a whole, constituted British Society.” The social class system in the early Victorian age was

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a very rigid one, which is generally regarded, as Pasaribu (2011) puts it, as “the organization of inequalities within society, the distribution of rewards, the allocations of scarcities, and the formalization of positions in some hierarchical order” (my emphasis, 183). There are many factors which determine these “inequalities within society” and which lay at the basis of Victorian class identity and of social Darwinism, as will be demonstrated later on (Pasaribu 2011, 183). Cody (2002) enumerates the most important factors as follows: “power, authority, wealth, working and living conditions, lifestyles, life-span, education, religion and culture.” Generally, “[a] man’s status depended primarily on his occupation and the family into which he was born; a married woman’s status derived from her husband”, since through marriage, she became her husband’s property and adopted therefore also her husband’s social status (Mitchell 1996, 22). Hence, not coincidentally, “women were expected to try to marry into a slightly higher social class, [but] they were not to leap too many social barriers” (Frost 1995, 81). However, as Frost (1995) notes, especially “[m]iddle-class prescriptive literature emphasized the dangers of interclass love” (81). In particular, marriage to a party belonging to a lower social class than your own, was strongly discouraged and rather exceptional since “one of the most rigid rules of social decorum in Victorian society [was] not to marry downward across class lines” (Schroeder and Schroeder 2006, 70). Therefore, Victorians usually married someone of the same social standing.

Victorian society primarily consisted of three social classes. Varying from high to low social status, respectively, there was the upper class, the middle class and the lower class or the working class, “which by the 1850s was so massive that it consisted of over half of Britain’s adult population” (Purchase 2006, 22). This three-way classification might by “an oversimplification” of the Victorian social stratification, as Supple (1978) admits, however it is indeed “a useful one”, as he adds (92). On a deeper level, each class could be subdivided into different sublevels or subclasses, depending on the type of work you did and on how well off you were. Accordingly, Purchase (2006) distinguishes between the “lower-upper, upper-middle, lower-middle, an upper or skilled working class, a lower or unskilled working class, and so on” (22).
First of all, at the pinnacle of the Victorian social hierarchy was to be found the old hereditary aristocracy, such as dukes and earls, next to the new landed gentry. As the Victorian aristocrats had inherited their wealth and title, there was no need for them to pursue a professional career. The new gentry on the other hand, had earned their spot at the top of the social pyramid through industrial activity, intelligent investments, professional activity and commercial qualities (Cody 2002). Consequently, as wealth meant power, the upper class was in charge of the country’s chief institutions and was very influential on political level.

The revolution of the middle class, then, was the product of the Industrial Revolution. As mass production increased the affordability of products, a middle class started to emerge which consisted of industrialists, bankers, lawyers, teachers, shopkeepers, clerks, etc. This boom implied that many professions trebled or even quadrupled such as administrative jobs and teaching (Supple 1978). Accordingly the Victorian age marks a shift from a class system based on birth, to one based on wealth. Gradually the economic success of the middle class turned into political power as well, as they were able to enforce the Reform Act in 1832. This Reform Act, also known as the People Act, enabled those who could afford a property worth 10 pounds a year, to vote for the electorate, which implied that those belonging to the working classes were naturally excluded. However, a series of Reform Acts later, the lower classes also gained a voice in parliament. In the late Victorian age, then, the middle class also improved accessibility to education, as there was a rise in public schools, next to other institutions which supported social progress.

Those men and women belonging to the working classes, on the other hand, often had to work under very hard circumstances for low wages, paid daily or weekly. The work performed by skilled or unskilled working-class members, was of a physical nature whereas those belonging to the middle class, performed “clean” labour. Some of the working-class occupations were the following: dairy

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maid, labourer, domestic servant, factory worker and stonemason. Compared to the unskilled workers, the skilled labourers had served an apprenticeship. Subsequently, their income was higher, which ensured them a more comfortable position within the working class. “In effect, the skilled formed a separate subclass within the working class, with differences in education, training, interests, and way of life” (Mitchell 1996, 20).

Lastly, one can also identify a so-called ‘underclass’ of “sunken people” to which belonged those who could hardly make ends meet and those who had ended up in the underworld of the Victorian society, such as criminals, prostitutes, vagrants and street-children (Purchase, 2006).

Hence, the Victorian class system provided order and structure to British Society. Only towards the end of the century, as Mitchell (2012) argues, “the formerly rigid class distinctions became more flexible” (127). According to Cody (2002), then, class boundaries were resolved after World War I. However, “class consciousness remained” (Mitchell 2012, 127). Even in modern-day Britain people still tend to be strongly aware of their social status. In his article entitled Of course class still matters – it influences everything that we do, dated January 10, 2010, Hutton argues that “about half of the Britons [...] identify themselves as working-class.” 20 Hutton (2010) even adds that although “[n]obody wants to believe that British society is as class-bound as it is [...] the social truth will out”. 21

5.2 Defining the Victorian ideal in relation to socially fit and unfit male and female ‘specimens’

According to Herbert Spencer the ability to adapt to one’s social environment, is one of the main competences required to determine whether individuals are socially fit or not (cited in Hawkins, 1997). This chapter will, thus, provide an introduction to the Victorian social masculine and feminine

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21 Ivi.
ideal. Subsequently, the more individuals deviate from these socially acceptable profiles, the less fit they will be considered in social Darwinist eyes.

The Victorian Age was an age marked by “prudishness and strict moral and social conventions” (Sharma 1998, 150). Especially since the newly risen and extremely increasing middle-class attempted to maintain their new social position by creating a respectable social profile, “[m]iddle-class values became mainstream social values in the Victorian period” (Potts & Scannell 2013, 3-4). Many of these moral and social values were gender-specific since the Victorian society was marked by gender inequality. Men and women had different responsibilities, domains of activity, and most importantly, a different social status both in and outside the nuclear family. According to Appell (2012), a Victorian man was socially successful (or fit in Social Darwinist terms), if he was able to “provid[e] for a woman and a family” (n.p.). These, as Appell (2012) continues, “were the ideals of the Victorian society, and not only men compared each other to meet these ideals, but women dreamed of marrying these types of men as well” (n.p.). The Victorian woman, on the other hand, was idealized as a chaste, pure, innocent, ignorant, self-sacrificing and vulnerable woman (Vicinus 1973). A Victorian wife, then, as Coventry Patmore famously put it, was supposed to fulfil “the role of the domestic-angel-wife, as a sacrificial slave to her husband” (cited in Purchase 2006, 45). Next to the care for her husband, women were also expected to take on domestic tasks and to play “the role of nurturant [sic] mothers and moral guardians” (Pascoe 1990, 35). As “bearers of morality”, women were thus expected to set an example for their children and hence, for future generations (Mackinnon 2012, 283).

Consequently, it appears that women, more than men, were pressured by Victorian society to behave correctly according to the Victorian ideal (Appell 2012). Not coincidentally there were various advice manuals for women in particular on etiquette and on socially accepted codes of conduct. Mrs. Ellis (1839), for example, advised her female readers as follows: “You have deep responsibilities; you have urgent claims; a nation’s moral wealth is in your keeping (24).
Although the Victorian ideal of the domestic angel-wife was the norm, not all women could live up to the ruling principles of social and moral conduct (Potts & Scannell 2012, 3-4). To start with, unmarried women were unable to respond to the Victorian domestic ideal. In 1851, “42 per cent of women between the ages of 20 and 40 were unmarried, and [...] two million out of Britain’s six million women were self-supporting” (Poovey, cited in Mackinnon 2012, 284). These unmarried and self-supporting women, or “redundant women as they were cruelly labeled” were advised to migrate to the colonies, to “restore the balance” (Poovey, cited in Mackinnon 2012, 284).

However, according to Victorian feminists like Maria Grey (cited in Dyhouse 1978) women were so much more than domestic servants and baby machines. In fact, the progressive New Women mindset encouraged middle-class girls to pursue a career:

Marriage should not be the first object of a woman’s life, any more than of a man’s; girls should be trained from childhood to the idea that they, like their brothers, must take their share in the work of life...they should not be allowed, but induced to work for their own maintenance. (Maria Grey, qtd. in Dyhouse 1978, 179)

In contrast, some scholars utterly disapproved of this feminist perspective, as they argued how “a learned, or even an over-accomplished, young woman [was] one of the most intolerable monsters in creation” (Saturday Review in Dyhouse 1978, 178). Naturally, intelligent, progressive and, hence, norm-breaking women were considered a threat to the patriarchal Victorian society.

Then, in contrast to middle-and upper-class women, neither working-class women could simply be put on a pedestal. Instead, to be able to feed the household, working-class women “continued to work in the nation’s factories and mills, alongside men.”(Purchase 2006, 45) Hence, next to their own income, “men continued to rely on the wages of their wives for the livelihood of their families.” (Hammertonn cited in Phegley 2011, 9) However, subsequently, these domestic conventions clashed with the idea of “manliness” (Hammerton, cited in Phegley 2011). Since, as mentioned earlier, middle-class men pursued a career, while their wives stayed at home, manliness was, in fact, equated to breadwinning (Hammerton, cited in Phegley 2011). Clearly, these domesticity
conventions did not respond to the realities of working class life. Still, although some classes were simply unable to live up to the Victorian ideal due to their social and financial situation, it was still important to create a socially respectable profile by not deviating from social norms (Frost 1995).

So, in my opinion, one can deduce that from a social Darwinist perspective, whether individuals are socially fit or unfit depends, partially at least, on how well their behaviour responds to the accepted, though idealized, Victorian norms and codes of conduct.

6. Social Darwinism in Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*

6.1 To *fit* or not to *fit*, that’s the question

This analysis of two of Hardy’s novels consists of one main chapter, entitled *To fit or not to fit, that is the question*, in which I will apply Social Darwinist theories discussed by three prominent Social Darwinists, that is, by Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin and William Sumner. As mentioned in the conclusion to the chapter on *Prominent Social Darwinists*, I chose to discuss the perspectives of these scholars in particular, since especially their theories provide new and interesting insights in Hardy’s *Jude* and *Tess*. Regarding Spencer’s social Darwinist perspective, I will focus on the fitness of Jude, Sue, Arabella and Vilbert (in *Jude*) and of Tess and Angel (in *Tess*), based primarily on their ability to adapt successfully to their social environment. As, according to Spencer, the characters’ ability to fit in depends on their social behaviour, I will attempt to analyze in what way the characters transgress norms, codes and conventions related to socially accepted behaviour. More specifically, I will analyze what the ruling social conventions are that control the lives of the characters mentioned above, and what the attitude of these individuals are towards these conventions. Also, if they deviate from these socially acceptable norms, what is it, then, that impels them to do so in the first place? Are they forced to abandon the path of social righteousness by external factors or are they driven by an internal force? Then I will also focus on the intellectual capacities of Jude, Sue, Tess and Angel in particular, since, according to Spencer (and Darwin later on), this is another criterion to measure an individual’s ability
of social survival. Hence, I will discuss to what extent the characters’ level or type of intelligence is an advantage or a disadvantage to their ability to survive in the jungle of social conventions. However, this topic on intelligence will be discussed to a lesser extent in respect to the character’s social adaptation, which is of more importance. Furthermore I will also focus on Darwin’s theory on altruistic behaviour related to the principle of group selection and on some of Sumner’s views, but less extensively compared to the application of Spencer’s theory to Hardy’s novels.
Jude the Obscure, published in 1895, is Hardy’s final novel of character and environment. One year earlier, after a series of revisions, the story already circulated as a serial story in Harper’s New Monthly Magazine. Before Hardy had settled on the present title of the novel, the story had first been titled The Simpletons and later on Hearts Insurgent. In the postscript to the novel, included in the preface, Hardy explains how the story was severely criticized and only scarcely appreciated in prudish Victorian Britain as well as in America (JO, v-x). In particular, the novel was heavily attacked for its matrimonial scenes. One bishop even burnt the novel, “probably in his despair at not being able to burn me”, Hardy adds rather humorously (JO, vii). However, other people regarded Jude as a work of serious moral stance. As Hardy wrote:

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An American man of letters, who did not whitewash his own morals, informed [Hardy] that, having bought a copy of the book on the strength of the shocked criticism, he read on and on, wondering when the harmfulness was going to begin, and at last flung it across the room with execrations at having been induced by the rascally reviewers to waste a dollar-and-half on what he was pleased to call ‘a religious and ethical treatise’ (JO, viii).

However, despite those few supporters, Hardy was not able to cope with the severe criticism he had received on Jude and therefore turned away from novel-writing entirely, devoting himself to poetry-writing until the end of his career.

1. Jude Fawley and Sue Bridehead

Orphaned at an early age, Jude Fawley was raised by his great-aunt Drusilla in a small village called Marygreen. He appeared to be a decent, handsome young man, who was hardworking, ambitious, and always prepared to help his great-aunt in the family’s bakery shop. The perfect son-in-law, it seems. However, already from a very early age, one can identify rather obvious indications of Jude’s naivety and his oversensitivity as (almost feminine and therefore inappropriate) weaknesses of character which already inform the reader of Jude’s unfit nature since these weaknesses will hamper his adaptation to and survival in the jungle of social convention. In particular, already in the first twenty pages, his innate weakness is exemplified when as a young boy Jude was assigned the chore of scaring away the rooks to prevent them from pecking Farmer Troutham’s corn. However, “at length, his heart grew sympathetic with the birds’ thwarted desires” upon which he resigned from his task by allowing them to eat the corn anyway, to the Farmer’s displeasure of course who banished him from his fields (JO, 11). This incident implies that Jude could not accept the cruelty of Nature’s rule. Instead, he preferred to replace the red-in-tooth-and-claw mechanism by a more peaceful mechanism based on harmony and equal chances for each organism. In fact, Jude felt strongly sympathetic towards animals in need, “and he could scarcely bear to see trees cut down or lopped, from a fancy that it hurt him” (JO, 13). As Hardy himself subsequently indicates in the novel : “[t]his weakness of character, as it may be called, suggested that he was the sort of man who was born to ache a good deal before the fall of the curtain

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upon his unnecessary life should signify that all was well with him again” (*JO*, 13). Jude’s “weakness of character”, that is, his oversensitive, naive and romanticizing nature would, indeed, be the cause of many inner struggles and troubles (*JO*, 13).

Another of Jude’s weaknesses was his passionate, though short-lived love for Arabella Donn, the daughter of the local pig farmer. She was a cunning young lady who knew how to make a man’s head spin. However, ever since Jude was a young lad he had felt the ambition to study classical languages at the University of Christminster (a fictional university). So, when Arabella announced her pregnancy, Jude’s plans fell apart, since for years he had been preparing himself for university by independently studying classical authors. At the same time, he was also apprenticed to a stonemason to learn the trade, as he knew that he had to be able to support a living while studying at Christminster. However, due to Arabella’s unexpected pregnancy, the couple was constrained to rush into marriage which ultimately postponed Jude’s university plans with a couple of years. As his love for Arabella soon evaporated, he considered his life “ruined by the fundamental error of their matrimonial union” (*JO*, 81). In contrast, from a social Darwinist perspective, Jude would have fitted in perfectly in society as he would have had to renounce his impossible studies and take up the role of a responsible husband and of the breadwinner of a low-class family. This outcome of events would have turned Jude into the masculine Victorian ideal, and consequently, into a strong social survivor from a social Darwinist perspective. However, Jude refused to conform to the suffocating social mould he was being pushed into. Consequently, removed even further away from his beloved university, and pressured by society to take on his marital responsibilities, Jude attempted to commit suicide, which was not an anomaly according to Morselli’s (1881) suicide statistics. As mentioned before, Morselli (1881) notes how the weak succumb and commit suicide as they cannot “cope with the stresses of civilized life”, and those “stresses” can be of various kind, including marital stresses (*Gates* 2009, n.p.). Unfortunately, the ice of the pond in which Jude had planned to drown himself refused to break; nature was cruel indeed. Nonetheless, he drank away his troubles, fostering this way a bad habit which would cost him dearly in the future. However, if Jude *had* succeeded in committing suicide, it would have been to the benefit of society, as Spencer believes that those who are weak, hence, unfit should
not leave progeny and be left to perish (Hawkins, 1997). Even more so, “the ‘survival of the unfit’ represented an evolutionary blasphemy by removing nature’s punishment for those too idle or improvident to adapt” and from a social Darwinist perspective one can argue that Jude was definitely too idle to accept the limitations of his social status (Spencer, qtd. in Hawkins 1997, 95). Then, as Malthus (Claeys 2000) claimed, only those individuals who benefitted the society were allowed to stay and Jude, in this case, was practising the trade of stonemasonry which could have proven successful, if only he had stuck to his trade and had renounced his idealized perspective on education much earlier.

Consequently, ambition is another important factor which creates struggle and which can be dangerous if it does not respect social limitations such as class. As a young boy Jude watched his schoolmaster, Mr. Phillotson, leave for the city to enter university and since then, this romanticized fantasy of Christminster, as “the city of light” and of “the tree of knowledge”, took hold of him (JO, 24). He believed that an education as a scholar “would just suit [him]” (JO, 25). However, Jude’s “dreams”, as Hardy notes “were as gigantic as his surroundings were small”, meaning that his dreams were not fit for the social class in which Jude was growing up (JO, 20). Hardy clearly indicates that, whether or not a course of life fits an individual, is not up to that individual to decide, but to the cruel mechanisms of society. Even his aunt warned him that Christminster “[was] a place, much too good for you (Jude) ever to have much to do with it” (JO, 14). However, soon after Arabella had left him, Jude did not waste any valuable time and set off to his holy city. On his first night, he roamed around the colleges, and imagined himself inside, studying and conversing with his fellow students, when he suddenly noticed that an optimistic soul had written the following phrase, not coincidentally, on the university walls: “How the world is made for each of us! And each of the Many helps to recruit the life of the race by a general plan” (JO, 97). Hence, the anonymous author of this phrase seemed to glorify social equality and cooperation, as well as open chances for everyone to the benefit of the human race. This is rather ironical considering Jude’s social circumstances. Jude would never be considered as equal to the undergraduates due to the fixed class system and the equally fixed social conventions. Hence, Jude, blinded by ambition could have misinterpreted this outcry as an optimistic one. In a more negative sense, the anonymous writer could have been crying for equality instead, which can be
deduced from the way in which the word ‘each’ seems to be emphasized twice, meaning that, to improve the quality of the human race, everyone should have equal access to knowledge, no matter what class they belong to. Perhaps this phrase has been written on the wall by an extremely embittered Mr. Phillotson so many years ago, when he himself had realized that he was never going to be a scholar at this university. This is merely an assumption. However, when Jude realized that his life-long dream had been an illusion, he expressed his frustration and bitterness in a similar way by writing a phrase on the college gates, as will be discussed later on. So, there could be a repetitive pattern in the way both men express their disappointment in society. Indeed, Mr Phillotson was not offered a scholarship and pursued a clerical career instead, while he continued teaching. Perhaps, this phrase could have been an omen to Jude, but he was too excited about his new future to pay attention to the signs. In fact, Jude was deeply convinced that one day the undergraduates would notice him and ask him to join them in conversation. But without divine intervention, that day would never come, as Jude was “a young workman in a white blouse, and with stone-dust in the creases of his clothes” (JO, 102). Hence, Jude was “obscure (like the title) both in that he was a mere working man of no social position and in that he did not understand himself or the forces at work in his life” (Carpenter, qtd. in Schwartz 1970, 800). Therefore, Schwartz (1970) even regards Jude, as a “moral masochist who places himself in the path of suffering [as] he does so only because he is unable to reconcile himself to a life far less satisfying than the one to which his being and freedom aspire” (801).

Unfortunately for Jude, it is only “[b]y the 1890s, [that] a variety of university extension schemes were in operation to help men and women like Jude who, because of their lack of resources, could not yet hope to attend university regularly” (Marshall 2002, 129). Consequently, as Jude the Obscure is most probably not set in the 1890s, but “between the mid or late 1860s and mid or late 1880s”, Jude could not yet profit from this university extension scheme (Plietsch 2004, 32). Apparently, only wealthy people could afford a university education, without any exceptions. Hardy seems to project on Jude his own failed university ambition. As Rimmer (2013) argues:

[Hardy had] had more schooling than most people below the middle class in his generation, along with professional training and some classical training. Yet he did not have a
gentleman’s education: His Latin and Greek were largely self-taught, and he never realized his dream of going to Oxford or Cambridge. (322)

What also seems to be projected on Jude, is Hardy’s determination, perseverance and initial refusal to face the facts. Some of Jude’s former villagers were not surprised that Jude had not succeeded to realize his ambition: “Just what we thought! Such places be not for such as you – only for them with plenty o’ money” (JO, 135). However, Jude refused to recognize his failure as he replied bitterly: “There you are wrong, [...] they are for such ones!” (JO, 135).

Nevertheless, the former conversation had proven to be a wake-up-call to Jude as he decided to step out of the shadow and take initiative by writing to the university’s academic dignitaries to explain his situation and to apply for a scholarship. However, only one dignitary replied as follows:

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 another course. That, therefore, is what I advise you to do. (JO, 140)

Hence, Jude is advised to stick to his trade and to remain within his own social sphere as this would ensure “a better chance of success in life” (JO, 140). As mentioned in the theoretical part with regard to Herbert Spencer’s view on the Victorian class system, one can notice a similar use of terminology. In particular, the use of the word “sphere” seems to be of major importance if we compare the note of the academic dignitary and Spencer’s social Darwinist perspective. Spencer (1865) claims that “the individual has no desires but those which may be satisfied without exceeding his proper sphere of action” (471). This quote implies that fit individuals are those who manage to keep their desires in check and find an equilibrium between their social environment and these desires. This is one of the most important social Darwinists ideas to which I will return rather frequently in the analysis of the novels, as many of Hardy’s characters cherish desires and ambitions which are not appropriate to their social environment and because of which they break socially accepted codes.
After reading the letter of the academic dignitary, reality kicked in and Jude finally realized his failure. Consequently, as mentioned earlier, he expressed his bitterness by writing the following biblical phrase on the gates of the College through which he, ironically, would never enter: “I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you; yea, who knoweth not such things as these? – Job xii.3” (JO, 142). By this phrase, Jude argued for equal access to knowledge for all men as he claimed to be as brilliant and as worthy of a university education as the wealthy undergraduates. Accordingly, I agree with Ruskin as he argued in Unto this Last (1862) that “[t]he rich not only refuse food to the poor, they refuse wisdom; they refuse virtue; they refuse salvation” (qtd. in Supple 1978, 110). However, in the cruel and hard social Darwinist world, equality does not exist. Equal opportunities would annihilate the selection-and-elimination-process, respectively, of the strong and the weak and this way, the human race would be unable to progress. So according to Social Darwinists like Spencer, Darwin and Sumner, Jude should not leave his lower social class of supposedly lazy and less intelligent individuals as they claim that this class cannot possibly benefit the development of the human race (Hawkins 1997).

When Jude then, turned to the comfort of liquor in the nearest tavern, he was challenged to recite the Creed in Latin, upon which one of the undergraduates who was present replied: “Good! Excellent Latin!” (JO, 145). However, rather cynically, Hardy adds that “[the undergraduate] had not the slightest conception of a single word [that Jude had uttered]” (JO, 145). Sadly, Jude’s words still seemed to echo: “who knoweth not such things as these?” (JO, 142). Hence, regarding Jude’s outcry for equality on the university’s walls, it appears that Jude is indeed not their inferior, but, in fact, their superior in intellect. By this comparison, Hardy indicates how cruelly unfair Jude’s social environment functions. Accordingly, Sue argues:

You (Jude) are one of the very men Christminster was intended for when the colleges were founded; a man with a passion for learning, but no money, or opportunities or friends. But you were elbowed off the pavement by the millionaires’ sons. (JO, 181)
Only the wealthiest individuals, millionaires’ sons, get the best opportunities in education. According to social Darwinists such as Sumner, this is only natural, as he believed that “the wealthy [were] biologically and culturally superior to all other humans” (qtd. in Finkelman 2006, 6). In fact, as mentioned in the theoretical part, Sumner (1902) stated that “[m]illionaires are the products of natural selection” (n.p.). However, the image Hardy portrays of the ignorant undergraduates, attacks Sumner’s theory and is somewhat in contrast to Spencer and Darwin’s social Darwinist views as they argued that intelligence is one of the most important criteria of fitness. Based on this criterion only, Jude would be the fittest in an, although, limited social Darwinist world. Unfortunately for Jude, there are other criteria to be considered as well, such as class, wealth, fecundity and most importantly, social adaptation. Although he was intellectually gifted and able to procreate, Jude was a poor working-class fellow who attempted to break free from his social class instead of accepting his social condition. Apparently, the Victorian society was not ready yet for self-made men like Jude and Hardy. However, there were scholars such as Samuel Smiles who encouraged universal social advancement in self-help manuals. In his bestseller Self-Help the latter claimed that truly anyone could improve his or her social situation (Smiles 1861). Still, as universities such as the one in Christminster, in line with social Darwinist perspectives, did not allow poor workmen with university ambition, like Jude, to improve their intellect and this way, their social status, self-help manuals only nurtured unrealistic ambitions. Clearly, at the time, Smiles’ perspectives must have been in grave contrast to the ruling social Darwinist views, first of all, because equality of opportunity would annihilate the selecting process which is crucial for the mechanism of natural selection. Secondly then, because social Darwinists like Sumner (Hofstadter, in Camfield 2005) believed in the Calvinistic predestination of an individual’s social status, social flexibility through social mobility, as promoted by Smiles, would be utterly disapproved of.

Next, another important factor which explains Jude’s weakness in his inability to adapt to his social environment, is related to the issue of heredity. Hardy seems to be strongly obsessed with heredity, which is no coincidence since “[f]rom the time of Darwin, heredity was a major preoccupation of nineteenth-century scientists and writers” (Ingham 1991, xxv). In particular, as
Ingham (1991) argues, “Hardy was interested in the recent theory of germ-plasm, thought to transmit characteristics unchanged from generation to generation” (Ingham 1991, xxv). In Jude there seem to be two important continuities of weakness, in social Darwinist eyes, across the various generations. The first hereditary aspect relates to the issue of suicide. Jude’s mother, Jude and also Little Father Time, all commit suicide. Hence, it seems as if the preference or the desire to end one’s life in times trouble runs through the Fawley blood.23 Instead of adapting to the ever changing circumstances in their environment, the three individuals mentioned above, choose to avoid the societal pressures, though for different reasons. As noted before, in the Victorian age scholars such as Morselli (1881) and Westcott (1885) implied that suicide was only committed by the weakest individuals in society. Both Jude and his mother attempted to drown themselves as their marriage had put too much pressure on them. Only Jude did not succeed, or at least, not initially. Moreover, right after Jude’s failed suicide attempt, it seems as if the narrator expresses his opinion on suicide as a low and weak deed. In particular, the narrator asks the reader: “What could [Jude] do of a lower kind than self-exterrmination [...]” (JO, 83). Only at the bitter end, Jude signed his own death by travelling through cold and rain, although he was severely ill, to see Sue one last time. This journey only aggravated his condition, of which he was strongly aware:

I made up my mind that a man confined to his room by inflammation of the lungs, a fellow who had only two wishes left in the world, to see a particular woman, and then to die, could neatly accomplish those two wishes at one stroke by taking this journey in the rain. That I’ve done. I have seen her for the last time, and I’ve finished myself—put an end to a feverish life which ought never to have been begun! (my emphasis JO, 469)

Also Jude’s son proves to be a weak though, in my opinion, noble individual. Since Jude’s family was increasing in number, they were constantly in financial trouble. So, to reduce the financial problems of, and subsequently also the societal pressure on his family, Little Father Time sacrificed himself and

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23 Interestingly, a recent study (September, 2012) confirms that suicidal behaviour is, indeed, genetic. For more information about this study, I can refer to the article entitled “The brain-derived neurotrophic factor gene in suicidal behaviour: a meta-analysis”, by Zai, Clement C. et. al.
his siblings by committing suicide after he had murdered his brothers and sisters, leaving a note, reminiscent of Malthus’ population theory, which said “done because we are too menny” (JO, 401). Hence, the financial pressure on the family resulted in this dreadful, but noble and clearly altruistic deed. Instead of disapproving of Little Father Time’s actions, as he had done earlier regarding Jude’s first suicide attempt, the narrator invokes compassion and admiration for Little Father Time’s actions, as he represents Little Father Time as child of eight who had involuntarily been driven to this horrible ‘solution’ out of love for his parents. As mentioned in the theoretical part, Darwin (1869) concluded that, although altruistic and heroic individuals are in fact necessary for successful group survival, they are clearly the weaker, unfit ones who do not survive as they sacrifice themselves to the benefit of their group members. Hence, surprisingly, from a social Darwinist perspective, Little Father Time should be regarded as a weak individual.

Then, the second aspect that relates to the issue of heredity, and which complicates Jude and also Sue’s adaptation to social conventions, regards the family’s so-called curse on marital unions. Jude’s aunt, Drusilla, informs Jude as follows: “The Fawleys were not made for wedlock: it never seemed to sit well upon us. There's sommat in our blood that won't take kindly to the notion of being bound to do what we do readily enough if not bound” (my emphasis JO, 82). Both Jude’s mother and her brother, Sue’s father, entered into a failed marriage. Consequently, aunt Drusilla bombarded the Fawley’s marital misfortunes as a curse that rested on the Fawley family, indicating that, in Jude and Sue’s case, marriage would be an unwise decision. Nonetheless, despite aunt Drusilla’s warnings both Jude and Sue do marry, which is, in fact, a socially respectable thing to do. However, it seems as if the curse seems to be real after all as both Jude and Sue enter into unhappy marriages twice with the same person and only seem to be happy when they live together unmarried, but therefore outside social and religious laws. Hence, their “appetite for joy” temporarily tempts the lovers to seek happiness outside marriage (TOD, 253, vol.1). This proves that the family’s curse on marital unions is one of the many factors that indeed hampers the couples ability to successfully adapt to their social environment.
Although, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, Sue does in fact marry twice, one of the most important themes in the novel is Sue’s anti-marriage attitude. However, a suchlike attitude was socially unacceptable during the Victorian age. As Harrison (cited in Köhler 2007) argues: “[in Victorian society] the marriage to a man was the most socially-approved goal for women to seek” (42). As mentioned previously in the chapter on the Victorian masculine and feminine ideal, a proper Victorian wife and consequently, as a perfect female specimen from a social Darwinist perspective, Sue was supposed to devote herself to domestic tasks, the care of her future children and fulfil “the role of the domestic angel-wife as a sacrificial slave to her husband” (Coventry Patmore, as cited in Purchase 2006, 45). Obedience, humility, patient suffering, respect, gentleness and resignation are all terms that indicate the way in which a Victorian wife was supposed to behave. Sue, in contrast, refuses to accept this “enslavement to forms” (JO, 480). Accordingly, in his postscript of 1912 to the preface of Jude the Obscure, Hardy depicts Sue as “the woman of the feminist movement – the slight, pale ‘bachelor girl’ – the intellectualized emancipated bundle of nerves that modern conditions were producing” (JO, ix). Sue thus seems to embody a rather ambiguous and socially deviating personality. On the one hand, she is depicted as a strong, bright, emancipated “bachelor girl”, a New Woman, who rebels against social conventions by refusing the matrimonial union. In doing so, Sue even goes a step further than feminists like Maria Grey who, as stated previously, did not entirely discard the institution of marriage, but claimed that “marriage should not be the first object of a woman’s life” (Maria Grey, qtd. in Dyhouse 1978, 179). On the other hand, then, Sue is depicted as “a bundle of nerves”, and hence as an extremely sensitive and vulnerable woman (JO, ix). So, at times, Sue is guided by her instinct, desires and rebellious beliefs, claiming:“I shall do just as I choose”, even if her behaviour goes against the Victorian ideal, whereas at other times, Sue’s instinct and desires are indeed tempered by her insecurity, her social conscience and her rationality of mind, as will be demonstrated later on (JO, 185). Hence, Sue’s double nature turns her into an extremely complex character. Her complexity and instability of mind is exemplified quite plainly as Sue, surprisingly, does in fact eventually marry, even if by doing so she goes against all the principles she believes in. However, this marriage guaranteed social respectability, a comfortable life and a loving husband, since the warm-hearted Mr. Phillotson offered her a professional teacher training and future employment in his school. Apparently,
these favourable prospects sufficed to convince Sue to change her mind about the institution of marriage. By marrying a respectable husband, Sue had conformed to the feminine ideal of the domestic angel-wife, meaning, in social Darwinist terms, that she was socially fit in that she had successfully adapted to her social environment. Unfortunately however, as was to be expected, soon enough, Sue felt imprisoned and deprived of her dignity as a woman. Although Mr. Phillotson was, in fact, a patient and caring husband, she gradually felt antipathy towards him. This attitude can easily be explained, as she had not entered into marriage out of love, but based on social advantage. Consequently, as she was still in love with Jude, her desires and beliefs took the upper hand again, due to which she started experiencing the crushing pressure of the marital contract:

[...] the social moulds civilization fits us into, have no more relation to our actual shapes than the conventional shapes of the constellations have to the real star patterns. I am called Mrs. Richard Phillotson, living a calm wedded life with my counterpart of that same name. But I am not really Mrs Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions and unaccountable antipathies. (JO, 245)

Hence, in this passage, Sue expresses how hard it is to keep up appearances, since her current social situation as a married woman did not coincide with the inner version of herself which pursued female emancipation and freedom of desire. These “social moulds [of] civilization” (JO, 245), that is, the norms and conventions by which society is ruled, are rather fixed and only those individuals who, rather literally, fit these moulds, are in Spencer’s terms also the fittest individuals in society (cited in Claeys 2000). In contrast, Sue admits that she is not one of those flexible individuals who manage to conform, primarily because, as she claims: “I don’t want to be respectable! (JO, 268). Consequently, Sue decided to break free from this social mould of the marital contract and also from the feminine ideal by turning to Jude with whom she then cohabited and raised three illegitimate children. Also Hardy had wished to break free from his first marriage to Emma Gifford, as it had become a drudgery. Just like Sue, Hardy “condemn[ed] an unhealthy marriage without love and validate[d] love without marriage, a shock to most of his Victorian readership” (Nowbari 2011, 5). Not surprisingly, Hardy has been regarded as being part of the “anti-marriage league” (Oliphant, cited in Heilmann 2013, 435).
Also the somewhat feminist attitude towards the prison of “holy wedlock” can account for this assumed “anti-marriage league”-membership as he “championed the struggle of the strong, intelligent, sexual woman [such as Sue and Tess] to achieve selfhood and social freedom” (Harvey 2003, 34).

Sue, then, in her pursuit of happiness blemished her social reputation severely. Although Phillotson freed her from her misery out of compassion, Sue’s departure was regarded as adulterous. Consequently, she did not only damage her own reputation, she also destroyed Phillotson’s good name. He even had to resign his job as a teacher “for condoning adultery” since his immoral behaviour did not set a good example to his students (JO, 295). Furthermore, as Sue repeatedly refused to marry Jude, the couple was severely punished by the community for not being married with children. Only by 1893, years after Jude’s death, the ‘Legitimation League’ started lobbying “for the legal recognition of children born out of wedlock” (Bland, cited in Heilmann 2013, 436). Hereby they wanted to “remove the stigma of bastardy from illegitimate children” in their support of free love (Porter 1987, 144). So, one can deduce that in the 1870’s en 1880’s co-habiting with children was still considered a social crime.

Sue and Jude are never truly joined in matrimony because of various reasons. First of all, Sue was severely traumatized by her first failed marriage to Phillotson, which she believed to be cursed indeed. Secondly, because she regarded the institution of marriage as “a sort of trap to catch a man”, which is “hopelessly vulgar” (JO, 322). Thirdly, then, because she feared that a businesslike marital contract would annihilate her passionate love for Jude. So Sue refused to conform to social and religious conventions as she valued passionate love over social respectability:

Fewer women like marriage than you (Jude) suppose, only they enter into it for the dignity it is assumed to confer, and the social advantages it gains them sometimes – a dignity and an advantage that I am quite willing to do without. (JO, 309)

Hence, although it was Jude’s deepest wish, the couple decides not to marry, or at least, not for real. They did, however, pretend to be married to satisfy the community and to stop Little Father Time from being bullied at school for the immoral relationship of his parents. Sue even addressed Jude as her
husband. However, despite the couple’s best efforts, increasingly less villagers called on Jude’s stonemason skills and Jude lost his seat in the committee of the “Artisan’s Mutual Improvement Society, in which he, ironically, argued for “equality of opportunity” (JO, 361). Consequently, the couple was forced to move to a town where they were unknown and could start anew. However, in every community they resided, their socially unacceptable behaviour was food for gossip and it turned them into social exceptions, scorned by the community. Gradually the family was ostracized and forced to live a rather nomadic life, moving from one village to another. However, finding a village where people would respect the couple’s way of living was a difficult task, as is exemplified when Little Father Time asks why the family has to avoid certain villages:

We mustn’t go to Alfredston, or to Melchester, or to Shagton, or to Christminster. Apart from those we may go anywhere. - Why musn’t we go there, father? - Because of a cloud that has gathered over us, though we have wronged no man, corrupted no man, defrauded no man! Perhaps we have done which was right in our own eyes. (my emphasis JO, 366)

Hence, the couple was well aware of the social and religious laws they transgressed by cohabiting instead of marrying, but they still preferred to live in sin rather than to conform, because love and happiness were more valuable to them than social approval. Earlier in the novel, one can observe several indications which already demonstrate how much Sue, in particular, enjoyed challenging social and religious conventions. One day, for instance, Sue purchased two pagan statuettes of roman gods, Apollo and Venus (the latter, the goddess of free and passionate love; the type of love defended by Sue), as ornament to her apartment. However when the mistress of the house, Mrs. Fontover, an extremely religious woman, discovered the statuettes, Sue was forced to leave. On another occasion, Sue, already engaged to Phillotson, went on a trip with Jude, but they failed to catch the last train back to Melchester upon which they were constrained to spend the night together in a shepherd’s home. Sue then expressed her excitement as follows:“I rather like this, […], outside all laws except for gravitation and germination” (JO, 165).
Furthermore, Jude and Sue recognized in each other an ally in their struggle against societal conventions, as both pursue ideals which did not respect social limitations, namely, Jude’s university ambition and Sue’s anti-marriage attitude. Accordingly, they regarded themselves as true pioneers in a world in which their social behaviour was not yet tolerated, as Jude argues: “Perhaps the world is not illuminated enough for such experiments as ours! Who were we to think we could act as pioneers!” (JO, 421). This world of fixed codes was simply not ready for them, and hence, hampered their ambition to progress as a new ‘social species’ or rather, as a ‘socialist’ species in their strife for equal opportunities. Accordingly, wondering who to blame for his never-ending social struggle, Jude accused society or as he put it: “the artificial system of things, under which the normal sex-impulses are turned into devilish domestic gins and springs to noose and [which] hold[s] back those who to progress” (259). He even regarded himself as a prophet, someone who can predict the future course of things, claiming that: “It takes two or three generations to do what I (Jude) tried to do in one” (JO, 388).

In the end, the loss of the couple’s children proved to be the climax and the turnover of the novel. Claiming that she was “beaten”, beaten by society, Sue argued that “we (Jude and Sue) must conform” as “all the ancient wrath of the power above has been vented upon his, his poor creatures, and we must submit, [as] there is no choice” (JO, 409). Furthermore she continued that “it is no use fighting against God”, upon which Jude responded that “it is only against men and senseless circumstance”, which was indeed the case. Fate and society partially determine the individual’s struggle for survival. To Sue, then, the tragic loss of her children had proven to be an eye-opener on her deviating social behaviour (JO, 409). Therefore, she decided that it would be best for both of them if she would remarry her first husband, “for form’s sake, and to satisfy the world, which does not see things as they are” (JO, 431). Indeed since Sue had lost her virginity to Phillotson, she was therefore his rightful property and hence, his true wife. In fact, despite Jude’s abhorrence of the idea, Sue even encouraged Jude to remarry Arabella as she was also his “true wife” and it would, stem “the cold and inhumane blast of the world’s contempt” (JO, 428). So, when she abandons Jude, her former ally in their battle against society, Sue behaves rather selfishly to secure her social survival. As a true social
Darwinist Sue confirms that “[e]very successful man is more or less a selfish man [...] and that] the devoted fail” (JO, 433). Indeed, as society is extremely cruel, only those who put themselves first, will survive. Although she regards her breakdown and ultimate acceptance of social norms as her personal defeat and weakness, in fact, in social Darwinist terms, she proves to be the stronger one; the one who is fit to fit.

II. *Arabella Donn and Vilbert, the quack-doctor: true survivors*

Arabella is a true survivor. In contrast to Jude, she is incredibly down-to-earth and flexible if it comes to fitting into society. Unlike Jude and Sue, she is able to adapt to her environment by maintaining a perfect balance between her possibilities and her desires. Like Jude, then, she is also hungry for social betterment although she, in contrast, attempts to rise on the social scale without openly crossing any social boundaries or pursuing romanticized ideal-visions. As mentioned before, in the Victorian age, “[...] the marriage to a man was the most socially-approved goal for women to seek”, and this is also Arabella’s life goal (Harrison cited in Köhler 2007,42). In contrast to Sue, who regards the marital union as a poisonous and suffocating contract that puts an end to both a woman’s freedom and her passionate love, Arabella has an entirely different perspective on marriage. In particular, according to her, marriage does not imprison Victorian women, instead it secures a woman’s legal protection and it enables a woman to realize the Victorian ideal in securing a respectable social reputation. These are the principles by which Arabella attempts to construct a decent life since, in contrast to Sue, she can perfectly do without love or passion. Indeed, she regards the marital contract rather as a loveless business-transaction to secure her interests, which can be derived from the following passage when she gives a piece of “woman to woman” advice to Sue on the advantages of marriage:

> Life with a man is more *business-like* after it, and money matters work better. And then, you see, if you have rows, and he turns you out of doors, you can get the law to protect you, which you can’t otherwise, unless he half runs you through with a knife, or cracks your noddle with a poker. And if he bolts away from you – I can say it friendly, as woman to woman, for there’s never any knowing what a man med do [...]. And as I say, I’d advise you to get the business
legally done as soon as possible. You’ll find it an awful bother later on if you don’t. (*my emphasis* JO, 320-321)

One of her first attempts of tying a husband to her is immediately a successful one. As she feigns pregnancy, Jude is constrained to marry her according to social and religious convention. Indeed, quite a number of Victorian marriages were entered to keep up appearances. Pre-nuptial pregnancies were especially common on the countryside among the working classes (Phegley 2011). Yount (2010) even argues that “[p]arish records of the time [first half of the 19th century] reveal that as many as 40 percent of first pregnancies were conceived before the wedding day”, which is a rather large number (180). Unsurprisingly, as Gillis (cited in Phegley 2011) argues, “pregnancy was sometimes seen as a desirable way for a working-class woman to secure a husband” (59). So young working-class men, like Jude, often found themselves caught in a similar love-trap. This strategy of marriage-traps displays a rather negative image of women. Also “D.H Lawrence criticized what he saw as Hardy’s negative representation of Arabella” (Newton 2013). In fact, according to D.H. Lawrence (cited in Newton 2013) Arabella is “Hardy’s Darwinian character who accepts without guilt her animal sexuality and who has no moral qualms about doing what is necessary to survive in the world by adapting to changing circumstance”(181). Nonetheless, from a social Darwinist perspective these supposedly negative qualities should be regarded in positive terms as strong survival skills which enable her to, as D.H. Lawrence puts it, to “[adapt] to changing circumstance” (cited in Newton 2013, 181). Women like Arabella who trap and manipulate their future husband, secure a respectable social reputation for themselves. Hence, Arabella is a strong woman who only wants to secure her survival in the Victorian jungle. So, once she is married, Arabella is convinced that she has succeeded in ensuring a comfortable future since to her Jude represented a road to opportunity. As soon as he would be skilled as a tradesman and set aside this impossible fantasy of him entering university, he would be able to gain a decent income to support her desired lifestyle:

Arabella, [...] felt that all these make-shifts were temporary; she had gained a husband; that was the thing--a husband with a lot of earning power in him for buying her frocks
and hats when he should begin to get frightened a bit, and stick to his trade, and throw aside those stupid books for practical undertakings. (*JO, 67*)

However, during the first six months as a wedded couple, Arabella saw her well-balanced plans crumbling down since Jude’s apprenticeship covered more time than expected, and as an apprentice he only received half his salary. Hence, for a fairly long period the couple struggled to make ends meet. Moreover, to Arabella’s displeasure, Jude desperately attempted to hang on to his books, which she, in a fit of anger, destroyed by covering them with lard. Eventually Arabella decided that Jude was “such a slow old coach and [that] she did not care for the sort of life he led” since “there was no prospect of his ever bettering himself or her” (*my emphasis* *JO*, 83). Consequently, Arabella left to accompany her parents to Australia as she reckoned that “[a] woman of her sort would have more chance over there than in this stupid country (England)” (*JO*, 83). Accordingly, the Victorian Age was also the age in which British imperialism flourished. Many Western colonizers set off to the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Brazil for better opportunities in agricultural work, or to set up a successful business. Also Arabella’s parents set off to Australia to set up a thriving pig business. Interestingly, also for women “[t]he ‘idea’ of migration as a road to self-betterment became increasingly popular” (*Darwin J.* 2009, 41). From the 1850s onwards, impoverished or distressed lower-class women could join an emigration society set up for women only, such as the “British Women’s Emigration Association” or the “Society for the Overseas Settlement of British Women” (*Swaisland 1993, 164*). Next to occupational interests, women also emigrated to the colonies in search of a husband. In fact, as Swaisland (1993) argues, “[i]n a largely male exodus, the demand from the colonies for wives was also a significant feature” (165). Accordingly, also Arabella had set her hopes on this prospect of finding a new, more suitable husband in the Australian colony because she did not want to be a so-called “redundant woman” (*Poovey, cited in Mackinnon 2012, 284*). In Australia she does, in fact, manage to seduce and marry a certain Mr. Cartlett, a wealthy hotel manager from Sydney. This way, she is able to lead a genteel life as a newly risen middle-class woman. However, she never divorced Jude and over a period of eight years she did not inform Jude of his son either, who, in fact, was born eight months after Arabella had left Jude,
though at the time she had not been aware of her pregnancy. Nevertheless, as the boy was being raised by her parents, she could keep his existence, as well as her first marriage, a secret to her second husband. Otherwise Cartlett would probably never have married a married working-class woman and mother. Clearly, to the reader, Arabella does not represent a good example of the ideal Victorian woman as she breaks several social laws. First of all, since Arabella has two legal husbands instead of one, she should be regarded as an adulteress. Secondly, Arabella does not correspond to the maternal ideal as she refuses to take care of her only son. In fact, she always distances herself from Little Father Time. The first time she leaves him in the care of her parents and the second time she drops him with Jude and Sue. Although Arabella should be regarded as a fallen woman, or as a social outcast, she is never ostracized by the community. As she is in control of, and plays around with social conventions, Arabella is perfectly able to keep up appearances and provide a clean social profile to the outside world as the angel of the house, in contrast to Tess and Sue, who fail to do so. Only the reader is aware of Arabella’s socially deviating behaviour.

However, one way or another (it is not mentioned in the novel), Cartlett must have been informed about her son and her first marriage to Jude, upon which he puts an end to the relationship. Arabella’s originally well-planned road to social success crumbles down. Fortunately for Arabella, Cartlett forgives her social disgrace, which is rather unusual in the Victorian age since, as mentioned earlier regarding the Victorian ideal, a woman’s chastity and purity were highly valued in Victorian society. When Cartlett and Arabella are reunited again, they decide to remarry properly for society’s sake, upon which Arabella asks Jude to divorce her first, and to give her a chance to enter a genteel way of living. However, since Arabella had committed adultery, Jude was capable of destroying her reputation. In fact, “[u]ntil the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1923, husbands (like Phillotson and Jude) could sue for divorce on the grounds of adultery, whereas wives [...] had to prove adultery combined with further aggravating causes, such as bigamy, cruelty, incest, sodomy, bestiality, or desertion without cause for over two years” (Holcombe, cited in Heilmann 2013, 438). Therefore, in contrast to the strong woman she is, she describes herself as “a weak woman”, who hoped that “[Jude] would not turn upon her, [...], and inform against her, and bring her to ruin now that she had a chance of
improving her circumstances and leading a genteel life”, Arabella succeeded in obtaining Jude’s permission (JO, 299). In fact, because of his love for Sue, Jude even desired to be released from his marital bonds, so he did not entertain feelings of revenge. Consequently, Arabella did not have to put much effort into convincing Jude to divorce her. Then, a couple of years later Cartlett dies, but hardly six weeks after her husband’s death, Arabella is again in ‘hunting mode’, or rather, in ‘survival mode’. She needs a new husband to support her and sets her mind on Jude once again, although he was rather unavailable as he lived together with Sue, three children and a fourth on its way. Nonetheless, she claims: “He’s more mine than hers! [...]What right has she to him, I should like to know! I’d take him from her (Sue) if I could!” (JO, 376). As a true predator, she awaits her moment, that is, when Sue decides to leave Jude and return to her first husband. Soon after Jude and Sue’s split, Arabella gets in touch with Jude and sets up a vicious trap to tie Jude to her once again. In particular, after she has stolen his money to buy a marriage license, she succeeds in driving Jude stone-drunk. Consequently, Jude and Arabella remarry without Jude being much aware of the event itself. However, as Jude falls ill only weeks after the wedding, Arabella set up a back-up plan for when Jude would die, which would be rather soon. In fact, she had set her eyes on Vilbert, the quack. Although Vilbert was, at the time, virtually twice her age, Arabella seems to be quite open about her hunting for a new husband:

Weak women must provide for a rainy day. And if my poor fellow upstairs do go off – as I suppose he will soon – it’s well to keep chances open. And I can’t pick and choose now as I could when I was younger. And one must take the old if one can’t get the young. (JO, 481)

Ironically, Jude had described Arabella as an “unsuitable woman”, however, it appears that, in contrast to Jude, Arabella is extremely suitable indeed as she always has a back-up plan to secure her ‘survival’ (JO, 86). She cunningly catches Jude, Mr Cartlett and Vilbert in her nets and shifts alternately from one man to another, depending on whomever suits her needs best at the time. She is someone who grasps opportunity with both hands and does not accept defeat. In contrast to Jude, for instance, she does not attempt to commit suicide in times of trouble. She has always been the stronger, more rational one. As mentioned earlier, although Hardy seems to put Arabella in a negative light by
depicting her as an extremely selfish, cunning, manipulative and secretive woman, in the jungle of Victorian society, these are the qualities of a strong woman who only wants to secure her survival.

Ultimately, as she was able rise on the social scale in marrying Mr. Cartlett, a successful gentleman, she can, in my opinion, even be considered as more fit than those individuals who ‘merely’ succeed to survive within their social class. Although, as mentioned earlier, Spencer (cited in Hawkins 1997) disapproves of social mobility as he argues that fit individuals are those who do not transgress their social class and keep their ambitions in check, I believe, in contrast, that there is, somehow, a social Darwinist dimension to the concept. However, I am not a social Darwinist, nor an expert on the issue of social mobility, but in my opinion, it appears only logical that those who manage to rise on the social scale and create a more comfortable financial and social situation for themselves, can be regarded as more fit than those who ‘merely’ fit into their social environment. Moreover, as noted earlier, in Victorian society “women were expected to marry into a slightly higher social class,” so Arabella has perfectly fulfilled one of her womanly duties, turning her into a prototypical female survivor (Frost 1995, 81).

Another peculiar character who features in Jude, is Vilbert, the quack-doctor. Like Arabella, he is a true survivor in the rural Victorian society of Wessex. In the novel, Hardy provides the reader with a full profile of the man:

Vilbert was an itinerant quack-doctor, well known to the rustic population, and absolutely unknown to anybody else, as he, indeed, took care to be, to avoid inconvenient investigations. Cottagers formed his only patients, and his Wessex-wide repute was among them alone. His position was humbler and his field more obscure than those of the quacks with capital and organized system of advertising. He was, in fact, a survival. (JO, 26)

Hence, although Vilbert is not a schooled nor skilled physician, and does not possess the financial means to advertise himself, he is indeed able to support a living by constructing a decent public reputation among the cottagers. Vilbert succeeds to do so by employing various strategies. First of all,
he always dresses himself quite neatly to make a convincing impression. One could even argue that he dresses himself as a dandy, “wearing an extraordinarily tall hat, a swallow-tailed coat, and a watch-chain that danced madly and threw around scintillations of sky-light as its owner swung along upon a pair of thin legs and noiseless boots” (JO, 26). Next to this spotless appearance, Vilbert possesses excellent social skills and is extremely eloquent. Additionally, as this country folk is too ignorant, naïve and superstitious to question his products or practices, he can make ends meet, although he has to walk several miles a day to do so. As Hardy noted: “[h]e was, in fact, a survival” (JO, 26). However, surviving does not bring out the best in people. He cheats and lies to steal people’s money by offering them worthless products as magical medicine. This way he sells for instance “a pot of coloured lard” as a “cure for a bad knee” (JO, 27). Moreover, he does not only fool his customers, indeed, he even uses young Jude to promote his products and obtain addresses of interested patients, in exchange for grammar books of Greek and Latin. However, Vilbert does not keep his promise, nor did he ever intend to do so from the start. Hence, honesty and loyalty are no characteristics of true survivors, of those who are able to fit into society.

Apparently, true survivors like Arabella and Vilbert are selfish, greedy, disloyal, dishonest, uncompassionate, deceiving, sneaky, secretive and manipulative. As mentioned in the theoretical part, Halliday’s definition of Social Darwinism indicates that the principle of natural selection only selects those individuals who possess “favourable inheritable variants” which are of value to society and to the progress of the human race (Halliday 1971, 398). Hence, since social Darwinists claim that the weak should be weeded out for the strong to survive (see Hawkins 1997), only strong or favourable (social) survival ‘qualities’ will be passed on to the next generation. Since these negative character traits enable individuals to secure their survival in social competition, one can deduce that, according to social Darwinists, these traits are considered equally positive and valuable. Consequently, from a social Darwinist perspective Arabella and Vilbert possess ‘valuable’ characteristics or ‘variants’ only. However, in depicting Jude and Sue as sympathetic and good-hearted individuals, who are merely the victims of their own failed ambitions, desires, hereditary flaws and of senseless circumstance, I believe that Hardy seems to question and challenge what social Darwinists consider to be ‘strong’ and
‘weak’ individuals and character traits and hence, whether survivors like Arabella and Vilbert should, in fact, procreate to the benefit of the positive development of the human race. Consequently, as Hardy does not exclusively focus his story on the glorious survivors, but on the weak, that is, on+ the failures of what is supposedly regarded as social ‘evolution’ and ‘progress’ instead, I would argue that Hardy cannot be considered a social Darwinist. The analysis of Tess of the d’Urbervilles in the next chapter will out whether this observation is valid for both of Hardy’s novels.
6.1.2 Tess of the d’Urbervilles

*Tess asleep at Stonehenge, with Angel Clare, during the final hours of her freedom* by D. A. Wehrschmidt (1891).24

*Tess of the d’Urbervilles: A pure woman faithfully presented,* is the full title of Hardy’s penultimate novel of character and environment, published in 1891, four years before the publication of *Jude.* Like *Jude the Obscure,* the novel caused a fair share of controversy in prudish Victorian England, since Hardy represented a peasant girl that turns into an adulterous murderess, as a “pure woman” (Ingham 1991). Formulated as such, this representation of the novel’s heroine resonates a rather oxymorous tension. Unsurprisingly, Hardy had struggled to find a publisher who would accept the novel even when it had already undergone some serious revisions to make it more “acceptable” to a late Victorian

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24 Wehrschmidt, D.A. *Tess asleep at Stonehenge, with Angel Clare, during the final hours of her freedom.* (1891). Illustration for the London “Graphic’s” 1891 serialization of “Tess of the d’Urbervilles”.
audience. Nonetheless, *Tess* was banned from the Victorian bookshelf for its moral indecency and its “improper explicitness in sexual relations and their consequences” (Gatrell 2013, 83). However, in Hardy’s (qtd. in Allott 1959) opinion, “[those] novels which most conduce to moral profit are likely to be among those written without a moral purpose;” a perspective which illustrates how far ahead Hardy was of his time (98).

In this chapter I will concentrate on Tess Durbeyfield, the heroine of the novel and a classic beauty, and I will also focus on one of the most prominent masculine characters of the novel, that is, Angel Clare. As is generally acknowledged, one of the most discussed themes in the novel is the social victimization of Tess which ultimately results in her death. In this chapter I will illustrate that this theme can also be discussed from a social Darwinist perspective. In particular, I will discuss the various factors which contribute to Tess’s social downfall. Hence, I will exemplify in what way Tess, is unable to ‘fit’ in, that is, to adapt to her social environment, and consequently be regarded as ‘unfit’ in Spencerian terms. Then I will also focus on how Angel functions in Victorian society, and whether his behaviour complicates his social adaptation or not.

In contrast to the chapter on *Jude the Obscure*, I will initiate the analysis with a brief introduction to the plot of the novel since the storyline of *Tess* is more complex. Tess Durbeyfield, is a sixteen-year-old peasant girl who grows up in the vales of Blackmoor, Wessex, and more particularly, in Marlott, a small country town inhabited by poor peasant families. As the eldest of many siblings she assists her parents to the best of her abilities. Therefore however, Tess was forced to renounce her ambition to pursue a career as a teacher, although it would mean her escape from physical labour and her rise on the social scale. One day, John Durbeyfield, her father, is informed by Parson Troutham that his ancestors were the mighty D’Urbervilles who used to live in Blackmoor. Hence, the name Durbeyfield is a corruption of the last name of their knightly ancestors. The trigger, then, which sets the story in motion, was when the horse of the family dies in an accident due to Tess’s inattentiveness. As the family is deprived of their only means of transport to the market, and hence of their income, Tess is obliged to visit their newly-discovered relatives, the wealthy Stoke-d’Urbervilles, and to claim kin in the hope that they would provide some charity. However, the Durbeyfields were
unaware of the fact that Alec’s father, Simon Stoke, had only added “d’Urbervilles” to his last name when he came to Blackmoor to start anew. At the mansion she meets the only son of the old and blind landlady, the young and cunning Alexander Stoke-d’Urbervilles (aka Alec), who seduces Tess and offers her a job, which she, on her mother’s advice, accepts out of guilt. However, presumably raped and, unfortunately also impregnated by Alec, Tess leaves the mansion and bears the child at home. Despite Tess’s good care, the child, appropriately called Sorrow, dies within four months. A year later, Tess is employed as a dairy maid at a Mr. Cricks’ dairy farm where she meets Alec Clare, a twenty-six-year old a handsome middle-class gentleman and parson’s son who aspires to skill himself in various trades in order to start his own farm or plantation in the colonies. They fall in love and he proposes to Tess, however, she constantly refuses him because of her disgraceful past with Alec which she keeps a secret. Eventually they do marry but on their wedding night Tess confesses all and Angel, disillusioned, leaves her and travels to Brazil alone. Upon this dreadful course of events, Tess is forced to work as a peasant girl again, hoping for Angel’s forgiveness. Unfortunately she crosses paths with Alec, who starts stalking her and proposing to her, but Tess refuses him time and time again as he utterly disgusts her. However, when unexpectedly her father dies of heart failure, the family is constrained to leave the cottage they were renting. Having no other choice, Tess finally succumbs and agrees to become Alec’s mistress since Alec promised a comfortable future for her family. Months later, Angel realizes his mistake, but his regret comes too late. After Angel had visited Tess, she murders Alec and flees with Angel but eventually she is caught and hanged for her crime.

I. Tess Durbeyfield / of the d’Urbervilles

Apparently, various factors complicate Tess’ social integration. First of all, “life's little ironies, mistimed encounters and erratic coincidences, or mishap, or, in Hardy's words ‘hap’,” control the characters’ lives and contribute to Tess’s struggle for survival (Lanone 2010, 104). In particular, Fate orchestrates the death of the family horse, or that Alec and Tess get lost in the woods which provides Alec the opportunity to presumably rape Tess, or that Angel does not find Tess’s confession-letter in time, or that Tess and Alec run into each other after Angel had abandoned Tess, or that John
Durbeyfield passes away, etc. Hence, these series of unfortunate events, constantly put Tess to the test, whether she is fit enough to adapt to the ever changing circumstances without breaking social rules.

However, when Tess realizes she is pregnant, she makes her first mistake in a social Darwinist world by not informing Alec of her pregnancy, although, as a poor, young and spouseless mother with no favourable prospects in a merciless society, she should have known better. If Tess would have accepted his offer “to pay the uttermost farthing” to win her love in marriage, she would, first of all, not have had to suffer a loss of face (*TOD*, 100, vol.1). Moreover, a cross-class marriage to Alec Stoke-d’Urbervilles, son of a deceased but wealthy and newly risen middle-class gentleman and therefore a gentleman himself, would have implied Tess’s rise on the social scale as a lady. Subsequently, Alec’s inherited fortune and Tess’s newly acquired social status as a middle-class lady, would absolve Tess from physical labour. Instead, she would be able to conform to the Victorian ideal of the angel-like domestic wife as she would take care of her husband and their child(ren). Most importantly, then, a marriage to Alec would also have guaranteed a safe and promising future for her child, mother and siblings. Of course, in my opinion, it is only normal that Tess, an innocent and free spirit, refuses to inform Alec, her rapist and the emblem of male dominance and evil mastery, of his unborn child. However, from a Social Darwinist perspective, one can disapprove of Tess’s feelings of pride and disgust, since they prevent her from having a rational perspective on the matter and from activating a true survival instinct; an instinct which would procure her adaptation to her social environment. So Tess chooses the hardest path in life, in contrast to Arabella. When, indeed, compared to *Jude the Obscure*, one can argue that Arabella is entirely Tess’s counterpart. Although both are simple peasant girls, Arabella is the stronger woman who is more rational in planning her future as she even sets up love traps to acquire more social benefits; benefits which Tess discards without remorse. In fact, Arabella would have gladly accepted Alec’s marriage proposal, as to her, money and status are more valuable than love and passion. Consequently, one can also argue that Tess’s attitude is, in some respects, similar to Sue’s as they both share the same pride and also a certain disgust towards love-traps. However they do differ as well. Tess had always “wished to walk uprightly” but due to some bad choices she had unintentionally turned herself into society’s enemy (*TOD*, 39, vol.1). Sue on the
other hand, had forcefully claimed that she did not want to live a respectable life (cfr. *JO*, 268), so her rebellion was more intentional, until the death of her children.

Then, to return to Tess’s pregnancy, as Tess did not conform to the ruling social codes being a young, spouseless and working mother, Tess was, as Hardy puts it, branded as a “social warning” by the community (*TOD*, 121, vol.1). During her pregnancy, Tess avoided church visits and eventually took walks only after dark, as she could not support the villagers’ hurtful gossip about her. Some had even composed a ballad in which they sung “[...] about the maid who went to the merry green wood and came back a changed state”, as to warn young girls not to seek the same fate as Tess (*TOD*, 120, vol.1). However, raped, “[Tess] had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly” (*my emphasis*, *TOD*, 112, vol.1). In his (auto)biography, Thomas Hardy wrote quite fittingly: “That which, is socially a great tragedy, may be in Nature no alarming circumstance” (Hardy 1962, 218). Nature follows its course, regardless of social codes and conventions, so Tess became pregnant with Sorrow, an illegitimate child and hence, an “offence against society” (*TOD*, 121, vol.1). Clearly, there is a tension between social and Natural laws, and this tension contributes to Tess’s fatal struggle. Although Tess had been the victim of sexual assault, there was no social excuse for Tess’s sinful though unintentional social offence. As Johnson (1979) observes: “[t]here [was] no in-between; [...] women, from this point of view, belong[ed] either on a pedestal or in a sty” (23). Hence, there seems to be no stage in between prostitute or domestic angel (Johnson 1979). Victorians clearly reasoned in terms of black and white. In fact, “most Victorians rejected such notions as degrees of fallenness or a hierarchy of fallen behaviors, and, by association, the possibility for redemption and social reintegration” (Johnson, cited in Logan 1998, 7). So, the birth of Sorrow, results in Tess’s fall from grace and in her inability to live up to the angelic ideal of the virtuous Victorian woman. Consequently, from a social Darwinist perspective, Tess is regarded as a weak and unfit social animal.

Furthermore, Tess also refused to baptize Sorrow as she had lost her faith in God’s good will after being raped by Alec. Since religion still played an important role in Victorian social and political life despite unsettling scientific discoveries, Tess’s refusal to introduce her child to the Christian faith
was deemed another offence against God and society. Only when the health of her child suddenly aggravated due to a severe illness, Tess decided to baptize Sorrow. Despite her loss of faith, Tess was well aware of the fact that the Holy Scriptures prescribed how non-baptized babies would be forever subjected to the torments of Hell. As her father forbade Tess to call on the local parson to perform the deed, she decided to baptize the child herself with her siblings as witnesses. To Victorian readers Tess’s improvised performance of the Holy Sacrament of Baptism was considered sacrilegious, but it was Tess’s last resort to save her child’s poor soul (Morgan 1988). However, as Morgan (1988) correctly observes, Hardy seems to temper social disapproval by presenting the event as witnessed by young, innocent children. In doing so, Tess is presented to the reader as an innocent, good-hearted and loving mother who wishes to redeem her child (Morgan 1988). Consequently, one can deduce that Hardy does not represent Tess as sinful and therefore as socially unfit, but rather as a strong maternal figure, to instigate the reader’s sympathy for her as his fallen heroine.

Also poverty is an important factor that contributes to Tess’s struggle for survival. The poverty of the Durbeyfields and of other rural families, can be ascribed to the changing socio-economic climate, as a result of the industrial revolution. This general rural poverty is often referred to as ‘the ache of modernism’ (Zehn, 2010). Also Tess and her family are “victims of [the] invasion of modern Civilization” as “[this] industrial civilization is replacing the agricultural civilization, by undermining the traditional farming and the rural culture” (Zehn 2009, 31-33). Consequently, as Zehn (2010) puts it, “[t]he life threatened by poverty forces the protagonist [Tess] to face a great risk in order to earn a living” (61). In fact, Tess takes more than one risk, since more than once, the poverty of her family leaves her no choice. First of all, although Tess, like a true social Darwinist, was fiercely opposed to the idea of outside intervention through charity of strangers she does, nonetheless, depart for the Stoke-d’Urbervilles to claim kin. Especially her siblings, brainwashed by their mother’s follies, had convinced her to do so, as they had wailed as follows upon her initial refusal: “Tess won’t go-o-o and be made a la-a-dy of! – no, she says she wo-o-on’t! [...] And we shan’t have a nice new horse, and lots o’golden money to buy fairlings!” (TOD, 56, vol.1). Consequently, out of compassion and also out of guilt for the loss of the family horse, Tess decided to abandon her pride and agree to the task.
Shortly after her meeting with Alec, Tess was forced to accept Alec’s offer to manage the poultry-farm of his mother where she cannot avoid working in Alec’s proximity. Consequently, Tess’s beauty awakens Alec’s lust which ultimately drives him to rape Tess and trigger, this way, her social downfall. Hence, the loss of her virginity was the price Tess had to pay for supporting her poor family. Secondly, belonging to the class of lifeholders, “whose cottages and gardens were leased by the lord of their manor for three generations”, the family was left homeless when John Durbeyfield, already a third-generation lifeholder, passes away (Zehn 2010, 61). Consequently, Tess is involuntarily driven into Alec’s arms again to the benefit of her family (Zehn 2010). So one can argue that, from a social Darwinist perspective, Darwin’s principle of group selection can be applied to Tess’s altruistic behaviour. Throughout the novel, Tess proves to be altruistic and therefore weak as she sacrifices herself several times to the benefit of the group, that is, of her family.

If one is born in a poverty-stricken family this is not a matter of choice, it is destiny. However, when having the luxury of choice, from a social Darwinist perspective, Tess does, in fact, make some unwise choices considering her circumstances. As Le Gallienne (qtd. in Maier, 2013) argued: “[Tess] is flawed with that lack of will, that fatal indecision at great moments”(123). Apart from the fact that she kept Sorrow a secret to Alec, Tess also confesses secrets which actually should have remained hidden to the benefit of her social welfare. In particular, one of her gravest mistakes was to confess to Angel on her wedding night the loss of her maidenhood to Alec. Hence, despite her mother’s severe warning (see the following quotation), Tess had chosen to ignore her mother’s advice on whether or not to inform Angel about her disgraceful past:

But with respect to your question, Tess, I say between ourselves, quite private but very strong, that on no account do you say a word of your bygone trouble to him. I did not tell everything to your father, he being so proud on account of his respectability, which perhaps, your intended (Angel) is the same. Many women – some of the Highest in the Land – have had a trouble in their time; and why should you trumpet yours when others don’t
trumpet theirs? No girl would be such a fool, especially as it is so long ago, and not your own fault at all. I shall answer the same if you ask me fifty times. (TOD, 3, vol.2)

Hence, it seems only logical that those women who keep their partners in the dark about their “bygone troubles”, like Tess’s mother, are strong women who are fully in charge of their social survival. Moreover, in fiercely supporting her daughter’s marriage, Tess’s mother wanted to avoid that Tess would be branded a so-called “redundant woman”, as was the case for many unmarried, working women at the time (Poovey, cited in Mackinnon 2012, 284). Nonetheless, although Tess is afraid of Angel’s reaction, she chooses to be honest with him and confess her past despite her mother’s advice. Unsurprisingly, Angel’s Victorian ideals on female chastity take the upper hand, and from her confession onwards, he regards Tess as an ‘impure woman’ who does not deserve his forgiveness nor his love, at least, not as long as Alec stands between them. Consequently, Tess loses her only chance of social regeneration and social advancement. Hence, as Hazen (cited in Zehn 2007) notes: “Tess is the example of the destructive effect of society’s pressures and conventions upon a naturally pure and unstained country girl”(36). Although honesty is generally regarded as a virtue, Hardy appears to inform the reader that honest and loyal individuals do not have any claim whatsoever on social benefits. Even more so, honesty is foolish if it obstructs favourable prospects. In comparison, Arabella (Jude the Obscure) does remain silent about her first marriage and her son, which enables her to marry a gentleman. If Tess, like Arabella, had acted upon her mother’s advice, she would have lived a comfortable life as a middle-class landlady, being married to the man of her dreams. So it appears that, from a social Darwinist perspective at least, dishonesty and secrecy are important character traits which help individuals to adapt to their social environment. Moreover, since social adaptation is one of the most important markers of social fitness, consequently, dishonesty appears to be a character trait of socially fit survivors only (like Arabella and Vilbert). Nevertheless, being the sensitive woman Tess is, she would probably have been unhappy if she had continued to carry a dark secret, which makes it only a matter of time before she would have confessed anyway. Naturally, these thoughts are speculation on my part. Still, it appears that Tess is constantly fighting an inner struggle of which the outcome is never a positive one because neither of her choices seem to secure happiness. On the one
hand she can choose those options which are morally and socially correct but which engender her unhappiness, while on the other hand, she can choose to pursue happiness but then she will inevitably bring the wrath of society upon her.

Despite a series of bad decisions and despite her low parentage, Tess is presented as an intelligent woman. Although Tess is not educated in for instance Greek philosophy and mythology like Angel, Hardy describes Tess as gifted with a “naturally bright intelligence”(TOD, 2, vol.2). Also by emphasizing Tess’s mother’s poor intellectual qualities, Hardy demonstrates that Tess is of a superior intellect compared to her mother:

Between the mother, with her fast-perishing lumber of superstitions, folk-lore, dialect, and orally transmitted ballads, and the daughter, 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 Victorian ages were juxtaposed. (TOD, 24, vol.1)

Additionally, Tess’s superior intellect is exemplified as she, barely sixteen of age, observes how “her mother’s intelligence was that of a happy child”, and she even includes her as “an additional one” (TOD, 42, vol.1). Tess’s mother’s poor intellectual capacities are clearly demonstrated by means of a malapropism when she utters “Oliver Grumble” while referring to “Oliver Cromwell” (TOD, 21, vol.1). Thus, Joan Durbeyfield displays her lack of knowledge of prominent British historical figures. However, as demonstrated also in Jude the Obscure, intelligence is not the only required characteristic to survive in Victorian society. In fact, in observing Jude, Sue and Tess’s fate, one can question Spencer’s criterion of intelligence as a marker of social fitness. Apparently, intelligent low-class individuals who would benefit the positive development of the human race are not valued in Victorian. Only those individuals who are wealthy or manage to adapt, survive. Hence, the most effective survival strategies seem to require social adaptation and/or wealth.
Furthermore, similar to Jude, another important cause of Tess’s inability to adapt to her social environment is related to her ancestral ties. Reading *Tess*, it seems that Thomas Hardy was obsessed with heredity. As mentioned before, regarding the chapter on *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy was interested in the theory of ‘germ-plasm’ (Ingham 1991, xxv). In *Tess*, Hardy continually reminds the reader of Tess’s historic lineage, almost to the reader’s irritation, to emphasize how the “d’Urbervilles blood is one more ‘cause’ of Tess’s actions”; actions which render her unfit as they obstruct her adaptation to the environment (Ingham 1991, xxv). First of all, already before Tess Durbeyfield is introduced to the reader, Hardy emphasizes the failed nature of Tess’s ancestors. In particular, upon asking “where do we d’Urbervilles live?”, John Durbeyfield is informed: “You don’t live anywhere. You are extinct – as a county family” (*TOD*, 5, vol.1). Accordingly, John Durbeyfield admits: “’tis true, that my family had seen better days afore they came to Blackmoor” (*TOD*, 5, vol.1). Consequently, in Spencerian terms, it appears that Tess’s ancestors were not able to adapt to the new environment of Blackmoor. 25 Peculiarly, Hardy even inserts the word “extinct” which is typically used by Darwin and other evolutionary scholars to indicate a race that seizes to exist. Hence, this incapacity of adaptation runs through the d’Urbervilles blood. Furthermore, a second important indication of Tess’s hereditary flaws relates to the legend of the d’Urbervilles coach. According to this legend, “[o]ne of the family is said to have abducted some beautiful woman, who tried to escape from the coach in which he was carrying her off, and in the struggle he killed her – or she killed him [...]” (*TOD*, 217, vol.2). Hence, Tess re-enacts the legend when she murders Alec, though this time the act does not take place in a coach but in the master bedroom (Gose 1963). So by performing this deed, it appears that Tess is an exact replica of one of her ancestors. Hardy even literally writes how “the sins of fathers [are visited] upon the children”(*TOD*, 94, vol.1). Additionally, Ingham (1991) affirms that, “Tess, in all her struggles and despite her purity of aims, impulses and will, is only able to act out a part determined by heredity: it is not that she has a narrow margin of choice but no choice at all” (Ingham 1991, xxvi). Hence, according to Ingham (1991), Tess’s cruel actions are determined by her historic lineage only. However, as demonstrated earlier in the analysis, other factors also complicate her survival in

25 As Spencer (cited in Hawkins 1997) argued: “those families and races which failed to adapt to this pressure, were liable to extinction” (*my emphasis*, 85).
Victorian society and which are not always the result of arbitrary choices. Nonetheless, as an adulterous murderess, Tess has inevitably broken the law. Consequently, in her rebellious action of killing Alec, her superior both in class and sex, Tess has become a danger to a Victorian patriarchal society; a danger that should be eliminated. Additionally Tess is arrested at Stonehenge where she had been sleeping on the altar, which is no coincidence according Butler (1978):

As a place of sacrifice [Stonehenge] determines a special sort of attitude that we must take towards Tess: she is the allegorical victim, the doomed tragic figure, the innocent lamb that must bleed for the supposed good of mankind, the useless sacrifice. [...] it is here that society – in the shape of sixteen policeman, in the eyes of which Tess is hopelessly impure, an adulteress, and a murderess, steps in and claims its revenge. (106)

Hardy does not portray Tess as a vicious character who deserves her punishment. Instead, he instigates the reader’s sympathy for Tess in depicting her as the victim of social limitations, Fate, love, hereditary flaws, pride, honesty and her own poor decisions on crucial moments. So both innate or internal and external factors contribute to Tess’s tragedy. Tess, like Jude, Sue and Angel, exemplifies the clash between natural feelings, desires and ambitions on the one hand, and social codes, conventions, prejudices and limitations on the other hand. Unfortunately for Tess, to society, she is only a poor nobody who has tempted and broken society’s rules in various ways. Therefore she must be eliminated to preserve society’s purity. So Stonehenge symbolically represents society’s revenge as the climax to Tess’s sinful life (Butler 1978). Nonetheless, Tess is an extremely courageous, bright, independent, loyal, dutiful and strong woman, and as Angel describes her: “an exceedingly novel, fresh, and interesting specimen of womankind” (TOD, 78, vol.1). Hence, from a purely Darwinist perspective, Tess should perfectly be able to survive, if it were not for society’s limitations. But from a Social Darwinist perspective, she is considered unfit to survive in the jungle of what is Victorian Society and of which her death is the ultimate proof. Consequently, one can conclude that Hardy wanted to demonstrate how the social environment can destroy a “pure woman”, and this is ultimately a pessimistic view on society.
II. Angel Clare

Angel was a bright young gentleman, however, as mentioned earlier in relation to Jude, Sue and Tess, his well-educated mind did not prevent him from making a series of unwise choices. As will be explained below, it appears that Angel could not manage to maintain an equilibrium between his desires and his social responsibilities. Consequently he alienated himself from his own social class or “sphere” and is hereby gradually turned into a socially unfit individual.

First of all, unlike his father and his brothers, Jude refused to pursue a career as a clergyman, although it would have been a proper and logical step for a middle-class gentleman. In fact, “as late as the 1890s, 40 percent of all clergymen were the sons of clergy” (Mitchell 1996, 142). Instead, Angel desired to break free from a life of study to set up a successful agricultural business in Brazil where he aspired to become “a rich and prosperous dairyman, landowner, agriculturalist, and breeder of cattle” (TOD, 67, vol.1). This is not an entirely unusual prospective as many British colonizers departed for the colonies to set up a thriving agricultural business. Still, since Angel lived rather comfortably in a middle-class family that could easily afford interesting job opportunities appropriate for a gentleman, there was actually no need for Angel to lower himself to farming. Also, to Tess “at times, [...] it did seem unaccountable [...] that a decidedly bookish, musical, thinking young man should have chosen deliberately to be a farmer, and not a clergyman, like his father and brothers” (TOD, 67, vol.1). Also, since Angel refused to follow in his father and brothers’ footsteps, there was no need for him to educate himself at Cambridge University. Hence, Angel’s attitude is in sharp contrast to Jude’s. Whereas Jude’s only wish was to enter university, Angel had no university ambition at all.

Already at the very start of the novel, Hardy portrays Angel’s behaviour as deviating from that of his brothers, and by the same token, of what is regarded as proper behaviour for a gentleman. In particular, one day, Angel and his brothers passed a group of dancing peasant girls on their way home. Whereas Angel joined the girls in dance, his brothers utterly disapproved of Angel’s behaviour and refused his offer to join him as follows: “No-no; nonsense! [...] Dancing in public with a troop of
country hoydens – suppose we should be seen!” (*TOD*, 15, vol.1). Hence, the brother’s derogatory description of peasant girls as “a troop of country hoydens” clearly reinforces the existing social boundary between the working- and middle-classes and it also demonstrates that Angel, like Sue, is not averse to challenging social boundaries. Clearly, this incident confirms that it was morally and socially unacceptable for a middle-class gentleman to publicly seek innocent pleasure with peasant girls. Consequently, it appears that Angel’s actions are directed by his “appetite for joy” rather than by his rational and educated mind (*TOD*, 253, vol.1).

At the dairy farm of Mr. Crick, Angel learnt various skills to be able to perform the trade of a dairyman. Although he was initially, as the narrator affirms, “out of his class” and full of prejudice towards dairy folk, after a few days Angel increasingly appreciated and even sought the company of his fellow men (*TOD*, 167, vol.1). Consequently, as Hardy writes, “[Angel] began to evince considerable *indifference to social forms* and observances” and “[t]he material *distinctions of rank and wealth* he increasingly despised” (*my emphasis*, *TOD*, 155, vol.1). Clearly, his stay at the dairy farm had an enormous effect on Angel’s perspective on class, social codes and on life in general. Angel even admitted that “[Dairyman Crick’s household’s ] position was perhaps the happiest of all positions in the social scale, being above the line at which neediness ends, and below the line at which the conveniences begin to cramp natural feeling” (*TOD*, 172, vol.1). Hence, in his adaptation to the lower-class way of life, Angel increasingly valued happiness more than socially respectable behaviour. Consequently, dairyman Crick even argued that “Mr Clare [was] one of the most rebellest rozums [he] ever knowed – not a bit like the rest of his family” (*TOD*, 170, vol.1). Speaking of which, his family also noticed Angel’s ‘make-over’ when he returned home after a few months. According to his brothers “the manner of the scholar had nearly disappeared”, and they also feared that Angel would lose his “moral ideals” and “intellectual grasp” if he stayed at the dairy farm any longer (*TOD*, 212-214, vol.1). Consequently, as intellect and morality were highly valued by his brothers, they began to regard Angel as a weak individual who did not fit into a middle-class family anymore. Clearly, Angel

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26 According to the OED Online (b), a “hoyden, n. and adj” is “a rude, or ill-bred girl (or woman); a boisterous noisy girl, a romp”.
was emancipating from his social environment as he was diverging from his family and also from the habits and perspectives proper to his social class. Angel regarded his own development as a positive one, whereas his brothers regarded his “growing social ineptness” as a negative evolution (TOD, 213, vol.1). Being a middle-class gentleman in nature, but a lower-class peasant in ambition, Angel does not fit in either social classes, which turns him into a socially inept individual, and hence, into a social exception. Interestingly, Hardy uses the word combination “social ineptness”, which can be directly linked to Spencer’s social Darwinist perspective. As mentioned earlier, according to Spencer (cited in Hawkins 1997), those who cannot adapt to or accept the limitations of their social environment, are weak and should be eliminated by natural selection. Hence, especially those individuals like Angel who voluntarily lower their social position as they are not pleased with their current social condition, can be considered as extremely weak individuals.

Then, Angel’s parents had always wished for their son to marry a lady of his own rank and they had set their mind on Mercy Chant in particular. She was the daughter of his parents’ best friends and a respectable, bright and devoted middle-class lady who taught at the local public school. If Angel had acted upon his parents’ wish, he would have married into a socially respectable family, instead of marrying a poor lower-class peasant girl who would bring scandal, shame and sadness over him and his family. So, refusing Mercy Chant is Angel’s second grave mistake from a social Darwinist perspective.

At the dairy farm, then, “Fate or Providence had thrown a woman in his way” and Angel had greedily accepted this poisonous gift of Fate, which was his third and worst mistake in a social Darwinist eye (TOD, 219, vol.1). When Angel fell in love with Tess Durbeyfield, he signed his own social downfall. However blinded by her beauty, Angel regarded Tess as “the visionary essence of woman – a whole sex condensed into one typical form”, and he idealized her as a divinity, calling her Artemis and Demeter (TOD, all quotes on 175, vol.1). Initially, his parents and his brothers were opposed to Angel’s desire to marry Tess. Nonetheless, Angel convinced them that Tess would be able to overcome her “social shortcomings” as he would educate and train her so she would behave like a proper middle-class Lady (TOD, 220, vol.1). Moreover, once he was informed about Tess’s knightly
ancestral lineage, he planned to play this “grand card” to convince his parents even more that Tess was, indeed, a lady in nature, and therefore also worthy of his love and of a middle-class position (TOD, 6, vol.2). However, as Hardy writes: “[p]erhaps Tess’s lineage had more value for himself than for anybody in the world beside. [...] It was a pretty lover’s dream, if no more” (TOD, 28, vol.2). In fact, the novel clearly indicates that in the Victorian age, ancestral name and fame were of no value anymore compared to the Middle Ages.27 Instead, in the Victorian age, income and occupation determined an individual’s social position:

[p]artial family fortunes had changed since the time of the d’Urbervilles”, but “the inhumanity of the relationship between classes had not. Tess is no princess in rags [...] she is a typical village girl of her generation [...]. (Williams 2005, 100)

Hence, again, Angel’s “appetite for joy” prevents him from thinking rationally and from understanding what is truly important, namely that by lowering himself on the social scale through this cross-class marriage he would lose his social respectability (TOD, 253, vol.1). Only sporadically it seems that, “[d]espite his heterodoxy, faults and weaknesses, Clare was a man with a conscience” (TOD, 207, vol.1). That is, at times Angel seemed to be aware of social conventions and of the possible consequences of this cross-class marriage, for instance, when he asked himself:

[...] ought he to marry her? Dared he to marry her? What would his mother and brothers say? What would he himself say a couple of years after the event? (TOD, 209, vol.1)

But soon enough, he discarded these thoughts and returned to his fantasy world, ruled by love and happiness.

Then, when on their wedding night, Tess confessed her shameful past with Alec and the birth of Sorrow to her new husband, Angel’s idealized image of Tess shattered completely. Victorian England was a man’s world in which women became the property of the man who had deprived them of their virginity. Hence,

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27 “Pedigree, ancestral skeletons, monumental record, the d’Urberville lineaments, did not help Tess in her life’s battle [...] So much for Norman blood unaided by Victorian lucre” (TOD, 16, vol.1).
[t]he transcendent importance of preserving virginity as the emblem of unsullied property meant, as Hardy clearly knew, that women were divided into two basic groups, determined not by the modern emphasis upon whether intercourse was consensual or not but by whether anatomical invasion had occurred. (Williams 2013, 388)

So to Angel, whether Tess had been the guilty party or not, did not matter, as he argued: “O Tess, forgiveness does not apply to the case! You were one person; now you are another” (TOD, 52, vol. 2). Apparently, Tess was not the pure woman he had imagined her to be, and as long as Alec, her “husband in nature”, was alive, his principles forbade him to live by her side (TOD, 71, vol.2). Tess was simply not his property to keep. Hence, it seems that, although Angel in his love for Tess, had left behind many of his former social and moral principles, Angel’s Victorian judgement on sexually deviating behaviour and especially on chastity, was still intact. As Angel had, indeed, renounced “all ambition to win a wife with social standing, with fortune, with knowledge of the world, [like Mercy Chant]” he still valued maidenhood as he wanted a wife with “rustic innocence” and “pink cheeks” (TOD, 64, vol.2).

Consequently, Angel finally realized that, echoing Jude after his first marriage, “he had utterly wrecked his career by this marriage, [a thought] which had not been among his early thoughts after the disclosure” (TOD, 99, vol. 2). As Hardy continues, although “[Angel] cared very little about his career; [...] he had wished to make it at least a respectable one on account of his parents and brothers” (TOD, 99, vol.2). Hence, Angel admits his foolish decision of proposing to a lower-class woman, calling himself a “dupe and a failure” (TOD, 100, vol.2). Then, when he left Tess, Angel made a first step towards his re-integration into his own social class, which is a good thing, at least from a social Darwinist perspective. However he still cherished lower-class ambitions. With high hopes Angel departed for Brazil. Unfortunately, due to illness, Angel was unable to achieve his goal, which made him understand that also this agricultural dream was merely a fantasy. However, Angel was certainly not the only one. As Hooker (2011) noted:
[...] Hardy drew upon the agricultural colonization movement sponsored by the Brazilian government, [which was] an opportunity, according to the English press, of which many of Angel’s non-fictional countrymen and women availed themselves, with results often far more catastrophic than his fictionalized one. (n.p.)

So, it seems that Angel had failed in realizing two of his most ambitious but inappropriate fantasies for a gentleman of his social standing. From a social Darwinist perspective then, Angel had come at a point in his life where he could have improved his social fitness by regaining his social respectability. In particular, Angel could have re-entered into his social class by divorcing Tess to marry Mercy. This way, he could have erased his disgraceful past to start anew. In fact, by marrying Mercy, he would, literally, have received society’s ‘mercy’ for his socially unacceptable behaviour. So the choice to regain face was entirely in Angel’s own hands. Unfortunately, Angel’s experiences had not changed his perspectives on life as he was still not interested in restoring his reputation. Instead, from a social Darwinist perspective, Angel deviated from his social class again as he was willing to forgive Tess and to live with her as husband and wife. When, upon Angel’s return, Tess stabbed Alec to death, Angel was technically married to an adulterous murderess. However, amazed about her devotion to him, Angel fled with her to Stonehenge without him realizing that his social reputation and also that of his family was beyond repair.

In the end, Angel made a final mistake as he, out of love for Tess, promised her to marry her younger sister, Liza-Lu. Hence, although this is only implied in the final scene as Angel and Liza-Lu hold hands, Angel will most probably be stuck to the poor Durbeyfield family in a loveless marriage and with no positive prospects whatsoever. Moreover, in marrying Tess’s sister, Angel will inevitably break the law, since before 1907 it was strictly prohibited to marry the sister of your deceased wife (Anderson 1982). In fact, “until 1907, marriage between in-laws was treated as incest by the law” (Anderson cited in Heilmann 2013, 437). Consequently, as Heilmann (2013) puts it: “[...] Hardy does not capitulate to conventional morals (Angel getting his ‘pure’ wife), but rather launches a renewed assault on the moral social and legal fabric of Victorian marriage” (437). As father Lawrence had predicted: “violent delights have violent ends” (TOD, 33, vol.2). Angel’s extremely idealized love for
Tess had ultimately wrecked Angel’s life. So *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* is not only a story about a poor cottage girl who becomes the victim of society’s laws and conventions. In fact, *Tess* also narrates the story of a bright and promising young middle-class gentleman who turns himself into a socially unfit individual by making socially inappropriate choices. Moreover, like Jude and Sue, Angel can also be regarded as a forerunner of a less rigid social order as he stepped out of his social class in his quest for happiness. However, as mentioned earlier in relation to *Jude the Obscure*, Victorian society was not ready yet for such social experiments.

### 7. Conclusion

The aim of my investigation was to apply the non-literary theory of Social Darwinism to two of Hardy’s novels to determine to what extent Thomas Hardy can be considered a social Darwinist. I was aware of the fact that social Darwinism is not usually applied to literature, therefore it was a challenge to identify social Darwinist aspects in Hardy’s novels. My analysis, then, has proven that, although one can apply social Darwinist theories to *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, it appears that this identification of Social Darwinist aspects does not necessarily imply that Hardy was, in fact, a social Darwinist. As will be explained later on in this conclusion, I found that, instead, his novels seem to convey a certain disapproval and criticism towards social Darwinist ideas.

As to sum up the Social Darwinist aspects in the novels I discussed, it appears that especially Spencer’s theory has proven to be most fitting, next to Darwin’s evolutionary theories of selfish competition and altruistic behaviour, and Sumner’s (Hofstadter, in Camfield 2005) Calvinistic perspective towards social predestination, but the latter two theories to a lesser extent. Spencer’s ‘adaptation to the social environment’- theory, related to the preservation of the ‘equilibrium between social limitations and individual desires’ to determine an individual’s social fitness, was of major importance and could be illustrated by different characters in various ways, since many characters transgress social boundaries in their quest for happiness (Hawkins, 1997). Hardy also included characters who engage in selfish competition (Arabella and Vilbert), and there are those who sacrifice
their happiness or even their life, to help their family survive (Tess and Little Father Time). The presence of selfish and altruistic behaviour in both novels supports Hardy’s conviction that, “[t]here is an altruism and coalescence between cells (organisms) as well as an antagonism” (Hardy 1930, 25).

Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier in this conclusion, despite the fact that the novels can be analyzed and understood from a social Darwinist perspective, in my opinion, Hardy is no social Darwinist as his novels do not seem to convey the same cold-hearted and merciless attitude of true social Darwinists towards the weak individuals in society. According to Spencer, Darwin, and Sumner, the weak should be weeded out for the strong to survive and they should not procreate because their offspring would not benefit the progressive evolution of the human race (Hawkins, 1997). Instead, the survival of the weak, would only encourage a degeneration of the human species (Hawkins, 1997). Hardy on the other hand, depicts his protagonists (Jude, Sue, Tess and Angel), the ‘weak ones’ from a social Darwinist perspective, as strong, beautiful, independent, loyal, loving, and intelligent individuals or, in other words, as excellent specimens of humankind. In portraying his protagonists as such, Hardy, in fact, challenges the social Darwinist perspective of what social Darwinists consider to be ‘weak or ‘strong’ individuals. In particular, Jude, Sue, Tess, and Angel are not weak, they are perfectly competent human beings with natural desires and ambitions. Moreover, they want to take the human race to the next level as they represent a new, more progressive social species that promotes more flexible social codes, the disappearance of social prejudice and a less rigid class system to increase equal opportunities and all this, to enhance personal happiness. Consequently, the novels seem to reflect, in my opinion, Hardy’s socialist and feminist attitude.

Survivors like Arabella and Vilbert, then, are represented as selfish, unfeeling individuals whose rational mind prevails over sentiment. Although Arabella and Vilbert both pursue happiness in life, like Tess, Sue, Jude and Angel, it is not the same kind of happiness they aspire to realize. Instead Arabella and Vilbert pursue social succes, which does not imply any emotional fulfillment. Furthermore, if Hardy would have been a true social Darwinist, then he would have focused exclusively on Arabella and Vilbert’s road to success as they are the ultimate social survivors.
However, it would have been hard for the readers to feel sympathy towards such cold and unsympathetic characters. Additionally, he would have portrayed Tess, Jude, Sue and Angel as utterly miserable and uninteresting characters which simply merit their unhappy fates. However, since Hardy’s novels focus on the weak but sympathetic characters, in my opinion, Hardy cannot be regarded a Social Darwinist. In fact, in representing Vilbert and Arabella as such, one can argue that Hardy seems to question whether these two characters, actually represent the positive development of the human race.

Then, although the application of social Darwinist ideas does not imply that Hardy was, in fact, a social Darwinist, a social Darwinist perspective did help to create a better understanding of what caused the characters’ downfall or success. The Victorian society can be considered a Darwinian jungle in which people strive to survive. On a basic level, people need a roof above their heads, nutrition and care, but physical survival does not secure social survival. On a higher level, people also need to behave properly in their social environment otherwise society will take its revenge and individuals will be referred to the margins of society as social outcasts or punished by death, like Tess. However, Hardy illustrates the difficulties of the social acceptance of, and adaptation to, the limits of one’s social class and the general social codes valid across classes, such as marriage-codes. Consequently, one of the main causes of the characters’ struggle is the clash between their natural goodness or their idealism in pursuing impossible ambitions, desires, or romantic fantasies on the one hand, and societal pressure on the other hand. As Jude was born in a low-class family he could only advance socially within the boundaries of his class by learning a trade. A university education was simply not an option. Angel on the other hand, a middle-class gentleman, could have pursued a successful career as a preacher, a teacher or a scholar, but not as a farmer. Sue, then, rejected the institution of marriage and as a new, modern woman, she fought for free and passionate love, until the death of her children convinced her to conform to social conventions and marry a “proper” husband. Also Tess had unintentionally broken social laws and after Angel had punished her severely for it, society took revenge for her passionate murder of Alec.
Then, as illustrated in the analysis, Hardy created rebellious, norm-breaking characters, stuck in unhappy marriages and deprived from their ambitions and desires which mirror Hardy in his own failed ambitions and marriage troubles. In *Tess* and *Jude*, it is suggested that happiness can only be realized out of wedlock. Sue and Jude, for instance, were happy when they lived together unmarried. However, they were scorned by the community for their immoral relationship and their illegitimate children. Also Tess and Angel never enjoyed a happy marriage and neither did Arabella and Cartlett. Although the latter couple was married and provided a socially respectable profile, it was, however, a loveless, business-like marriage. Hence it appears that in Hardy’s novels, love, the institution of marriage and social respectability are not compatible, which is a terribly pessimistic view on society and on life in general. However, as mentioned before, Hardy (Hardy 1930, 190) claimed that he was no pessimist, but an evolutionary meliorist instead:

This *meliorism* is a hope, at least, that human action can make the circumstances of life and life itself better in ethical quality and in happiness than they have been. His adjective *evolutionary* means that improvement may take an extremely long time, proceeding in minute stages over thousand years, in process of adaptation like those of biological evolution. (Bailey 1963, 570)

One may derive from *Tess* and *Jude* that Hardy hoped for a *better* world; a world without social victims such as Jude, Sue, Tess and Angel, who were deprived of their happiness by social restrictions. Consequently, one can argue that his novels illustrate Hardy’s strife for a flexibility of social laws, gender equality and consequently, for a more positive response between an individual’s desires and social circumstances.
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