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Barad, Dilipsinh P., 2005, “*Women in the Novels of Thomas Hardy : A Critical Study*”, thesis PhD, Saurashtra University

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**WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF
THOMAS HARDY: A CRITICAL STUDY**

**A
DISSERTATION
TO BE SUBMITTED TO
SAURASHTRA UNIVERSITY,
RAJKOT
FOR THE AWARD OF
*DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
ENGLISH***

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2005

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Date: 1st January, 2003

Thomas Hardy

2nd June, 1840 – 11th January, 1928



Thomas Hardy

Statement Under Uni. O. Ph.D. 7

I hereby declare that the work embodied in my theses entitled as **“Women in the Novels of Thomas Hardy: A Critical study”**, prepared for Ph.D. degree has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University on any previous occasion.

And to the best of my knowledge, no work has been reported on the above subject.

And the work presented in this thesis is original and whenever references have been made to the work of others, they have been clearly indicated as such and the source of information is included in the bibliography.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Thomas Hardy's Wessex novels have been a long-time love of mine. This research work began as an exploration. It was undertaken not, at first, because I had something I was curious to say, but rather because there was something I wished to find out. Briefly, I wanted to know what made Hardy *Hardy*. I was convinced that the answer could be found in his portrayal of women characters. Research works on Hardy, like diggers for treasure in the Thames mud may be numerous, but the treasure is not yet exhausted. I hope that I have been able to recover a little more of it.

It is a fascinating piece of investigating that I have before me. Hardy's fiction is really interesting. The unforgettable environment of Wessex, fascinating stories with inventive power of story-telling, play of human emotions & passions, aspirations, hopes and desires, 'beautiful and ineffectual angels, beating in the void' their 'luminous wings in vain', and above all the evil forces contriving against Mother Natures' children and play sport with them 'as flies to wanton boys' to kill them and their aspirations for 'mere sport' are the salient features of Hardy's fictional world.

And hence the purpose of this research is to categorically study every individual woman portrayed by Hardy in his fourteen Wessex Novels. Though it took more than what I had initially thought of in completing this dissertation, yet the present work, as it is, could be a reality because of generous support, guidance and co-operation of quite a few people around me. It is my moral duty to express my sense of sincere gratitude to all of them.

The first and foremost, I am extremely grateful to Dr. Jaydipsinhji Dodiya, Associate Professor, Department of English and CLS, Saurashtra University, Rajkot, without his kind co-operation, inspiration and esteemed guidance, this research work would have

remained a dream. He is in real sense, a friend, philosopher and guide to me. His way of dealing with his research students is unique one. He never gets tired of answering questions. During the period of my research work, I have experienced that he is a man of insatiable nobility and his 'never say No attitude' is rarity among the men of letters. I am extremely thankful to him for his motivation, when I most needed it. Even during the period of his sabbatical leave, when he was extensively busy with his books, which are to be published soon, he spared time for me. Words are inadequate to express my gratitude towards him.

Equally thankful I am to Dr. J.V.Dave, Department of English, N.G.University, Patan. It was his teaching *Tess* at Bhavnagar Univerisity that had sown seed to do research work on Hardy. In his letters written as a reply to my, he provided me some points which helped me in my dissertation.

I can never forget the love and affection bestowed upon me by my parents. For the sacrifice, my wife, Bhavna and lovely daughters, Jheel and Durva, gave during these years of research was painstaking for them. But for their support this thesis would have not seen the light of the day.

I am indebted to my principal Shri V.S.Damani, who made all available resources of college open for me.

For variety of reasons my special thanks are due to Friends and colleagues. I cannot mention names of all as list is very extensive. But I acknowledge all those, whose contribution has made this work possible.

Junagadh

Dilip Barad.

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CHAPTER – 1

INTRODUCTION:

THOMAS HARDY'S LIFE AND WORKS

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THOMAS HARDY’S LIFE AND WORKS

THOMAS HARDY (1840-1928):

"Critics can never be made to understand that the failure may be greater than the success... To have the strength to roll a stone weighing a hundredweight to the top of a mountain is a success, and to have the strength to roll a stone of then hundredweight only halfway up that mount is a failure. But the latter is two or three times as strong a deed."

(Hardy in his diary, 1907)*

Hardy is a remarkable twentieth-century poet as well as a nineteenth-century novelist. Though the date of his birth is now nearly one hundred and sixty five years far-away and the date of his death already seventy seven, yet his Wessex novels are as germane and fresh as it was during Victorian era. Hardy was much concerned about the secrecy of his personal life. It has been observed by Michael Millgate and Richard Little Purdy¹

that his biography *THE EARLY LIFE OF THOMAS HARDY 1840-1891* (1928) and *THE LATER YEARS OF THOMAS HARDY 1892-1928* (1930) was written and published by his second wife, Florence Emily Dugdale. It has been observed by them that it was originally written 'in condition of intense secrecy by Hardy himself'². Florence Hardy, an expert typist, typed up the successive segments of the manuscript as Hardy completed them, and Hardy then burned the original handwritten pages.³ These two books were later on published as *THE LIFE OF THOMAS HARDY*. It preserved personal details and comments about life and literature that might otherwise have been entirely lost. The glimpses of Hardy's Life and works as we unearth from these sources are as under:

Thomas Hardy was born on June 2, 1840, in the Dorset hamlet of Higher Bockhampton near Dorchester, in the neighborhood of which he has lived a retired and secluded life, averse to the public gaze, for practically the whole of his long and busy life; and it is to him we are indebted for the revival of the old name of Wessex for that part of beautiful southern England.⁴

He was the eldest of the four children of Thomas Hardy, a stone-mason and jobbing builder, and his wife Jemima, and that his father's self-employed status gave the family a modest level of economic independence that was far removed from comfortable affluence.⁵ Hardy was acutely conscious of his humble class origins and modest

education. This sensitivity to social rank and privilege remained with him throughout his life and informs his fiction and poetry. Many of his plots centre on the detrimental effects of notions of class and social position on sexual relationships. Hardy's mother – Jemima Hand – had social and intellectual aspirations but her plans were curtailed when, three months pregnant, she married Thomas Hardy senior in December 1839. Hardy's first-hand knowledge of the economic hardships suffered by rural women and their pragmatic attitude to sexual relationships, coupled with his friendships with forward-thinking and cultured women in London, encouraged the development of strikingly unconventional conceptions of women and sexuality in his novels.⁶

Thomas Hardy's own life wasn't similar to his stories:

“[...] no book he had ever written contained less of his own life.[...] there is not a scrap of personal detail in it”⁷

He was born on the Egdon Heath, in Dorset, near Dorchester. His father was a master mason and building contractor. Hardy's mother, whose tastes included Latin poets and French romances, gave him good education. After receiving a good primary education at Bockhampton Village School and Dorchester Day-School, Hardy was apprenticed at the age of 16 to John Hicks – a local

architect and church restorer based in Dorchester. He worked in an office, which specialized in restoration of churches. He met Horace Moule, who helped him study Greek and write poetry. Around this time he began writing verses and prose articles for the Dorset County Chronicle somewhere during this period he witnessed a woman's public execution, an episode which later figures in the ending of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

At the age of 22 Hardy moved to London. He became a student of modern languages at King's College. In 1862 he became an assistant architect in the drawing office of the London-based practice of Arthur Blomfield where he wrote poetry as a relief from the tedium of architectural drawing, in which he idealized the rural life. As an assistant in the architectural firm of Arthur Blomfield he pursued the study of modern Gothic architecture. During these London days, he visited art galleries, attended evening classes in French at King's College, enjoyed Shakespeare and opera, and read works of Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and John Stuart Mills, whose positivism influenced him deeply. In 1836 he gained the prize and medal of the Institute of British Architecture for an essay on Coloured Brick and Terra Cotta Architecture, and the Tite prize for architectural design. His first appearance in print, however, seems to have been an unsigned article, How I Built Myself a House, published on March 18, 1865, in Chambers' Magazine. While in London, he became involved with the

city's cultural life, but was disenchanted with society and rigid class structure. He seems to have seriously considered entering the church as a way of combining writing with earning a living. However his limited schooling, which left him ill-prepared for university admission, and the impact of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), which he claimed to have read in the early 1860s, led him to abandon this scheme. Darwin's ideas on adaptation, gradualism and survival reverberate through Hardy's fiction and poetry.⁸

In 1867, due to ill-health, Hardy left London for the family home in Dorset, and resumed work briefly with John Hicks in Dorchester. He entered into a temporary engagement with Tryphena Sparks, a sixteen-year-old relative. In Hick's offices Hardy was able to devote more time to writing and the desire to enter the profession led him to turn to the more lucrative genre of prose fiction. In 1868 he sent a "strikingly socialistic novel" called *The Poor Man and The lady: A Story with no Plot; containing some Original Verses* to the publisher Alexander Macmillan. The manuscript was declined. Unable to find public for his poetry, the novelist George Meredith advised Hardy to write a novel. His first novel, *The Poor Man and The lady*, never found a publisher. George Meredith, being publisher's manuscript reader, with friendly criticism and advice, rejected his first essay in novel writing and Hardy eventually burned the

manuscript. He took it sportingly and came back with *Desperate Remedies*.⁹

In March 1870 Hardy was sent to Cornwall to sketch the church of St Juliot near Boscastle prior to its restoration. Here he met the curate's daughter Emma Lavinia Gifford whom he married four years later. The circumstances of their meeting and subsequent life together are immortalised in Emma's short prose account *Some Recollections*. Hardy continued his architectural work, but encouraged by Emma Gifford, he started to consider literature as his "true vocation." Later in 1874 he married her, for whom he wrote 40 years later, after her death, a group of poems known as *Veteris Vestigiae Flammae* (Vestiges of an Old Flame). His early experiences with Emma also inspired his third novel *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873). During his extended courtship of Emma, Hardy published four novels to increasingly positive reviews: *Desperate Remedies* (1871); *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872); *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873) and the novel that was to decide his future *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874). By 1873 Hardy had turned his back upon architecture as a profession. The success of *Far From the Madding Crowd* confirmed him in his resolve to become "a good hand at a serial" as well as making his marriage financially possible.

For some time after his marriage, Hardy and his wife wandered about Europe and England 'like tramps', with nothing but boxes of books and a book-case. They

sojourned at Sturminster Newton, in a villa with a view of water-meadows, and in this serene and lovely setting they lived for two years amid a profusion of bird-song and garden-fruit in summer, and surrounded by floods in winter. His rétrospectif, Years later, to the period spent at Sturminster Newton was 'as our happiest time'.

The cool reception of his fifth novel *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876) wherein he drew upon his London experience sent him back to the mythical county of Wessex for material for his next two novels *The Return of the Native* (1878) and *The Trumpet Major* (1880). Shortly after the publication of *The Trumpet Major* Hardy fell ill and was forced to dictate much of his next novel *A Laodicean* (1881) from his bed. On his recovery from a long convalescence Hardy and Emma moved back to Dorset living in a rented house in Wimbourne for two years where he wrote his ninth novel *Two on a Tower* (1886)

The composition of *Two on a Tower* was much interrupted by frequent trips to Dorchester and the surrounding district where Hardy hoped to find a plot of land on which to build a house to his own design. During this period he also wrote an essay 'The Dorsetshire Labourer' published in Longman's Magazine in July 1883 in which he defends the rural worker against "the pitiable picture known as Hodge" and laments the passing of traditional rural life. Hardy's return to Dorset was fuelled by the need to tap his most reliable and congenial

creative resource. In 1885 he designed and built Max Gate where he wrote his best-loved and most critically acclaimed novels: *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *The Woodlanders* (1887), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895/6). He also wrote three collections of short stories: *Wessex Tales* (1888), in which he laid definitive claim to the term 'Wessex' for himself and for his work; *A Group of Noble Dames* (1891) for which he drew extensively from Hutchin's History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset and *Life's Little Ironies* (1894) with its dominant themes of class and sexual morality.

Hardy claimed that the unfavourable critical response that greeted the publication of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* led to his emphatic withdrawal from prose fiction. Pausing only to revise *The Well-Beloved* for publication in book form in 1897, Hardy concentrated almost exclusively on collecting, revising and writing his poetry. The main objections to *Tess* and *Jude* were made on moral grounds. Reviewers queried the appropriateness of the subtitle *A Pure Woman* to describe Tess Durbeyfield – a seduced milkmaid who eventually murders the man who destroys her happiness – and *Jude* was criticised for its intense pessimism and the sexual irregularity of its two central characters. However, the majority of reviews were highly favourable and Hardy was being disingenuous. Financially secure and with the reputation of being one of the most distinguished novelists of the day he now felt free to follow his earlier

inclination towards poetry. His first volume of verse – *Wessex Poems* – appeared in 1898 and was followed by *Poems of the Past and Present* (1902). Between 1904 and 1908 Hardy published *The Dynasts*, a four-part epic drama of the Napoleonic Wars. It was followed by two more collections of poetry: *Time's Laughing Stocks* (1909) and *Satires of Circumstance* published in 1914.

Hardy was greatly distressed by Emma's sudden death in November 1912. Their relationship had been marked by increasing discord and their virtual estrangement towards the end of her life meant that her chronically painful illness had gone virtually undetected. She died of complications ensuing from impacted gallstones. Shortly afterwards he found her diaries, in which she had described him and their marriage in bitter terms, and the manuscript of *Some Recollections*. This discovery resulted in an extended period of remorse for Hardy and initiated the composition of some of his finest elegiac poetry – in particular the 1912-13 sequence contained in *Satires of Circumstance* (1914). In February 1914 Hardy married Florence Dugdale who had been Emma's companion and secretary and who had fulfilled a similar function for Hardy after Emma's death.

Hardy's career as a publishing poet spanned almost thirty years, from 1898 until the publication of *Winter Words* a few months after his death in 1928, but he always felt that his poetry was overshadowed by his success as a novelist. In the General Preface to the

definitive Wessex edition of the novels and poems, published in 1912, Hardy claimed that he had never attempted to articulate a particular philosophy of existence in his work. Later, in the 1922 preface to *Late Lyrics and Earlier*, he redefined what had been labeled as pessimistic in his poetry as 'evolutionary meliorism': "that is to say ... the exploration of reality, and its frank recognition stage by stage along the survey, with an eye to the best consummation possible". Chiefly written in the lyric and ballad form Hardy's poetry explores the themes of rural life and Nature, love and loss, cosmic indifference, the ravages of time, the inevitability of death and inhuman ironies of war. His poetry has been praised for its technical virtuosity and skill and criticised for its occasional awkwardnesses which Hardy claimed were examples of his predilection for "the art of concealing art".¹⁰

The First World War had blighted Hardy's new-found tranquility. His visit to the German and the English wounded soldiers, lying Dorchester hospital, affected him deeply. Alert and courteous, interested in everything around him, a vigorous campaigner against cruelty to animals, and now, to his great delight, a Freeman of Dorchester, he became himself a beloved part of the Wessex he had so lovingly delineated. His old tranquil age brought forth a harvest of poetry, and his life amid the quiet countryside ended as quietly, after he had

listened to his wife reading poems including Browning's *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and Walter de la Mare's *The Listeners*.

He died on January 11, 1928 at the age of 87. His death was felt as a loss, not only of a figure unique in literature because of his great age and eminence, but also as a snapping of the last link with the nineteenth century. He was mourned as "the last Victorians".

Hardy: A prolific Writer:

Hardy's career as writer spanned over fifty years. His earliest books appeared when Anthony Trollope (1815-82) wrote his Palliser series, and he published poetry in the decade of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Hardy's work reflected his stoical pessimism and sense of tragedy in human life.

Hardy's stories are not only interesting but also arresting & exciting. Yet, the appeal to the readers & researchers does not lie in any skillful manipulation of incident but in a treatment of characters. Characters are treated as the inevitable outcome of a special environment. The Nature plays very important role in his fiction. The immutability of Nature, the mutability of human life; the inexorable character of Natural laws and the puny struggles of human personalities trying to evade them are very meticulously depicted by him in his novels.¹¹.

Approximately one half of Hardy's sixty-year literary career was devoted to the novel. From 1871 until 1897, Hardy wrote fifteen novels, fourteen of which were published.

A Chronological list of Hardy's Wessex Novels:

Desperate Remedies (1871), *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876), *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Trumpet Major* (1880), *A Laodicean* (1881), *Two on a Tower* (1882), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *The Woodlanders* (1887), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), *Jude the Obscure* (1895), and *The Well-Beloved* (1897) which was serialised 1892.

Hardy has given us a considerable amount of both prose and poetry; perhaps a classified rather than chronological list may be found both interesting and helpful: Hardy classified the Wessex Novels in the following manner¹²:

1. **Novels of Character and Environment:** *Under the Greenwood Tree; Far From the Madding Crowd; The Return of the Native; The Mayor of Casterbridge; The Woodlanders; Tess of the D'Urbervilles; and Jude the Obscure.*
2. **Romances and Fantasies:** *A Pair of Blue Eyes; The Trumpet Major; Two on a Tower and The Well-Beloved.*

3. **Novels of Ingenuity and Experiment:** *Desperate Remedies; The Hand of Ethelberta; and A Laodicean.*

Arthur Compton-Rickett¹³ classified Hardy's complete works as below:

- (1) Pastoral Tragedies: *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of the Casterbridge* (1886), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), *The Simpletons and Hearts Insurgent*, published serially in 1894 -95, revised and issued as *Jude the Obscure* (1895).
- (2) Pastoral Comedies: *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876), *A Laodicean* (1881), *Two on a Tower* (1882).
- (3) Pastoral Romances: *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874), *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1875), *The Trumpet Major* (1880), *The Woodlanders* (1887).
- (4) Pastoral Extravaganza: *The Well Beloved* (1897), published as *The Pursuit of The Well-Beloved* in 1892.
- (5) The volumes of short stories uniting the above classifications: *Wessex Tales* (1883), *A group of Noble Dames* (1891), *Life's Little Ironies* (1894) and *A Changed man* (1913); the last volume includes *The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid*, which first appeared in the Graphic in 1883.

(6) Between 1894 and 1913 Hardy turned his attention to poetry, and gave us *Wessex poems* (1898), *Poems of the Past and Present* (1901), an epic-drama, *The Dynasts*, in three parts (1903, 1906, 1908), *Time's laughing Stocks* (1909), and *Satires of Circumstances* (1914).

The Wessex novels are gallery of women portraits. The important women figures can be divided into three groups:

The first group consists of those women who belong to a high order of personality and of whom we get full-length studies in Chapter three are:

Women Characters	Novels
Tess Durbeyfield	<i>Tess of D'Urbervilles</i>
Sue Bridehead	<i>Jude the Obscure</i>
Eustacia Vye	<i>The Return of Native</i>
Bathsheba Everdene	<i>Far From the Madding Crowd</i>

To the second group belong women of less personal significance, though they too have been portrayed in detail and are thoroughly studied in chapter four:

Women Characters	Novels
Elfride	<i>A Pair of Blue Eyes</i>
Ethelberta	<i>The Hand of Ethelberta</i>
Grace Melbury	<i>The Woodlanders</i>
Anne Garland	<i>The Trumpet Major</i>

The third group is mixed one, consisting of women who, though fully studied, are of much less significance, and of others who though of deep significance, are not fully drawn:

Women Characters	Novels
Paula	<i>A Laodicean</i>
Fancy Day	<i>Under the Greenwood Tree</i>
Elizabeth-Jane	<i>The Mayor of Casterbridge</i>
Viviette Constantine	<i>Two on a Tower</i>
Marty South	<i>The Woodlanders</i>

Apart from these, the other women of more or less importance are critically studied in the sixth chapter:

Women Characters	Novels

Arabella Donn	<i>Jude the Obscure</i>
Fanny Robin	<i>Far From the Madding Crowd</i>
Thomasin	<i>The Return of the Native</i>
Mrs. Yeobright	<i>The Return of the Native</i>
Lucetta	<i>The Mayor of Casterbridge</i>
Picotee	<i>The Hand of Ethelberta</i>
Tabitha Lark	<i>Two on a Tower</i>
Susan	<i>The Mayor of Casterbridge</i>
Charlotte De Stancy	<i>A Laodicean</i>
The Three Avices	<i>The Well-Beloved</i>
The Three Milkmaids	<i>Tess of D'Urbervilles</i>
Mrs. Yeobright	<i>The Return of the Native</i>
Mrs. Goodman	<i>A Laodicean</i>
Mrs. Swancourt	<i>A Pair of Blue Eyes</i>
Mrs. Melbury	<i>The Woodlanders</i>

All these women stand out clear and distinct from one another. Hardy shows great power of differentiation in portraying them. Deep as is his understanding of human nature as a whole, it is in the female personalities that he is most wonderfully learned. Hardy's estimate of women is high, but it is qualified and conditioned by his keen observation of the realities of life. He makes his women beautiful, interesting, fascinating, and gives them

great parts to play, but he cannot help it if life treats them cruelly.

Commentary on Chronology of Novel:

Desperate Remedies (1871)¹⁴ :

It is astonishing that Hardy, the writer of the thirteen 'Wessex Novels' that followed, should have made this particular kind of false start, but the important thing is that he realized at once not only that novels of this kind gave scope for little but 'ingenuity', but the certain parts of the book stood out like oases in a desert.¹⁵ There is something of Hardy's own irony in the fact that out of the advice given by George Meredith to Thomas Hardy should have come the novel *Desperate Remedies*. In this novel, the crime and mystery elements are rich and satisfying. The only other way in which *Desperate Remedies* is recognizably Hardian is in the interweaving of the plot by coincidences and accidental happenings. Cytherea advertises for a situation, and the one reply comes from a woman who presently turns out to have been the lost love of Cytherea's father. When Manston consults a time-table with the object of meeting his wife's train he overlooks a 'shunting' sign and meets the wrong train – with enormously complicated results. All Cytherea's efforts to avoid being married on a Friday are in vain: the inevitability with which the fatal day bears down upon her

is quite in Hardy's manner. But there is little evidence of the master hand that was so soon to be Hardy's. The machinery of the intricate plot is not too well architected, and there is crudity in the method of discovering some of the necessary facts – as of those given by Manston in XIII.3 to the woman masquerading as his wife. The chief characters have originality of conception and are carefully studied, but they seldom come alive; Cytherea's force of character and Manston's ungovernable passion are well shown, and provide the germ of later successes. But there is little evidence of the master hand that was so soon to be Hardy's.¹⁶

Under the Greenwood Tree (1872)¹⁷:

The deliberateness with which Hardy took hold of the rustic theme with the intention of making it characteristically his own is shown by the opening of *Under the Greenwood Tree*. Its careful nature observation (including those tree-voices that interested him right through to *The Woodlanders*¹⁸), its conscientious description of the Mellstock villages, and its minute study of those of the inhabitants who are to form the staple of the book's interest. Much of this novel has 'Georgic-like closeness to earth'¹⁹: gradually the perfection of the things grows upon the reader: line by line the rustic group is being built up; and presently the reader is listening to the first of its many colloquies. The rustic group of *Under the Greenwood Tree* is the Mellstock choir: old Grandfather

William Dewy, his son Reuben, the tranter, and Dick Dewy, Reuben's son; Michael Mail, Robert Penny, Elias Spink, and Joseph Bowman, with a merely musical appendage, Thomas Leaf.

In this novel, where the new theme is being given a more extended treatment than it afterwards received, the choir becomes a collective entity, one of the actors in the village drama; and their struggle to retain the time-honoured orchestra and keep out the intruding organ interests us far more than the love story which is the novel's other subject: the interview with the Vicar has an epic quality, and is as thrilling as the knight's fight with the dragon to save the princess.²⁰ But even here the group has more of a reflective than an active character: its action consists in the presentation of a point of view, and the choir is content with having presented it; fate is not diverted; only a little postponed. For the rest, they make music, which is another kind of meditation; and the first carol-singing chapter is a classic piece as faultless as one of those Dutch paintings to which the title-page refers us.

Upon this vivid, strongly-painted background the pale little love story of Dick Dewy and Fancy Day appears almost as an intrusion. Nevertheless there is much craftiness in the way in which the heroine is introduced, a dainty boot in the pocket of Penny the shoemaker, the candle flame approaching the window-blind, and a vision

of beauty that makes an anti-climax of the minx-like character of the young woman as it later on develops.

The limited aim of *Under the Greenwood Tree* prevents it from taking a place among the 'great' novels, but within its limits it has a perfection achieved by none of the masterpieces. Its position is rather like that of *Youth*, though it does not represent Hardy's many-sidedness so fully as that other novels but it stands for his genius.

***A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873)**²¹:

Hardy classified *A Pair of Blue Eyes* among 'Romances and Fantasies'. A favourite of Tennyson, its melancholy treatment of youth, love and death is expressive of late nineteenth century susceptibilities. Not unnatural in an early novel, Hardy draws freely on his own life. Elfride, the heroine of the novel is much drawn from Emma Gifford.²² If in writing *Under the Greenwood Tree* Hardy learnt to use his rural background and his rustic chorus, he showed for the first time in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* that he could handle characters on a large scale. Here we first meet that prose style that presently became characteristic of Hardy in his tragic mood. The earlier part of the book is often naïve and ineffective in its description (though narrative and dialogue have a confident strength). The book is, on the whole, a 'society' novel, and Hardy, whose native genius ran on other lines, was not yet at his ease with this kind – things were

different by the time he reached the next 'society' novel, *The Hand of Ethelberta*.²³

We see Elfride, the butterfly, full of sparkling life, born for happiness, but destined to be broken on the wheel of a man's egotism. And we see Stephen Smith, her counterpart in everything except birth, the man she could have been happy with. In this novel, we have a glimpse of Hardy's terrifying powers to depict ironic situations. In the scene where Stephen extracts, word by word, from Elfride the confession that she had a previous lover, who was now dead, and who lay buried under the very gravestone on which they were sitting is perhaps the best ironic situation in this novel. Narrative and dialogue are pared to the bone.

"Elfride... Look in my face, and as you believe in God above, tell me truly one thing more. Were you alone with him?"

"Yes."

"Did you return home the same day on which you left it?"

"No."²⁴

Hardy makes a number of his men use some special device for inducing emotion in the heart of the women they want. Manston in *Desperate Remedies* used the piano

and Troy in *Far From the Madding Crowd* used the less commonplace broadsword. Here Knight employs his ruthless superiority in chess to make the first breach in Elfride's defences. The second stage, which brings knight and Elfride passionately together, is rather a device of fate than of human choosing – the adventure on the cliff.²⁵

The relation between Elfride and Knight presently becomes a preliminary sketch of the story of Tess and Angel Clare. Elfride's lapse has, of course, been less serious than Tess's; but then Knight's life has been, as he says, so "absurdly" unspotted that he, unlike Clare, has some right to expect his fancy for an 'inexperienced wife' to be realized. Tess confesses her fault; Elfride obstinately keeps to herself: the result is precisely the same in both cases. The series of scene in which Knight slowly discovers the truth for himself are done with power and perfection. The first is full of dramatic irony, as Knight calmly insists that Elfride is even more inexperienced than himself. The last, in which the full 'truth' of her association with Stephen Smith is at last forced from her, is as cruel as anything in the novels earlier than Tess. Perhaps the note of high tragedy is lacking because of the slightness of Elfride's character, and, above all, the preposterousness of Knight's wooden intolerance.²⁶

Tess of the D'Urbervilles ends in appalling tragedy, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* in stark Hardian comedy – the quarrel of

the two suitors, Knight and Smith, once friends, and their discovery that Elfride is dead, and has died lady Luxellian.

Far From the Madding Crowd (1874)²⁷:

“*Far From the Madding Crowd* is Hardy’s first masterpiece and it went near to being his greatest. Only *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* surpasses it, and for sheer Hardian quality I doubt whether even *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, even *Jude the Obscure*, quite reaches the wonderful heights of this first wonder of all.” H.C.Duffin.²⁸ *Far From the Madding Crowd* is central in every way. Its sureness of attack, no less than its classic richness and spaciousness, convey what is in a sense a most un-Hardy-like impression of confident ease and surging inspiration. After many readings it remains his most absolutely satisfying novel, the most characteristic expression of his genius.²⁹

The opening chapter is memorable for an everlastingly beautiful picture of Bathsheba on the halted wagon, with Gabriel oak unseen but critically observant, the whole scene steeped in colour and sunlight. This chapter, with its fresh, clear atmosphere, is followed by the classic ‘Norcombe Hill by Night’, which passes from pure description to a moving picture of lambing operations – one glows as one reads – and all is done with quite deliberate beauty. The last chapters, where Gabriel and Bathsheba find beauty in loneliness by breaking it in

two, have a sunset peace in which we see the loveliest side of Hardy's outlook on life: his faith in that camaraderie, the product of experience endured side by side, which alone can make love strong as death.³⁰ It is also the logical and long-foreseen end of the story: this is where fate, character and the fitness of things have been leading.

This novel is one of those few among the Wessex Novels in which beauty is commensurate with greatness. The action passes against a rich background of pasture and byre, sheep-fir and sheep-farm. And when we add to all this the constant and expert use of one of the grandest of the chorus groups – Smallbury, the aged maltster, with Jacob and William his son and a grandson, Joseph Poorgrass of the saintly profile, Jan Coggan, 'Henery' Fray, Mark Clark and Matthew Moon – we find we have a pattern woven so cunningly of love, courage and death, beauty, humour and the basic meaning of life, that the annals of creative fiction will not often provide its equal.³¹

The nature of such comedy is nothing less than things as they really are: its principle is the presentation in art of the incongruity of life. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, no less than in Chaucer and Shakespeare, in the *Odyssey* or in Joyce's *Ulysses*, 'joy after woe and woe after gladness' is shown forth as the spring and source of art, of the power that a Matthew Arnold said can calm and satisfy us as no other can.³²

The success of *Far From the Madding Crowd* confirmed him in his resolve to become “a good hand at a serial”³³. Critics praised the novel for its intimate knowledge of the rural community and for the vividness and power of Hardy's imagination although Leslie Stephen, the editor of the *Cornhill Magazine* in which the novel was first serialised, raised the question of sexual impropriety in his work. This issue was to dog Hardy throughout his career as a novelist.

The Hand of Ethelberta (1876)³⁴:

In an attempt to escape typecasting as a rural novelist by his critics, Hardy drew upon his London experiences for his fifth novel *The Hand of Ethelberta*. This novel is to some extent satire on the marriage market, social ambition and the commodification of women.³⁵ To read this novel after *Far From the Madding Crowd* is to find the surroundings irritating and the story nauseatingly dull.

However, it is the sudden contrast with the strong deep lines of its great predecessor that makes the intrigue and the petty motives of the book seem without significance: taken by itself the story is seen to be contrived with great skill. Its chief interest lies with the family of the heroine, her butler-father, her artisan brothers, and her younger sister Picotee. Ethelberta herself is powerfully drawn, and there is subtlety in the

figure of old Lord Mountclere, the Marquis of Steyne of later *Vanity Fair*. The story-interest is divided between Ethelberta's maneuvers to get into high society and keep there; and the race for her hand run by Julian, Neigh and Ladywell (at this time Hardy liked a triple male grouping : we have seen it twice before, and it appears again in *The Trumpet Major* and *A Laodicean*, but not afterwards).³⁶ Julian, who is perhaps the 'hero' of the story, eventually marries Ethelberta's sister Picotee. Hardy had a tenderness for 'younger sisters' – it comes out again in 'Liza-'Lu Durbeyfield – and Picotee is made a very charming character, a much fitter mate for Julian than her terrifying sister. Ethelberta herself is snatched from under the eyes of the three by lord Mountclere, who comes late into the story and revives its flagging interest. He is very much what Ethelberta deserves: rich, cultured, amenable – but given dithering over fashion plates.³⁷

However, the final impression left by *The Hand of Ethelberta* is that it would make a first-class film story. It has all those melodrama that goes to make crowd catcher movies. But as a work of literature, it rarely has any class. Hardy was an established novelist by this time, and he proceeded to disappoint expectations by turning away from country life to his London experience. Its cool reception sent him back to the mythical county of Wessex for material for his next two novels *The Return of the Native* and *The Trumpet Major*.

The Return of the Native (1878)³⁸:

Probably none of Hardy's novels is so popular now as *The Return of the Native*; yet since its first appearance none has provoked more contradictory interpretations. Its strong feeling for the more mysterious qualities of human nature has no doubt been part of its enduring charm. Even so, it is a far more plainly intelligible nook than some of its commentators have been prepared to admit – and the published criticism of it is full of curious feats of fantasy and willful blindness.³⁹

The Return of the Native is the book of Egdon Heath; without Egdon it would not hold together. With most of the other novels the scene could be transposed to some other part of Wessex without vitally affecting the story: this story could not run its course anywhere other than amid the solitudes of Egdon. Egdon influences all the human characters, moving them to love, to despair, or to the philosophic mind. Even pretty Tamsie, to whom it is just “a ridiculous old place”, confesses she could live nowhere else.⁴⁰ D.H.Lawrence in his ‘Study of Thomas Hardy’ produced the classic expression of the view that Egdon Heath is the most important character in the book – ‘Egdon, whose dark soil was strong and crude and organic as the body of a beast’.

Egdon has been set before us with all Hardy's unmatched powers of description. Similarly, humanity is also presented in such a way as to leave the spell

unbroken. The fantastic reddleman and his unexplained preoccupation; the anomalous old naval officer; mysterious figures on the barrow; the woman momentarily queen of the solitude, then vanishing into Egdon's shade, all of them are drawn with humane touch. Nevertheless, the opening of this novel is not so miraculous as that of *Far From the Madding Crowd*: it is conscious, deliberate, not a "growth of the soil". So the marvelous description of Eustacia that comes presently is the product of an art less exquisite than by which Bathsheba was shown in one bright flash. Eustacia herself is an otherwise unexampled type in Hardy: a woman who lives to love, and to love in a hot, blind, lustful way. Wildeve is really pitiful, and Eustacia's intrigues with him are painfully squalid. Troy, at least, had some glamour of tinsel and swordsmanship about him. Troy was fascinating; Wildeve makes even Eustacia yawn.⁴¹

It is a grim story, this first of Hardy's tragedies, with a single, relentless drive to disaster. A striking difference between Shakespeare and Hardy is that in every one of his tragedies Shakespeare kills both hero and heroine.⁴² This may be due to his sense of artistic finish, or to his tenderness for the children of his hand. Hardy, the President of the Immortals, more cruel, leaves, as life generally does, one alive but maimed.

The Trumpet Major (1880)⁴³:

The Trumpet Major is the light-hearted novel Hardy ever wrote. It is highly original contribution to the genre of historical fiction, which took many shapes during the nineteenth century. An awareness of the individual as a historical person slowly began to grow up, in historians, in novelists, and in men and women engaged in neither history nor literature but in living with a more heightened awareness of time and of the times. *The Trumpet Major* is written out of this awareness. It is also a novel which takes an important place in what we may usefully call the Thomas Hardy world. Like his early novels, especially *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *Far From the Madding Crowd*, it is an imaginative study of ordinary people, in a tradition of pastoral simplicities which includes the poetry of Wordsworth and the early prose of George Eliot. Like his later novels, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, which deal with more extraordinary persons, it is a dark novel, written out of an intense questioning of the meaning of human existence in a world without Providence.⁴⁴

Thomas Hardy's historical consciousness is compounded of a sense of history and a sense of time. Unlike those historical novelists, like Scott or Flaubert, whose interest is primarily social, or even archaeological, he is a novelist of sensibility, a time-haunted man whose attitudes to history and to philosophy are the products of

this haunting. In some ways, he is very like George Eliot, and, with a similar refusal to move from Christian optimism to pessimism, he too calls himself meliorist. Like her, he takes an intense interest in the individual man's awareness and unawareness of the conditions that determine his life, including the pressures of time, place, heredity and society. He records the changing pattern of custom, ritual and occupation, and returns constantly to a reflection on man's ironical ignorance of the world that makes him.⁴⁵

The novel is a return to the idyllic, and opens with a bright impression of the double ménage at the mill. Hardy is splendid in parties, and soon has a grand one going, given by Miller Loveday for the homecoming of his son John. This, however, is nothing to the Olympian feast that, at a later day, is prepared for the wedding of sailor Bob. Hardy's sly skill at a middle-aged woman, seen in Parson Swancourt's second lady, is shown in his picture of Mrs. Garland. Daughter Anne, the heroine, is a mild but charming young person who appears a little uncomprehending and stupid for most of the novel, until we find she really has a very clear notion of what is going on behind the manly bosoms of her three lovers. For there are three suitors again in this novel, and the triangle they form would fit inside that made by the three men of *Far From the Madding Crowd*. Festus Derriman is the Troy, of this story, suitably lowered in tone; John

Loveday, the trumpet-major, approximates more closely to Gabriel Oak.

A Laodicean (1881)⁴⁶:

A *Laodicean* has scarcely a single point of resemblance to *The Trumpet Major*. All the characteristic features which go to make up the charm of the latter are here absent. It *should* have cost hardly any effort at all, if quality were the measure of effort. It has fewer excellences, less interest, more faults, than any other of the Wessex novels, but it perhaps sufficiently accounted for by Hardy's own apology, to the effect that he dictated the book during a period of illness, and intended it as nothing more than an idle afternoon's entertainment...

“As some of these novels of Wessex life address themselves more especially to readers into whose souls the iron has entered, and whose years have less pleasure in them now than heretofore, so "*A Laodicean*" may perhaps help to while away an idle afternoon of the comfortable ones whose lines have fallen to them in pleasant places; above all, of that large and happy section of the reading public which

has not yet reached ripeness of years; those to whom marriage is the pilgrim's Eternal City, and not a milestone on the way.⁴⁷”

Hardy had set himself to write a story which is perhaps more faultless, and certainly less mannered, than anything that he had yet produced. The fancy which ran wild in *The Trumpet Major* is chastened to one or two touches. The eager and animated narrative has given place to a single thread of love-story. Surprisingly modern in theme, *A Laodicean* focuses on the discontents and dilemmas of the 'New Woman' and its heroine Paula Power anticipates the complexity of Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure*.⁴⁸ The opening situation, of the young lady refusing baptism by immersion, is competently done, and, though verging on the ridiculous, affords us at once the desiderated explanation of the title. The Laodicean type of mind has never been thought attractive, and the young lady in question, Paula Power, who certainly maintains this character through, is least attractive of Hardy's heroines, which is not to say that she is altogether devoid of charm.

If *A Laodicean* can scarcely become one of Hardy's most popular stories, it yet marks distinctly the continuous development and the versatility of his genius.

Two on a Tower(1882)⁴⁹:

In turning to *Two on a Tower*, we pass from the least important of Hardy's novels (*Desperate Remedies* always excepted) to what is perhaps the best of all the lesser ones. It has not the perfection of form of *Under the Greenwood Tree*, but it has the full Hardy quality in much greater variety, and an artistic excellence that is a constant delight.

To some extent the degree of a novel's sheer inspiration can be judged from its opening, and certainly in the way of writing that comes lovingly off the pen we have had no opening chapter like the first chapter of *Two on a Tower* since *Far From the Madding Crowd*. The bare economy of the narrative in the first two pages is a joy to contemplate. There follows a description of the hill and the tower, with its sighing Hardian trees below. An impression is built up to the isolation and loneliness of the tower, after which comes the sudden but quiet disclosure, to the reader as to the woman who has ascended the tower, of the youth at the summit, a beautiful youth of twenty, with fair hair and eyes of the woman, whom we know to be about twenty-nine, and who presently proves to be Lady Constantine, "wife of absent Sir Blount Constantine". The young man, Swithin St. Cleeve, is a student of astronomy, and the astronomical dialogue that ensues is in Hardy's best vein, leading up

to the youth's naïve but dignified ambition to become Astronomer Royal.⁵⁰

It is a wonderful book with a wonderful ending, which falls short of greatness only because the main characters, though full of interest, make no claim to anything like heroic proportions.

The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886)⁵¹:

Thomas Hardy started writing "*The Mayor of Casterbridge*" in 1884, and he finished the novel on April 17, 1885. The novel was serialized in a magazine in 1886, and then published in two volumes that same year. The novel was originally entitled "The Life and Death of *The Mayor of Casterbridge: A Story of a Man of Character.*"

"*The Mayor of Casterbridge*" is shocking, and has been called improbable. Such events cannot take place in real life. After all, who would believe that a young man, Michael Henchard, would sell his wife and young daughter to a sailor, even if he is under the influence of alcohol? The next morning, when Henchard realizes the horrible act, he laments his actions:

"She's gone - to be sure she is - gone with that sailor who bought her and little Elizabeth-Jane. We walked here, and I had the firmity and rum in it - and sold her. [...] Now, what am I to do?"⁵²

Upon the dawning of the next day, Henchard promptly sets off in search of his sold-off family, stopping by a church along the way to swear off strong liquors "for the space of twenty-one years." Failing in his search for his family, he gave them up for dead and went on with his life, eventually becoming a powerful figure in Casterbridge, the Mayor. Even as success found him, the old saying of "Character is destiny" seemed to haunt his life. Henchard destroys that which was most valuable when he sold off his family in the heat of a moment. He tries to explain his failure by likening himself to Cain and Job, but he demonstrated his true character when he allowed inebriation and money to separate him from his wife and child.⁵³

Once more we have a supremely good opening. The description of Henchard and his wife approaching Weydon-Priors is like a picture mirrored in clear water, reminding us again of the opening of *Far From the Madding Crowd*. But while that picture was bright with sunshine and the joy of life, this one is dark with silence, fear and tragic personality. No other novel opens so dramatically as this. The incident epitomizes Henchard's character – his recklessness, the effect of drink on him, his hard inflexibility with a touch of softness in the afterthought. Then, after one of Hardy's unforgettable early morning pictures we have the almost equally dramatic taking of an oath to avoid strong drink for twenty years. The book is sub-titled, 'the story of a man of

character': it might have been called the story of two men of character. For Farfrae, is a man of character too. Character enables its possessor to make those who have less of it do things they would rather not do, but it has no power over circumstance.

Henchard always rises to the occasion when magnanimity is called for: hence we can forgive him the rest. His profoundly tragic end is the artistic conclusion of the tale.

The Woodlanders (1887)⁵⁴:

From the streets of a market-town we pass to a scene as remote from civilization as was the life of Egdon, isolated not by space but by trees. In Casterbridge life was complicated by business troubles and the need to make money; in Little Hintock men are not idle, certainly, but their work consists for the most part in lending a helping hand to nature.

In the secluded forest community of Little Hintock, Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders* inextricably links the dramatic English landscape with the story of a woman caught between two rivals of radically different social statures. Grace Melbury is promised to her longtime companion, Giles Winterborne, a local woodlander and a gentle, steadfast man. When her socially motivated father pressures her to wed the ambitious doctor Edred Fitzpiers, Grace's loyalties shift—and her decision leads to tumultuous consequences. *The Woodlanders*, with its

explorations of class and gender, lust and betrayal, is one of Hardy's most vivid and powerful works. This portrait of five people in an English village who are tangled in a drama of passion, betrayal, poverty, and pride of place richly demonstrates all of Hardy's distinguishing qualities — intimacy with rural England, his feeling for nature, his frankness about physical desire, and his gift for rendering, in the most specific way, the mystery at the heart of things. In this classically simple tale of the disastrous impact of outside life on a secluded community in Dorset, Hardy narrates the rivalry for the hand of Grace Melbury between a simple and loyal woodlander and an exotic and sophisticated outsider. Betrayal, adultery, disillusion, and moral compromise are all worked out in a setting evoked as both beautiful and treacherous. *The Woodlanders*, with its thematic portrayal of the role of social class, gender, and evolutionary survival, as well as its insights into the capacities and limitations of language, exhibits Hardy's acute awareness of his era's most troubling dilemmas.

Marty South – ‘...ever a lonely maid”, is a superb sketch, but done in too few lines – we should have liked more of her; and Giles Winterborne stands as the only figure in the front rank of Hardy's great presentations of character. For this reason *The Woodlanders*, though the most beautiful of the Wessex novels (Hardy said he liked it as a story best of all), has some difficulty in holding place with the greatest of them.

Tess of D'Urbervilles (1886)⁵⁵:

The story of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, cruelly seduced by her relative the cynical Alec d'Urbervilles, betrayed by the moralist, Angel Clare and haunted by her guilt and shame, becomes in Hardy's hands an indictment of all the crimes and hypocrisies of nineteenth century England – its pharisaic religion, its cruel class-system, the destruction of traditional agriculture and the perversions of the 'modern' consciousness. Of all Hardy's heroines none is more touching than Tess, and of all his novels this is the one with the most universal range. Hardy was never more masterful than here in evoking a vanished rural way of life and even this most tragic of books is lightened by his delightful and clear-eyed humour.

This novel was first intended for publication in serial form by the newspaper syndicate of Tillotson & Son of Bolton, but on seeing a substantial portion of the manuscript, including the seduction and the baptism scene, they rejected it. It was offered in turn to Murray's magazine and Macmillan's magazine, but rejected by both, on similar moral grounds. When serialised and later on published as book, the novel received an amount of comments and discussion much greater than any of his earlier works. It provoked a storm of critical argument involving prejudices and passions well outside the purely literary sphere. *The Atlantic Monthly* praised the novel as

Hardy's masterpiece and note particularly its effect of enlarging human sympathy: 'it has left at least one reader believing that many of the crimes served up morning and evening in the newspapers would seem less barbarous, less unintelligible, if there were at hand to explain the motives of them, some seer of human nature, some Thomas Hardy'.⁵⁶

Ironical enough, the novel which was rejected for publication by several magazines because 'magazine must contain nothing which could not be read aloud in any family circle', did more than any other novel to widen Hardy's reputation. *Tess* is the greatest of all the Wessex Novels. The material of *Jude the Obscure* is vaster and more varied, but it is not completely digested, whereas the development of this story moves with the rhythmic certainty of music to its predestined end. As beautiful as *Far From the Madding Crowd* or *The Woodlanders*, it plunges far deeper into the tragic heart of life, and it has none of the imperfections that mar *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Return of the Native*. *Tess* herself is the most sublime figure in Hardy, combining supreme beauty with nobility that elevates the whole conception of human nature. From whatever aspect it is considered – subsidiary characters, landscape background, intellectual and moral content, adequacy of style – *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* has no superior among Hardy's novels, and it must take its place among the three or four greatest

works of fiction the nineteenth century produced in England.⁵⁷

The Well Beloved (1897)⁵⁸:

(In **The Pursuit of *The Well-Beloved*** (1892) and ***The Well-Beloved*** (1897))

Hardy writes two different versions of a strange story set in the weird landscape of Portland. The books were written one before and one after his 'last' novel, *Jude the Obscure* (1895). Both stories are richly ambiguous but the first shows the successful exercise of masculine power and the second shows women triumphant. . The double work, coming at the end of Hardy's long career as a novelist, anticipates modernist writing by offering not merely alternative endings but alternative plots.

The Well Beloved appeared in serial form in the Illustrated London News and Harper's Bazaar during 1892, but was considerably revised for the book publication in 1897. It is therefore not really a later work than *Jude the Obscure*. It is the story of Jocelyn Pierston, celebrated sculptor, who tries to create an image of his ideal woman in stone, just as he tries to find her in the flesh. Overt exploration of the relationship between erotic fascination and creativity make this novel a 19th century landmark in the ongoing debate about art. Henry C.

Duffin finds it difficult to know whether to take this novel seriously or not. He further clarifies, if it is accepted as a satire on the artistic temperament, there is no difficulty in taking it as a successful work, seriously intended and humorously written. There is plenty of ground for this view of the novel. But the preface asks us to read the novel as a frankly fantastic story, one embodying moreover a Platonic dream. In either case the novel is thoroughly enjoyable, though possessing few of the features that delight us in the other novels.

Part I presents well enough Jocelyn Pierston, the rake with a theory, who, while hesitating over Avice Caro as a possible embodiment of his fitting ideal, runs away, farcically and ineffectively, with Marcia Bencomb. He is then twenty. In part II, twenty years later, he returns to the Isle to find Avice dead, and her daughter, otherwise her mother's image, an uneducated laundress. His middle-aged attempt to rouse the girl to tenderness is funny. However, he takes her to London, where he behaves perfectly. Finally asks her to marry him, only to know by her confession that she is already married to a quarryman at home. Part III begins with amusing account of Jocelyn, who, even at sixty, refuses to grow up. Harboring still his "genealogical passion", he proposes to and is accepted by Avice the third, grandmother of the first Avice. But as Jocelyn once had left Avice the first for Marcia, Avice the third now runs away from him to marry Marcia's son. Jocelyn has illness, and recovering, finds

himself old indeed – bald, sciatic, with his artistic sense quite gone, and with it *The Well-Beloved* bee.

In spite of all the anticlimaxes, Hardy does stick to his idea with such persistence and skill that he compels us at last to take it seriously.

Jude the Obscure (1895)⁵⁹:

In the Preface of the 1912 edition, Hardy described the novel's subject as 'the shattered ideals of the two chief characters' and the instinct are forced by society into moulds that do not fit them. As Hardy's epigraph for the novel '*The letter killeth*' suggests this result in tragedy.

Jude the Obscure is the tragic story of a young country workman obsessed by his ambition to become an Oxford student. The novel recounts the painful process of his disillusionment, and his final destruction at the hands of an oppressive society which refuses to acknowledge his desires. Interwoven with this theme is the story of Jude's fraught relationships with two women – Arabella, the country girl who ensnares him into marriage, and his cousin Sue Bridehead, a 'modern' emancipated girl with whom Jude can achieve some brief happiness, in defiance of social convention. It is one of Hardy's bleakest and most outspoken novels, a work of unremitting insight and power. It is also a novel of graphic contrasts: between town and country, sexual

passion and the urge for knowledge, the death agony of an old era and the birthpangs of the new.

Jude the Obscure, Hardy's last novel, was first published as a serial story in Harper's New Monthly Magazine from December 1894 to November 1895, and in November 1895 was published as a complete novel. The title of the serial was *Hearts Insurgent* changed from *The Simpletons* after the first installment. When the novel was finally published as an unexpurgated whole, the critical comment it attracted was of mix kind. Bishop of Wakefield commented that novel is 'insolence and indecent ... threw it into the fire', and New York Bookman observed, 'it is simply one of the most objectionable books that we have ever read in any language whatsoever'. At the same time the novel was acclaimed by the reviewer in The Illustrated London News (No.54) as "... read the story how you will, it is manifestly a work of genius ... most of our fiction is to *Jude the Obscure* as a hamlet to a hemisphere."⁶⁰

Although *Jude the Obscure* was published in 1895 and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* in 1891, Hardy tells⁶¹ us the later novel was begun, at least as to note-making, eight years earlier. Nevertheless it is impossible not to see in it an artistic sequel, or parallel, to *Tess*. It looks as if Hardy, having shown the consequences of certain things happening to a young woman, decided to show the consequence of the same things happening to a young man. *Jude the Obscure* is a tremendous book. There is no

end to the meaning and inspiration. It has an infinitive variety that neither age can wither nor custom stale. The problem of Tess is more soluble: we may decide and leave it, grieving or rejoicing. But there is no solving Jude. It wakes dim enigmas; it starts strange trains of unanswerable questions that carry us out into the infinite spaces of thought, till we lose ourselves in *O altitudes* of wondering, and come back at last having learnt the riddle of life – which is its inviolable incomprehensibility.⁶²

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³ Michael Millgate, "Thomas Hardy: the Biographical Sources", Dale Kramer, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. p.2.

⁴ Arthur Compton – Rickett, *A History of English literature*. New Delhi: UBS Publishers,1993. p.540.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.5.

⁶ Jane Thomas, University of Hull. "Hardy, Thomas." *The Literary Encyclopedia*. 17 Jul. 2001. The Literary Dictionary Company. 12 November 2005.

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⁷ Emma Lavinia Gifford Hardy, Florence Hardy, Michael Millgate . *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*. Oxford university Press: Google Books Partner Program, 2005. p. 129.

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⁹ Arthur Compton – Rickett, *A History of English literature*. New Delhi: UBS Publishers,1993. p.540.

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CHAPTER – 2

**VICTORIAN ENGLAND AND
WOMEN IN VICTORIAN SOCIETY**

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Victoria's coronation in 1837 signals the official inception of an era which we now designate the Victorian Era, just as her death in 1901 marks its official demise. Amid the multitude of social and political forces of this age, a few things stand out clearly. It is an age of democracy, educational awareness, religious tolerance and of profound social unrest. The multitudes of men, women and little children in the mines and factories were victims of a more terrible industrial and social slavery.¹

Victorian culture emphasized nationalism and cultural absolutism. Victorians placed humans over and outside of nature. They believed in a single way of looking at the world, and in absolute and clear-cut dichotomies between right and wrong, good and bad, and hero and villain. Further, they saw the world as being governed by God's will, and that each person and thing in this world had a specific use. Finally, they saw the world as neatly divided between "civilized" and "savage" people. According to Victorians, the "civilized" were those from industrialized nations, cash-based economies, Protestant Christian

traditions, and patriarchal societies; the "savage" were those from agrarian or hunter-gatherer tribes, barter-based economies, "pagan" or "totemistic" traditions, and matriarchal (or at least "unmanly" societies).²

Similarly, women in the Victorian Period in England still were struggling for their essential human rights. The age was marked by a growing agitation for the equality of women, and the conventional social response to the agitation was largely unfriendly. The women's-rights social protest challenged received wisdom about appropriate women's behavior. One aspect of the challenge was the more or less formal women's-rights movement responding to a whole range of domestic injustices.

Victorian women were willing to struggle for emancipation, even if it meant dying for it. Victorian women had to live under many societal constraints, which kept them subservient and shackled to their relationships. When women struck out for independence and vitality, they were crushed by an unbending Victorian society whose mores did not encourage personal growth and empowerment of women. Tess, although alienated by the men in her life, asserts her dependence by challenging the masculine notion that denies women's voices and by controlling her final destiny.

In Victorian society, women had an extremely well-defined, repressive and limited role in society with strict taboos surrounding female sexuality, which was not a subject available for polite discussion.

Women and the Law in Victorian England³

'By marriage', according to Sir William Blackstone's **Commentaries on the Laws of England** (Oxford, 1765-69, 'the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during her marriage, or at least is incorporated or consolidated into that of her husband, under whose wing, protection and cover, she performs everything.'

This system of coverture underpinned the laws of Victorian England so far as they related to married women. In effect, a woman surrendered her legal existence on marriage. The various amendments to this position during the nineteenth century were piecemeal rather than systematic.

Property

On marriage, the control of woman's property and income from woman's real property, that is, property held in the form of freehold land, passed under the common law to her husband, though he could not dispose of it without her consent. Her personal property, that is, money from

earnings or investments, and personal belongings such as jewellery, passed absolutely into his control, and she could part with them only with his consent; he could, for example, overrule any bequests she made of her personal property. To evade these provisions under the common law, it was necessary to agree a marriage settlement under equity law.

The property laws before 1882 had further significant consequences, related to the fiction of the legal identity of husband and wife; a married woman could not sue or be sued -- if, for example, she felt herself to be libeled, her husband could sue and claim for damages, because he was the only injured party, but she could not. Married women held the same legal status as criminals, minors and the insane.

Divorce

Before the **Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act** of 1857 divorces could only be obtained in England through a cumbersome process involving a suit by the husband against another man for 'criminal conversation' (i.e., for compromising his wife, and therefore diminishing her value, so that he could claim damages), then an ecclesiastical divorce which did not allow the right of re-marriage, and finally a private Act of Parliament which separated the parties *ex vinculis matrimonii* (from the chains of marriage) and did allow re-marriage. The 1857 Act was designed (in

effect) to allow moderately wealthy men to divorce their wives. A woman could be divorced on the simple grounds of her adultery (her adultery threatened his ability to pass his property to his male heirs), whereas a woman had to prove adultery aggravated by desertion (for two years), or by cruelty, rape, sodomy, incest or bigamy. The husband could claim damages against the adulterous third party, the wife could not. There was no provision for consensual divorce, so (for example) the divorce granted Jude and Sue in *Jude the Obscure* would have been invalid since they were not in fact adulterous; and they would have been in breach of the law in allowing it to be supposed that they were.

This was the law until 1923, when the grounds of divorce were made the same for both sexes. Until Legal Aid was available after 1949 divorce remained expensive, and the less well-to-do had to make use of the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878 which allowed a less costly judicial separation but without the right of re-marriage.

Victorian women⁴ provided a vast reservoir of labour, necessary for an expanding though immature economy whose fluctuations demanded additional workers at one time, fewer at another. The precise size of the female working population is impossible to know since the Census returns almost certainly underestimated it; the numbers of women factory workers may well have been more or less

accurate, domestic servants probably rather less so, but thousands of milliners and seamstresses, washerwomen, framework knitters, nailers, straw-plaiters and women workers in the score or more of 'sweated' trades where they worked in their own homes, sometimes whole-time, sometimes part-time, must have escaped the Census investigators, especially when it was feared that penalties might follow from a full declaration of income. The Census of 1851, the first to attempt to count occupations in any detail, gave a total of 2.8 million women and girls over the age of ten in employment out of a female population of 10.1 millions, forming a proportion of 30.2 per cent of the whole labour force. (In 1901 they composed 29.1 per cent and in 1931 29.8 per cent of the labour force, though compulsory schooling to fourteen by the latter year has to be taken into account.⁵) Domestic service took by far the greatest number in 1851 -- 905,000, not including 145,000 washerwomen and 55,000 charwomen. [48-49]

There is a modern myth to the effect that until quite recent years the vast majority of women devoted themselves exclusively to home-making and the bearing and rearing of large families, and that only a few engaged in gainful employment. What has, in fact, changed is that more married women and more middle-class women now work than formerly. Given the huge size of the Victorian working class (at least 80 per cent of the population if we

take the 'manual' definition of class), the demographic consideration that because of the unequal sex ratio one in three women were 'doomed' to spinsterhood anyway, and the fact that the wages of many semi-skilled and unskilled male workers were so low or so uncertain that they would not support a family unless supplemented by the earnings of wives and children, it cannot be doubted that a high proportion of Victorian women, both single and married, regularly engaged in paid work.

While unmarried middle-class women earlier in the century were relegated to becoming their married sisters' companions (as first Mary and then Georgina Hogarth were for Catherine Dickens), those who engaged in gainful employment such as domestic servants (for example, Tess in Hardy's novel) or governesses (for example, Tom Pinch's sister, Ruth, in Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit* [1843]) virtually lost their social status. A middle-class woman's only means of securing status and economic security was marriage -- hence, the desperate competition between the village beauties for the hand of eligible bachelor Tony Kytes in Thomas Hardy's farcical short story *Tony Kytes, the Arch-Deceiver* (first published in March 1891 in Harper's New Monthly Magazine as the first of what would become the frame-tale collection *A Few Crusted Characters* in *Life's Little Ironies* (1894). In the *jeu d' esprit* that parodies with a gender reversal the romantic situation in *Far From the*

Madding Crowd (1874) -- that is, a heroine wooed by three suitors, Hannah Jolliver exercises the only control she can grasp over the exasperating situation under her father's watchful eye by rejecting the young carrier as a prospective husband, even though she is apparently his first choice: "I have spirit, and I do refuse him!" (*Collected Stories* 522), casting her refusal in a positive form. "I would sooner marry no -- nobody at all!" Hardy does not mention whether the proud beauty ever does marry, or whether, like the hapless Phyllis Grove, the doctor's daughter in the tragic "*Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion*" (first published in *The Bristol Times* in January 1890), she lives to regret losing her sole chance for domestic stability, if not exactly domestic bliss. Such aging spinsters constituted a kind of Malthusian "surplus population" who were regarded as redundant because they could not fulfill their divinely sanctioned roles as wives and mothers as Nature (in the Darwinian sense of biological imperative) seemed to have dictated. William Rathbone Greg reflected a commonly held opinion when he argued against employing middle-class women in "Why Are Women Redundant?" in *Literary and Social Judgments* (1873).

The Victorian society held rigid 'views on marriage' and the role of women in life. Most women regarded marriage as a fixed fact of nature. It was a fundamental part of their life plan, as was childbearing. In the mid-19th century,

reproduction was considered a woman's only correct occupation. On average, women of all classes married between the ages of 23 and 26, men between 25 and 30.

Marriage and divorce legislation regulated the relations between men and women. During the 19th century there were great changes made to matrimonial law; however, marriage laws still continued to grant more rights to men than to women. Under the common-law doctrine of *couverture*, when a woman married she lost her independent legal personality as a *femme sole* (single woman) and became a *femme couvert* (covered woman). Men could divorce their wives solely on the grounds of adultery, but women were forced to show proof of cruelty, bigamy, incest, or bestiality along with infidelity. Husbands could beat to death their wives and get only a minimal prison sentence, but wives were considered reprehensible for killing their husbands, even after years of abuse, and often received a death sentence. Divorce was very expensive, mostly only available to the rich. People most often simply lived apart or separated from one another. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1923 equalized the grounds for divorce by allowing woman to sue an adulterous husband for divorce.⁶ The only acceptable alternative to marriage for Victorian women of the middle class was entering one of a limited number of professions, including teaching (like Hardy's Fancy Day in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, although

she is not driven by economic necessity, but, as Boumelha notes, uses teaching as "a means of filling in time until marriage"[39]), nursing, social work, and (despite the limited number of subjects that society expected them to deal with) journalism and writing (like Hardy's poetess, Ethelberta, and romance-writer, Elfride, respectable women in droves became novelists in fin de siècle Britain). In the 1880s and 1890s, younger middle-class "New Women" were able to take advantage of the social trail-blazing of their sisters in the previous generation, including Florence Nightingale (and of the late nineteenth-century technological revolution), and enter the burgeoning Civil Service and other white-collar and service sectors of the economy without loss of social status.

In the middle of this strict social code, Hardy came into being. He lived in a time when marriage was the expected practice for young men and women. He had a very distinct view of the institution and the implications that came along with it. He himself was married twice in his long life, both times not very happily, and had progressive views about the union of the sexes, most particularly regarding divorce. His ideas and opinions are not too carefully concealed in his literary works, though he contested that he kept his own views out of his fiction.

Hardy's personal philosophy on "the marriage question," as it was often phrased, was progressive for his

time. He felt that the institution of marriage damaged through “overregulation” what it sought to protect. He felt that it was absurd to force two people to vow to love each other forever and even if that did not happen, the couple was socially required to stay together. Divorce was not only expensive, but it went against the social mores of the Victorian years, as can be discerned from the legislation described above. Hardy was no so much against marriage as he was against the idea that it was an irrevocable contract.

The Victorian era was one in which massive inequalities existed between men and women; women were not allowed to vote, and in many cases, their right to own property was tenuous, and their place in society was limited. The author points out that *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* deals in the inequities women face and their serious consequences for the sex. *Sense and Sensibility* deals with the full spectrum of gender issues, while approaching the gendered system as posing problems for both male and female lovers, and *Wuthering Heights* seeks to transcend gender within love altogether, even though its characters, in this sense, often fail.

This "Victorian dichotomy"⁷ is a moral and intellectual construct or generalization that was created largely by males without much reference to human realities. To say that any woman who is not chaste must be depraved is to

put half of the human creation into just two categories, and this must be a gross over-simplification.

Probably Hardy's most challenging rejection of this dichotomy was to give *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* the subtitle "*A Pure Woman*". (This decision was, by the way, an afterthought.) This little phrase caused a great scandal, for Tess bears a child out of wedlock - and so, respectable opinion held, she could not possibly be "pure", which is a term only applicable to those women who are either virginal or whose sexual experience is confined to their marriage. The point he was trying to make is that Tess is essentially pure and innocent, despite the fact that she has been exploited and abused by Alec.

Tess is certainly not chaste, but who could possibly describe her as depraved? Well, in the novel Angel seems to regard her in this way, and the irony of this situation is that he himself has had a sexual relationship outside marriage. From his point of view, however, there is one law for a woman, another for a man.

In *Jude the Obscure*, Sue offers another example. She lives with Jude and bears him children even though they are not married to each other, and so conventional prejudice would brand her as "depraved". However, she is in fact an extremely moral person, conscientious and even high-

minded, and it would be misleading to regard her conduct as depravity.

In his view moral judgments need careful thought, and each individual case needs to be considered on its merits. To apply ready-made judgments regardless of circumstances is profoundly unjust, and my novels, especially the later ones, were written partly to demonstrate this fact. In a novel such as *Tess* or *Jude*, the reader is invited to examine all the evidence relating to a very complex case and to reach a sensitive and humane verdict, not one that simply consists in applying a formula.

Elizabeth Lee⁸ wrote in his article “Sex and Sexuality”,

“We are well-accustomed to the ideas of the prudish, sexually-repressed Victorians, who cautiously guarded themselves against any temptation, no matter how slight. Critics and reader have largely and successfully questioned this conception and proven it inaccurate. For during this period, even in seeking any man or woman's ultimate goal in achieving the apparently conservative happy ending of marriage, Victorians were inevitably led to the consummation of their love

and the creation one's own home and family. Sex and sexuality, then, were unavoidable issues for the Victorians.”

It was very commonly believed that male intelligence was greater than female, men had greater independence and courage than women, and men were able to expend energy in sustained bursts of physical or cerebral activity... Women on the other hand... were superior to men in constancy of affection and sympathetic imagination... [they had] 'greater patience, more open-mindedness, greater appreciation of subtle details, and consequently what we call more rapid intuition. The roles of men and women understood as thus, the Victorians still had to deal with the actual sexual act, wherein the bipolar model still held. Earlier on in the century, women were considered the weaker, more innocent sex. She had little to no sexual appetite, often capturing all the sympathy and none of the blame over indiscretions. Men represented the fallen, sinful, and lustful creatures, wrongfully taking advantage of the fragility of women. However, this situation switched in the later half of the period; women had to be held accountable, while the men, slaves to their catabolic purposes and sexual appetites, could not really be blamed. Therefore, women were portrayed either frigid or else insatiable. A young lady was only worth as much as her chastity and appearance of complete innocence, for women were time

bombs just waiting to be set off. Once led astray, she was the fallen woman, and nothing could reconcile that till she died. Many artists and writers of the period did not accept such strict roles for men and women in either their sexualities or their contributions to sexual intercourse. Hardy was one of them.

The nineteenth-century woman was defined by her adherence to submission and resistance to sexuality. She was portrayed by most writers as a naive, accepting figure with strong concerns about living up to the prescribed societal ideals for a respectable woman. The women in Jane Austen's novels offer a clear representation of the nineteenth-century woman. Austen refuses these women any sexual expression and focuses more upon their concern with marriage and society. Thomas Hardy resists Austen's socially accepted depiction of the female with his radically independent heroines.

Hardy redefines the role of women in his novels, focusing on sexuality. By emphasizing the physical aspect of femininity in his unorthodox representation of the sexual female, Hardy threatens the Victorian model of women. Sexuality is evident in *Far From The Madding Crowd* when Bathsheba unknowingly admits her passion to Sergeant Troy. "If you can only fight half as winningly as you can talk, you are able to make a pleasure of a bayonet wound!" Bathsheba realizes her impulsive expression of sexuality

and when she attempts "to retrieve it," she makes the situation worse claiming, "Don't however, and suppose that I derive any pleasure from what you tell me"(chapter xxvi). Allowing Bathsheba to disclose her sexuality, Hardy begins to emphasize the sexual qualities of his female character. In redefining the female, Hardy's passionate heroines display characteristics previously found only in male characters.

In *The Return of The Native*, Eustacia Vye combines the strength of a man with the beauty of a woman. Like the heath, Eustacia is untamable, dark, and wild. Her association with the heath illustrates her masculine qualities. The Victorian ideal displayed in Eustacia's feminine desires conflicts with this masculinity. "She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman"(chapter xi). Eustacia wants to escape the environment that keeps her from finding independence. Hardy creates an unconventional woman antagonized by the desires of passionate love and the independence of a male.

A similar conflict occurs in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Tess, defined by sexuality, is characterized as a "lush bit of nature, a sexual being" (S. Morgan, 43). In contrast with this sexuality, Tess possesses certain qualities inherent in males. The thriving passion of Tess serves two purposes in Hardy's novel. In her defiance of the Victorian ideal Tess is

empowered and strengthened. This passionate sexuality also results in her isolation from society and ultimately her death. Portrayed as a strong woman, Tess is capable of proving her purity and innocence despite the criticism of a cruel Victorian environment.

Independence and strength separate Hardy's heroines from the previous idea of the Victorian heroine. The combination of sexuality and masculine qualities in Hardy's passionate heroines exemplifies a new characterization of women.⁹

'Victorian notion of sexuality' are intriguingly obvious in nineteenth century reviews of Hardy's fiction, beginning with the 1871 publication of the first novel, which provoked a set of responses that remained roughly consistent at least until 1891 appearance of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.¹⁰ The *Athenaeum* objected to "an occasional coarseness" in *Desperate Remedies*, while *Spectator* said that the novel was "disagreeable" that it portrayed "no display of passion except of the brute kind"¹¹. These accusations of coarseness and brutishness – deprived partly from Victorian social and scientific discourses about both the lower classes and primitive racial groups, as well as about women – were variously echoed, in both negative and positive directions, in reviews of Hardy's work during the ensuing two decades. Repeatedly, reviewers or so called moral

police of Victorian prudishness; saw Hardy's treatment of sexual desire as sensational, violent, pagan and bestial. What provoked these reactions in Hardy's contemporaries was not simply the fact that he offered unusually explicit description of female desires; more unconventional and troubling, perhaps, was his sympathetic treatment of his heroines. Victorians were shocked to read Tess like fallen women as "a pure woman". There in lies the challenge to Victorian dichotomy. Five years before Sue Bridehead 'horrified' the Victorian public with her sexual vagaries, James Barrie summarized Hardy's plots in these terms:¹²

"Mr. Hardy seems by the time he began to write to have formed a theory about young women, which ... amounts to this, that on the subject of matrimony no woman knows her own mind ... They think they would like to marry, but are not sure when they arrive at the altar. They hesitate about becoming engaged lest they should then cease to love ... They are seldom sure of their own love unless there is ground for believing that it is not returned, and the only tolerably safe thing to predict of them is, that first they will have two lovers and then marry a third."¹³

This '*laodiceanism*' in Hardy's heroine is, in fact, a psychological struggle: to abide by Victorian norms or to live a life unshackled. Symbolically, Hardy's heroine represents the strife and struggle of Victorian women. Women in Victorian society were agitating for their rights, emancipation and empowerment. *Laodiceanism* in Hardy's heroine represents this agitation at psychological level. It (*laodiceanism*) proved to be *hamartia* to Hardy's heroine but Victorian women did get their rights, although, later in twentieth century.

In the light of this, complexly intertextual relationship among post-Darwinian scientific texts, literary works by Hardy, and critical responses to Hardy, it should not be surprising that an important early interpreter of Hardy was Havelock Ellis¹⁴, whose theories about gender were to become a formative part of the discourse of sexology, the new science of sexual difference during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1893, Ellis placed Hardy's fiction – because of its “minute observation,” its “delicate insight,” and its “conception of love as the one business life”¹⁵ – in the feminine tradition of novel-writing represented by such authors as Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, and George Eliot. Ellis summarized an aspect of Hardy's writing that was endlessly intriguing to Victorian readers: here was a male writer offering a style of writing and of plot construction that was considered to be exclusively female. Charles Dickens and William Thackeray, for example, whom

Ellis invoked as contrasts to Hardy, did not confine their emphasis so exclusively to the courtship plot, especially to the woman's position within that plot, In Ellis's view, however, Hardy's fiction was also different from that of his female models precisely because his heroines were more "instinct-led" – Ellis repeatedly used this term about them – than concerned with moral questions¹⁶:

"Morals, observe, do not come in [...] Mr. Hardy's heroines are characterized by a yielding to circumstance that is limited by the play of instinct. They are never quite bad. It seems, indeed, that this quality in them, which shuts them out from any high level of goodness, is precisely that which saves them from ever being very bad. They have an instinctive self-respect; an instinctive purity [...] Even Eustacia Vye has no impure taint about her. One feels compelled to insist on the instinctiveness of these women."¹⁷

Implicit in the language of this passage is a linkage of Hardy's women with those racial and social groups a "primitive" by Victorian social theories, and later, in a consideration of the Wessex setting, Ellis directly articulated this idea:

“It would almost seem that in the solitary lives on these Dorset heaths we are in contact with what is really a primitive phase of society [...] and that those qualities which we have found to be distinctive of his heroines, the absence of moral feeling, the instinctiveness, had a direct relation to the wild and solitary character of their environment.”¹⁸

Here Ellis gave expression to the idea, suggested less clearly in many reviews, that Hardy’s construction of gender difference works in terms not of civilized, Christian codes but of post-Darwinian anthropological theories about social behaviour: the “purity” of Hardy’s characters, especially his women, is that of the rural rustic, of the “instinctive” and amoral “primitive” races.

In this discussion on Victorian social ethics, Jagdish Chandra Dave in his book *“The Human Predicament in Hardy’s Novel”*¹⁹ quotes Douglas Brown:

“With so many others, he (Hardy) adhered to firm moral standards and kept his conscience unusually sensitive, but without acknowledging any transcendental Cause as the ground of

moral values. [...] His moral feeling is outraged by the indifference of nature to human values. But a profound sense of human responsibility remains.”²⁰

Hardy's position in social ethics may accurately be described as humanism. Like all the varieties of nineteenth and twentieth century humanism it takes its stand on the altruistic sentiment as adequate basis, and boldly refuses to connect morality with any material reward. Unlike them all, however, it is free from all hedonistic elements, and treats vicarious suffering as the supreme value. In this and his recognition of life as a thing to be put up with, though without the consolations of belief in Heaven, Hardy was nearer to the essential and authentic Christianity than those who criticized him as a heathen and a heretic were. Hardy, of course, does have sympathy for the zest for existence of the human race when it was young; Angel in *Tess* and Sue in *Jude* do state that ancient Greece, not ancient Israel, should have been the source of Europe's inspiration. But correctly interpreted, this only implies Hardy's inspiration for the uninhibited flow of the Hellenic life, of a great culture founded on the freedom of thought and feeling, and his regret that Christianity had ceased not only to rejoice in life in accordance with Nature, but also to regard it as amoral. He, it seems, felt that Christian morals, essential for formal, if freely chosen, were excellent, and deplored

that they had degraded into repressive taboos and customs.²¹

In this exploration of Victorian prudish attitude towards ethics, morality, sex and sexuality, in the end, it is worth considering what Dellamora²² and Kincaid²³ has explored. Their works open up valuable new approaches to Hardy's depiction of sexuality. Importantly, both critics point to the ways in which Hardy's fiction simultaneously depicts and elicits sexual responses that are transgressive, not only for their failure to conform with standard rules governing courtship and marriage, but also for their failure to subscribe exclusively to the dictates of compulsory heterosexuality. In this field, however, there remains much to be done. In her groundbreaking book *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick makes only brief mention of the Henchard – Farfrae relationship as subliminally erotic,²⁴ but Hardy's fiction offers great potential for an analysis of a gender framework in which women are the mediating link between men. Homoerotic relationships are pervasive in Hardy²⁵ and little has been done with this interesting topic. More ignored is still the subject of female same-sex desire in Hardy, which made an amazingly explicit appearance, complete with a lovemaking scene in bed, in the Cytherea – Miss Aldclyffe relationship of *Desperate Remedies*. Analogous to this is the scene in *The Woodlanders* where Grace Melbury

and Felice Charmond, sexually rivals in their respective relationships with Edred Fitzpiers, cling to each other when lost in the woods at night. In these scenes and others (even those involving the milkmaids at Talbothays), Hardy presents physical and emotional ties between women that seem in the eyes of the twentieth century reader, startlingly explicit. Yet no one has thoroughly dealt with these relationships.

It is Havelock Ellis, after all, who was attracted to Hardy's supposed primitivism and who, some twenty years later, published a book on *sexual Inversion*, and this strange conjunction once again draws attention to the complex relationship Hardy's text bears to a whole range of cultural discourses that continue to shape our own constructions of sexual difference. For this reason alone, readers in the twenty first century will no doubt persist in reading the works of Thomas Hardy for their conflicted and contradictory engagement with matters of gender in Victorian England.

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CHAPTER – 3

***TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES, JUDE THE OBSCURE,
THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE, AND
FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD***

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TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES, JUDE THE OBSCURE, THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE, AND FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *Jude the Obscure*, *The Return of the Native*, and *Far From the Madding Crowd*, we find a unique portrayal of women characters like Tess, Sue Bridehead, Eustacia Vye and Bathsheba Everdene. Once we get acquaintance with them, they linger in our memory all the way through our life. These women are so powerfully drawn that they go on haunting us. Then onwards, whatever piece of literature we read, unconsciously, we are forced to compare and contrast it with them.

Among these, Tess claims attention first, not only in popularity, but more especially, in that her creator distinguished her by the appellation of '*a pure woman*'. Her most dangerous rival in supreme interest is Sue Bridehead. The most important, distinctive and interesting element in her nature is a certain 'sexlessness'. In the way of sheer greatness Eustacia Vye stands out with Sue Bridehead and Tess. The contrast between Eustacia and Sue is so marked that it might seem that Hardy had in them sought to portray the two extremes of the splendid

characteristics in woman. Another equally important woman character is Bathsheba Everdene. She is fine character and Hardy thought her worth studying; indeed, he was enthusiastic enough about her to call her “an Elizabeth in flesh and a Mary Stuart in spirit”!¹

Durbeyfield, Teresa (‘Tess’):

The name was suggested by that of Hardy’s cousin, Teresa Hardy, who lived at Higher Bockhampton. When the novel was published, she told Hermann Lea that ‘the main episodes happened to a relative of theirs’. Another of Hardy’s cousins (who lived at Puddletown) stated that ‘Tess’s life and adventures and final death are practically what happened to a relative of ours’.²

She was the eldest of the Durbeyfield family, between her mother and Tess, with her National School education, lay ‘a gap of two hundred years, that between the Jacobean and the Victorian ages’³. Her sensitive perceptiveness made her:

‘[...] quite a Malthusian towards her mother for thoughtlessly giving her so many little sisters and brothers, when it was such a trouble to nurse and provide for them’.⁴

In order to help her family, she went to work, as soon as she left school, on nearby farms, hay-making,

harvesting, and, preferably, milking and butter-making, as she had learned to do at home when her father owned cows. A guilty sense of responsibility for the death of her father 's horse Prince impelled her to accept employment at the Slopes, which she had visited when her parents fondly thought they were related to the 'd'Urbervilles' there, and had hopes that the link might work to Tess's advantage. Hardy writes:

“Tess Durbeyfield at this time of her life was a mere vessel of emotions untinged by emotions.”⁵

Tess overcame her reluctance to go, after forming an unfavourable impression of Alec d'Urbervilles. She was a handsome girl, of physical maturity which belied her years. Hardy introduced her as:

“She was a fine and handsome girl – not handsome than some others, possibly – but her mobile peony mouth and large innocent eyes added eloquence to colour and shape. She wore a red ribbon in her hair.....”⁶

Alec had had one aim when he contrived to find work for her, and his opportunity came when Tess accepted his protection to escape physical violence from the two 'Amazonian' Darch sisters, as they were returning from their Saturday-night revels at

Chaseborough. 'Out of the frying-pan into the fire!' laughed dark Car's mother. Lost in the Chase, Tess was at Alec's mercy, and he was ruthless. Afterwards she forgot her principles to the extent of accepting presents from him, but she soon realized her folly, despised him, and left for home. Marriage to such a man was out of the question, whatever her mother thought.

"And yet th'st not got him to marry 'ee!" reiterated her mother. "Any woman would have done it but you, after that!"

"Perhaps any woman would, except me."⁷

Tess was a woman of high principles, with certain characteristics such as a careless and unselfish acceptance of her lot which at critical points contributed to the tragedy of her life after her early downfall. But chance, or fate, played a great part in directing her life along tragic courses. The most significant feature of Tess is what she expressly shows what to Hardy were the greatest virtues as enunciated by St. Paul.

After the death of her child, Tess rallied and accepted work as a dairy-maid at Talbothays. Here, from spring to autumn, she spent her happiest days, though they were clouded at times by recollections of the past,

and increasingly when Angel Clare wanted to marry her. She felt she was not worthy of him, and tried to tell him about the past, but was balked and deferred the task. She did not wish to stand in the way of the other dairymaids who were in love with Angel. But the time came when she could no longer refuse an answer to his proposals. She was in love with him, but wished that:

“It would always be summer and autumn, and you always courting me, and always thinking as much of me as you have done through the past summer-time.”⁸

Despite her mother’s advice, Tess had to tell the truth. She wrote to Angel, but the letter she slipped under his door was thrust under the carpet, and he did not see it. On the evening of the wedding-day, Angel confessed to dissipation with a woman in London. Tess readily forgave, and told her story. But, despite his intellectual freedom, Angel’s love was so ideal and that his Victorianism so engrained that he could not compromise. When Tess urged him to forgive her...

“Forgive me as you are forgiven!
I forgive you, Angel.”

“O Tess, forgiveness does not apply to the case! You were one person; now you are another. My God – how can forgiveness meet such a

grotesque – prestidigitation as that!
[...] I repeat, the woman I have been
loving is not you. Another woman in
your shape.”⁹

His idealized Tess was ‘dead’, and separation followed almost inevitably. Where a woman of the world might have prevailed, Tess accepted his decision ‘as her deserts’. She ‘sought not her own; was not provoked; though no evil of his treatment of her.’

When Angel left for Brazil, she maintained herself by working on farms as far from Talbothays and her home as possible. Most of the money Angel left her she gave to her destitute parents. She did not persist in her attempt to see Angel’s parents at Emminster; the result was that she met Alec d’Urberville again, and his passions revived. The hardships she endured at Flintcomb-Ash made her conclude that there was no escaping the law:

“Once victim, always victim.”

Hearing of her mother’s illness, she left the farm at once, though it meant walking many miles in the dark. Her father’s death and the eviction of the family from Marlott meant great distress, and the thought of it haunted her. Despairing of Angel’s return, she gave way to Alec’s importunities for the sake of her family, and went to live with him at Sandbourne. She had become a victim of circumstance. On his return, Angel saw ‘that his

original Tess had spiritually ceased to recognize the body before him as hers – allowing it to drift, like a corpse upon the current, in a direction dissociated from its living well¹⁰. Fate had tricked her, but to her agonized and overwrought mind it was Alec, who had always said Angel would never return, who had played her false; and she stabbed him to death. Before her arrest, she enjoyed short-lived happiness with Angel. When it came, she was glad. The end had to come, and she was ready for it. Tragic end of Tess is described by Hardy as:

“Justice’ was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess.”¹¹

Hardy’s giving subtitle “A Pure Women”, to *Tess* aroused great controversy among Victorians. To Hardy, it had nothing to do with purity in the narrow moral sense. Purity is of the spirit, and with a spiritual (not physical) reference. In that sense she is not almost but absolutely pure.¹² Whether morality be of mind, or of the heart, or of both, there cannot be two respectable opinion about Tess’s morals. Her behaviour, her thoughts, her desires, on all perilous occasions – with D’Urberville, early and late; with Clare; with her other admirers – are unimpeachable, considered from the most critical code and point of view. Moreover, her shame and remorse are infinite. Mentally and morally she is stainless. From the beginning till the end, she strives to remain so. Even

during the later period of dissipation with D'Urberville her mind is drugged and dead with weariness, pain and despair, and yet she remains guiltless and morally 'pure'.

But it is man's privilege and problem to have a body as well as a mind and in Tess the flesh was slightly at variance with her spirit. Early in the novel we read:

"She had an attribute which [...] caused D'Urberville's eyes to rivet themselves upon her. It was luxuriousness of aspect, a fullness of growth, which made her appear more of a woman than she really was."¹³

Here Hardy clearly suggests an element in the flesh antagonistic to the mental purity emphasized above. Whatever else we call her, Tess remains the most lovable of Hardy's heroines. What she might have made of life, what life might have made of her, had circumstances and Clare been kind, is beyond dreaming. Had Tess's guardian angel or the providence of her simple faith, been present among the yews and oaks of The Chase, she surely would have made a beautiful life. It always remains an unanswered question:

'why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often

the coarse appropriates the finer
thus, the wrong man the woman, the
wrong woman the man, many
thousand years of analytical
philosophy have failed to explain to
our sense of order'.¹⁴

Bridehead, Susanna:

The name may be an amalgam. 'Susanna' recalls 'The History of Susanna' in The Apocrypha; it was at one time the name for Tess. 'Bridehead', by analogy with 'maidenhead', suggests Sue's marital squeamishness. 'Head' was at first Jude Fawley's surname, and derives from Hardy's grandmother, who lived at Fawley or 'Marygreen'.

She was Jude's cousin. Her father had been an ecclesiastical metal-worker at Christminster. Her mother had left him and lived with Sue in London. He had left Christminster when Jude arrived there, but Sue worked in Miss Fontover's ecclesiastical warehouse. She had been very friendly with a Christminster undergraduate, who lent her many books. She had read widely and had most advanced views. To Jude, her outlook was quite Voltairean. When her friend left Christminster, she lived with him in London, sharing a sitting-room for fifteen months, but refused to love him.

He died broken hearted. But for the complications arising from his marriage to Arabella, this was very much the pattern that Jude was to follow with Sue. She was a creature of 'epicene' sweetness and aversion to sex, with an astonishing freedom of intellect. When Miss Fontover smashed Sue's Greek statuettes, they quarreled, and Sue decided to leave. It was Jude who found her a position as pupil-teacher with Phillotson at village called Lumsdon. She was an apt pupil, and became a Queen's Scholar at Melchester Training College for teachers. Sue and Jude missed their train back to Melchester late one evening, after an excursion to Wardour Castle, and as a result Sue was condemned to solitary confinement for a week. She escaped and took refuge at Jude's. Though she loved him; she decided to fulfill her engagement to marry Phillotson, then schoolmaster at Shaston, when she heard that Jude was married. Phillotson is truly noble and little subject to passion's sway. Their marriage is certainly not bad in Hardy's view.¹⁵

“O, he's too old for her – too old!” cried Jude in all the terrible sickness of hopeless, handicapped love.¹⁶

His words are those of a defeated rival. Jude, moreover, is too young to understand that parity in age between the marrying couple is a standard desirable

from the point of view of sexual satisfaction only. Hardy observes:

‘Phillotson was perhaps twenty years her senior, but many a happy marriage had been made in such conditions of age.’¹⁷

Sue herself says to Jude:

‘If you think I am not happy because he’s too old for me, you are wrong.’¹⁸

Jude acted as best man at her request. The marriage was a failure from the start, and sue was finally released. She was a woman ‘tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies’. She delighted in Jude’s company and returned to him, but her delight was of a supremely delicate kind which she did not wish to endanger by sexual passion or the ‘iron contract’ of marriage. Even when she and Jude had freed by divorce, she could not contemplate matrimony for reasons which Hardy set out succinctly in a letter to Edmund Gosse¹⁹:

“One other reasons fearing the marriage ceremony is that she fears it would be breaking faith with Jude to withheld herself at pleasure, or altogether, after it; though while uncontracted she feels at liberty to

yield herself as seldom as she chooses’.

She surrenders for sexual relationship only when she felt jealous that Jude might leave her for Arabella. The coming of Father Time, whom Sue took to her heart immediately, the fact that their marriage had been deferred, and Jude’s failure to defend himself in both divorce cases, created so much scandal at Aldbrickham that both he and Sue found it increasingly difficult to obtain work. Two children were born and a third was expected. It was at Christminster that Father Time, Arabella’s child, feeling that he was an intruder, and Sue’s children were the cause of their parents’ afflictions, killed them and hanged himself. Sue never recovered from the shock. The turning point came in her life and philosophy:

“Arabella’s child killing mine was a judgment – the right slaying the wrong.”²⁰

Earlier, her intellect had ‘scintillated like a star’, and played like lighting over conventions and formalities’ which Jude had respected. Like Hardy, she had believed that the First Cause worked automatically like a somnambulist and had never contemplated the development of emotional perceptiveness in the human race. But now affliction made opposing forces anthropomorphic. She could not oppose God. She must

make amends for her 'insolence of action' and accept the only marriage which was right in the sight of Heaven. So, although she loved Jude still, she returned to Phillotson and assumed a relationship which was right in the eyes of the world but 'adultery' to her former self. Circumstance and the 'letter' of the law had killed her spirit.

In portraying Sue, Hardy seems to be in mood of revolt against Victorian social mores, especially marriage institution. Sue, the wife of Phillotson, tells Jude about the misery of bad marriage:

“And it is said that what a woman shrinks from – in the early days other marriage – she shakes down to with comfortable indifference in half-a-dozen years. But that is much like saying that the amputation of a limb is no affliction, since a person gets comfortably accustomed to the use of a wooden leg or arm in the course of time.”²¹

Similarly, Jude's marriage with Arabella is irretrievably bad and has unnecessarily crippled him:

“Their lives were ruined, he thought; ruined by the fundamental error of their matrimonial union: that of having based a permanent contract

on a temporary feeling which had no necessary connection with affinities that alone render a life-long comradeship tolerable.”²²

The most important, distinctive and interesting element in Sue’s nature is a certain sexlessness. And the concentrated essential perfume of this lily, the trait by which she is Sue Bridehead, is her desire for marriage without physical sex-union.²³ D.H.Lawrence rightly observes:

“She must, by the constitution of her nature, remain quite physically intact, for the female was atrophied in her, to the enlargement of the male activity. [...] She wanted some quickening for this atrophied female. [...] that the new rousing might give her a sense of life. But he could only *live* in the mind.”²⁴

The conception is, of course, not put forth in *Jude* for the first time. The term ‘Platonic affection; has been often abused, but Sue’s ideal of a sexless-union of spirits might claim some analogy with that which Socrates and his great pupil intended by Love. At the other end of time we have Bernard Shaw, in the introduction to *Man and Superman*, suggesting that

spiritual and physical marriage should be distinguished and separated.

There is, of course, the view that Sue is merely dabbling in one of the many subtleties of modern sex-relations. Hardy himself wrote in a letter after the publication of *Jude the Obscure*:

“One point [...] I could not dwell upon: that, though she has children, her intimacies with Jude have never been more than occasional, even when they were living together. [...] one of the reasons for fearing the marriage ceremony is that she fears it would be breaking faith with Jude to withhold herself at pleasure, or altogether, after it; though while uncontracted she feels at liberty to yield herself as seldom as she chooses.”²⁵

That may be the case. It would not necessarily be the worse for that. To subtilise is not always to degrade. But a more interesting possibility is suggested by Sue herself: Jude has declared her a phantasmal, bodiless creature, with very little animal passion in her; to which she replies:

“I am not so exceptional a woman as you think. Fewer women

like marriage than you suppose, only they enter into it for the dignity it is assumed to confer.”²⁶

Sue’s returning back to Phillotson maybe viewed as Hardy’s New Woman’s laodiceanism: in her struggle against Victorian social ethical standards, she, at last, succumbs to it. To quote her:

“I have thought that we have been selfish, careless, even impious, in our courses, you and I. our life has been a vain attempt at self-delight. But self-abnegation is the higher road. We should mortify the flesh – the terrible flesh – the curse of Adam!”²⁷

To quote once more:

“We ought to be continually sacrificing ourselves on the altar of duty! But I have always striven to do what has pleased me. I well deserved the scourging I have got!”²⁸

But Jude does not understand this new development in her from the vindication of impulses to the vindication of the regulating moral will, from self-indulgence to self-renunciation.²⁹ He fails to see that

she has turned only to the Cross, not to 'Christianity, or mysticism, or Sacerdotalism'.³⁰

Hardy's critics have likewise failed to understand the real nature of her change. H.C.Duffin, for example, writes: "From her old free thought she moves to ritualistic religion, and she becomes totally oblivious of her old same reasoning on the marriage question".³¹

D.H.Lawrence observes:

"The last act of her intellect was the utter renunciation of her mind and the embracing of utter orthodoxy, where every belief, every thought, every decision was made ready for her, so that she did not exist self-responsible".³²

Jagdish Chandra Dave observes:

"Neither Jude or Hardy's critics as represented by Duffin and Lawrence have grasped the essential point that instead of ceasing to be self-responsible she has now exhibited the existential 'authenticity'".³³

Similarly, Edith Kern says it is the awareness of 'freedom and responsibility of choice'³⁴, and Hector Hawton defines it as 'an act of will rather than an act of

intellect'³⁵. Her intellect is in its proper place. Only now it has to shed light on the path of ethical will.³⁶ But she fails to explain it all to Jude. When he said that he could not understand her extraordinary blindness to her own old logic which regarded their union as nature's marriage, or see any reason why she should return to Phillotson, her answer is:

“Ah, dear Jude; that's because you are like a totally deaf man observing people listening to music. You say 'what are they regarding? Nothing is there.' But something is.”³⁷

Sue is an intellectual woman. But she is no hard-boiled logician, no frigid unemotional robot. She is quiveringly sensitive, she is often perverse; she is alive with emotions. She thinks as well as feels; she is capable of estimating right and wrong with her reasoning power. And we know what tragic part her reasoning plays in her destiny. Sue is no unexpressive as other Hardy's women such as Tess and Elfride: her position is at least as difficult of explanation as theirs, but she never fails to make herself perfectly clear to Jude and Phillotson. Yet her intellectuality does not save her from falling, at the most critical moment of her life, a victim to the most unintellectual of human frailties – jealousy. Whatever may be thought of her yielding to Jude's demand that their marriage shall be brought to the ordinary consummation, there can be no two opinion – a fear lest he should return to Arabella.³⁸

H.C.Duffin better sums up Sue as:

“A woman of spiritual quality, born to live a life of fine passion, she made intellect her star: perhaps the ‘complex’ that resulted is the explanation of her tragedy.”³⁹

Vye, Eustacia:

A girl of nineteen, She lived with her grandfather Captain Vye at Mistover Knap. She was the daughter of a Corfiote bandmaster at Budmouth, and well educated. When her parents died she was taken from this fashionable seaside resort to live a lonely life on Egdon, from the boredom of which there was little escape but reading and dreaming of a glamorous life at Budmouth or elsewhere. Wildeve was her one real distraction, and it is hardly surprising that she used the bonfire signal again to renew their meetings when she heard he had returned unmarried from Anglebury.

She was a voluptuous lady; a whole winter did not contain darkness enough to form the shadow of her hair; her eyes were ‘pagan’ and ‘full of nocturnal mysteries’. She was ‘the raw material of a divinity’. The darkness in which she is introduced on Rainbarrow is in harmony with her lot. Hardy describes her:

“Eustacia Vye was the raw material of a divinity [...] She has the passions and instincts which make a

model goddess – that is, those which make not quite make a model woman [...] To see her hair was to fancy that a whole winter did not contain darkness enough to form its shadow [...] She had pagan eyes, full of nocturnal mysteries [...] Her moods recalled lotus-eaters [...] her motions, the ebb and flow of the sea; her voice, the viola [...] To be loved to madness – such was her great desire.⁴⁰

Her appearance also suggests unmistakably the Hellenic character of her mind, and an utterly this-worldly zest for existence at its brightest, of the world's younger days sparkles in her dark pupils. But she has been existing "in suppressed state and not in one of languor, or stagnation" because she has to live in a place that does not harmonize well with her longings.⁴¹

Egdon was her Hades; the bonfire, a parallel to her Promethean 'rebelliousness'. Her disposition, however, was to 'let events fall out as they might sooner than wrestle hard to direct them'. The first sound we hear from her is 'a lengthened sighing' that harmonizes with the sound of the heath. She yearned for sunny afternoons on an esplanade, with military bands, officers, and gallants. She idealized Wildeve 'for want of a better object'. 'Her high gods were

William the Conqueror, Strafford, and Napoleon Buonaparte.⁴² The telescope and hour-glass which she often carried suggest ‘the desire of something afar’, and the sense that the time for enjoyment is slipping away. Clym’s return from Paris was like a man coming from heaven:

“A young and clever man was coming into that lonely heath from, of all contrasting places in the world, Paris. It was like a man coming from heaven.”⁴³

When he spoke to her, her perfervid imagination produced ‘a cycle of visions’⁴⁴. The Captain suggested that reading had filled her head with too much ‘romantic non-sense’:

“If Miss Eustacia, had less romantic nonsense in her head it would be better for her.”⁴⁵

She wanted “life – music, poetry, passion, war and all the beating of pulsing that is going on in the great arteries of the world”⁴⁶. In a moment of tragic decision, shortly before her death, she regretted that Wildeve was not Saul or Bonaparte! Before Clym’s return to his native heath, she lived in a wilderness, and desired love ‘as one in a desert would be thankful for brackish water’. All that Egdon offered was the ‘pond’ associated with Wildeve. When she realized that

Clym did not intend to return to Paris, her moon of love was eclipsed.

Happiness in marriage with him – “when the July sun fired Egdon and its crimson heather to scarlet and It was the one season of the year, and the one weather of the season, in which the heath was gorgeous”⁴⁷ – did not last long. She tired of the dullness of life with a man who by turns studied and took to furze-cutting for a living, and soon renewed her meeting with Wildeve. She had resented what seemed to her the ignoble implications of Mrs. Yeobright’s asking whether she had received money from Wildeve, and swore she would never see her again. Wildeve came with the intention of telling her the fortune he had unexpectedly inherited, just when Mrs. Yeobright was reaching Alderworth to seek reconciliation with Clym and Eustacia. Hearing Clym utter ‘Mother’, Eustacia assume he had opened the door to her, and promptly saw Wildeve out another way. But Clym worried about the rift with his mother, had been talking in his sleep. Mrs. Yeobright went away and died on the return journey, completely exhausted and bitter at heart. She had seen Clym enter the house ahead of her and Eustacia look out at the window when she knocked.

It was while Clym was recovering from the illness consequent on his mother’s death and his sense of guilt that his suspicions were awakened against

Eustacia. His inquiries led him to think that she was both a 'murderess' and adulteress. Eustacia bore his false accusations and fury with dignity and without any attempt at self-exoneration, but at last broke down and left him. She returned to her grandfather's and was tempted to think of suicide when she saw his pistols. Charley, suspecting her intention, hid them. She recovered, and decided to make advantage of Wildeve's offer to help her to Paris. The night she chose for her departure was wild, dark, and stormy. Eustacia was lost on the heath and in great distress as she tried to make her way to her rendezvous. She fell into the swirling flood below Shadwater Weir and was drowned.

Many critics have assumed that she committed suicide, and Clym, in his self-condemnation for the death of the two women he had loved, did not appear to rule out the possibility. Hardy's clues indicate that Eustacia quickly recovered from the temptation which came to her at her grandfather's, that she was looking forward to her escape from Egdon, and that when she found that resistance was useless in the escape from Egdon, and that when she found that resistance was useless in the vortex of the pool, she resigned herself to fate, as was customary with her. She lay:

“[...] still in death [...] the expression of her finely carved mouth was pleasant [...] Eternal rigidity had seized upon it in a momentary

transition between fervour and resignation.”⁴⁸

In the way of sheer greatness Eustacia Vye stands out with Sue and Tess. The contrast between Eustacia and Sue is so marked that it might seem that Hardy had in them sought to portray the two extremes of the splendid in woman – the one, in whom spirit governs, leaving flesh to play a purely ancillary part; the other – who is to the first as a burning forest is to a star – whose flesh, glorious and exultant, has absorbed her soul, and has blood-red passions of its own⁴⁹. It is this second type that we have marvelously portrayed in Eustacia, and it is an astonishing thing that Hardy should have found one phrase which he thought appropriate both for her and for Sue:

“As far as social ethics were concerned Eustacia approached the savage state, though in emotion she was all the while an epicure. She had advanced to the secret recesses of sensuousness, yet had hardly crossed the threshold of conventionality.”⁵⁰

An epicure in emotion, like Sue! Well, perhaps. But how different are Eustacia’s emotional feasts from Sue’s cool experimental savourings. If epicures both, it was as *gourmand* and *gourmet*! However, a rich sensuousness is undoubtedly her dominant

characteristic, making her conspicuous among Hardy's women. She had "predetermined to nourish a passion for Yeobright"⁵¹. She declares she once saw an officer of Hussars ride down the street, and though he was a tall stranger and never spoke to her. She loved him till she thought she should really die of love. It is not a pleasant thing, this nature in woman; it is only tolerable in Eustacia because her personality as a whole is heroic enough to glorify all its constituents.⁵² Her sensuous nature is incapable of thought. She is built entirely of high-potentialised feeling. Her indolence covers, a Mrs. Yeobright perceived, very strong passions. Her every act is the instant product of impetuous desire. Her cry that she has tried to be a splendid woman is bitterest ignorance of self; conscious and deliberate effort to be anything at all – to effect any change in her nature, to resist any impulse – is mere impossibility to her purely instinctive character. Such a woman must inevitably sin, according to all human notions of virtues: her soul dissolved in her hot blood, the restraint of reason absent, she has no guide but emotion and animal wants.⁵³

Hardy is compassionate towards all her spontaneous urges for what is called life. He writes of the afflicted Eustacia :

"There was a forlorn look about her beautiful eyes which, whether she deserved it or not, would have

excited pity in the breast of any one who had known her during the full flush of her love for Clym.”⁵⁴

Jagdish Chandra Dave in *The Human Predicament in Hardy's Novels* observes:

“Hardy, in spite of his sympathy, does not approve of her thoughtless forces for longing which proves destructive. There is no reason why the desires of such a beautiful shapes languishing upon the heath should not be satisfied. But then, the universe is irrational, and her condition irremediable.”

Eustacia fails to understand, does not even try to understand, that her own frantic quest for the homeland after heart's desire has alienated her in the only place where she is condemned to live. Her anger blinds her to the right way of establishing harmony which is by turning the bitter divorce of existence into a peaceful co-existence with Nature, into an emotionality agreed separation to correspond well with rational recognition of the fact.⁵⁵ She conceives, like a pagan, ‘some indistinct, colossal Prince of the World, who had framed her situation and ruled her lot’,⁵⁶ and whines:

“O, the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been

injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control! O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all!”⁵⁷

The rebel is left sad and tired when energy is exhausted in the fruitless strain of revolt.

“I have made a bad bargain with life,” says Eustacia, “and I am weary of it – weary [...] what makes death painful except the thought of others’ grief? – and that is absent in my case, for not a sigh would follow me!”⁵⁸

Death, then, appears to be the only ‘door of relief’ and she enters it by drowning herself. The obstinate ‘this-worldly’ Hellenic desired for life at its happiest thus terminate in the tragic disintegration of the being who cherishes them.

Everdene, Bathsheba:

Bathsheba is the central character round whom revolve the stories of Gabriel Oak, Boldwood and Troy. When Gabriel Oak met her at Norcombe Hill, she was young and attractive woman, but suffering, he thought, from vanity. Nevertheless, he proposed to her, but she rejected him. Until she met Troy, she was proud of

being a woman and had never thought seriously of marriage. Although she scarcely knew the divinity's name, Diana was the goddess whom Bathsheba instinctively adored.

Oak meet her again when he was seeking employment; she had taken over Weatherbury Upper Farm. On the sudden death of her uncle, James Everdene, She needed a shepherd, and promptly accepted Oak's services after he had helped to extinguish the fire which threatened one of her ricks. At the Corn Exchange in Casterbridge she excited much comment, and it was the indifference of Farmer Boldwood which prompted her to send a valentine:

"The Rose is red
The violet blue
Carnation's sweet
And so are you. [...] Marry me."⁵⁹

This valentine love-letter written in an idle and thoughtless mood resulted in the most unfortunate consequence. Gabriel remonstrated against her behaviour when it was obvious that she had aroused Boldwood's interest, and was immediately dismissed. And emergency with the sheep made Bathsheba request his return.

Against her better judgment, she became infatuated with Sergeant Troy. She was so alarmed by

the vague threats of the jealous Boldwood that she decided impulsively one night to drive off alone to Bath to warn Troy and sever connection with him. Admiration, fear of scandal from seeking out Troy in Bath, and the jealousy which he had succeeded in rousing, resulted, however, in her consenting to an immediate marriage.

Events soon revealed his hollowness and his intention to pursue pleasure even if it meant her ruin. His perfidy was disclosed when jealousy curiosity made Bathsheba open the coffin containing Fanny Robin and her child. Still she wished to cling to him, but Troy, overcome with remorse and a sense of his baseness, left her. He was presumed drowned, and Boldwood renewed his suit. Bathsheba kept postponing an engagement to which her heart could not consent. However, she promised to declare her decision at a Christmas party Boldwood held in her honour. Troy's sudden irruption and his seizure of Bathsheba's hand was too much for the overwrought Boldwood, who promptly shot him dead. Bathsheba took charge of her husband, had his body conveyed to her house, and prepared him, without assistance, for burial. Afterwards she felt that life held nothing further for her. Nevertheless, when Oak talked of emigrating, she realized how much she had come to depend on him, and readily consented to marry him. Theirs was the love which grows up gradually 'in the interstices of [...]

hard prosaic reality'⁶⁰, the only love, Hardy adds, which is capable of being as 'strong as death'⁶¹.

At first she seems light and coquettish. But the adversity that comes to her in the wake of her bad marriage with Troy makes her sober. After the reported death of Troy she feels fairly chastened. After his murder by Boldwood even her residual zest for life passes away and her rebellious tendency dies. But her power of endurance does not break.⁶² Commenting on her behaviour soon after Troy falls dead, Hardy writes:

“Deeds of endurance, which seem ordinary in philosophy, are rare in conduct, and Bathsheba was astonishing all round her now, for her philosophy was her conduct, and she seldom thought practicable what she did not practice. *She was of the stuff of which great men's mothers are made.*”⁶³

Jagdish Chandra Dave compares her tragic end with that of Michael Henchard. He observes: ‘But for her fortitude, “more of will than of spontaneity”⁶⁴, is like Henchard’s, and has no affirmative character. Henchard breaks when his capacity to bear is exhausted, Bathsheba also would have broken if she had been lonely at the end as Henchard, and if Oak’s affectionate support had not been readily available.

Over above her round individuality Bathsheba stands symbolically for life itself, capricious and alluring, who breaks Boldwood, satiates Troy and satisfies despite her coquetry and caprice Gabriel Oak who, disinterested in the material sense, loves her in the abstract. Her marriage with Oak at the end is significant. It means that resignation alone is right affirmation, as hope represented in Boldwood paves the way to despair, and possession, as in the case of Troy, is ennui.⁶⁵

“In the ill-judged execution of the well-judged plan of things, the call seldom produces the comer; the man to love rarely coincides with the hour for loving. Nature does not often say, “See!” to her poor creature at a time when seeing can lead to happy doing, or reply “Here!” to a body’s cry of “Where?” till the hide-and-seek has become an irksome, outworn game.”⁶⁶

But for Bathsheba and Sue, who, at least at the end, found Gabriel Oak and Phillotson in this irksome game; Tess and Eustacia fails to produce the ‘comer’ or to get an answer from Nature to their body’s cry of ‘where?’.

These prominent women characters of Hardy suffered a lot. They were battered and tattered,

sometimes by Victorian dichotomy and social mores, occasionally by 'well-judged execution of ill-judged plan'⁶⁷, at times by the folly of their nature and so often by evil circumstances. Their woes can better be summed up in a poem which appeared on the title-page of *The Return of the Native*:

"To sorrow
I bade good-morrow,
And thought to leave her far away behind;
But cheerly, cheerly,
She loves me dearly;
She is so constant to me, and so kind.
I would deceive her,
And so leave her,
But ah! She is so constant and so kind."⁶⁸

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- ³ Thomas Hardy. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. London: Pan Books.1995. p.54.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p.54.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p.35
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p.97 and 98.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p.151.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p.225.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 337
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.373.
- ¹² Henry Charles Duffin. *Thomas Hardy: A Study of the Wessex Novels, the Poems, and the Dynasts*. New Delhi: Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd., rpt. 2000. p.219.
- ¹³ Thomas Hardy. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. London: Pan Books.1995.p.67.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.88 and 89.
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- ¹⁹ Hardy, Florence Emily. *The Later Life of Thomas Hardy 1892 – 1928*. London: Macmillan, 1930. p.272.
- ²⁰ Thomas Hardy. *Jude the Obscure*. London: Pan Books.1995. p. 362
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p.221..
- ²² *Ibid.*, p.76.
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- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 356.
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- ²⁹ Jagdish Chandra Dave. "Jude the Obscure: Bad Marriage & Free Love". *The Human Predicament in Hardy's novels*. London: Macmillan. 1985. p. 128.
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⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.97.

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⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

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⁵⁵ Jagdish Chandra Dave. "The Return of the Native ". *The Human Predicament in Hardy's novels*. London: Macmillan. 1985. p. 43.

⁵⁶ Thomas Hardy. *The Return of the Native*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd. Google Books Partner Program, 2005 p. 246

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⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

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- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 348
- ⁶² Jagdish Chandra Dave. "Far From the Madding Crowd ". *The Human Predicament in Hardy's novels*. London: Macmillan. 1985. p. 75.
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CHAPTER – 4

***A PAIR OF BLUE EYES, THE HAND OF
ETHELBERTA, THE TRUMPET MAJOR AND
THE WOODLANDERS***

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A PAIR OF BLUE EYES, THE HAND OF ETHELBERTA, THE TRUMPET MAJOR AND THE WOODLANDERS

These four novels have yet another powerful portrayal of women characters. In these novels we get in close with the feminine psyche through the characters such as Elfride Swancourt, Ethelberta, Anne Garland, Grace Melbury and Marty South. Purely Teutonic, and closer akin to our ordinary sympathies, is Elfride. To call her fickle, and allured in turn by the young and romantic, the strong and intellectual, and the wealthy and aristocratic, is to take a superficial view of her character. Ethelberta may be an intellectual woman but of cool and calculating reason. In love, she is equally utilitarian. And if Grace 'had more of Artemis than of Aphrodite in her constitution' and shares the characteristics with Sue and Bathsheba, Marty is predecessor of Tess.

Swancourt, Elfride:

Elfride Swancourt - leading female character in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, the possessor of the blue eyes, is girlish, impulsive, flirtatious and naïve. She is Granddaughter of Lady Elfride Luxellian, who eloped with the singer Arthur

Kingsmore. Her mother had eloped with Mr. Swancourt when he was a curate. At the time of receiving the young architect Stephen Smith at Endelstow Rectory, she had written *The Court of King Arthur's Castle*, a romance of Lyonesse. She often wrote her father's sermons. She fell in love with Smith, who was encouraged by her father. In the face of her father's snobbish refusal to contemplate Stephen Smith as a suitor because of his lower class status, she agrees to elope, but vacillates and then retreats in cowardice from the venture, absurdly blaming her horse for her indecision about keeping her marriage appointment. She regards her returning by night train from London to Plymouth with Stephen as a wicked escapade. Her nervous temperament anticipates those of Eustacia Vye and Sue Bridehead.¹ Elfride and Stephen Smith are too immature to make a successful marriage; she is vacillatory and he lacks the forcefulness to secure her commitment to him. Smith is somewhat boyish and feminine in character. Stephen's love-making is trivial and passionless, but not unreal in view of his youth and inexperience. In the same way, Elfride's prim reception of his modest advances seems annoyingly unnecessary, but after all, she is the daughter of a country clergyman, and mid-Victorian at that, so that it is second nature with her to check Stephen even while she wants him to go on. Hardy gives full-length narrative of 'Elfride's first kiss':

“And so awkward and unused was she [...] none of those struggles to get out [...] which only results in further getting in [...] no face upon face [...]. That graceful [...] position [...] making sweethearts the sweeter, was not here. Why? Because experience was absent. A woman must have had many kisses before she kisses well.”²

In the prolonged absence of Smith, she remained loyal to him. Stephen's rival in love for Elfride, Henry Knight, his somewhat older mentor, a man of intellect and a book reviewer. Hardy succeeds in presenting a fine psychological study of an arrogant idealist, whose emotional coolness and moral rigidity looks forward to Angel Clare. His neurosis takes the form of having to be the first man to have been the focus of his woman's affections, and while he is unable to forgive Elfride her previous trivial defiance of convention, he is shaken by the eruption of his repressed sexual life. A man strangely and tragically out of touch with the world, even failing to purchase earrings successfully, he is also the focus of a remarkable scene as he hangs perilously from a cliff, reviewing past geological ages recorded in the cliff face, before being rescued by Elfride, who makes a rope from her underclothes. The saving of Knight's life was the turning-point in her life.

Elfride's inconsistency is evident only nine months after Smith's departure for Bombay, when she finds herself attracted to the handsome Lord Luxellian whom she encounters in Hyde Park. Then her attention is drawn to Henry Knight. Her greatest weakness, however, is her passivity and cowardice in concealing from Henry Knight her relationship with her first suitor Felix Jethway, who died. She is out of her depth with the older, sophisticated man and cannot measure up in the end to Knight's expectations. She fell in love with him; but, prudish and suspicious of her past, he deserted her inhumanly. This led to the collapse of their relationship, her marriage to the ultra-worldly and uncomplicated Lord Luxellian, who desires her in a direct way, and to her death in childbirth. When Smith and Knight met again, Knight discovered that he had wronged Elfride. Each set off to Endelstow with renewed hope, but Elfride was dead.

From a potential tragic heroine, she declines into a figure of pathos,³ and there is a mordant irony in the railway porter's description of the carriage containing her body on its last journey to Endelstow, as:

“‘The carriage is light enough,’ said one in a grim tone. ‘Light as vanity, full o’nothing”.

‘Nothing in size, but a good deal in signification,’ said the other.”⁴

Elfride is purely Teutonic and closer akin to our ordinary sympathies. She is almost lacking in that grandeur of personality that characterizes Vye, Tess and Sue, but she is an interesting study, and, despite her somewhat ironic finale, not unworthy. To call her fickle, and allured in turn by the young and romantic (Stephen Smith), the strong and intellectual (Henry Knight), and the wealthy and aristocratic (Lord Luxellian), is to take a superficial view of the matter.⁵

The third case is easily explicable – is indeed explained – and its irony is only intended to come home to Stephen and Knight, between whom lies the essential struggle. The fact that each of these three absolutely different types of men found in her something deeply satisfying shows that wideness of her appeal. She is thoroughly feminine; indeed, this side is marked almost to satire. Thus, she is incredibly foolish in her pettish obstinacy and reticence to Knight over the earlier affair with Smith. Yet there is the woman’s truer instinct in her insistence on Knight continuing to love her whether satisfied or not as to her conduct, while he, proceeding on lines of mere intellect, demands satisfaction first. Again, she is high-strung in a much more nervous and unpoetic

sense than Tess, as may be seen in the extraordinary scene of the chess-playing between her and Knight. Knight is, indeed, too massive and masterful to find fit place in her life.⁶ How telling – if Knight had but taken to heart the tale it told – is that passage in which Knight offers Elfride her choice of “ a well-chosen little library of the best music”⁷ or a pair of pretty ear-rings; and to his amused chagrin she chooses the ear-rings – because “music doesn’t do any real good”⁸. By nature joyous, light-hearted, affectionate, she was Stephen Smith’s queen and fairy; under the sterner influence of Knight she becomes love’s vassal to a painful degree – her gay spirits are crushed, she is no longer Elfride.⁹

The blot in her ‘escutcheon – and a black one it is – is her desertion of Smith for Knight, which is done in a way that is nothing less than shocking. The change-over is made without a word of explanation: when Stephen comes home she agrees to meet him in the church porch – and simply fails to turn up; and when, after waiting for an hour, he goes to her house, he hears her talking and laughing with knight inside. And when they do meet, in Knight’s presence, she just treats Stephen as a stranger! Stephen bore the mark to his grave; and if ever a woman deserved to ‘pay’ it was Elfride, though perhaps her punishment (like Tess’s, though of course in far less degree) was out of proportion with her unreflecting offence.¹⁰

Her sisters of real life see little in her; wonder 'if girls are really as silly as that'. But she deserves more respect. Great she is not, but in her sphere she is decked with all the charm of Browning's *Pretty Woman*. She might have danced daintily through life; but Life came and tossed her down into the strife of harsher things, and she was not brave swimmer enough to beat her way up from the waves. Poor Elfride! she goes down with the nebulous light on her hair, as when Stephen Smith saw her first, singing, with little instant understanding, but with some prophetic fervour, Shelley's dirge of Love.¹¹

Ethelberta:

Ethelberta, a poetess and story-teller of rare charms and accomplished, is, as the title itself suggests, the central character in this novel. The third of a butler's ten children, she passes herself off as the daughter of late Bishop of Silchester, and carefully conceals her identity, not because she is ashamed of owing her parents, but because she wants to rise higher in order to raise her family up from poverty. She became a poet of the Satanic school, and then a governess in the house of Sir Ralph Petherwin. She looked:

“Ethelberta’s appearance answered as fully as ever to that of an English lady skillfully perfected in manner, carriage, look and accent; and the incongruity of her present position among lives which had had many of nature’s beauties stamped out of them, and few of the beauties of art stamped in ...”.¹²

At Solentsea, she met Christopher Julian, only to jilt him and marry Sir Ralph’s son, who died soon after the marriage. Sir Ralph died shortly afterwards, and Lady Petherwin sent Ethelberta to Bonn to complete her education. She had written poems, which lady Petherwin had thought scandalous when published; and a quarrel on this question led to Ethelberta’s being cut off without a legacy. She had many admirers, including Mr. Ladywell, a painter, and Mr. Neigh. She would have married Julian. If only he had been rich, she wanted someone who could provide for herself and family, and someone whom she would respect. Though she posed as a lady, she was always loyal to her family, and sometimes she could wish to be Berta Chickerel again ‘and live in a green cottage’ as she did when a child. Ultimately she consented to marry an old roué, Lord Mountclere, who skillfully parried all attempts to prevent the union. Ethelberta’s managerial proclivities

were soon shown; she took over the administration of the Enckworth estate, saved Mountclere from bankruptcy, and made him live a regular and respectable life.

H.C.Duffin compares Ethelberta with Sue and describes her character as:

“She, with more exactness than in the case of Sue, may be called an intellectual woman. Sue was a marvelous blend – masculine in its complexity – of passion, intellect and emotion; I find little in Ethelberta but cool, calculating reason. Of passion there is no hint, and her gleams of faint and colourless emotion are quickly extinguished in the cold douche of her argued scheme of life. One yields ready admiration for the woman’s single-handed fight through the pressing seas of difficulty, but the feeling stops short at admiration; mere-cold-blooded strength in a woman is not lovable, and is not the case with Ethelberta, her aim being (perhaps necessarily) nothing more than her own maintenance. In love she is equally mathematical, and as, I have previously suggested, one cannot

decide whether to regard her marriage with Lord Mountclere as a reward for her pluck or a punishment for her scheming.”¹³

But Jagdish Chandra Dave in his book *The Human Predicament in Hardy's Novel* looks at Ethelberta from the different point of view, of that of J.S.Mill's *Utilitarianism*. He writes:

“Self-abnegation is the chief characteristic of her soul. Iron will and an ability to manoeuvre situations into the desired direction by dint of patience and perseverance, are others. She knows no defeat or despair and pursues the larger happiness of all concerned in her actions as the *summum bonum*.”¹⁴

He further vindicates Ethelberta and writes that in her situation she has to turn even marriage into a means of realizing the welfare of her family. That is why she renounces Christopher Julian whom she loves, and marries Mr. Petherwin. After the death of her husband she could have waited until her responsibilities were over, to marry Christopher at last. But she discovered that Picotee, her younger sister, had developed a hopeless one-sided passion for him. Out of tender maternal regard for the

young sister, consequently, she subdues her own passion; leaves Picotee free to love Christopher Julian, and decides even to accomplish their marriage. As for herself, she turns her mind to manoeuvring for a useful marriage rather than a marriage of love. After carefully considering about the suitability of the three suitors for her hand – Neigh, Ladywell and Lord Mountclere – her choice falls upon the last one who is older than her father. She consults, before reaching a positive decision on this issue, J.S.Mill's *Utilitarianism* and finds guidance from the treatise. The passages in which she does so must be quoted at length as they throw light not only on this one critical choice of her life, but also on the sort of thinking that usually guides her willing:

“She took down a well-known treatise on Utilitarianism [...] she desultorily searched for argument and found one:

‘The ultimate end’, she read, ‘with reference to and for the sake of which all other things are desirable (whether we are considering our own good or that of other people) is in existence exempt as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments, both in point of quantity and quality ... This being, according to the utilitarian

opinion, the end of human action, is necessarily also the standard morality.”¹⁵

It was open question, so far, whether her own happiness should or should not be preferred to that of others. But that her personal interests were not to be considered as paramount appeared further on:

“The happiness which forms the standard of that is right in conduct is not the agent’s own happiness but that of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator.”¹⁶

J.C.Dave finds it difficult to understand why Hardy calls Ethelberta’s application of the utilitarian philosophy to the marriage question ‘an operation of her own as unjustifiable as it was likely in the circumstances’, ‘unconscious misapplication of sound and wide reasoning’, and ‘distorted Benthamism’¹⁷, for Mill’s treatise read rightly would fully sanction her conduct throughout her career and in this event in particular,. There is no reason why the utilitarian theory which lays down general principles for

moral guidance should specifically exclude the 'marriage question'.¹⁸

The views of H.C.Duffin and J.C.Dave on Ethelberta's character and motives are quite contradictory. Ethelberta's motives for 'such a perverse choice as Lord Mountclere'¹⁹ remain ambiguous. Initially, her desire to provide an income for herself and her family simply involved the construction of a *persona*, Mrs. Petherwin, and English lady of refinement, who tells romances of which she is the heroine. However, Ethelberta's whole life becomes the performance of a fiction. She can speak warmly of her family, yet refers to her brothers condescendingly as mere workmen. Driven by her powerful will and social ambition, she becomes a decided personality, alienated from her family by her acceptance of the absurdity of the class system that requires them to live parallel lives. By the end of the novel, Ethelberta has repressed her emotional life and her sexuality, rejected alternative suitors, and has subdued her husband. Her life now revolves around overseeing the efficient operation of his estate and the writing of an epic poem. There is a sense in which she has become the victim of her own mutually reinforcing obsession with social class and fiction-making, and has surrendered the simpler values of her humble family from Wessex for an uneasy place in a new world. Potentially *The Hand of Ethelberta* is a psychological tragedy, but Hardy avoids this by leaving

Ethelberta's feelings unrecorded, so that she remains and enigma. Not surprisingly, Ethelberta has given rise to recent critical debate among both materialist and feminist critics.²⁰

How better can we sum this character than in her musings in the novel?

“In looking back upon her past as she retired to rest [...] She had begun as a poet of the Satanic school in a sweetened form; she was ending as a pseudo-utilitarian.”²¹

Hardy writes at the end of the novel:

“Yet Ethelberta's gradient had been regular: emotional poetry, light verse, romance as an object, romance as a means, thoughts of marriage as an aid to her pursuits, a vow to marry for the good of her family; in other words, from soft and playful Romanticism to distorted Benthamism. Was the moral incline upward or down.”²²

Anne Garland:

Anne Garland, the heroine of *The Trumpet Major*, is a mild but charming young person who appears a little uncomprehending and stupid for the most of the novel, until we find she really has a very clear notion of what is going on behind the manly bosoms of her three lovers – Festus Derriman, Bob Loveday and John Loveday.

Hardy's introduction of his heroines is always a thing of beauty. With the colourful shades of words, he paints beautiful portraits of his heroines. In the very first chapter, we get an exceptionally striking portrait of Anne:

“Anne was fair, very fair, in a poetic sense; but in complexion she was of that particular tint between blonde and brunette [...] her eyes were honest and inquiring [...] she was graceful and slender [...] her mouth cleanly cut and yet not classical [...] at the merest pleasant thought [...] two or three teeth were uncovered [...] makes her, whether she would or not, very pleasant and attractive.”²³

Anne was very humble, modest and of gentle nature. Yet she was very attractive in her communiqué. Hardy writes:

“In her manner, in her comings and goings, in her ‘I’ll do this’, or ‘I’ll do that’, she combined dignity with sweetness as no other girl could do; any impressionable stranger youths who passed by were let to yearn for a windfall of speech from her.”²⁴

But she was not a coy mistress:

“[...] beneath all that was charming and simple in this ²⁵young woman there lurked a real firmness, unperceived at first, as the speck of colour lurks unperceived in the heart of the palest parsley flower.”

She lived with her mother, Mrs. Garland, at Overcombe Mill, and used to visit Oxwell Hall to read the newspaper to old Benjamin Derriman. Her mother’s encouragement to marry his nephew Festus fell on deaf ears. She was quite indifferent to his advances, but narrowly escaped his clutches on more than one occasion. The trumpet major, John Loveday, loved her unostentatiously, but she was more warmly disposed to his brother Bob of the merchant

services, until he announced his forthcoming wedding to Matilda Johnson of Southampton. Bob's departure from Overcombe to serve on the *Victory* grieved her. She visited Portland Bill to see the ship pass on its way to Plymouth, and at Budmouth was approached and consoled by the King. When Bob, on his return to Portsmouth, lost his heart to someone else, she began to find much to admire in the steadfastness and self-abnegation of John, but her encouragement led only to a modest response and subsequently to a strange cooling, when the trumpet-major learned that Bob's hopes were still fixed on Anne. By the time John was due to leave England for Spain, she had forgiven Bob, and had promised to marry him in six months. Benjamin Derriman was just as fond of her as he was ill-disposed to his profligate nephew Festus. When a false invasion alarm was raised, and again when he suspected that Festus and Matilda Johnson were bent on stealing his hidden money, he brought his treasure-box to be hidden at the mill, his final trust being in Anne. He left her nearly all his property, including the neglected Oxwell Hall.

In the foreground of Hardy's subtle interplay between the machinations of war and personal histories is a tale of Anne that itself has a timeless quality. It is an ironic comedy of courtship that hinges on the social and sexual weakness of Anne Garland, the daughter of a landscape painter living with her widowed mother next to the mill, who

has the problem of choosing a husband from between the miller's two sons, the harum-scarum merchant seaman Bob Loveday, her first childhood sweetheart, and his stolid, worthy brother John, the trumpet-major, who lacks sexual assertiveness.²⁶

At the center of Anne's vacillation between the two brothers is social class and sexual attraction. Hardy makes much of Anne's insistence on her genteel sense of superiority to miller Loveday and his sons. But she rejects the squire's son, Festus, through sexual aversion and fear, while Bob's cause is aided by his promotion to lieutenant, probably the result of Anne's brief conversation with King George. Her scruples are finally overcome by the reappearance of her fickle scapegrace, safe from war, in his dashing uniform. By a mordant irony, the couple's elevated social status is confirmed when Anne inherits Oxwell Hall from Squire Derriman, which bestows on them the position in society that Anne had craved.

Very few critics of Hardy have given their comments on Anne. From which Julian Hawthorne's review in *The Spectator* is noteworthy.²⁷ He reviews:

"The heroine Anne Garland belongs to a class of a woman who are found nowhere else in literature than in Mr. Hardy's novels; whether they also

exist in real life, we do not undertake to say, but after reading about them, we cannot help believing that they do. Anne is personally lovely and attractive: she is, moreover, amiable, innocent, generous, and tender-hearted, and yet she makes woeful havoc of the heart of a worthy man.”²⁸

We may not agree with Hawthorne when he says that ‘She is selfish, as Mr. Hardy’s heroines are selfish’²⁹ – but may be he is true when he elucidates his point of view, “[...] not willfully or intellectually, but by dint of her inborn, involuntary, unconscious emotional organism.”³⁰

Anne recognizes John Loveday’s goodness, his self-abnegation, his lovableness, and she can no more justify herself in not loving him than she can in loving his scamp of a brother; nevertheless, and despite all the obstacles of self-respect, gratitude and expediency, she marries Bob, and sends John to die on a Spanish battle-field. It is Hardy’s ‘delight’³¹ to show his chosen women doing these things.

A hasty criticism might deem him cynical, but to us this judgment seems uncalled for. The truth is, such a character is not only picturesque in itself, but the cause of

picturesqueness in others, and is, therefore eminently suited for literary purpose. Compare a woman like Anne Garland with a woman like – to take an extreme case – *David Copperfield's* Agnes, or with any of Scott's pattern heroines. When a woman is governed by reason, conforms to the canons of responsibility, obeys the dictates of prudence and strict propriety, and sacrifice herself on the altar of what she is pleased to consider her womanhood, the less we hear of that woman (in fiction), the better are we content. What we want, and what artistic beauty demands, is colour, warmth, impulse,. Sweet perversity, pathetic error; an inability to submit the heart to the guidance of the head, a happiness under conditions against which a rational judgment protests; and all this, and more, we get in Anne Garland and her kindred.³²

Their conduct is indefensible, but it is charming – we love them the better for their tender naughtiness. We are appalled to see what harm these gentle, compassionate, sweet-tempered creatures can do; to remark the naïve cruelty and harshness that underlie it all; but we are fain to confess it is nature, and incorrigible – we must even admit that humanity would be dry and frigid without it. For the selfishness is always passionate, never calculating. Whatever pain Anne Garland inflicts upon John, whom she esteems, she would herself suffer in tenfold degree for Bob, whom she loves. Anne knows it when she says to John:

“Well, I am very blind and stupid. I have been hurting your heart all the time without knowing it. It is my fate, I suppose. Men who love women the very best always blunder and give more pain than those who love them less.”³³

And let the moralist be appeased, since we may see with half a glance that the fault carries its full punishment with it.

Grace, Melbury & South, Marty:

The Woodlanders has two equally important female characters. If Grace is a girl ‘throughout the story’, Marty appears at ‘infrequent intervals’ and takes little direct part in the action, yet the depiction of both these women is noteworthy.

Grace Melbury is situated by Hardy very precisely between the two groups of simple woodlanders and sophisticated urban interlopers. She is the daughter of George Melbury, the timber-merchant of Little Hintock. Her mother died shortly after her birth, and Grace had developed so much affection for the nurse who replaced her that Mr. Melbury, the father, had married her for the child’s

sake. He spent a great deal on her education in the hope that it would promote her happiness and welfare. She was fair, slim, gentle, and rather indecisive. She continued to like Giles Winterborne, despite her genteel education and his social shortcomings, for she was not an ambitious girl. In marrying dashing and dissolute doctor, Edred Fitzpiers, she 'was borne along upon a stream of reasonings, arguments, and persuasions', chiefly her father's, 'supplemented, it must be added, by inclinations of her own at times'. She was soon disillusioned; their relationship was not founded on confidence or truth. To her the marriage failed because of:

"I wish you had never, never thought of educating me. I wish I worked in the woods like Marty South. I hate genteel life, and I want to be no better than she."

"Why?" said her amazed father.

"Because cultivation has only brought me inconveniences and troubles. I say again, I wish you had never sent me to those fashionable schools you set your mind on. It all arose out of that, father."

If I had stayed at home I should have
married ..."³⁴

Her father's obsession with social class drives the plot. It causes to break faith with Giles, who was promised to Grace, when Giles loses his houses. Melbury's effort to control also play their part in Grace's marriage to the doctor Fitzpiers, who offer the level of social intercourse and refined manners she has become used to. Hardy's recurrent interest in the problem of marrying across class boundaries involves, in this novel, grace's learning the superficial values of the class to which she aspires, and her initiation into the compulsion of sexual attraction that transgress not only the boundaries of class but also the marriage contract.

It was not surprising that her heart returned to Giles. Hardy narrates her feelings as:

"The veneer of artificiality which she had acquired at the fashionable schools' was 'thrown off, and she became the crude country girl of her latent early instincts [...] Honesty, goodness, manliness, tenderness, devotion, for her existed only in their purity now in the breasts of unvarnished men; and here was one who had

manifested such towards her from his youth up.”³⁵

Never did she realize this quite to the full, as she did when Giles’s self-sacrifice was revealed to her at One-Chimney Hut. Yet such was her nature that she appeared to forget him, and her husband’s hollowness, all too quickly. Fitzpiers had little difficulty in coming to reconciliation with her, thanks to Timothy Tang’s man-trap. Grace’s father had no illusions about her future.

She is indeed but a girl throughout the story, and her strength at one point, when her rivals in love come anxiously to her to inquire about her missing husband, is remarkable for one who must be still under twenty.³⁶ But her half-digested ‘superior’ education, and her childish subservience to her adoring but over-bearing father, make it difficult for her to have anything decided in the way of character. Even with Giles, of whom she ‘has no fear’ she shows this weakness.

“You won’t – go back to your husband?” Giles suggested. “No, no, no! Don’t make me!” she cried piteously.³⁷

But, on the whole, foolishly weak where her father's changing wishes are concerned; she plays the tyrant with generous and non-insistent men like Giles and Fitzpiers.

To Duffin³⁸, the most interesting feature in her character is that her emotions are set at a low temperature, and this fact is chiefly interesting because Grace shares the characteristic with two others among the heroines, Sue and Bathsheba. Hardy indicates the quality in each case (other than by the course of the action) by associating it with the names of a classical goddess. Sue we know: she herself demands the freedom of a relationship with men which she describes as "the wide field of strong attachment where desires play, at least, only a secondary part – the part of – who is it? – Venus, Urania" – Aphrodite spiritual. Of Bathsheba we read, "Although she scarcely knew the divinity's name, Diana was the goddess she instinctively adored". And now we are told that Grace had learned to understand, too late, the purity of Giles's nature and his freedom from the grosser passions, and that she revered him for it, since she herself "had more of Artemis than of Aphrodite in her constitution"³⁹. As Hardy took such beautiful care with the nomenclature of this triplicate quality we may assume that he had it in mind when he expressed a special liking for the 'Sue' type, in whom it is so marked.

Apart from this, though Grace is a very charming girl, she excites less admiration than most of her fellow-heroines, and is perhaps worthy of her unheroic and not too auspicious ending.⁴⁰ Her affection for Giles, uncomprehending as it was, was the one deep feeling of her life, and when that was withdrawn she underwent an obvious degeneration. She was not badly broken up by Giles's death, and her desire to be rid of the responsibility for it is only too characteristic. She had that kind of commonsense that takes the line of least resistance, and her chief claim to distinction is that she was the object of Giles Winterborne's chivalrous love.

Geoffrey Harvey⁴¹ sums up her character as 'the subtlest and most realistic study of the workings of class obsession and sexual choice is Grace Melbury'. Resisting her father's conventional reliance on femininity as ensuring entry into the middle class through marriage, and rejecting Giles's timid courtship, she instinctively chooses the man who offers sexual excitement and endorsement of her new social status. However, Boumelha⁴², approaching Grace as a feminist, sees it as Hardy's most radical to date. Although she notes that he draws on genres that are sometimes incompatible, he makes the issues of sexuality and divorce explicit for the first time, and shows the convention of marriage being undermined by the natural law of desire. Ingham⁴³ argues for Hardy's evolution of the new feminine

sign of the womanly for Grace, by which she means her frank sexual desire for both Fitzpiers and Giles.

To H.C.Duffin Marty South is far better a character than Grace. He raises a very important question in 'Hardy's Women: Hardy's view of women'⁴⁴:

“But have we called Grace the heroine of *The Woodlanders*? Is there no Marty South, a figure of far greater beauty and interest? There is indeed; and if it gives you any satisfaction to regard her as the principal female character of the book I shall not dispute her claim.”⁴⁵

Marty South is the daughter of John South, on account of whose illness she toiled long hours, often far into the night, and sold her tresses of hair, her one pretension to beauty, to grace Mrs. Charmond. She was young and slim; Hardy depicts her as:

“Her face had the usual fullness of expression which is developed by the life of solitude. Where the eyes of a multitude continuously beat like waves upon a countenance they seem to wear away its individuality; but in the still water of privacy every tentacle of

feeling and sentiment shoots out in visible luxuriance, to be interpreted as readily as a printed book by an intruder.”⁴⁶

Hardy continues to say more about her:

“In years she was no more than nineteen or twenty, but the necessity of taking thought at a too early period of life had forced the provisional curves of her childhood’s face to a premature finality. Thus she had but little pretension to beauty, save in one prominent particular – her hair. Its abundance made it almost unmanageable; its colour was [...] a rare and beautiful approximation to chestnut.”⁴⁷

When her father died, she had ‘nothing more left on earth to lose, except a life which she did not over-value’. She did work for Melbury and occasionally for Giles, whom she helped to plant trees. To her they seemed like human beings, ceasing to sigh only when lying down. She never told her love for Giles. When Grace was unhappy as a result of Fitzpiers’s infatuation for Mrs. Charmond, she did the only thing within her power to help, she wrote to

Fitzpiers, revealing the origin of Mrs. Charmond's beautiful hair. Marty's 'bullet reached its billet' in an unusual way. When Giles died she could claim him as hers. Grace had discovered that 'Marty South alone [...] has approximated to Winterborne's level of intelligent intercourse with nature'. Marty intended to continue Giles's work with the cider-press, with Creedle to assist her. Her devotion to Giles never failed, like Grace's and her closing words over his grave revealed her as Hardy's true heroine. In her can be seen the Pauline virtues to which Hardy was to pay tribute in *Tess* and in his poetry: long-suffering, endurance, kindness, humility, and unfailing loyalty and devotion.

Marty appears at infrequent intervals, and takes little direct part in the action. She quickly realizes that Giles, whom she loves, is in love with Grace, and from that moment she becomes an almost silent but deeply interested watcher of the passing show. Only twice does she intervene. Her writing of the rhyme in Charcoal on the white-washed wall of Giles's house is the action of the sprite she is (Giles thinks the sound of her writing is the movement of a rose bush in the wind). The letter she sent to Fitzpiers about Mrs. Charmond's fine hair (not her own but Marty's) was an arrow loosed at a very distant mark, but it does eventually fly home, and succeeds, where everything else failed, in detaching Fitzpiers from his

charmer and bringing him back to his wife.⁴⁸ Most of what little is shown of Marty we saw in this sentence:

“Giles saw Marty standing in her doorway, a slim figure in meager black, almost without womanly contours as yet”.⁴⁹

Again at the end of the novel, Hardy describes her standing near the gravestone of Giles:

“As this solitary and silent girl stood there in the moonlight, a straight slim figure, clothed in a plaitless gown, the contours of womanhood so undeveloped as to be scarcely perceptible, the marks of poverty and toil effaced by the misty hour, she touched sublimity at points, and looked almost like a being who had rejected with indifference the attribute of sex for the loftier quality of abstract humanism.”⁵⁰

When Hardy loves one of his girl-characters that is the way he describes her. It carries a degree further the attributes so pleasantly noted in Sue –

“[...] the small, tight, apple-like curves of her bodice, so different from Arabella’s amplitudes”.⁵¹

Marty is no inarticulate country wench, and though her speechless rises and falls – now crude, now finely expressive – her thoughts are always lofty. In her plain, unpolished steadfastness she is a deliberate foil to Grace. She had opened the novel, and she closes it – with those words of divine simplicity, mysterious beauty:

“Now, my own, own love,” she whispered, “you are mine, and on’y mine; for she has forgot ‘ee at last, although for her you died. But I-- whenever I get up I’ll think of ‘ee, and whenever I lie down I’ll think of ‘ee. Whenever I plant the young larches I’ll think that none can plant as you planted; and whenever I split a gad, and whenever I turn the cider-wring, I’ll say none could do it like you. If ever I forget your name, let me forget home and Heaven!--But no, no, my love, I never can forget ‘ee; for you was a GOOD man, and did good things!”⁵²

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⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

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CHAPTER – 5

***THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE, TWO ON A
TOWER, UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE AND
A LAODICEAN***

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THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE, TWO ON A TOWER, UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE AND A LAODICEAN

In these four Wessex novels Hardy is not at his best in depiction of his heroines. Among these four, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is ‘the story of a man of Character’ – Michael Henchard, whose character overshadows every other character, even Elizabeth-Jane. And *Under the Greenwood Tree* is a light and charming summer’s day story, in which one does not look for profound psychology. In the rest, we find the women characters who, though fully studied, are of much less significance, and though of deep significance are not fully drawn - Lady Viviette and Paula Power.

Elizabeth-Jane:

Elizabeth-Jane was the child of Michael Henchard and Susan, when Henchard sold his wife at Weydon-Priors. She took Elizabeth-Jane with her and emigrated to Canada with Newson. The child died three months after the sale. She is a part of the tragic irony of the story, and of Henchard’s nemesis, that his affection for the second Elizabeth-Jane is rooted in the assumption that she was his daughter. He did not discover that she was Newson’s

daughter until after Susan's death. On her first appearance she was about eighteen:

“[...] appeared as a well-formed young woman of eighteen, completely possessed of that ephemeral precious essence, youth, which is itself beauty, irrespective of complexion or contour.”¹

She was almost look-alike of her mother, Susan. Hardy writes:

“A glance was sufficient to inform the eye that this was Susan Henchard's grown-up daughter [...] her former spring-like specialities were transferred so dexterously by Time to the second figure, her child ...”²

She was devoted to mother and showed a strong respectable-complex. Accustomed to hard work, she did not hesitate to serve at the Three Mariners, where she felt her mother could ill afford to stay. She had learnt from experience and anxiety not to be light-hearted. She was reasonable in everything and especially in her dress and appearance when she enjoyed relative affluence, after her mother's remarriage to Henchard. She possessed natural insight but lacked accomplishments, which she tried to gain by discipline study, only to earn

Henchard's ill-tempered disapproval after he had discovered that she was Newson's daughter. Before her death, Susan had done her simple best to bring Elizabeth and Farfrae together, but Henchard's jealousy and folly were such that he forbade their meeting. Though Henchard had informed her that she was his daughter before he learnt the truth, and chose not to undeceive her, he treated her with such impatience and disapproval after learning that she had demeaned herself by serving at the Three Mariners that she chose to live with the lady Lucetta, who had come to live at High-Place Hall. He had relented sufficiently, however, to allow Farfrae to renew his courtship, but the 'subtle-souled' girl knew intuitively how swift was the course of love between Lucetta and Farfrae. She endured stoically, isolated in her suffering, just as Henchard was at this time. 'She had learnt the lesson of renunciation, and was as familiar with the wreck of each day's wishes as with the diurnal setting of the sun.'³

When she knew that she had lost Farfrae to Lucetta, she left High-Place Hall and considered how she could earn an independent living. It was her duty to look after Henchard in his humiliation, to warn Farfrae of his threats, and to try to spare Lucetta the sight of the Skimmington-ride. After Lucetta's death, she and her stepfather lived together for a period, and Henchard's affection for her grew until he could not bear to part with her. It was this that had prompted him to tell Newton his

daughter was dead, and reawakened his jealous possessiveness when he discovered that Farfrae was courting her again. Newson's return completely unmanned him, and he left Casterbridge. Elizabeth and Farfrae were married, and Henchard returned in the hope of forgiveness, but Elizabeth reprimanded him for having kept her from her father for five years. When she discovered his wedding-present, with the goldfinch starved in the cage in the garden where Henchard had left it, her heart softened and she could not rest until she had found him and reached reconciliation. It was too late. Hardy writes:

“All was over at last, even her regrets for not having searched him out sooner, though these were deep and sharp for a good while.”⁴

She lived with Farfrae, neither proud not elated like Lucetta and about her early married life Hardy writes:

“[...] Elizabeth-Jane found herself in a latitude of calm weather, kindly and grateful in itself [...] As the lively and sparkling emotions of her early married life cohered into an 'equable serenity', the finer movements of her nature found scope in discovering to the narrow-lived ones around her the secret of making limited opportunities

endurable [...] to the magnitude of positive pleasure.”⁵

She had reached kind of wisdom of which her author approved. Like Hardy, she did not assume that life offered ‘evermuch’. Hers were the ‘Minerva-eyes of one “whose gestures beamed with mind” made easy settling on her face.’⁶ Her tragedy is diminished by Henchard’s, as Hardy inscribe at the end: “Having herself arrived at a promising haven from at least the grosser troubles of her life ...”⁷

Not only to Hardy, but also to Duffin, she “was probably the most percipient and unexceptionable of his heroines”.⁸ Her picture is drawn in the softest of half-tones, and does not at once catch the eye, but longer acquaintance with her story shows her full of fascination for the connoisseur in fine human pieces. She is another ‘intellectual’; but how different from Sue or Ethelberta is Elizabeth-Jane’s “grey eyed reasonableness”. She is the only girl in Hardy with eyes of grey – “aerial grey eyes”⁹, he calls them, and they go well with her earnest and sober mien: perhaps even better with that inquiring aspect of her mind that leads her creator to describe her as “subtle-souled”¹⁰. She is a single-hearted girl, with a marked “willingness to sacrifice personal comfort and dignity to the common weal”¹¹.

Her personality is light and unemphatic, perhaps excessively modest in the earlier stages – she is almost

too “impersonally human”¹². But her personality develops, first under suffering, when Henchard’s discovery that she is Newson’s daughter makes him treat her harshly – at this time she is “full of dumb, deep feeling”, and is “construed not by a single contiguous being”¹³: and later with her involvement with Farfrae. Even this, in its preliminaries, bring her more unhappiness, while Farfrae is being let astray by his attraction for Lucetta, but Elizabeth-Jane “bears up against the frosty ache of the treatment as she had borne up under worse things”¹⁴, and shows herself a rare and special type of woman. She was, or became, a little philosopher, learning to accept life’s habit of substituting for the deeply-desired the not-desired-so-much. Her secret lies perhaps in her possession of a sense of humour: she is able to note with amusement that:

“[...] when Lucetta had pricked her finger they were as deeply concerned as if she were dying; when she herself had been seriously sick or in danger they uttered a conventional word of sympathy at the news, and forgot all about it immediately¹⁵.”

This sense of humour, to H.C.Duffin is an exceptional thing among Hardy’s women – only Anne Garland and the second Avice share the quality.¹⁶ But her firm little character comes out on numerous

occasions, and includes a “craving for correctness of procedure that was almost vicious”¹⁷. It is this, perhaps, together with a certain deficiency of ‘heart’ in her constitution, that leads her to her one bad lapse from virtue – her unkind dismissal of the hopefully-returning Henchard. But this does not prevent her creator from regarding her as something approaching the ideal – at least he calls her “the flower of nature, Elizabeth-Jane”¹⁸.

Jagdish Chandra Dave observes that ‘the corrective note of affirmative resignation comes from Elizabeth-Jane’.¹⁹ Her gift of calm thinking keeps her secure in a state of repose beyond the onslaught of both happiness and sorrow. She is brought up in poverty and has passed through vicissitudes of fortune ordinarily difficult to endure. She loses her father first, and her mother soon afterwards. Henchard’s affection is as moodily withdrawn as earlier it was lavished upon her. In Farfrae’s marriage with Lucetta she loses not only her lover, but also the only home she then had under Lucetta’s roof. All these events and the absolute loneliness of this quasi-orphan girl are more heart-breaking in the objective sense than those which Henchard suffered. Yet, while Henchard is broken, she lives, and not only lives, but ‘the solidity of character’²⁰ positively helps and consoles her better-placed friends – Henchard, Lucetta, Farfrae – in their troubles.²¹

Thomas Hardy exposes Elizabeth-Jane’s thinking:

“She admired the serious light [...] at serious things. [...] had seen no jest in ambiguities and roguery [...] she disliked those wretched humours of Christopher Coney and his tribe [...] she felt about life and its surroundings – that they were tragical rather than a comical thing; that though one could be gay on occasion, moments of gaiety were interludes, and no part of the actual drama.”²²

This revelation of her mind on her first appearance in the novel, particularly the last sentence in the passage quoted above, agrees well with her conclusive feeling, much quoted to illustrate Hardy’s thought:

“[...] happiness is an occasional episode in the general drama of pain.”²³

It reflects not pessimism, but affirmative resignation.

If Geoffrey Harvey looks at Elizabeth-Jane as:

‘she has a more important narrative function, dependent on her being placed naturally at the centre

of a web of characters: Susan, Henchard, Farfrae and Lucetta'²⁴.

J.C.Dave thinks 'there is no doubt that Hardy thinks through her'²⁵. After Henchard's remarriage with Susan, when 'This freedom she experienced, the indulgence with which she was treated, went beyond her expectations'²⁶ she refused to be shaken from her equanimity. Her prettiness developed into beauty, and there was plenty to satisfy her every wish. Her triumph was tempered by circumspection; she had still that field-mouse fear of the coulter of destiny despite fair promise, which is common among the thoughtful who have suffered early from poverty and oppression.

"I won't be too gay on any account,' she would say to herself. It would be tempting Providence to hurl mother and me down, and afflict us again as He used to do."²⁷

Let us conclude her character with what J.C.Dave has observed:

'Knowledge – the result of great natural insight – she did not lack; learning, accomplishments – those, alas, she had not.'²⁸

By knowledge Hardy means the awareness of the human situation and the wisdom to ease its rigour. To add learning to her knowledge she studies books of philosophy and becomes 'a young perusing woman'. Such habit of serious reading is a characteristic of most of Hardy's idealists. She does not simply cram information or amuse herself in the intellectual gymnasium of philosophy in the western academic sense. Hers is 'adversity's sweet milk philosophy'. She translates her thought into action. And follows philosophy as a way of life. There can be no doubt that Hardy thinks through her.

Lady Viviette Constantine :

Viviette is a refined Eustacia with incoherent aspirations; she scarcely attracts us at first but succeeds eventually in winning our sympathy.²⁹ She had been unhappily married to Sir Blount Constantine, who had deserted her and gone lion-hunting in Africa. When Parson Torkingham visits her, Hardy portrays her as:

“There was an appearance of confidence on lady Constantine's face [...] she wore a heavy dress of velvet and lace, and being the only person in the spacious apartment she looked small and isolated [...] the soft dark eyes [...] large, and melancholy by circumstance far more than by

quality – were the natural indices of a warm and affectionate, perhaps slightly voluptuous temperament, languishing for want of something to do, cherish, or suffer for.”³⁰

Then again when she goes to meet Swithin, who is busy with his telescope, Hardy writes:

“Her hair was black as midnight. Her eyes had no less deep a shade, and her complexion showed the richness demanded as a support to these decided features. As she continued to look at the pretty fellow before her, apparently so far abstracted into some speculative world as scarcely to know a real one, a warmer wave of her warm temperament glowed visibly through her, and a qualified observer might from this have hazarded a guess that there was Romance blood in her veins.”³¹

Though twenty-eight or twenty-nine, she could not resist her love for the handsome young Swithin St Cleeve, whom she found pursuing his astronomical studies at the top of the tower on Rings-Hill. Swithin is a student of astronomy, and the astronomical dialogue that

ensues is in Hardy's best vein, leading up to the youth's naïve but dignified ambition to become Astronomer Royal. Viviette is a very feminine sort of woman: she persuades Swithin to leave a critical series of nightly star-watchings on which he is engaged, in order to do something business for her in London. Much of their conversation necessarily goes on at night, and night in the country always stirs Hardy to certain splendour of writing, and the astronomical theme suits well with his cosmic outlook. The wonderful conception, expressed in his purpose to set two souls against the universe, is finely realized. Swithin's disquisitions on the stars are full of personal feeling about the 'ghastliness' of space and of stellar distances; and a sense of the insignificance of human troubles broods over these pages. But it is not long before the young astronomer discovers that his gracious friend has interests more pressing than "the universe".

News came to her of the death of her husband in Africa, and her lawyer soon discovered how straitened her circumstances had become through his improvidence. So genuine was her love for Swithin, for whom she had bought the expensive apparatus he needed, that she did not regret her impoverishment. When he realized his love for her, Swithin insisted on marriage, and she gave way, on the condition that it be kept secret until he had made a name for himself. She was religious, and insisted on his confirmation. The Bishop of Melchester, who came to

Welland for the service, was fascinated by her, and proposed marriage. She remained indifferent. When her brother Louis Glanville told her that Swithin was in love with Tabitha lark, she showed some natural jealousy. News came that Sir Blount had died much later than had been reported; in fact, after her marriage to Swithin. At the very point when the two lovers had decided on legalizing their marriage publicly, Lady Constantine discovered that Swithin would forfeit a regular income from his great-uncle's legacy if he married before the age of twenty-five. She insisted on his fulfilling his earlier plans of travelling and studying astronomy abroad in the meantime. So great was her solicitude that she made him promise not to write to her until the conditions of the will were carried out. When she realized that she was pregnant, she rushed to Southampton in the hope of marrying him. She was too late. In her despair, she was momentarily tempted to leap from the tower. She succumbed to her brother's machinations, and married the Bishop of Melchester. Her second marriage proved to be unhappy. When the Bishop died, she returned with her boy to Welland House. She had aged considerably. Swithin was shocked when he saw her:

“Yes; he was shocked at her worn and faded aspect. The image he had mentally carried out with him to the Cape he had brought home again as that of the woman he was now to

rejoin. But another woman sat before him, and not the original Viviette. Her cheeks had lost for ever that firm contour which had been drawn by the vigorous hand of youth, and the masses of hair that were once darkness visible had become touched here and there by a faint grey haze, like the Via Lactea in a midnight sky.

Yet to those who had eyes to understand as well as to see, the chastened pensiveness of her once handsome features revealed more promising of her once handsome features revealed more promising material beneath than ever her youth had done. But Swithin was hopelessly her junior. Unhappily for her he had now just arrived at an age whose canon of faith it is that the silly period of woman's life is her only period of beauty. Viviette saw it all, and knew that Time had at last brought about his revenges."³²

When, however Swithin told her that he had come home to marry her, her emotion was too great, and she

died in his arms: “sudden joy after despair had touched an over-strained heart too smartly”³³.

We are left, from the outset, in no doubt about Viviette Constantine’s character. She is repeatedly called voluptuous, perfervid, and she soon finds herself getting foolishly interested in Swithin, her feelings being described a maternal, sisterly, and amorous – all three. When her love-letter is read by Swithin, Hardy writes:

“She blushed a blush which seemed to say, “I am getting foolishly interested in this young man.”³⁴

As he talks to his stars she watches him with luxurious contemplative interest: “‘Say some more of it to me’, she continued, in a voice not far removed from coaxing.”³⁵ The Venus and Adonis situation is not a pleasant one to contemplate, but there is something to be said for the temperate Victorian version that succeeded the frank paganism of Ovid and Shakespeare and has given place to the deeper spiritual brutality of the twentieth century. Viviette mooned and sentimentalized over her beautiful young scientist – a modern woman of her type would go swiftly and ruthlessly to work to ‘seduce’ him.³⁶

Geoffrey Harvey in *The Complete Critical Guide to Thomas Hardy* looks from different angle.³⁷ To him,

Swithin represents scientific rationalism, while Lady Viviette stands for sexual passion and love-kindness. The science was important, since Hardy's aim, as he made clear in a letter to Edmund Gosse, was 'to make science, not the mere padding of romance, but the actual vehicle of romance'. The tower of the title also has a centrally symbolic importance. As Hardy said in the 1895 Preface, he intended to 'set the emotional history of two infinitesimal lives against the stupendous background of the stellar universe'³⁸ in order to show the true importance of human scale. Swithin's introduction of Viviette to the immensity of the universe makes her feel that 'it is not worthwhile to live' and that 'nothing is made for man'³⁹. The tower thus offers a perspective of an annihilating nullity.

On a novel structured around contrasts, the main opposition is between Swithin and Viviette, who are presented as binary figures in a serried of ways: aristocratic and lower class, youthful and mature, single and married, fair and dark, religious and agnostic. But the central opposition is between the scientific rationalism of Swithin and Viviette's generous humanity. Hardy's rejection of the tyranny of scientific reason, may be seen even more strongly in his portrayal of Viviette, whose love countervails the terror of an empty universe and redeems the emotionally immature Swithin through passion.

Fancy Day:

Fancy day is the heroine of *Under the Greenwood Tree*. Her mother, Geoffrey Day's first wife, had been a teacher 'in landed country-family's nursery'. Fancy was first among the Queen's Scholars of her year. She lived at Mellstock school-house (Lower Bockhampton). Her father, keeper of Yalbury Great Wood, had ambitious plans for her, and therefore disapproved of Dick Dewy as her suitor.

Under the Greenwood Tree is a light and charming summer's day story, in which one does not look for profound psychology. Yet there is one chapter in it, the first of part the fourth – 'Autumn – Going Nutting'⁴⁰, in which the minds of a man and a maid are read and written with a success as perfect as anything of the sort. And the reading is in no small degree cynical, so far as the girl is concerned. She is not among the great ones of her sex; of course, but her behaviour here and its effect upon Dick Dewy, with her consequent repentance and his necessary forgiveness – all of which are set forth too exquisitely to submit to summarizing without injury – are easily paralleled in the lives of more heroic women, and are handled by Hardy with a light and playful bit quite deliberate and deserved sarcasm. Hardy writes in this chapter:

“[...] he was face to face with Fancy.

‘Dick, Dick! O, is it you, Dick!’

‘Yes, Fancy,’ said Dick, in a rather repentant tone, and lowering his nuts. She ran up to him, flung her parasol on the grass, put her little head against his breast, and then there began a narrative disjointed by such a hysterical weeping as was never surpassed for intensity in the whole history of love.

‘O Dick,’ she sobbed out, ‘where have you been away from me? O, I have suffered agony, and thought you would never come any more! ‘Tis cruel, Dick; no; tisn’t, it is justice! I’ve been walking miles and miles up and down [...] directly you were gone, I thought I offended you and I put down the dress [...] I’ll wear an old one Sunday! Yes, Dick, I will, because I don’t care what I wear when you are not by my side – ha, you think I do, but I don’t [...] and I ran after you, and I saw you go up - [...] not look back once -...] I was so far behind [...] I did wish the horrid bushes had been cut down so that I

could see your dear shape again!
And then I called out to you and
nobody answered [...] then I kept
wandering and wandering about, and
it was dreadful misery, Dick. And
then I shut my eyes and fell to
picturing you looking at some other
woman, very pretty and nice, [...] then
imagines you saying to your
self, 'Ah, she's as good as Fancy, for
Fancy told me a story, and was a flirt,
and cared for herself more than me,
so now I'll have this one for my
sweetheart.' O, you won't, will you,
Dick, for I love you so!"⁴¹

These dialogues are self explanatory and tell all about the character of Fancy. Her flirting nature, her repentance at it, her jealousy, her mild and meek disposition, her apprehensions and all that is found in woman is depicted of Fancy in this single incoherent narrative with panic-stricken expression of grief.

Penny Boumelha in her article "The patriarchy of Class" in Dale Kramer's *The Cambridge companion to Thomas Hardy* writes⁴²:

"Since there are no other young
and marriageable women of any
narrative significance in the text,

Fancy is almost the exclusive focus of both erotic attention and gender generalizations, and her status as a kind of queen bee among the workers of Mellstock is brought out by the repeated references to beehives. In a sense, then, Fancy *is* Woman for the novel; if she is fickle, it is because Fancy is fickle. Just as Tess Durbeyfield is “pure woman” precisely *because* she is impure, so Fancy Day is “perfect Woman”⁴³ precisely by virtue of her imperfections; complete in her incompleteness, she is, for this text, the singular example of ‘united ‘ooman’.”

Though it is very Victorian to agree with Boumelha’s view on Tess, yet we may agree on what she says of Fancy. The dialogue cited above proves the point.

Fancy’s character is also important from the perspective of class consciousness and gender bias in Victorian society. The patriarchal power of the father and his class consciousness is note worthy in the cases of Fancy Day and Grace Melbury. The fathers dominant role as to make, accept, or refuse the marital choice on behalf of his daughter is exemplified in the case of Fancy also. Mr. Geoffrey Day’s attempt to prevent Fancy marrying

Dick and Mr. Melbury's early desire to force Grace to marry Giles are only apparently opposites; in fact, they betray the same social power. In each case, too, the primary concern of the father is whether his daughter, educated beyond the level of her family and her peers, will justify the investment by making a socially advantageous marriage. In other words, the daughter is at once the object of and the vehicle for the social ambition of the father.⁴⁴

Positioned between the group who want things to stay the same and the individuals who want to change them is Fancy Day, so that her choice among available suitors represents also a choice among attitudes to community and tradition.⁴⁵ Fancy's symbolic choice between the old ways and the new comes to what is in a sense a predictable conclusion: a compromise. She does displace the Quire from the church, but she also adopts many of the old-fashioned customs, in order to have a wedding like her mother's.⁴⁶ Her exposure to the ways of 'persons of newer taste' allows her to bring about some modest changes in manners and habits. Her ending in compromise (as we have seen in the above cited dialogue also) does not constitute an avoidance of resolution, though; it marks her character's final recognition that the breaking of pattern and cycle by the intrusion of desire is in turn itself a pattern, a cycle. To sum her character let us cite from her letter to Mr. Maybold in Part the Fourth, chapter vii 'Second Thoughts':

“ [...] I have been thinking seriously and sadly through the whole of the night [...] It is my nature – perhaps all women’s – to love refinement of mind and manners; but even more than this, to be ever fascinated with the idea of surroundings more elegant and pleasing than those which have been customary. And you praised me, and *praise is life to me* [...] Ambition and vanity they would be called; perhaps they are so.”⁴⁷

Paula Power:

Paula’s surname ‘Power’ alludes to the wealth of the new English industrial ‘aristocracy’. She is the daughter of John Power, the great railway contractor who bought Stacy Castle. He was a staunch Baptist, and his dying wish was that she should bear public testimony to her faith by submitting to immersion in sight of the congregation. Paula tried to be dutiful, but could not face the ordeal. The opening situation, of the young lady refusing baptism by immersion, is competently done, and though verging on the ridiculous, affords us at once the desiderated explanation of the title. The ‘Laodicean’ type

of mind has never been thought attractive, and the young lady in question, Paula Power, who certainly maintains this character throughout, is the least attractive of Hardy's heroines, which is not to say that she is altogether devoid of charm.⁴⁸ After this glimpse she is cleverly kept out of sight, though mentioned intriguingly several times, until Chapter VII, when she appears before the hero to thank him for a well timed rescue, which was however nothing more heroic than the defeat of an aged Baptist minister in an argument on the subject of infant or adult baptism.

She was attracted to the architect George Somerset, and, realizing her ignorance, soon left the planning of Stancy Castle improvements and extensions to him. She believed that castle were to be held in trust for the nation. He visited Greece and Spain, and had a predilection for Greek forms and, including gymnastics; nothing, however, could uproot her *predilection d'artiste* for old castles and aristocratic lineages like that of the De Stancys. Whether her father would have allowed her to appear in *Love's Labour Lost* even for charity is conjectural; the Baptist minister Mr. Woodwell regarded this fall more in sorrow than in anger. How far her self-restraint with George Somerset, whom she loved, was due to temperament or to her *predilection d'artiste* it is impossible to judge. It is George who expresses his feelings; and she who says that they are going to be 'practical young people'. In her letter to him from the

Continent, she is indeed a Laodicean, 'neither cold nor hot'. When he is despondent, she can quote Marcus Aurelius: 'Be not perturbed.' Captain De Stancy was very persistent in his attachment when her uncle 'the phlegmatic and obstinate Abner Power' took her away from Stancy Castle to the Continent in the hope that she would lose interest in Somerset and marry him, but he made no progress. It is De Stancy who, with a certain 'boy-man' called Dare (an illegitimate son of De Stancy), constitute the fatal weakness of this novel, when his rival had been degraded by Dare's cunning. Dare is a film-like, gangster sort of person, with a flashy pushfulness and self-confidence based on a total absence of feeling. A surprising weakness in such a strong character – despite her uncle's warning, whose has changed his mind after discovering the secret of Dare's relationship to De Stancy, she suddenly agreed to become engaged to him on hearing that he had succeeded to the title of Sir William De Stancy.

But for chance she would have married him as only a few hours before her wedding that Paula discovers the truth about Dare. Her heart was with Somerset, and it is part of the 'ideal comedy' of the novel⁴⁹ that she had to pursue him from place to place in Normandy, as he had pursued her from Nice to Karlsruhe, before she found him, and explained away all misunderstandings. They were married in Normandy.

She is modern in many respects, especially in her technical and Hellenic outlook, but her closing words show that her predilections are not resolved:

“I wish my castle wasn’t burnt,
and I wish you were a De Stancy!”

She is unusual heroine, because of her laodiceanistic characteristic; in an unusual novel - full of turns and twists - much too good a fun for anything outside Hollywood movies.⁵⁰

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- ⁸ Thomas Hardy. "General Preface to the Wessex Edition of 1886". *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.
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- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 178.
- ¹⁶ Henry Charles Duffin. *Thomas Hardy: A Study of the Wessex Novels, the Poems, and the Dynasts*. New Delhi: Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd., rpt. 2000. p.231.
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⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁴⁷ Thomas Hardy. *Under the Greenwood Tree*. London: Macmillan. Rpt. 1961. p. 182, 183.

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CHAPTER – 6

OTHER WOMEN CHARACTERS

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One of the disadvantages of living in an imperfect world is that it makes the life of the pure artist a difficult one. The temptation to join in the hopeless labour of trying to bring reality up to the demands of the ideal must be considered. Representationally, and in regard to material objects, including the human anatomy, the artist is permitted to indulge his longing. Even Keats could not be content with the unblemished artistic presentation of his allegory in the original *Hyperion*. And we have seen that Hardy made no attempt to hide the fact that he had 'views' about women. On the whole, however, he tells the stories purely for the stories' sake, which is the novelist's art.¹ Yet, his Wessex Novels, all fourteen of them, very emphatically, express his views on the feminine psyche. He surely becomes the first of the feminists who cared to study women so thoroughly and dared to express it as he thought. Not dissimilarly, it may be said that the touchstone of a novelist's power, and the rock upon which he most frequently splits, is his handling of woman.²

Hardy's Wessex Novels, as we have seen up till now, is a gallery of women portraits. But apart from these

great names of all time in the world of literature, there are, standing modestly in the background, but everyone a figure of intense individual interest - Arabella Donn (*Jude the Obscure*), Thomasin (*The Return of the Native*), Susan & Lucetta (*The Mayor of the Casterbridge*), Picotee (*The Hand of Ethelberta*), Tabitha (*Two on a Tower*), Matilda (*The Trumpet Major*), Fanny Robin & Charlotte (*Far From the madding Crowd*), the three Avices (*The Well Beloved*), the three Milkmaids (*Tess of D'Urbervilles*), elder ladies like Mrs. Yeobright (*The Return of the Native*), Mrs. Goodman (*A Laodicean*), the second Mrs. Swancourt (*A pair of Blue Eyes*), and the second Mrs. Melbury (*The Woodlanders*).

We shall begin by some degree of closeness at a representative selection from this alluring array of names.

Arabella Donn:

Arabella plays a second lead to Sue in *Jude the Obscure*. She *is* the daughter of the pig-jobber at Cresscombe. She had been a barmaid at Alfredston before she met Jude. Hardy describes her as:

“She [...] was a fine dark-eyed girl, not exactly handsome, but capable of passing as such at a little distance, despite some coarseness of skin and fibre. She had a round and prominent bosom, full lips, perfect teeth, and

the rich complexion of a Cochin hen's egg. She was a complete and substantial female animal – no more, no less; and Jude was almost certain that to her was attributed the enterprise of attracting his attention from dreams of the humaner letters to what was simmering in the minds around him.”³

The pig's pizzle she threw at Jude makes Hardy's intentions clear. When he was seduced and tricked into marriage by Arabella, Jude's dreams of Christminster ended, until they quarreled and she left him. She emigrated to Australia with her parents and married Mr. Cartlett, a 'hotel-keeper' at Sydney. She remarried him in England, after her divorce from Jude, and helped him to run the Three Horns tavern in a gin-drinking district at Lambeth. As soon as he reached England from Australia, where he had lived with the Donns, she sent her son 'Father Time' to Jude. After Cartlett's death, she sought consolation in religion; Sue's remarriage to Phillotson provided her opportunity, and she took advantage of Jude's drunkenness to marry him at Christminster. Jude was ill and indifferent to life, and it was the amorous Vilbert she had in mind as his successor. Jude had scarcely died when she left with friends for the regatta, where she was seen with Vilbert's arm round her waist.

Arabella represents the lure of the flesh, but offends Jude by her grossness' while Sue stands for sensitivity and intellect, but frustrates him by her sexual reticence.⁴

Hardy makes the most of Arabella to criticize marriage institution. In the 1912 Postscript to the original Preface, Hardy said he thought that the cruelty of marriage to one of the parties rendered it 'essentially and morally no marriage', and that this 'secured a good foundation for a tragedy'. *Jude the Obscure* is an angry novel in which marriage is treated bitterly as a tragic farce.⁵ Jude is married twice to Arabella; Sue is married twice to Phillotson. Arabella the lawless sensualist and irresponsible mother subverts the stereotype of the fallen woman who traditionally suffers shame and social exclusion, by committing bigamy with Cartlett, marrying Cartlett, and at the end of the novel is pursuing Vilbert with a further marriage in view. The polarized treatment of these marriages is represented by Arabella and Phillotson. Governed by earthy realism, Arabella regards husband as a convenient provider of sexual and material comfort, while Phillotson becomes, with his cynical friend Gillingham, the spokesman for the supremacy of social convention. Marriage is revealed as a meaningless contract institutionalizing sexual inequality.

In her article 'The Anti-marriage League'⁶ published in Blackwood's magazine (January 1896), Mrs. Oliphant critically reviews Arabella as:

“Arabella, the first – the pig-dealer’s daughter, whose native qualities have been ripened by the experiences of a barmaid – is the Flesh, unmitigated by any touch of human feeling except that of merciless calculation as to what be profitable for herself. She is the native product of the fields, the rustic woman, exuberant and overflowing with health, vanity and appetite. The colloquy between her and her fellows in their disgusting works, after her first almost equally disgusting interview with Jude, is one of the most unutterable foulness – a shame to the language in which it is recorded and suggested; and the picture altogether of the country lasses at their outdoor work is more brutal in depravity than anything which the darkest slums could bring forth, as are the scenes in which their good advice is carried out.”⁷

Arabella also symbolizes the struggle and emancipation of women against Victorian mores. Ingham⁸ is of the view that in the later novels, Hardy endorsed spontaneous female sexuality by evolving a ‘new set of

feminine signs [...] Grace of the womanly, Tess and Arabella of the fallen woman, Sue of the New Woman'. Grace Melbury's acceptance of Fitzpiers is prompted by sexual desire, and her love for Giles is also explicitly sexual in origin. Arabella spiritedly refuses to conform to the idea of the guilty fallen woman. She creates a new meaning for their autonomous self outside the bounds of male language and opposition to stability and order.⁹

Thomasin:

Thomasin plays second lead to Eustacia in *The Return of the Native*. Hardy's description of Thomasin stands no comparison at all with that of Eustacia, which glows with colour and poetry. Hardy portrays her as:

“A fair, sweet, and honest country face was revealed, reposing in a nest of wavy chestnut hair. It was between pretty and beautiful. Though her eyes were closed, one could easily imagine the light necessary shining in them as the culmination of the luminous workmanship around.”¹⁰

She lived with her father until his sudden death. She had gone to live with her aunt Mrs. Yeobright at Blooms-End. When she was herself, she had a happy temperament, and was very much at home with Egdon

Heath. There can be little doubt that she was not wholly indifferent to her first suitor, Diggory Venn; but she rejected him out of respect for her aunt, who hoped she would marry a professional man. She fell in love with Damon Wildeve, the landlord of the Quiet Woman Inn. She was taken to Anglebury by Wildeve who had promised to marry her, but the marriage could not take place on account of invalidity of marriage license. The narrative of the story begins here, a simple country lass was not able to comprehend the situation and Hardy writes:

“The groundwork of the face was
hopefulness; but over it now lay like
a foreign substance a film of anxiety
and grief.”¹¹

After her marriage with Wildeve, she lived at the Quiet Woman. Precisely at the time when Clym's marriage with Eustacia was disrupted, a daughter was born to her, and, ironically, named Eustacia Clementine. Wildeve inherited a fortune and, had he not been involved again with Eustacia, he and 'Tamsie' would have moved to Casterbridge. After Wildeve's death, she married Diggory and moved to his dairy-farm at Stickleford. An element of critical controversy surrounds Diggory Venn. From a feminist perspective, Morgan (1988) sees him as 'a power mongering bully and degrader of voluptuous womankind'. Hardy's conclusion had also attracted critical attention, notably Berger (1990), who argues that

the conventional comic resolution, the marriage of Thomasin and Diggory, is deliberately unconvincing, in order to draw attention to realism.¹² That perhaps is not what Hardy thought when he gave this happy ending to Thomasin. May be it was the demands of the magazine-reading public. Hardy remarked in a footnote to the Preface of the 1912 Wessex edition of this novel, ‘the marriage of Thomasin and Diggory was required by certain circumstances of serial publication’, the original intention being for Thomasin to remain a widow, while Venn mysteriously disappears.

Anyhow, Thomasin, though not depicted as vividly as Eustacia, yet she stands out uniquely among other minor women character portraits. She is portrayed in contrast to Eustacia, may be to highlight Eustacia, she is coloured in half tones. These two women are entirely different from each other in their temperament, their outlook upon life, and their reactions to persons, situations, and events. As a whole, Thomasin is good, sincere, faithful, honest, and dependable girl. Even Wildeve feels hurt because of goodness of her character:

“Love is the smallest thing where the lover is quite honest. [...] don’t you offer me tame love?’, Eustacia to Wildeve.

‘I wish Tamsie were not such a confoundedly good little woman.’ Said he, ‘so that I could be faithful to

you without injuring a worthy person. It is I who am the sinner after all; I am not worth the little finger of either of you.’”¹³

Mrs. Yeobright:

She was a middle-aged widow who lived with her niece Thomasin at Blooms-End. Her husband been a small farmer, but she was a curate’s daughter. Hardy in the narrative introduces her as:

“She had something of an estranged mien: the solitude exhaled to the heath was concentrated in his face that had risen from it. The air with which she looked at the heath men betokened a certain unconcern at their lonely spot at such an hour, thus indirectly implying that in some respect or other they were not up to her level. The explanation in the fact that her husband had been a small farmer she herself was a curate’s daughter, who had once dreamt of doing better things”¹⁴

Hardy further elucidates her character:

“Persons with any weight of character carry, like planets, their

atmospheres along with them in their orbits; and the matron who entered now upon the scene could, and usually did, bring her own tone into a company.”¹⁵

These lines of her character reflect that she was superior to the unlettered inhabitants of Egdon Heath, and her outlook was such that at times ‘she seemed to be regarding issues from a Nebo denied to others around’¹⁶. She seems to have been a woman who had made up her mind rather inflexibly, and thought more than she was accustomed to speak. She felt strongly, and was rather quick to take offence. Disappointed in life made her ambitious for Clym and Thomasin. She had hoped that they would become ‘man and wife’. In both she was to be disappointed, and her disappointment was to reach its tragic climax with her death. For Thomasin she hoped marriage would bring social and professional status. Diggory did not meet her requirements, and she disapproved of Wildeve because he was anything but a ‘saint’. She was upset when Clym abjured the flashy business life of Paris to settle on Egdon Heath, but this was nothing compared with her unhappiness when she saw that her son was falling in love with Eustacia Vye. His ‘steady opposition and persistence in going wrong’ almost broke her heart:

“O Thomasin, he was so good as
a little boy – so tender and kind”.

“Then it s over [...] Well, well!
And life too will be over soon [...] and
why should I go on scalding my face
like this? Cry about one thing in life.
Cry about all; one thread runs
through the whole piece. And yet we
say, “a time to laugh!”, she murmured
as she heard the distant bells
proclaim that the wedding service at
East Egdon church was over.”¹⁷

Her efforts to bring about reconciliation, after the quarrel with Eustacia over the guineas which had gone astray, are the last act in a tragic drama which is accentuated by the long and pitiless walk across the heath in a torrid sun, and her apparent rejection by her son. She dies exhausted and comfortless, her last thoughts with him.

She is one of Hardy’s most convincing dramatic presentations. Eustacia has great imagination appeal, but she does not stir such deep and lasting sympathy. She is termed as an honest woman by Hardy in the chapter in which her strategy to excite Wildeve’s sense of rivalry to marry Thomasin, is described: ‘The Dishonesty of an Honest Woman’. But again, as it is common with Hardy’s tragic treatment to his characters, her character is her destiny. Her stiff and rigid opposition to her son’s educational plans as also to his marriage with Eustacia is

responsible for her tragic death. Her blind anger is due is due to jealousy and to the frustration of the maternal instinctive expectation of obedience.¹⁸ Thus, while temperamental disparities are the basic cause of the conflict, the situation is aggravated and the tragedy precipitated by the operation of chance and coincidence for which fate or destiny alone cannot be held responsible.

Susan:

When the narrative began, she is Susan Henchard, the wife of 'the man of character'. She lived with her sullen, frustrated, irritable and ambitious husband, Michael Henchard, the hay-trusser, until, the worst day of her life, under intoxication; he auctioned her at Weydon-Priors Fair. Her endurance had been overtaxed, and she welcomed release from him, and accompanied her purchaser, the sailor Newson, to Canada with her baby daughter Elizabeth-Jane, who soon afterwards died. Her simplicity was such that she assumed she was Newson's legal wife. A daughter was born to them, and also christened Elizabeth-Jane. They came to England and settled at Falmouth. Here Susan began to realize that her marriage had no legal sanction and her husband had been drowned to death. Then Susan with her eighteen-year-old daughter left Falmouth to find her husband Henchard. She found him Mayor of Casterbridge.

By this time Susan was weak in health and spirits, but instinctively she sought to secure her daughter's future. When Henchard married her, her main aim was to ensure Elizabeth's future, and, in her simple-minded way, she endeavoured to bring her and Farfrae together. Her schemes were foiled by Henchard's angry temperament. Susan was too ill to enjoy the amenities which marriage with Henchard placed at her disposal, and she died about a year after their reunion. Her death is affectingly told by Mother Cuxom.

The way Hardy treats Susan; it brings to light the harsh reality of Victorian society's treatment of women. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* begins with a scene that dramatises the analysis of female subjugation as a function of capitalism: the auction of Michael Henchard's wife Susan at the fair at Weydon-Priors:

“To shake loose from one's wife; to discard that drooping rag of a woman, with her mute complaints and maddening passivity; to escape not by a slinking abandonment but through the public sale of her body to a stranger, as horse at sold at a fair; and thus to wrest, through sheer amoral willfulness, a second chance out of life – it is with this stroke, so insidiously attractive to make fantasy,

that *The Mayor of Casterbridge* begins."¹⁹

Henchard's auctioning off his wife to the highest bidder at Weydon Fair²⁰ verifies that in early nineteenth-century England women of her class in rural districts were regarded as little more than stock to be disposed of at their owners' whims: as Newson, the sailor says, "it has been done elsewhere"²¹. It affirms that such sales were not uncommon.

Eighteen years later, when Susan returns to Henchard, destitute after Richard Newson's being reported lost at sea off the coast of Newfoundland, Henchard attempts to make amends. Although he may have been signaling his desire to be forgiven, he encloses with a note to his former wife five pound notes and five shillings, in total the same amount for which he had sold her:

"He sat down at the table and wrote a few lines; next taking from his pocket-book a five-pound note, which he put in the envelope with the letter, adding to it, as by an after-thought, five shillings."²²

Although conducted in his library rather than in his business office, this act looks suspiciously like another cash transaction on the part of a merchant who makes his

living by buying and selling commodities, and knows to a penny what it will take to make a purchase. Even the narrator notes that Henchard's gesture of enclosing the bank-notes and coins "may tacitly have said to her [Susan] that he bought her back again"²³.

Thus Susan though plays a very small part in the novel, but her character has much larger symbolical significance. The prudish attitude of Victorian society and their gender bias – 'Victorian dichotomy' – is remarkably exposed in Susan's character.

Lucetta Templeman:

Lucetta was the daughter of a rather reckless military officer, and lost both her parents when she was young. She lived in Jersey, tended Henchard while he was ill on a business visit to the island, and fell in love with him. Her conduct excited a great deal of comment, so much so that Henchard eventually agreed to marry her if she were prepared to run the risk of Susan's return. Susan did return, but, by the time of her death, Miss Lucetta *Le Sueur* had inherited a fortune from her widowed aunt. She took High-Place hall, and engaged Elizabeth-Jane as her maid and companion in the hope that it would enable Henchard to call without exciting undue comment. Pride and pique on both sides conspired to the effect that it was not Henchard but Farfrae whom she saw first. He had come to see Elizabeth-Jane.

Lucetta fell in love with him, and soon received the attention of two men who were rivals not only in business but also in love.

Ultimately, she promised to marry Henchard, but when she heard of the sale of his first wife (as a result of Mrs. Goodenough's court disclosures) she immediately made arrangements to marry Farfrae at Port-Bredy. Henchard's business, personal life, and reputation all crashed within a very short period. In his bitterness, Henchard taunted Lucetta and threatened to compromise her by making known the contents of her letters to him. He could not do it, however, and handed them to Jopp to return to her. Lucetta was handsome but somewhat vain, and proud in the eyes of the humbler citizens of Casterbridge. She was affluent, and Casterbridge furniture, dresses, and ways were hardly elegant enough for her. She was elated by Farfrae's success, particularly on the day of the Royal visit when Farfrae as Mayor read the address of welcome to the 'Illustrious Personage'. But before she could enjoy those dreamt days of happiness, Jopp's disclosure of the contents of the letters she had written to Henchard from Jersey had immediately suggested a skimmington-ride, and the shock of its cruel exposure, when she was expecting a baby, resulted in her death.

Throughout the novel, Lucetta seems to play the role of "the other woman". She has an affair with Henchard while he is still married to Susan, then she marries

Farfrae instead of accepting Henchard's offer to clear her reputation. Lucetta may have changed her name to the properly English Templeman, but Hardy lets you know that she is French at heart. To British readers, her Frenchness implied sensuality and possibly even moral looseness. In Chapter XXII, Hardy writes, "She had arrived at Casterbridge as a Bath lady (a proper Englishwoman), and there were obvious reasons why Jersey (where she was condemned as a loose woman), should drop out of her life." But it never does.

Lucetta is capricious and at times conniving. She is also the one character in the novel who feels sexual passion. This sexuality makes her a more interesting character, but it also gets her into trouble. Her rapid romance with Farfrae contrasts greatly with Elizabeth-Jane's slow-building relationship with him. Lucetta is as impulsive as Henchard and even more emotional. Why else would she suffer a stroke at seeing herself paraded in effigy in the skimmity-ride? Her reaction to the skimmity-ride also reveals another character trait of her. She is hypersensitive, the characteristic which further lead her to her destruction.

Like Henchard, Lucetta is also self-destructive. There are elements within her nature which brings forth her tragic end. Chance and coincidence plays their vital role but ultimately her 'character' leads her to her appalling and dreadful death.

Lucetta also has a snobbish streak that brings her trouble. She wants to be the great lady of Casterbridge. Her attitude causes Joshua Jopp, Henchard's fired grain manager, to want to destroy her and leads the townspeople to enjoy humiliating her.

Picotee Chikerel:

Picotee is daughter of Mrs. Chickerel and younger sister to Ethelberta. Mrs. Chickerel's husband, Picotee's father, is a discreet and dignified butler at the Doncastles' in West London. Her mother had been a nurse in a nobleman's family. She had ten children, including Gwendoline and Cornelia, Sol and Dan, Ethelberta and Picotee, Emmeline, Georgina and Myrtle. They lived at Arrowthorne Lodge, but, after the death of Lady Petherwin, Ethelberta soon contrived to lodge then in her house at Exonbury Crescent.

Hardy is at his best, again, in depicting Picotee:

“Of the two classes into which gentle young women naturally divide, those who grow red at their weddings, and those who grow pale, the present one belonged to the former class. She was an April-nurtured, pink-cheeked girl, with eyes that would have made any jeweller in England think of his trade – one who

evidently took her day in the daytime, frequently caught the early worm, and had little to do with yawns or candlelight.”²⁴

She was a teacher at Sandbourne, but lived in the country ‘two or three miles out’. She met Mr. Julian on Sandbourne Moor and fell in love at first sight. When her family moved to Exonbury Crescent, she followed to act as her sister’s maid. She was a witness at the private marriage of Lord Mountclere and her sister, Ethelberta. In the end, she was engaged to be married to Mr. Julian, who is perhaps the ‘hero’ of the story. Hardy had a tenderness for ‘younger sisters’ – it comes out again in ‘Liza-‘Lu Durbeyfield – and Picotee is made of very charming character, a fair enough mate for Julian than her terrifying sister.²⁵

The Three Avices:

- Avice Caro – the first, grandmother
- Anne Avice – the second, mother
- Avice Pierston – the third.

In **The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved** (1892) and **The Well-Beloved** (1897), the central figure, Jocelyn Pierston, is a man obsessed both with the search for his ideal woman and with sculpting the perfect figures of a naked Aphrodite. The pursuit finally fixes on three women

called Avice Caro – grandmother, Anne Avice - mother and Avice Pierston - daughter – in a way that mixes tragedy and high farce.

The first of the three Avices with whom Pierston thought he was in love, was a girl of seventeen or eighteen with brown hair and bright hazel eyes. She was a possible embodiment of his fitting ideal. But then, he met Marcia Bencomb, and she became her ideal. Avice married her cousin Jim Caro, a quarryman.

Avice the second was a washer-woman, a daughter of quarryman, Jim Caro. She has a habit of falling in and out of love. She is an ordinary counterpart of the artistic Jocelyn. He met her just after her mother's death.

“I have loved fifteen a’ready!” she tells him laughing. And when he asks with a sinking heart, “Am I – one of them?”. She ponders critically before she replies, “You was; for a week”.²⁶

However, he is not discouraged, he takes her to London and for a short time she was his servant in London, where he proposed to her only to discover that she was secretly married at home.

Avice the third was grand daughter of Avice Caro. Her mother – Anne Avice, to whom Jocelyn had proposed twenty years earlier, and to whose mother he had been

attached, hoped she would marry Jocelyn. He thought her 'the very She' (reference is to her mother). She was a governess at Sylvania Castle, lady-like, and finer in figure than her mother and grandmother. She agreed to marry Jocelyn. Unlike with her grandmother, he decides to be honest with her, and tells her how he had loved her mother before her and her grandmother before that.

“But [...] Mr. Pierston! You are not old enough? Why, how old are you? – you have never told me.”

“I am very old.”

“My mother’s (young man), and my grandmother’s” said she, looking at him no longer as a possible husband, but as a strange fossilized relic in human form [...] and were you my great-grandmother’s too? She asked with an expectant interest.’

The unexpected arrival of a young admirer, Henri Leverre, made her change her mind. On the eve of the wedding, she eloped with him and married in London. Life comes to its full circle. Jocelyn having let Avice the first fro Marcia, Avice the third now runs away from him to marry Marcia’s son.

These females are not drawn at full length. Margaret R. Higonnet attempts to discover symbolic meaning in it. In her book *The sense of Sex: Feminist Perspective on Hardy*, she writes,

“Perhaps the most disturbing linkage between desire and dishonesty – given Hardy’s championing of art’s candor-is forged by the narrative’s reflections about art itself. *The Well Beloved* hints – like no other Hardy novel – at how tenuous the canon of artistic honesty is.”²⁷

Fanny Robin:

Fanny Robin was the youngest maid –servant at Farmer Everdene’s, employed with the recommendations of Gabriel Oak, acted as her guardian. She left, trying to find Sergeant Troy, her lover, at Casterbridge barracks on the evening Gabriel oak entered Weatherbury. Troy’s regiment had left Casterbridge for Melchester. Fanny followed, and Troy would have married her at an unnamed town and military station ‘many miles north of Weatherbury’ had she arrived at the church in time. Unfortunately she mistook All Souls’ church for All Saints’. She then ‘picked up a living’ as a seamstress in Melchester. When she was expecting her child she walked all the way to Casterbridge Union. In the last stages other journey, she was completely exhausted. She made her way to Grey’s Bridge with the aid of improvised crutches. A dog supported her from the bridge to the Union. Here

she died in childbirth. She was due to be buried at Weatherbury, but Joseph Poorgrass, who was conveying her coffin, was persuaded to stay too long at the Buck's Head Inn. The coffin was left at Bathsheba's, only for Bathsheba (who had married Troy) to discover her husband's double perfidy. Troy's contrition was mocked at by fate, and for the first time in his life he despised himself.

Fanny's character does not have many shades. She is significantly used to turn the course of the story. Her death crammed Troy with remorse. Over the dead body of Fanny he said:

“But never mind, darling, in the sight of Heaven you are my very very wife”.

He abandoned Bathsheba and left the place. Thus her death led to separation of Bathsheba and Troy, and later on brought about tragedy in their lives.

Charlotte De Stancy:

She appeared in *A Laodicean*, as daughter of Sir William De Stancy and sister of Captain De Stancy. She was very charming but pathetic figure. She lived at Stacy Castle and was very fond of Paula Power. Secretly she was in love with George Somerset, they met by chance

after he and Paula had become estranged; and the result of this encounter was that she discovered Dare's perfidy. Principles gained over self-interest; she might lose George and destroy her brother's chances of marrying Paula, but she had to disclose what she had learned. She retired to live with an Anglican Sisterhood, much to Paula's regret. Somerset very truly judged her character:

"She was genuine, if anybody ever was; and simple as she was true."²⁸

Mrs. Goodenough, The Furmity Woman:

She was a furmity-seller at Weydon-Priors Fair. It was in her tent that Henchard sold his wife Susan. Nearly twenty-one years later she was charged with indecent behaviour on the street of Casterbridge. It happened that Henchard was on the bench when her case was tried. She remembered him, and told the court about the sale of his wife.

The furmity woman appears four times in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*- twice in Weydon-Priors, first playing a major role in the auction, and then, 18-20 years later, giving Susan the message that leads her [Susan] to Casterbridge. Mrs. Goodenough again appears twice in Casterbridge, where she both reveals Henchard's "crime" and participates in the skimmity-ride. Each time you see her, the furmity woman's appearance and fortunes seem

to have deteriorated further. She goes from mistress of the furmity tent to tender of an outdoor pot, to town vagrant. Although her fall is in direct contrast to Henchard's rise, in the end, she helps to bring him down to her level. Mrs. Goodenough seems to fill a role as Henchard's conscience and an instrument of his self-destruction.

Perhaps that is the reason for her name. She reveals to Henchard that he is not always good enough. In fact, whenever she appeared on the scene, something wrong happened. At first, her mixing rum into furmity played havoc in the life of Susan; then showing path of Henchard, the mayor to Susan, she destroyed happy marriage prospects of Lucetta; then her case in Casterbridge, ruined the mayor by giving him bad name as his past was disclosed; and at last, the skimmity-ride and its consequence, Lucetta's death.

Now let us see minor women characters of Hardy's Wessex novels. These women characters, very briefly described here, is not given a great deal of attention in the novels also by their creator.

Mrs. Goodman²⁹ is Paula Power's widow aunt. She is 'chaperon and adviser on practical matters'. Her pragmatic advices to Paula, and her critical comments are of great value in the novel. She clearly had reservations about Captain De Stancy, and was

sympathetic to George Somerset. She accompanied Paula in her Continental tours.

Miss Tabitha Lark³⁰ is a happy and talented girl. We get full length picture of her: ‘a pleasant, sensible girl, the basis of the favourite Hardy type, the country girl of natural refinement and plain simple culture.’ She is the daughter of a dairyman at Welland. She used to read to Lady Constantine at Welland House, and was the church organist. At the confirmation service, Louis Glanville was quite certain that she and Swithin were in love; he concluded that the coral bracelet which the Bishop of Melchester had found at Swithin’s observatory belonged to her, and, in consequence, Lady Constantine’s intrigue with Swithin escaped detection. Tabitha studied music with great success in London, and played at concerts and oratories. When the novel closes with the tragic death of Lady Constantine, there can be little doubt that Swithin’s future is linked with hers:

“Viviette dies in his arms [...] Swithin looks up for help, sees – ‘Tabitha lark, who was skirting the field with a bounding tread - the single bright spot of colour and animation within the wide horizon’.”³¹

The second Mrs. Swancourt³² in her younger days eloped with Mr. Swancourt when he was a curate.

Her mother Lady Elfride Luxellian also eloped with the singer Arthur Kingsmore. She is mother of a beautiful daughter with blue eyes, Elfride. but she cannot help her daughter suffer from the snobbish Knight and Smith.

The second Mrs. Melbury³³ (Lucy): The first wife of Mr. Melbury having died shortly after the birth to timber-merchant's only child –Grace, Lucy had acted as nurse. Ultimately Melbury persuaded her to marry for the sake of child. She was of placid, accommodating nature, ready to help in the preparations for Giles Winterborne's Christmas party, and creating no difficulties when Grace invited her to accompany her to the woods to observe what futurity had to offer the frisky maidens of Little Hintock on Midsummer Eve. She was ideally suited to her partner by temperament, very sympathetic, and anxious to allay his anxieties and distress, whether real or imaginary.

Johnson Matilda³⁴ was an actress, with whom Bob Loveday of the merchant service promptly fell in love at Southampton. He wrote home to day he had arranged for the wedding to take place at Overcombe so that his father should enjoy the wedding-feast. Her reputation, however, was such that John Loveday had no difficulty in persuading her to leave Overcombe immediately. She soon became acquainted with Festus Derriman, and was ready to help him in his designs on uncle Benjy's wealth.

In order to leave the way clear for Bob, John pretended that he was not in love with Anne, but courting Matilda. She appeared in the play at Budmouth before the king. Finally she married Festus Derriman.

Mother Cuxsom³⁵ was a fat widow of the lower-class community of Casterbridge. She was found always smiling and her 'smiling countenance' was a 'circular disc reticulated with creases'. She is found with the rustic groups giving commentary and comment on the main narrative and chief characters of the narrative. Hardy used this type of character as 'chorus' in his novels. We get such rustic characters in *The Return of the Native* (Fairway, Christian, and Grandfer Cattle etc), *Far From the madding Crowd* (Poograss, Henry Fray, Billy Smallbury, Coggan etc) and so on in several other Wessex novels. They are here to provide comic relief. Mrs. Cuxsom did not regret the death of her husband. He used to bat her: "Ah, yes, Cuxsom's gone, and so shall leather breeches!" Her services in making the machinery run smoothly and perspicuously are invaluable, and she, along with other rustic characters, also helps to bring out significance of that is 'happening'. They are not mere unthinking herd or stage furniture, but like Shakespeare's peasants have a amusing and witty logic of their own. Rich fragments of rusticity, they are as entertaining as any of the classic comic characters of Fielding or Goldsmith. But, unlike them and like Shakespeare's, they can also stir serious emotion. Mother Cuxsom's

description of 'the incidents of Mrs. Henchard's death' has the same pathos and eloquence as Dame Quickly's description of Falstaff's death.

Susan Nunsuch³⁶ was described by Hardy as 'widespread woman whose stays creaked like shoes whenever she stooped or turned'. She lived at Mistover, not far from Captain Vye. Through her character Hardy expressed memories of Wessex customs and superstitions. She was convinced that Eustacia was a witch, and that her son Johnny's ailments were caused by the spell she had cast over him. She pricked needle in Eustacia's arm in church 'so as to draw her blood and put an end to the bewitching of Susan's children'. On the dark stormy night when Eustacia was wandering across the heath to her death, she was busy preparing a wax image of Eustacia, which she thrust through and through with pins, and melted over the fire, as she repeated the Lord's Prayer backwards three times against her enemy. This character is the manifestation of Hardy's memory of stories told him by his grandmother.

The Three Milkmaids³⁷: In the wearisome life of Tess, if there was any sort of 'happiness' as 'a brief episode in her general drama of pain', it was during her stay at Talbothays. She worked as milkmaid under dairyman Mr. Richard Crick's management. It was here that she got in touch with Angel Clare and also got some

lovely friends. Among others, three milkmaids, Marian, Retty Priddle & Izz Huett, came very near to Tess's bruised heart. About **Marian**: Hardy said was 'one of the few portraits from life in his works'. She was a milkmaid, four years older than himself, whom he taught in the Sunday School at Stinsford. Here in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, she was one of Tess's fellow-milkmaids at Talbothays, and, like the rest of them, very much in love with Angel Clare. Her face was jolly and ruddy in complexion; her figure was decidedly plump. She tried to forget her disappointment in drink when Angel married Tess. Loyal and generous-minded, she helped Tess to find work at Flintcomb-Ash, and tried to save her from Alec d'Urberville. **Priddle Retty**: The Priddles were descendants of the aristocratic Pridelles who owned extensive estates in the King's Hintock area. Retty was a milkmaid and like Marian she also tried to drown herself when Angel married Tess. She was red haired and slightly built. **Izz Huett**: she was also in love with Angel, she controlled her feelings more than Marian or Retty but was bitterly disappointed when Angel – after separating from Tess – withdrew his invitation that she should accompany him to Brazil. She 'had an ear' for 'pretty verses' at church, and could quote the Scriptures. She followed Marian and Tess. In turn, she was followed by a lover, Amby Seedling. She and Marian wrote anonymously to Angel, warning him to the danger to Tess from Alec.

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- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.
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- ²³ *Ibid.*, Ch. 10, p. 82.
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- ²⁹ Mrs. Goodman in *A Laodicean*.
- ³⁰ Tabitha Ms. Lark in *Two on a Tower*.
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- ³³ Mrs. Lucy Melbury in *The Woodlanders*.
- ³⁴ Johnson Matilda in *The Trumpet Major*.
- ³⁵ Mother Cuxsom in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.
- ³⁶ Susan Nunsuch in *The Return of the Native*.
- ³⁷ Marian, Retty Priddle & Izz Huett in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

CHAPTER - 7

CONCLUSION

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The power of creating personages which live, and become even more real than many historic phantasms is rare than we may think. Most people who make pretensions to the study of literature have read not only Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Marlowe, but also Kalidas and Meghani and lot more of global literature available in translation. Yet there are very few writers whose characters or titles or plot or isolated passages remain in the memory. The *dramatis personae* of these writers are so familiar that they have become an essential part of our life.

Now if we ask ourselves who in English fiction have made their brain children our familiar friends, whom not to know is to be wanting is acquaintance with letters? We get a unanimous answer, Thomas Hardy. Categorically, now, we may say that Hardy has gargantuan range and unfathomable depth in his portrayal of Victorian women, in particular, and ‘woman’, in general. All his women stand out as clear and distinct from each other as primary colours. If certain traits appear in more than one woman it is because Hardy was not a pure artist, but was a thinker and a

dreamer as well: he was not content to paint the world just as he saw it, but must add a hint or so of what he would have it be.

At the same time, it could in no sense be said of Hardy (as Ruskin said of Shakespeare and Scott) that “he had no heroes, only heroines”, or even that his women put men in the shade. A review of the men and the women, greater and lesser, of the Wessex novels, from the points of view of interest, significance, moral and general quality, shows an almost exact balance between the two sides. It is rare to forget, Michael Henchard or Jude or Oak or ... the list may go on. They are none the less drawn with deep understanding of human nature. The depth with which Hamlet or Othello are portrayed, the same insight and depth we find in depiction of Henchard’s tragedy. Perhaps it is because Hardy has experienced that woman suffers a lot in life as compared to man, so his creative powers concentrated more on woman characters.

The nineteenth-century woman was defined by her adherence to submission and resistance to sexuality. She was portrayed by most writers as a naive, accepting figure with strong concerns about living up to the prescribed societal ideals for a respectable woman. The women in Jane Austen's novels offer a clear representation of the

nineteenth-century woman. Austen refuses these women any sexual expression and focuses more upon their concern with marriage and society. She conforms to her times, and during the period she wrote, there was no radical change in the status of women. The ideal man-woman relationship was one in which the man continued to be the bread-winner, assertive, self-reliant and energetic. The woman continued to be submissive; and accepted the role of an 'angel in the house' – unassertive, docile, and a dutiful housewife. Just like an Indian woman, she was put on a pedestal and venerated as a goddess, only to be brought down and beaten by domestic problems and meaningless tyrannical customs and conventions. The woman's fate was always decided by someone else and she was never given the rightfully due opportunity to shape her own destiny.

Similarly, Dickens's women characters also largely conform to the traditional role and he exalts their angelic qualities. From his novels it is possible to analyse Dickens's attitude towards women. From the beginning of his writing career, Dickens was aware that in nineteenth century England, a woman's identity, soon after her marriage, was absorbed in that of her husband. No rights were granted to her, and she had to perform a number of duties. She had to keep up the image of the 'angel in the house', take care of the children, and be devoted to her husband.

Thomas Hardy resists Charles Dickens and Jane Austen's socially accepted depiction of the female with his radically independent heroines. Hardy understood the predicament of woman in the Victorian England. To him, the marriage vows did not emphasize a loving partnership; but, with it the woman entered into a contract which denied her legal and economic rights. The law was in curious contrast to the words of the marriage service when the man was made to say, 'with all my worldly goods. I thee endow'. It was really the other way round.

Hardy redefines the role of women in his novels, focusing on sexuality. By emphasizing the physical aspect of femininity in his unorthodox representation of the sexual female, Hardy threatens the Victorian model of women. Sexuality is evident in *Far From The Madding Crowd* when Bathsheba unknowingly admits her passion to Sergeant Troy. Allowing Bathsheba to disclose her sexuality, Hardy begins to emphasize the sexual qualities of his female character. In redefining the female, Hardy's passionate heroines display characteristics previously found only in male characters. In *The Return of The Native*, Eustacia Vye combines the strength of a man with the beauty of a woman. Like the heath, Eustacia is untamable, dark, and wild. Her association with the heath illustrates her masculine qualities. The Victorian ideal displayed in Eustacia's feminine desires conflicts with this masculinity.

Hardy creates an unconventional woman antagonized by the desires of passionate love and the independence of a male. In her defiance of the Victorian ideal Tess is empowered and strengthened. Portrayed as a strong woman, Tess is capable of proving her purity and innocence despite the criticism of a cruel Victorian environment.

It is because of this that Hardy has been alleged as having cynical attitude towards sex and sexuality. Some critics are of the view that though Hardy's pictures of womanhood glow with love and admiration, the text of the novel is scattered freely, with observation on 'the sex' which seems to indicate a general attitude that can be called cynical. Some of them are indeed dramatic, but they are uttered with a certain zest. Hardy is, at times, very implicit in dealing with sex and sexuality. His views on the relationship between man and woman were vehemently criticised. Though the Victorian reading public tolerated his depiction of the problems of modernity, it was less receptive to his religious skepticism, marriage question and criticism of the divorce laws. His public and critics were especially offended by his frankness about relations between the sexes, particularly in his depicting the seduction of a village girl in *Tess of D'Urbervilles*, and the sexual entrapment and child murders of *Jude the Obscure*. The passages incensed the late Victorians and also the average twentieth-century reader because Hardy dealt with delicate matters obliquely.

May be Hardy's attitudes towards women were complex because of his own experiences. Certainly the latter stages of his own marriage to Emma Lavinia Gifford must have contributed much to his somewhat equivocal attitudes.

Another allegation on Hardy is his women's inability to appraise a man. We have seen how insistent Hardy is on this in the action of the stories, showing it in the blindness of Bathsheba, Anne, Thomasin, and Grace with regard to Gabriel, John, Diggory, and Giles. He seems to have felt with John Donne that –

A naked, thinking heart that makes no show,
Is to a woman but a kind of ghost!

He himself made a private note – “I often think that women [...] do not know how to manage an *honest* man”.

Some other critical comments find a different target, as that which declares that the brighter endurance of women in life's dark hours owes more of its origin to a narrower vision than that to hopefulness.

A possible conclusion – to be drawn from the forgoing facts is that Hardy's heroines are characterized by a yielding to circumstance that is limited by the play of instinct. They are never quite bad. It seems, indeed, that this quality in them, which saves them from ever being very

bad. They have an instinctive self-respect, an instinctive purity. When they err, it is by caprice, by imagination. Even Eustacia has no impure taint about her. One feels compelled to instinctiveness of these women. There is in truth, something elemental, and something *demonic* about them. We see at once that they have no souls. And that is why the critic, who called them 'Undines of the earth', was striking the keynote of every one of them. In their ever-varying and delicate moods and caprices, which are never untouched by the elemental purity of nature, in their tenderness, in their unconscious selfishness, Fancy, Elfride, Anne, Eustacia, Viviette, Ethelberta, Arabella, Sue, Bathsheba, they are all Undines. Very few, probably, will care to say that they are, for that reason inferior women. Whatever it maybe, to Hardy, his heroines are, as Humbert Wolfe calls 'the uncommon woman' as the *flower of human kind*.

His limitation of choice to the *rural* type is more marked with women than with men. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *A Laodicean*, which are 'society' novels, the women are necessarily of more or less exalted birth, but outside this the only exception to the rule is Lady Constantine.

For his choice of rural characters in his fiction, Hardy has once said that the conduct of the upper classes is screened by conventions, and thus the real character is not easily

seen; if it is seen it must be portrayed subjectively. Whereas in the lower walks, conduct is direct expression of the inner life; and thus character can be directly portrayed through the act. In one case the author's word has to be taken as to the nerves and muscles of his figures, in the other they can be seen. As a realist, Hardy felt that art should describe and comment upon actual situations, such as the heavy lot of the rural labourers and the bleak lives of oppressed women.

Reading this we realize at once how it is that he moves with such ease and sureness over the canvas when he is dealing with simple, primal natures; how it is that certain awkwardness and theatricality show themselves whenever he has to deal with the more complex character of the highly civilized man and woman.

But beyond this we may say that *Hardy's favourite heroine is a country girl with a dash of culture*. The dash may vary in quantity, but it must not be too large; part at least of the trouble with Grace Melbury is that to her sound rustic origin her father has added such a measure of education as to leave her neither fish nor fowl. But consider those girls and women on whom Hardy has lavished his loving artistry in greatest profusion: Sue, Tess, Bathsheba, Elizabeth-Jane, Marty, and – in lesser degree – Tabitha Lark. All are pure country, born and bred, and nearly all

have some slight cultural background: Tabitha plays the organ and reads to Lady Constantine, Marty's soft hands 'might', at least, have guided the pencil or swept the strings. Only poor Tess faces life in the full naked loveliness of absolute ignorance, with no shade of borrowed accomplishment to clothe her simple country mind, until Clare comes to take her in hand.

It has been said that Hardy is very cruel with his women characters. Of the ten principal heroines, five are brought to tragic ends after great suffering, and several of the others endure much suffering though they escape the ultimate tragedy. It is because of the torment and torture through which his heroines pass that he is termed 'pessimist' by his critics. He is also termed as 'misogynist' because of his melancholic treatment of women.

Duffin also expresses his views that some of the grimness in Hardy's treatment of women may be due to a hurt idealism – to Hardy's sense of the gulf between woman's possible best and her actual achievement towards it. The pathetic deficiency seems to have come home to him with appalling force, and his ruthless pictures of woman's folly and suffering are the bitter cry wrung from him by grief. Shakespeare's cruel satire, in the *Troilus*, on that the world esteemed noblest in human nature, was inspired not by hate, but by a wounded love, of mankind – the fierce dissatisfaction and disillusion that came between a joyous

acceptance of the raptures of life and the large sad comprehending forgiveness of its baseness.

But it does not mean that Hardy get a special pleasure out of inflicting torment upon women. After all, he saw life as a very hard school, and if the women suffer more than the men it may be because woman is the weaker vessel. Life imprints its 'coarse pattern' in equally harsh manner on man and woman, but it was so ruthless 'upon these beautiful feminine tissues, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet', that they were doomed to receive it, and Hardy writes in *Tess of D'Urbervilles* that many thousand years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order, the order of Nature.

David Cecil is right when he states that Hardy's 'subject is not men or women, but man. His theme is mankind's predicament in the universe'. But as J.C.Dave affirms that he fails to note that Hardy also considers man's being in the midst of society, and that more important than the *perception* of these two elements (the cosmic and the social absurd) is Hardy's ameliorative ethical *reaction* to them. Even D.H.Lawrence agrees with it when he says that they (Hardy's characters) are people each with a real, vital, potential self and this self suddenly bursts the shell of manner and convention and from such an outburst the

tragedy usually develops. For there does exist, after all, the great self-preservation scheme (society), and in it we must all live.

It is in this struggle of Hardy's women against society and nature that Ted R. Spivey seems to say that they are tragic in the Aristotelian sense. Hardy saw women beaten down by forces within and without herself and sought to record women's eternal struggle with fate. Just as the Greeks and Shakespeare saw the human predicament in struggle with fate. Conceding that Hardy's women lack the universality, the rich intellects and imaginations of Shakespeare's heroes, nevertheless we see in Tess and other female characters "souls capable of great feeling, souls capable of exultation" and "nobility of passion. The drives of Hardy's characters to achieve states of love and ecstasy are powerful enough to make his chief characters among the most passionate in English literature. His tragic women characters cry out defiantly against their fate, but accept their doom with an insight into and an awareness of the forces of evil which have effected their downfall. By the very strength of their passions Hardy's women command our sympathies and we experience a feeling that someone of great worth has been lost when we see them destroyed. Although we do not meet them on the stage, Hardy's heroines are specifically "tragic" in the Aristotelian sense

because they elicit from the reader the requisite (and somewhat contradictory) responses of pity and fear.

It is in this intermediate stage that Hardy's view of woman seems to lie, and – if this explanation of his attitude has anything in it – he never got beyond it. However, no such explanation is in fact required. It is not Hardy who treats his women cruelly, but *life* as Hardy saw it. What Hardy could do for his women he did – he made them full of beauty, interest, fascinating and lovable qualities of all kinds, he gave them great parts to play, and let them play those parts well. His estimate of woman is high, but tempered and conditioned by keen observation of the realities around him. He has the necessary ideals of her as a creature nobly planned and bright with angelic radiance, but he knows also that it is only in rare cases that she is found free: not only from social mores, but also from the implications of her nature and that of fate. Matthew Arnold's picture of Percy Bysshe Shelley, is similarly true for Hardy's heroines also”

“A beautiful and ineffectual angel,
beating in the void his luminous wings
in vain...”

And so Hardy, through all his dissatisfaction at the often sorry show that woman makes, manages to “hold fast, hope hard in the subtle thing” that is the spirit of woman. It

is just so that we love: we are not blind to the imperfections of the Beloved, but through them all we keep our eyes fixed on the light of absolute loveliness that burns undyingly at the central shrine of her very self. Hardy is no misogynist, but true lover in very deed.

Thus to conclude we may say, undoubtedly, that Hardy's understanding of women goes deep. He is almost a specialist in women. Profound as is his comprehension of human nature itself, it is in the female personality that he is most marvelously learned. In his portrayal of woman we discover supreme pinnacle of psychologic revelation in women, the soul's tragedy. There is a dignity and beauty about Hardy's portrayal of women characters, for which lovers of literature may be grateful to him. Differences of opinion must naturally be held of Hardy as a critic of life, but as an artist – as a painter of certain concrete aspects of that life, he is among the greatest in English Literature.

Thomas Hardy's WESSEX



Pictitious names as
Exonbury
Real names as
Portsmouth

0 5 10 Miles

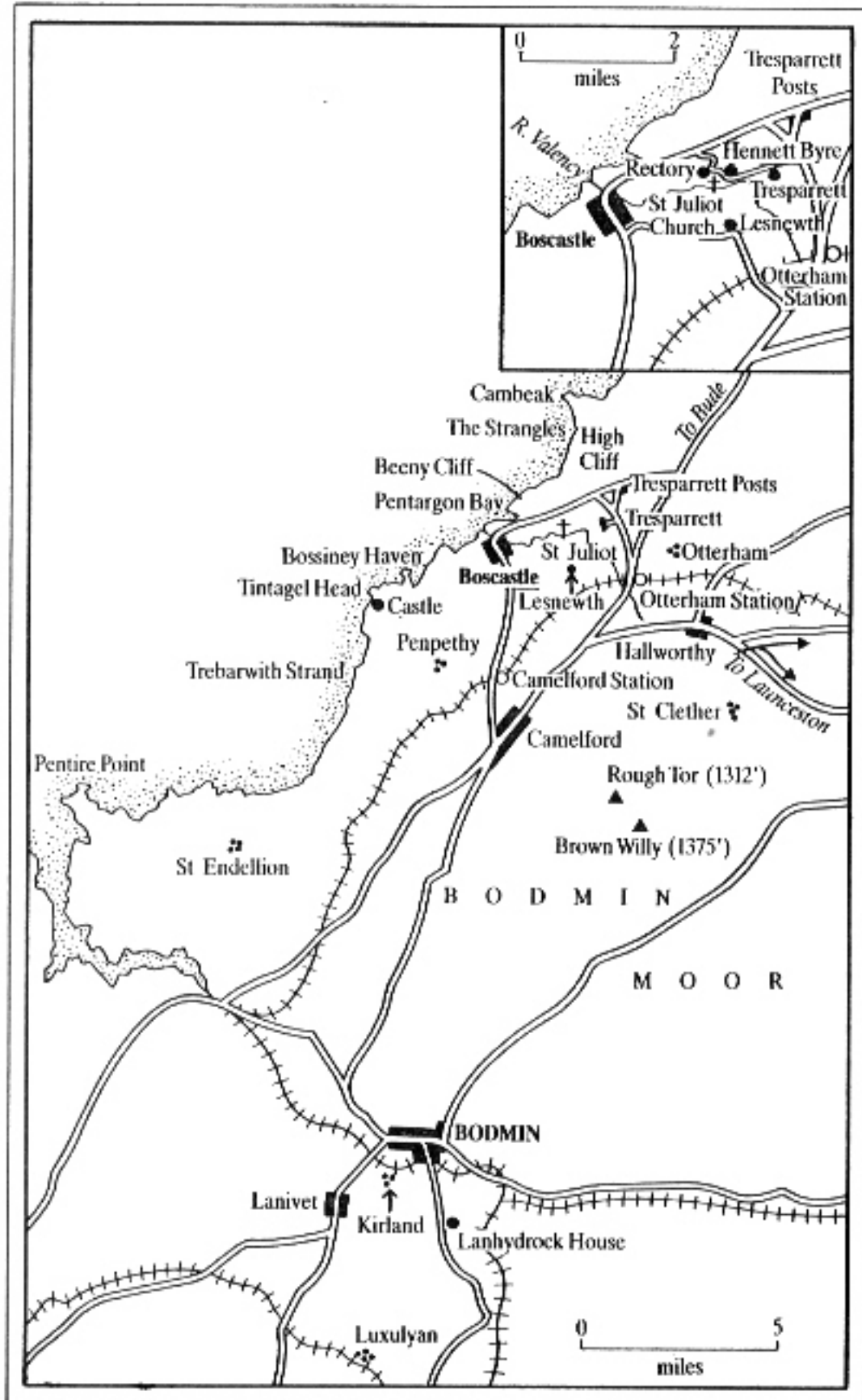
0 5 10 15 Miles



A simplified map of the country of FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD

*Hardy's fictional names are within parentheses ()





The Cornwall of Hardy's Lyonesse

12th
175

The forsaking of the Nest.

"The hoers quit the mangel-field,
The firelight flecks the loam,
It is the minute of the hour
She named to start for home.

"I see her step form from the town
And leave the lamps behind,
And trot along the eastern road
Where elms stand double-lined.

"And now she nears the branching path,
And takes the quieter way
Across the meadows where the brooks
Glide gurgling night and day.

"By now she cracks the kissing-gate
Beneath the storm-tried trees,
And passes to the second mead
That fringes Mellstock Leaze.

"And ^{soon} ~~now~~ she swings the wicket next
The grey brick garden wall,
And sees the third mead stretching down
Towards the waterfall.

When.
"And though the mind-reached kissing-gate,
Still nearer and more near
She draws to me; and, as 'tis eight,
She should be almost here.

"And now she should approach the door,
Unlatch it with her thumb,
And show the form I have reared and reared —
But ah — she does not come".....

What chanced by that third kissing-gate
When the hushed mead grew ~~dun~~ dun?
Lo — two dark figures eloped and closed
As if they were but one.

The waiting father counts the clock,
And still no footstep nighs,
For new delight has come to mock
All early filial ties!

Thomas Hardy.

During Wind & Rain

They sing their dearest songs -

He, she, all of them - yea

Treble & Tenor & bass,

And one to play;

With the candles mooning each face, ...

Ah, no; the years O!

How the sick ~~and~~ leaves ^{fall} ~~drop~~ down in throngs!

They clear the creeping moss -

Elders & juniors - yea,

^{making} ~~stepping~~ the pathways neat

And the garden gay;

And they build a shady seat....

Ah, no; the years O!

^{See,} ~~How~~ the webbed white storm-birds wing across!

They are blithely breakfasting all -

Men & maidens - yea,

Under the summer tree,

With a glimpse of the bay,

While pet birds come to the knee....

Ah, no; the years O!

~~How~~ ^{rotten} rose is rift from ~~the wall~~ ~~the wall~~

They





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