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The Noble Survivor and the Sublime Victim: A Study of Two Hardy Heroines, Elizabeth-Jane and Tess

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The Noble Survivor and the Sublime Victim:

A Study of Two Hardy Heroines, Elizabeth-Jane and Tess
(TITLE)

BY

Wei Gao

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

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To Xianyang
for his love and support

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Abstract

In his novel-writing career, Thomas Hardy created a host of female characters struggling to survive in nineteenth-century England. Whether center stage or in the background, these women embody Hardy's insights into the conditions of the female sex--their frailties, strength, miseries, dreams, and finally, their destinies. Throughout his career as a novelist, Hardy's representation of women has not been consistent. His earlier heroines--heroines in the novels preceding *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886)--are generally depicted as faulty characters eventually subdued or destroyed. In contrast, the later heroines are portrayed with increasing emphasis on their intellectual or mental traits and moral superiority. This inconsistency, seen in nineteenth-century cultural context, indicates that Hardy's representation of women moves from affirming contemporary ideologies about the nature and role of women toward challenging conventional views about women.

Elizabeth-Jane of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and Tess of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) represent Hardy's overt challenge to contemporary thought about women. Among all the female characters created by Hardy, Elizabeth-Jane and Tess are the strongest and most independent. Both women suffer horrible injustices and demonstrate rare nobility of spirit throughout their ordeals; yet, they meet with very different ends. While Tess is destroyed, Elizabeth-Jane survives, even thrives as the world destroys those around her. This thesis takes a close look at the characters of Elizabeth-Jane and Tess and answers the fundamental question of what brings the two to differing ends.

As one of Hardy's most conspicuous survivors, Elizabeth-Jane has traits important for survival and success. Observant and meditative, she consciously learns about people and events in order to gather wisdom about life. She carefully balances herself amidst the

vicissitudes of life, neither consumed by miseries imposed upon her nor transported with unexpected good fortunes. Her equanimity is acquired through renunciation of desire based on sensible appraisal of life's limitations and possibilities. Elizabeth-Jane's triumph suggests that reason, restraint, and compliance with natural and social code are essential for survival and success.

Tess in many respects seems the opposite of Elizabeth-Jane. While Elizabeth-Jane's sexuality is muted, hardly noticed, Tess is described in an extravagantly sensual way. Her sexuality dooms her to be an irresistible object of male desire. Alec desires Tess only as a physical temptation, while Angel idealizes Tess as a spiritual abstraction. Both men fail to appreciate Tess's full identity and worth, and this splitting of Tess as an individual is responsible for Tess's miseries. Unfortunately she is both sexually desirable and poor, thereby more susceptible to being sexually victimized. Tess's situation is continuously aggravated by her class position. She is also the victim of the unjust sexual morality that has its foundation in and also perpetuates gender inequality.

Hardy's presentation of Elizabeth-Jane and Tess as moral authority is drastically different from his earlier depiction of women in which the heroines have to go through a period of "taming" for moral improvement. The change in Hardy's presentation of women at the final stage of his novel-writing career represents Hardy's reaction to the culture as well as personal pressures he experienced at this time. The increasing freedom and independence that women began to claim in the last twenty years of the nineteenth-century made it possible for changes to take place in fictional representation of women. For Hardy, the possibility of creating new images of women was enhanced by his ambition to surpass himself as an artist and by his augmented power to embody contemporary problems in his

fiction and challenge his middle-class readers. As an artist bent on portraying the reality of human existence, Hardy expanded and complicated his world of women and vision of female experience by presenting Elizabeth-Jane as a survivor and Tess as “a pure woman”.

The thesis includes five chapters. Chapter I examines how Hardy’s earlier depiction of women encompasses contemporary sexual ideologies. Chapter 2 traces the cultural and biographical contexts within which Hardy underwent his last phase as a novelist. Chapter 3 and 4 discuss the characters of Elizabeth-Jane and Tess respectively. Chapter 5 examines the significance of these two characters with respect to the consistency/inconstancy of Hardy’s vision of female experience.

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CHAPTER ONE

Earlier Depiction of Women:

Subdued or Destroyed Inferiors

In his novel-writing career, Thomas Hardy created a host of female characters struggling to survive in nineteenth-century England. Whether center stage or in the background, these women embodied Hardy's insights into the conditions of the female sex--their frailties, strength, miseries, dreams, and finally, their destinies. As a writer's thought and vision are shaped and conditioned by the character of the age in which he lives, an interpretation of Hardy's representation of women must be, as Penny Boumelha advocates, "situated historically" (8). Hardy's fiction writing spanned at least twenty-four years, from 1871 to 1897.¹ This was a period when ideologies about sexual differences and sex roles were undergoing shifts and mutations. In such a context, "the expectation of a consistent account, treatment, analysis of woman/women/the feminine," as Patricia Ingham asserts, "is not sustainable" (6). My reading of Hardy and research of feminist discussions on Hardy suggest that Hardy's views on women have not been consistent. Hardy's earlier heroines--heroines of the novels preceding *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886)--are generally depicted as faulty characters eventually subdued or destroyed, while his later heroines are portrayed with increasing emphasis on their intellectual or mental traits and moral superiority. This change, seen historically, indicates that throughout his novel-writing career Hardy's representation of women moved from affirming contemporary ideologies about the nature and role of women toward challenging conventional views about women.

Hardy's challenge of contemporary thought about women is best shown through his depiction of Elizabeth-Jane of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and Tess of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891). Among all the female characters created by Hardy, Elizabeth-Jane and Tess are the strongest and most independent. Both women suffer horrible injustices and demonstrate rare nobility of spirit throughout their ordeals; yet, they meet with very different ends. While Tess is destroyed, Elizabeth-Jane survives, even thrives as the world destroys those around her. This thesis will answer the fundamental question of why Elizabeth-Jane and Tess arrive at such different ends and a number of related questions: Why does Hardy depict Elizabeth-Jane as a survivor in a hostile, unforgiving world? What may Elizabeth-Jane's triumph suggest about Hardy's vision of female experience and his view on the fundamental question of survival and fulfillment of desire? Why does Hardy defend Tess as a "pure" woman? What pressures--personal and/or cultural--might be Hardy responding to with these characters? By examining these questions, I shall demonstrate that the presentation of Elizabeth-Jane and Tess as models of intelligence and moral rectitude represents a major change in Hardy's views on women and an overt challenge to contemporary ideologies about women. In the first chapter, I will examine how Hardy's earlier depiction of women encompasses contemporary sexual ideologies. Chapter 2 traces the cultural and biographical contexts within which Hardy undergoes his last phase as a novelist. In Chapter 3 and 4, I will discuss the characters of Elizabeth-Jane and Tess respectively. Chapter 5 examines the significance of these two characters with respect to the consistency/inconstancy of Hardy's vision of female experience.

To enhance the understanding of the extent to which Hardy's vision of female experience encompassed or challenged contemporary views, I shall now briefly review the nineteenth-

century sexual ideologies that conditioned Hardy's earlier portrayal of women. Nineteenth-century sexual ideologies centered upon the nature and role of women, and scientific inquiry into sexuality reinforced the tradition that regarded women as inferior to men, delimited women's sphere of activity, and preached female submission. Cynthia Russett's study of the Victorian construction of womanhood shows how such ideologies came to dominate the Victorians. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, questions such as "What is woman?" and "What are the differences between men and women?" were largely within the domains of folklore, theology, and philosophy (Russett 3). However, sex was one of the great themes of nineteenth-century science. Darwin, for example, "raised the question of sex differences in *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex (1871)*" (7). Sexuality shifted, in Boumelha's words, "from the area of moral discourse to that of the scientific" (12). The second half of the nineteenth century also witnessed feminist challenges concerning education and occupation, and feminist demands for legal, political, and social status. Russett states that in response to these agitations, scientists began "a detailed and sustained examination of the differences between men and women that justified their differing social roles" (10). This investigation involved scientists--males, of course-- coming from a wide range of fields, including anatomy and physiology, evolutionary biology, physical anthropology, psychology, and sociology, and was guided almost uniformly by the beacon of evolution. According to Russett, despite the deficiencies of their methods, such as lack of empirical data and neglect of cultural and societal roles in differentiating the sexes, the scientists reached consensus about women:

Women were inherently different from men in their anatomy, physiology, temperament, and intellect. In the evolutionary development of the race women had

lagged behind men [...] The reason for woman's arrested development was the need to preserve her energies for reproduction [...] women could never expect to match the intellectual and artistic achievements of men, nor could they expect an equal share of power and authority. Nature had decreed a secondary role for women. The great principle of division of labor was here brought to bear: men produced, women reproduced. (Russett 11-12)

Russett points out that this biologically deterministic view of female nature, given a fresh impetus by Darwinism, "reinforced traditional stereotypes and lent credence to the validity of separate spheres" (12). Similarly, Boumelha remarks that the appeal to science on the vexed issues of female nature led to the confirmation of "not only the long-standing diagnosis of irrationality, pettiness, vanity and inconsequentiality," but also of "the necessity of confining women to their traditional spheres of activity, home and family"(14). Thus, "the site of the disabilities of women," Boumelha says, was removed from history to nature (16). Consequently, the notion that women were inferior by nature undermined women's struggle against oppression.

One indication of Hardy's conformity with contemporary views about women is that in his early novels, he created female characters who demonstrate what was regarded as typically female frailties, such as irrationality, triviality, vanity, capriciousness, and the tendency to react physically to mental or emotional distresses. Ruth Milberg-Kaye observes that typical Hardy heroines "always have the same fault": "[...] they betray the men they love by entertaining sentiments for other men and then proceed to compromise themselves and their lovers. Sometimes the betrayal is a kiss or listening to a proposal; sometimes the first lover is discarded and the heroine marries another" (30). Cytherea Graye, the heroine of

Hardy's first published novel *Desperate Remedies* (1871), prefigures the capricious women of later works. She loves Springrove simply from the description her brother Owen gives of him and later betrays Springrove by marrying Manston. The next in line is Fancy Day of *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872). As Boumelha summarizes,

Fancy Day conforms almost exactly to the unfavorable literary stereotype of female character in her vanity, fickleness, whimsical inconsequentiality, and coquetry. She lacks what this image would have her lack: personal sexual identity (as opposed to generalized gender identity), genuine feeling, independence of thought, consideration in the exercise of her will. (30)

Fancy Day is so vain that her lover Dick cannot help feeling bitter about it: “‘What she loves best in the world,’ he thought, with an incipient spice of his father’s grimness, ‘is her hair and complexion. What she loves next best, her gowns and hats; what she loves next best, myself, perhaps!’” (qtd. in Carpenter, 45). Although she is engaged to Dick, Fancy Day “tells the Reverend Maybold that she will marry him perhaps as much because he carries an umbrella and promises her a ‘pony-carriage, flowers, birds, pleasant society’ as because he swears his passionate love for her” (Carpenter 45). Her capriciousness, aggravated by vanity, indeed exceeds that of Cytherea Graye.

Such “female” weaknesses also characterize Elfride Swancourt of *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), Bathsheba Everdene of *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), and Eustacia Vye of *The Return of the Native* (1878). Like Fancy Day, Elfride is vain about her good looks and fond of ornaments. Elfride also acts impulsively and erratically, as can be seen by the following example Richard Carpenter gives. She changes her mind about marrying Stephen as soon as she lands in London; in distress, she writes Mrs. Jethway a note of appeal only to

find later that the note turns against her (51). Although Bathsheba Everdene is depicted with a fresh touch of complexity and independence, she resembles her predecessors in her vanity, impulsiveness, and caprice. According to Carpenter, she is “a logical development from Cytherea Graye who cannot make up her mind about the men she loves, the innocently vain village temptress seen in *Fancy Day*, and the emotionally motivated irresponsible Elfride Swancourt” (86). Bathsheba’s vanity is immediately revealed through Oak’s first secret gaze at her when she is smiling and blushing at her own reflection in a mirror. Her vanity causes her to be blind to the worthy Oak and throws her into an entanglement with the raffish Sergeant Troy. Provoked by Farmer Boldwood’s inattention to her, Bathsheba in a prankish mood sends him a valentine. Unable to love Boldwood, she indulges in the satisfaction of the glamorous Troy’s flattery. Like the preceding heroines, Eustacia Vye is also irrational, willful, and inconstant, as Patricia Stubbs’s observation shows. Eustacia resorts to engaging herself in romantic relationships to get rid of her boredom and frustration with life on the Heath. Despite her awareness of Wildeve’s shortcomings, Eustacia prefers to “put them from her—at least until another, more interesting man appears, complete with the seductive charm of Paris in his traveling bag” (Stubbs 74). Eustacia betrays Wildeve by marrying Clym and then deserts Clym for Wildeve. Her love for Clym is not founded on any real appreciation of his personality; rather, “she is attracted to him by rumors about his glamorous life abroad and loves him because she has decided to do so, even before she has seen him” (75).

Hardy’s acceptance of contemporary ideologies about women is also evident in the narrators of the early novels. These narrators assume the authority of patronizing judges who extend unfavorable comparisons between the individual woman and the female sex as a

whole. Both Patricia Ingham and Kristin Brady have studied Hardy's narrators in this respect, and their observations will help to illustrate my point. Brady argues that Hardy's narrators "consistently occupy the normative position of the male speaking to other male about women" and "persist in constructing and interpreting female characters according to standard notions about women's weakness, inconstancy, and tendency to hysteria" (88-89). I think this argument applies more to Hardy's earlier novels than to his later novels, for the narrative voice in the later works tends to be more sympathetic and less judgmental towards the heroines. Ingham identifies in the following quotation from *Desperate Remedies* the narrator's dismissal of Cytherea's resilience to poverty as a result of a "remembrance" of the essentialist view of women as inferior: "[...] the brighter endurance of women [...] owes more of its origin to a narrower vision that shuts out many of the leaden-eyed despairs in the van, than to a hopefulness intense enough to quell them" (qtd. in Ingham 15). The narrator interprets Cytherea's endurance as an outcome of a "narrower vision," and, moreover, this disability for great vision is gendered--it is a quality found in women as a whole. When Cytherea dresses prettily and carefully for her wedding, Ingham observes, the narrator comments on her action as "an essential triviality" by referring to received doctrine (15). To the narrator, this preoccupation with dress is an instance "in which a difference of sex amounts to a difference of nature" (15).

Brady points out that the narrator of *Desperate Remedies* emphasizes female physical and mental weakness throughout his description of Cytherea and such characteristics are attributed to her not as individual to herself, but as typical of her biological status as woman:

Cytherea involves herself in the drama of other people's lives because "(y)oung women" have this "habit, not noticeable in men"; she fails to see "any but the serious

side of her attachment" to Springrove because this is typical of women, while "the most devoted lover has all the time a vague and dim perception that he is losing his old dignity and frittering away his time". (Brady 92)

According to Brady, the narrator's generalizations about female nature "take on an epigrammatic flavor, as if they were statements of universal wisdom" (92). After Cytherea has sent her note off to Manston, the narrator makes this comment: "A great statesman thinks several times, and acts, while a young lady acts, and thinks several times" (qtd. in Brady, 92). The narrator's tone, prescribing women's behavior to gendered norms, is not only formulaic, but also patronizing:

Of all the ingenious and cruel satires that from the beginning till now have been stuck like knives into womankind, surely there is not one so lacerating to them, and to us who love them, as the trite old fact, that the most wretched of men can, in the twinkling of an eye, find a wife ready to be more wretched still for the sake of his company. (qtd. in Brady, 92)

This apparently sympathetic statement, as Brady observes, has "a disturbing doubleness":

The satire that lacerates woman is not an external force of which she is the victim, but her own innate tendency to submit to the "most wretched of men"; and the narrator analyzes this phenomenon from his own position of chivalrous privilege, as one who loves women rather than as one who is a woman. At the basis of this narrator's construction of his female characters is his complacent sense that he and his reader stand outside the biological group he speaks of with such clinical authority. (92)

The same detached clinical tone is also echoed in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Ingham notes that Elfride's equanimity in the face of her father's disapproval of Stephen represents, to the narrator, "only a meretricious superiority" (15):

Either from lack of the capacity to grasp the whole *coup d'oeil*, or from a natural endowment for certain kinds of stoicism, women are cooler than men in critical situations of the passive form. Probably, in Elfride's case at least, it was blindness to the greater contingencies of the future she was preparing for herself. (qtd. in Ingham, 15-6).

The behaviors of the proud, adventurous, and capricious Bathsheba, of course, are commented on by the narrator time and time again with his habitual association of the individual woman with the whole female sex. Bathsheba rejects her first suitor Gabriel Oak, a stable young man who can be shaken, as Carpenter says, "only by Bathsheba" and continuously puts himself into her hands despite her refusal (86). After Oak helps to extinguish the fire that threatens one of her ricks, Bathsheba promptly accepts his service as a shepherd. Being the center of attention among the farmers at the Corn Exchange, Bathsheba cannot stand Farmer Boldwood's indifference to her, which prompts her to send him a valentine. Oak remonstrates against her behavior when it is obvious that she has aroused Boldwood's interest, and is immediately dismissed. Only an emergency with the sheep makes Bathsheba request Oak's return. Bathsheba's dealings with Oak and Boldwood, as Ingham notes, are interpreted by the narrator as revealing an essential female characteristic: "Women are never tired of bewailing man's fickleness in love, but they only seem to snub his constancy" (qtd. in Ingham, 16). Her infatuation with Troy provokes the vague threats of the jealous Boldwood. Alarmed, she impulsively decides to drive off alone

to Bath to warn Troy and sever connections with him. Contrary to her intention, however, she consents to an immediate marriage as a result of admiration, fear of scandal, and the jealousy Troy rouses in her. After the marriage, Troy squanders her inherited fortune, debauches her farmhands, and finally admits that he never loved her (Carpenter 86). Despite Troy's perfidy, Bathsheba still wishes to cling to him. The narrator explains her dealings with Troy as deriving from the mutual exclusiveness of womanliness and rationality: "Bathsheba, though she had too much understanding to be entirely governed by her womanliness, had too much womanliness to use her understanding to the best advantage" (qtd. in Ingham, 16). Kathleen Blake finds that "practically every folly of Bathsheba Everdene manages in the telling to reflect on her sex," whereas "Sergeant Troy is allowed to represent only himself by his sins" (214).

None of these irrational and impulsive heroines thrive in the end. Although Cytherea is finally rescued from the villainous Manston and returns to her first love, "too much has happened for her to retain her previous personality," as T.R. Wright remarks (42). Fancy Day eventually marries Dick, but that union is mildly compromised by the fact that she still has to keep a secret--her once temporary acceptance of Farmer Shiner's proposal. Elfride dies in a miscarriage. Bathsheba, the vibrant and proud girl seen at the beginning, loses her spiritedness in the end and is brought to heel after her failures, both private and public, oblige her to rely on Oak. Eustacia is drowned in her desperate attempt to escape her frustrations at the Heath. In totality, Hardy's earlier women, including the most liberated, are eventually either destroyed or subdued. Such destinies assigned to these heroines correspond to contemporary sexual ideologies that perpetuate and reinforce women's subjected position.

In sum, through characterization, narrative stance, and development of plot as it concerns the destinies of the heroines, Hardy's earlier representation of women embodies contemporary sexual ideologies. Yet, these earlier novels also contain elements that contest conventionality. Ingham points out that the disparaging explanations of women's behavior "constitute one discourse among several and are set in a context that generates unease with the stereotypes" (16). The dominance of the contemporary tendency to classify and appropriate women in stereotypical terms, present both in the narrator and male characters, is unsettled by the emergence of the female subjects' self-perception, as opposed to perception by others--that is, men. Bathsheba, for example, realizes it is "difficult for a woman to define her feelings in language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs" (qtd. in Ingham, 24). Ingham finds that Elfrida also recognizes "a gap between her inner life and the language she has to use, though she does not ascribe it to men's appropriation of words" (24). Boumelha suggests that Paula Power, the heroine of *A Laodicean* (1881), "marks a first attempt at what Hardy will later do with Sue Bridehead – to create by the interposition of commentators and interpreters a female character who will resist the appropriation of the narrative voice" (35). Eustacia, on the other hand, is troubled not so much by other's perception of her as by her own feeling of frustration with her unfulfilled life on Egdon Heath. She goes further than other heroines in her desire to realize her sense of self, though she appears perverse in her attempt to fulfill that desire. Eustacia's rejection of Egdon Heath, as Stubbs sees it, signifies her dismissal of "society's definition of female 'normality'" (74). But of course, Eustacia pays a terrible price for such freedom.

Hardy's movement toward challenging contemporary sexual ideologies is also indicated in the way he revises the images of women. For although Hardy's earlier heroines

demonstrate the so-called female mental weaknesses, such as irrationality, fickleness, and capriciousness, these women sometimes resemble men in actions and behavior. Bathsheba confidently claims her desire for independence, and Eustacia boldly dresses herself in man's clothes to "get excitement and shake off depression" (qtd. in Stubbs, 74). Eustacia is a particularly noteworthy case, representing Hardy's revision of what Ingham calls the seductress "sign woman" (24). Her behavior might associate her with a fallen woman, but as Ingham observes, "she carries none of the meaning of the fallen woman;" "For such connotations the narrator substitutes a welter of pagan mythological imagery which erases it" (Ingham 25). Fanny Robin of *Far from the Madding Crowd* represents a revision of the fallen woman, who is typically drawn as a figure filled with "guilt, self-hatred, remorse, self-destructiveness". Ingham observes that Fanny's self-perception is "never revealed," and that the traditional significance of such figures is replaced by "the emblematic Fanny whose play as a sign is limited to pictures and surfaces: her sad and fruitless visits to the barrack and the church, her painful journey to the poorhouse where she dies" (25). The image of fallen woman was to be revised again, in a drastic way, in *Tess*.

Although only implicit in these early novels, Hardy's challenge to conventional views about women is explicit in his later novels. The later heroines are drawn as increasingly complex individuals who do not fit in with the sexual stereotypes, and the narrative voice in these later novels unequivocally conveys Hardy's sympathy with their suffering and struggles for survival. Elizabeth-Jane and Tess are Hardy's most admirable heroines in this respect. Elizabeth-Jane is the first of Hardy's heroines who are not destroyed or subdued. Why does Hardy pause, as it were, in his depiction of women subdued or destroyed, to present Elizabeth-Jane as a survivor? Why does he defend Tess, who has fallen in the

conventional view, as a “pure” woman? What pressures--personal and/or cultural--might Hardy be responding to with these characters? To answer these questions, I shall now examine the cultural context within which Hardy undergoes his last phase as a novelist as well as the events in Hardy’s life that affect his novel-writing at this stage.

CHAPTER TWO

New Images of Women:

The Cultural and Biographical Contexts

The presentation of women in Hardy's earlier fiction, as the previous chapter has shown, embodies contemporary ideologies about the nature of women; yet it also contains elements that challenge conventional assumptions about the nature of woman or what is womanly. This duality did not go unnoticed in Hardy's own time. Calling Hardy's women "Undines of the earth," Havelock Ellis maintained that "Hardy's attitude to all these 'not too good' women was 'in a great degree, new'" (Gittings 35). The touch of unconventionality in Hardy's earlier depiction of women would develop over time into the shocking radicalism that characterizes the last phase of his novel writing career. In her study of Hardy's fiction, Penny Boumelha argues that the radicalism of Hardy's representation of women lies in "their resistance to a single and uniform ideological position" (7). This is especially true of Hardy's later heroines, who resist a reductive interpretation of their characters and roles and command the reader's sympathy and even admiration. Elizabeth-Jane possesses both intelligence and moral authority; Tess is as morally commendable as she is sexually attractive; Sue Bridehead is, in Wright's words, "a new-fangled feminist in a dilemma about her sexuality, not wanting to deny it but not wanting either to be reduced to a sexual object" (125). Hardy's radical revision of women's images in the last phase of his novel-writing career represents his reaction to the cultural as well as personal pressures he experienced at this time. The increasing freedom and independence women began to claim in the last twenty years of the nineteenth-

century made it possible for changes to take place in fictional representation of women. For Hardy, the possibility of creating new images of women was enhanced by his ambition to surpass himself as an artist and by his augmented power to challenge his middle-class readers and to embody contemporary problems, such as sexual morality and marriage, in his fiction.

Although the Victorians were dominated by a sexual ideology that endorsed women's subordination and limited women's sphere of action, the condition of women improved considerably during the reign of Queen Victoria. According to Merryn Williams, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, women had "few rights and opportunities," and very few ever found "their own voices" (1). Marriage was assumed to be women's natural destiny, and if they married, they neither owned their property nor had right to the custody of their children. Williams finds that "a wife was classed with lunatics, criminals and minors," and "it was very difficult for her to leave her husband, however badly he might treat her" (6). After 1857, however, a series of Acts of Parliament were passed in response to women's campaign efforts and removed most of women's legal disabilities. In 1857 the Matrimonial Causes Act allowed a legally separated wife to keep what she earned. The first Married Women's Property Act became law in 1870, and the Second Married Women's Property Act in 1882 entitled them to complete control of their incomes. These reforms gave many women, as Stubbs says, their "first taste of economic independence" (53). In addition to these improvements, women were demanding the right to vote. By the end of the 1870s, a London National Society for Women's Suffrage had been established. Over the next three decades, as Williams's finding suggests, "while women in practice got more and more freedom, the cause steadily gathered support" (19).

Women formed their own organizations and “it was widely accepted that they should take an active part in the world outside the home” (1). In 1870 Josephine Butler founded The Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. As a result of the campaign, the Acts were repealed in 1886. Williams also adds that “pressure from Mrs. Butler and others against the prostitution of young girls led in 1885 to the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which raised the age of consent from twelve to sixteen” (20). As Gail Cunningham points out, “although the official concessions made to women in the nineteenth century look paltry by modern standards they did mark essential steps in the struggle for emancipation” (4).

Other changes also facilitated women’s emancipation. Williams finds that “Good schools and colleges for girls had begun to open and many more jobs were available” (1). Individual efforts of such women as Elizabeth Blackwell, Elizabeth Garrett, and Sophia Jex-Blake led the medical profession to admit women, though with extreme reluctance. As nurses and teachers began to receive professional training, areas of female employment expanded. By the 1880s, it was more likely for a woman to break the confinement of home than at the beginning of the century. Cunningham’s investigation reveals that the census returns of 1861 and 1871 show no female clerks in the commercial world; however, “by 1881 there were nearly 6000 and by 1891 the number had almost trebled to 17,859” (4). As a result of reforms in law and in educational and professional institutions, women had a broader range of new opportunities. Williams notes that by 1889 a man was “no longer expected, even in well-to-do middle-class society, to support his adult sisters and daughters as well as his wife and infant children.” (21). Also, there were general discussions of sexual questions and the increase of knowledge about

contraception. By the end of the century, according to Cunningham, “the practice of birth control had become fairly widespread among the middle classes, and was firmly attached to the feminist cause” (7). Although by the end of the nineteenth century women still had no votes, they were much freer and more independent than they had been.

These changes provided the basis for the emergence of a new concept--the New Woman--and a revision in thinking about women and about sex. According to Stubbs, the New Woman is a term coined in the 1890s to describe “women who had either won or were fighting for, a degree of equality and personal freedom” (54). The New Woman daringly deviated from the norms of female behavior:

She could now elect to put her energies into professional rather than matrimonial achievement, and could justify her decision by pointing out that marriage, as conventionally defined, was a state little better than slavery. She could make her own choice about having children, either with or without the authority of a marriage license, and she could demand complete freedom from either parental or legal control in selecting her sexual partner. (Cunningham 10)

According to Cunningham, the New Woman, much portrayed and discussed in the popular press, provided artistic inspiration for contemporary “novelists who were sensitive to the ideas of the feminist debate or who were anxious to develop artistically a fresh view of women and sexual relationships” (3). Although “few novelists specifically identified their heroines as New Women,” Cunningham argues, “a great many novels which appeared in the nineties seemed to contemporary readers to be directly propagating the New Woman’s ideas” (17). Cunningham remarks that major and minor authors alike portrayed “marital breakdown, adultery, free love or bachelor motherhood

unaccompanied by the approved moral retribution-or indeed heavily supported by an impassioned moral defense,” thereby uprooting the “foundations of idealized femininity on which much of the Victorian moral structures was built” (19).

The last phase of Hardy’s novel-writing career overlapped with the last twenty years of the nineteenth century when women’s persistent efforts for emancipation won for themselves unprecedented freedom and led to a revision in thinking about women. Thus, Hardy’s depiction of women in his later works was contextualized by women’s struggle for freedom and independence. Compared with Hardy’s earlier heroines, the later ones are portrayed in a much more favorable light. The presentation of Elizabeth-Jane as a virtuous woman and a survivor marks a major change in Hardy’s depiction of women. Although in some ways--such as her modesty and submissiveness--Elizabeth-Jane represents the traditional feminine ideal, her intelligence, desire for learning, and independence sets her apart from that ideal. Clearly she is also different from the later highly sensationalized New Woman, who denounces marriage and defies the prescribed gender role; nevertheless, in terms of mental characteristics, Elizabeth-Jane anticipates and is identifiable with the intellectualized, individualistic, and independent New Woman.

While Hardy’s conception of an intelligent and independent woman such as Elizabeth-Jane may have been affected by women’s emancipation movement, the presentation of Elizabeth-Jane, who survives, even thrives, in a hostile world, perhaps had for Hardy a great deal of personal significance. Prior to writing *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy had already established a name for himself with major works such as *Under the Greenwood Tree*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and *The Return of the Native*. The three

novels following *The Return of the Native*, however, were not as well received.

According to Robert Gittings, Hardy realized “the light-weight quality of his last three novels, and was in the grip of one of his periodic wishes to improve his work, and to surpass himself as a writer” (36). In a similar vein, Michael Millgate writes:

Some notes from the summer of 1882 suggest that Hardy had realized, before he had finished writing *Two on a Tower* and long before it was published and reviewed, that he had somehow lost his way in his past two novels and that it was necessary for him to attempt to return to the material which he best knew and understood and to the narrative modes which had won him his earlier success and established for his readers a sense of his individuality. (234)

For fulfillment as an artist, Hardy returned to Dorchester, the place of his childhood, in June 1883, and, according to Millgate, Hardy fell back upon his “oldest, deepest, and surest creative resources” (249).

Hardy wrote *The Mayor of Casterbridge* after moving back to Dorchester, and while he was building Max Gate, the house in which he spent the rest of his life. “In his new serious purpose as a novelist,” according to Robert Gittings, Hardy “turned away from all former heroines,” who invariably have their “moments of caprice and coquetry” (40). Millgate points out the importance of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* in Hardy’s novel writing career: “It was only with *The Mayor of Casterbridge* that he regained, through what was now an entirely conscious choice of story, setting, and treatment, those levels of achievement at which he had so much more spontaneously arrived in the finest of his early works” (249). It can be inferred from Millgate’s statement that Hardy’s treatment of Elizabeth-Jane may have derived from his own conscious choice. The time when Hardy

wrote *The Mayor of Casterbridge* was for Hardy a time of reflecting upon the past and the present, of attempting to surpass himself as a novelist. He could not have been unaware of the changes happening to one of his persistent concerns--women. It is reasonable to assume that Hardy was moving towards a new vision of women. For the first time, Hardy allowed his heroine to be a cool observer of life rather than an irresponsible flirt. The power of observation and the ability to see beneath the surface characterizes Elizabeth-Jane more than any other trait. Of all the characters in the novel, Elizabeth-Jane alone recognizes Henchard's essential goodness despite his apparently demonic temper and conduct, and endears herself to him in his most dejected state. Her capacity to discern deeper reality, of course, is to be sharpened and enhanced through experience, so that her eventual prosperity does not blind her to her earlier vision that "happiness was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain" (*Mayor* 256).

Hardy's notes during this period consistently reveal his emphasis on observation and seeing beneath the surface. A note on July 19, 1883 shows his readiness to challenge conventional or prevalent views and articulate his own judgment based on observation:

In future I am not going to praise things because the accumulated remarks of ages say they are great and good, if those accumulated remarks are not based on observation. And I am not going to condemn things because a pile of accepted views raked together from tradition, and acquired by instillation, say antecedently that they are bad. (*Early Life* 210)

In another note, Hardy claimed the noblest of art "shall produce real pictures of human life in its environment--neither photographs, unfaithful in their very accuracy, nor daubs, unfaithful through lack of knowledge, experience (or) power" (*Literary Notebook* V1.

165). Having such determination to depict the real, lived experience and opportunities to associate with intelligent and successful women, Hardy was likely to arrive at a new understanding of women and portray them as they were in the changing society. A note on George Eliot's women shows Hardy's awareness of both the "nobleness" and malignity in women: "George Eliot's women-A truly magnificent revelation of the nobleness that is in women. But the other side is not fairly shown. The mystery of feminine malignity is barely touched upon...Art ought to be impartially representative" (*Literary notebook* V1. 152). Apparently, Hardy was emphasizing impartial representation of women, but his affirmation of Eliot's portrayal of women conveys his conviction that women do possess noble qualities.

Elizabeth-Jane's intelligence and sound character challenge the conventional notion that women lack rationality and moral firmness. But more than simply an example of the nobleness found in women, Elizabeth-Jane embodies Hardy's own visions and attitudes. Like Hardy the artist in the real world, Elizabeth-Jane in the micro-society of Casterbridge aspires to rise above herself, cultivates her mind by reading, and gathers wisdom by observing life and discovering deeper reality. In no other work did Hardy allow so much convergence of the narrator's point of view with that of a character, especially a female character. As Millgate points out, Elizabeth-Jane

represents the novel's nearest approach to the distinctly Hardy voice and point of view--not just because she is endowed with much of the inconspicuous ubiquity characteristic of Hardy's authorial narrators, but because she alone steadily learns and grows in the course of the narrative and achieves through quiet suffering a kind of disillusioned yet compassionate understanding that the reader comes to

recognize and accept as wisdom. (253-4)

Other evidence also suggests Hardy's identification with Elizabeth-Jane. The lack of ostentation of Elizabeth-Jane at a time of good fortune corresponds to the way Hardy lived his life after he established himself as an accomplished novelist: "the basic patterns of life and work adopted at this time remained little changed thereafter," and "his personal habits were as abstemious as they had always been—as, in childhood, they had had to be" (Millgate 262). Hardy "once declared that the only way for a writer to cope with success was not to allow it to change his mode of living" (264). This calls to mind Elizabeth-Jane who refuses to be elated in times of good fortune. But more than simply incorporating his own beliefs and attitudes into the characterization of Elizabeth-Jane, Hardy might be conveying, through Elizabeth-Jane's rise to prosperity, his own desire to succeed in his profession. Millgate asserts that Elizabeth-Jane's final words "certainly constituted an admirable summary of both the aspirations and the essential methods of that consciously regional artist whom Hardy had become during his progress from the beginning of work on the manuscript of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* early in 1884 to its completion in mid-April 1885" (254).

If Hardy incorporated his new understanding of women and his own desires and attitudes into the character of Elizabeth-Jane, he also drew on his experience with women close to him for his artistic creation. Millgate's study suggests that the character of Elizabeth-Jane seems to be based on Eliza Nicholls, "the most important figure in Hardy's early emotional life" (84). Some of the qualities of Elizabeth-Jane, such as her seafaring background, earnestness, and interest in books, find resemblance in Eliza Nicholls. Hardy also wrote some poems concerning his relationship with her. Millgate

notes that Hardy's relationship with Eliza Nicholls, upon whom he constantly depended for reassurance and good advice, was "allowed to drag on far beyond the span of its inherent vitality" (99). It is not farfetched to surmise that when Hardy returned to Dorchester in 1883 for artistic inspiration and searched the past for the conception of his new story and characters, he recalled Eliza Nicholls, one of the few intellectual women to whom Hardy emotionally attached himself. Gittings, however, suggests that Elizabeth-Jane is connected with Hardy's sister, Mary:

The self-effacing Elizabeth-Jane is all the more moving for her personal origins. Hardy had returned to the one person who could move his sympathy almost as deeply as his mother. This was his sister Mary. She was now beside him in the streets of Dorchester itself... Mary's silent witness pervades the novel... Years later, hearing the parson read over his sister's grave the verse, "I held my tongue and spake nothing: I kept silent, yea, even from good words," Hardy exclaimed, "That was my poor Mary, exactly." (42)

Apparently, Elizabeth-Jane bears resemblance to both Hardy's early love Eliza Nicholls and his sister Mary. Created at a time when women began to claim independence and freedom, embodying Hardy's own desires and attitudes, and modeling on women whom Hardy had much depended upon and deeply cared for, it is understandable that Hardy should present his new heroine in a more favorable light. As Millgate suggests, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is particularly a product of Hardy's "self-imposed demand for accuracy" which was "inseparable from that fundamental puritanism which obliged him in his best and most characteristic work to tell the truth about the lives of his characters, to follow them, faithfully and unflinchingly, to whatever fates their

personalities and circumstances seemed to lead or compel them” (Millgate 252). With a demand for “accuracy,” for telling truth, Hardy must have drawn on the real, lived experience of women of his time and incorporated it in his presentation of Elizabeth-Jane. With reforms in law and increased educational and professional opportunities opened up to women, the Victorians were witnessing the emergence of women who were independent, who “had high ideals”, and who “examined the world from an intelligent and informed base” (Cunningham10). These features are all present in the characterization of Elizabeth-Jane.

The Mayor of Casterbridge, in which Elizabeth-Jane has the final words, was published in 1886. With the flood of good reviews for the work, Hardy moved into a new phase as an artist (Gittings 48). He was now middle-aged--forty-six, a successful and accomplished storyteller in full command of his art, all of which gave him the freedom to challenge his middle class readers. During the 1890s Hardy “began to make more forthright and challenging statements in his own right” (Boumelha 118). In *Candour in English Fiction*, Hardy bitterly and forcefully recorded “the shifts and trimmings to which the ‘undescribably unreal and meretricious’ narrative conventions of the family serial condemned him” (118). In an essay contributed to a symposium on the need for sex education, Hardy “expressed his progressive views quite emphatically” (118). At this period, sex roles and the double standard were being increasingly questioned both in fiction and in public discussion. Hardy was “unquestionably aware of the areas of debate aroused by the fiction of the New Woman and the controversy it provoked” (93). Boumelha notes that Hardy “appeared to be lending the weight of his position as a well-established (if slightly controversial) author” to the developments of the New Fiction

(119). In the novels of the late 1880s and the 1890s--in *The Woodlanders* (1887), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), and *Jude the Obscure* (1895)--the sexual and marital themes that had always been important in Hardy became, in Boumelha's terms, "more overtly and polemically central to his fiction" (93-4). This new element of polemic is immediately suggested by the subtitle of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, "A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented." In the Explanatory Note to the First Edition of the novel, Hardy unequivocally declares his views and intentions:

I will just add that the story is sent out in all sincerity of purpose, as an attempt to give artistic form to a true sequence of things; and in respect of the book's opinions and sentiments, I would ask any too genteel reader, who cannot endure to have said what everybody now thinks and feels, to remember a well-worn sentence of St. Jerome's: If an offence come out of the truth, better is it that the offence come than the truth be concealed. (*Tess* 1)

With *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, "Hardy came to be thought of as a writer with a philosophical-cum-moral axe to grind" (Boumelha 119).

J.T.Laird's study of the evolution of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* suggests that the novel received extensive shaping from its earliest serial version to later volume editions. One example is "the increased bitterness of the philosophic comments" from the third layer of the manuscript onward (Laird 191). According to Laird, these comments "represent an angry, and understandable, reaction by Hardy to the prevailing ethos of his time" (191). Cunningham points out that Hardy's "authorial comments and the structuring of the double-standard theme reveal a consistency and strength of purpose which leave no doubt that he is arguing undisguisedly in favor of an unpopular position" (99). The heroine's

characterization also received substantial shaping. Compared with the heroine of the later manuscript layers, the Ur-heroine is “less modest” and “less scrupulous in matters of sexual morality” (Laird 128). Laird finds that Tess’s character “received most of its final shaping during the last three layers of the manuscript,” and that “the concept of Tess as ‘a pure woman’ continued to engage Hardy’s attention during the revisions which attended the publication of the *Graphic*, the First Edition, and the edition of 1892” (190). The features of Tess’s characterization, such as her modesty, integrity, resourcefulness, and loyalty, are, as Cunningham says, “necessary for the novel’s argument” (98).

To sum up, the change in Hardy's presentation of women at the final stage of his novel-writing career represents Hardy's reaction to the cultural as well as personal pressures Hardy experienced at this time. The increasing freedom and independence that women began to claim in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century made it possible for changes to take place in fictional representation of women. For Hardy, the possibility of creating new images of women was enhanced by his ambition to surpass himself as an artist and by his augmented power to embody contemporary problems in his fiction and challenge his middle-class readers. As an artist bent on portraying the reality of human existence, Hardy expanded and complicated his world of women and vision of female experience by presenting the characters of Elizabeth-Jane and Tess--their struggles and destinies. Both women suffer horrible injustices and demonstrate rare nobility of spirit throughout their ordeals; yet, they meet with very different ends. While Tess is destroyed, Elizabeth-Jane survives, and even thrives as the world destroys those around her. What brings the two to such different ends? In the next two chapters, I will study the portrayal of Elizabeth-Jane and Tess to answer this fundamental question.

CHAPTER THREE

The Triumph of Elizabeth-Jane

Elizabeth-Jane of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is a unique figure among all the female characters created by Hardy. While most Hardy heroines are eventually subdued or destroyed, Elizabeth-Jane survives, even thrives, in a hostile unforgiving world. Nonetheless, this character has long been ignored by Hardy critics. As early as in the late 1960s, Raymond O’Dea noticed this inadequacy of critical attention to Elizabeth-Jane, which he attributed to most critics having been concerned with the fate of the mayor, Michael Henchard. O’ Dea did what perhaps was the first focused discussion on Hardy’s presentation of Elizabeth-Jane and identified the dual nature of her role, “the force for life and the force for death” (33). O’Dea’s groundbreaking and insightful study of Elizabeth-Jane is prompted by the notion that “she plays a major role in the moral struggle she has imposed to some extent upon others” (33). A few later critics have briefly commented on the character of Elizabeth-Jane, but this is done chiefly for providing perspective for the analysis of the central character, Michael Henchard, or for the interpretation of other literary, philosophical, or aesthetic aspects of the novel.² My study of Elizabeth-Jane, however, is initiated by the preservation and ascendancy of her life amidst the horrors that destroy those around her and what this may imply about Hardy’s view on the fundamental question of survival and fulfillment of desire, especially as it is experienced by women. Hardy’s presentation of Elizabeth-Jane as a survivor is significant and worth studying because her triumph suggests an alternative exit out of the destructive

entanglements of human frailties, obstructed desires, social injustices, and vicissitudes of fortunes to which Hardy's heroines too often fall victim.

The struggles and destinies of Hardy's more glamorous and sexually exciting heroines have been frequently discussed by Hardy critics, and some attribute to the novelist a sense of loss when these women are eventually subdued or destroyed.³ However, if one considers the overall female experience rather than simply what becomes of the heroine at the conclusion of the plot, Elizabeth-Jane deserves more attention and sympathy than she is generally given. Unlike most other Hardy heroines, who suffer chiefly from romantic entanglement or marital frustration, and are more or less responsible for their own victimization, the virtuous, indeed almost faultless, Elizabeth-Jane suffers a multi-dimensional predicament. Like Tess, she is beset by poverty, patriarchal oppression, and thwarted love, none of which are her own fault. Growing up in a seaside village, she lives a life constantly shadowed by poverty. Barely eighteen, she is bereft of protection and love of a caring father, who is presumably lost at sea. Although she is able to live without material want for some time after her mother remarries Michael Henchard, such good fortune is short-lived. Her mother soon dies, and she is made to believe Henchard is her biological father. No sooner has she accepted such a painful twist of fate than she has to face harsh treatment by Henchard, who presently discovers she is in fact not his own daughter. Her fledgling romantic relationship with Farfrae, whom she believes is her intellectual and physical mate, is roughly stopped by Henchard. Later, out of his selfish need to get rid of Elizabeth-Jane, Henchard allows his business rival Farfrae to resume his courtship with her. In the absence of Elizabeth-Jane, however, Farfrae is dazed by Lucetta, Henchard's lover who has befriended and lives with Elizabeth-Jane. Already

estranged by Henchard, Elizabeth-Jane not only has to see her lover fall in love with her friend, but also is compelled to seek lodging and means of living again as a result of Farfrae and Lucetta's marriage. Elizabeth-Jane, however, is not crushed by such a series of destructive events: she survives, even thrives, as the world destroys those around her, especially the mayor Michael Henchard.

The triumph of Elizabeth-Jane, paralleling the destruction of Michael Henchard, reinforces the theme that "character is fate" (*Mayor* 88).⁴ She carefully balances herself amidst the vicissitudes of life, her poise, which itself is a strategy for self-preservation, forming a sharp contrast with the eruptive, self-destructive character of her stepfather, Michael Henchard. This poise is an index of the intelligence and moral strength that enable her to survive where others fail. She is portrayed as a meditative, almost philosophical woman. Compared with the fallible and sexually interesting female protagonists Hardy created before her, and even compared with Lucetta, Elizabeth-Jane is the least sensuous but the strongest and most independent and intelligent woman. Employing various novelistic techniques, Hardy portrays a woman who survives in a hostile world by constantly cultivating the mind and striving for self-improvement, by adapting herself to the needs and limits of her society, and by stoically enduring pains and preserving moral integrity throughout life's ups and downs.

These survival strategies cannot be well carried out to their ends without a high degree of self-identity. Though apparently passive, Elizabeth-Jane possesses such consciousness; she knows where she is and what she wants. Early on in the novel, Susan's reflection on her daughter clearly informs the reader of Elizabeth-Jane's desire: "The woman had long perceived how zealously and constantly the young mind of her companion was struggling

for enlargement; and yet now, in her eighteenth year, it still remained but little unfolded. The desire--sober, repressed--of Elizabeth-Jane's heart was indeed to see, to hear, and to understand" (*Mayor* 20).⁵ Such desire makes Elizabeth-Jane a seeing and thinking subject, which she remains throughout. And she is presented as such. This effect is achieved by the narrator's emphasis on her visions and thoughts rather than on her erotic appeal. Her sexuality is almost not spoken of at all. Hardy's depiction of Elizabeth-Jane's initial appearance in the novel is quite simple. Dressed in black, she "appeared as a well-formed young woman about eighteen, completely possessed of that ephemeral precious essence youth, which is itself beauty, irrespective of complexion or contour" (16). The significance of the color of her dress should not be dismissed. As Raymond O'Dea points out, the color is justified both by her necessity for mourning and by her philosophical state of mind, as black signifies wisdom. Elizabeth-Jane's first words in the novel are a series of questions she asks of her mother concerning the purpose of their journey to Casterbridge. Her inquisitive, observant, and meditative disposition is immediately hinted not only by her inquiries, but also by the narrator's use of words such as "observed" and "gazed round about" in describing her activities (17). Rather than an object of gaze, Elizabeth-Jane is an observer and thinker.

Indeed, watching people and events around her is one of Elizabeth-Jane's major activities, and her watchfulness is exceptional among Hardy's characters. No other of Hardy's characters, male or female, are endowed as Elizabeth-Jane is with similar powers of perception--in O'Dea's words, "almost superhuman sensibility and insight" (35). Apart from her natural endowment with a pair of gray, thoughtful eyes, she is also furnished with or acquires for herself vantage-points that facilitate her observing and meditative

activity without protruding her presence. The “rather high” position of Elizabeth-Jane’s room in Henchard’s house affords her opportunity for accurate observation of what is going on in the hay-stores and granaries below (*Mayor* 69). Her subsequent lodgings--High-Place Hall where she resides as Lucetta’s companion and the room nearly opposite Henchard’s former residence where she lives alone--are also located on high. It is not amiss to say that apart from the gaze of the ubiquitous narrator, the only other dominant gaze is that of Elizabeth-Jane. The vision of the narrator often merges with that of Elizabeth-Jane so that frequently the reader sees what happens in Casterbridge through the latter’s point of view. For example, when Elizabeth-Jane and Susan encounter the furmity woman who witnessed years ago Henchard’s sale of his wife Susan, it is through Elizabeth-Jane’s eyes that the reader sees the change of fortune as manifested in the former mistress of the furmity tent: the “once thriving, cleanly, white-aproned, and chinking with money” mistress now is “tentless, dirty, owning no tables or benches, and having scarce any customers” (17). In contrast, the formerly jobless young man Henchard has by now achieved success and prominence--he has become the Mayor of Casterbridge. Yet, he is soon to descend quickly in his prosperity and finally loses all that he had and desired. Elizabeth-Jane quietly watches one episode of the drama after another, through which she learns about characters and gathers wisdom about life.

In Casterbridge, Elizabeth-Jane witnesses almost all the important events leading to Henchard’s downfall. In Henchard’s office where she is to tell him of her mother’s intention to meet him, Elizabeth-Jane sees Henchard’s curt refusal of Jopp as the new manager because Henchard has hired Farfrae for the position. She discerns Jopp’s eagerness for the employment from his stepping forward “like the quicker cripple at

Bethesda” and the “bitter disappointment” written everywhere in his face in response to Henchard’s bluntly refusing to discuss the matter further (*Mayor* 50-1). From this brief encounter, Elizabeth-Jane must have realized Jopp’s meanness, for later on when she hears that Henchard has engaged Jopp in an attempt to beat Farfrae, she expresses her apprehension to Henchard despite the risk of making her stepfather angry (141).

Henchard’s indiscrete handling of Jopp not only harms his own business, but also gives incentive to Jopp’s subsequent retaliatory act of divulging Henchard’s past scandal with Lucetta, which in turn leads to Lucetta’s breakdown and aggravates Henchard’s ostracism and humiliation. Elizabeth-Jane also observes Henchard’s changing relationship with Farfrae, a chief factor contributing to the mayor’s downfall. She discerns, for example, that at the height of Henchard’s friendship with Farfrae, “Henchard’s tigerish affection for the young man, his constant liking to have Farfrae near him, now and then resulted in a tendency to domineer, which however, was checked in a moment when Donald exhibited marks of real offense” (69). From her window, she observes Henchard’s threat to Abel Whittle as a result of the young employee’s habitual tardiness--the rooting of the seed that is to “lift the foundation” of the friendship between the mayor and Farfrae (74). Farfrae’s open opposition to Henchard’s rough treatment of Abel Whittle marks the beginning of a strained relationship between Henchard and Farfrae. While the former’s reputation descends, the latter’s ascends: townspeople say Farfrae is “better-tempered, and Henchard’s a fool to him” (77). As Henchard’s antagonism to Farfrae increases with the latter taking the upper hand in their business contests, Elizabeth-Jane, surveying “from the crystalline sphere of a straightforward mind”, also perceives that the two became “more desperately enamoured” of Lucetta every day (137). Henchard eventually

loses to Farfrae in their struggle for Lucetta's love. Deprived of wealth, power, and love, Henchard meets his most humiliating moment during the royal visit when he attempts to shake hands with the "Illustrious Personage" (204). Elizabeth-Jane sees how Farfrae, "with Mayoral authority", seizes Henchard by the shoulder, drags him back, and roughly tells him to be off (204). The subtle-eyed girl not only witnesses Lucetta's elation amidst the hubbub on the occasion of the royal visit, but also comes to help Lucetta by trying to prevent her from seeing the "skimmity ride", a cruel burlesque of Lucetta and Henchard's past love affair. Elizabeth-Jane's quiet presence and her keen eyes direct our attention to what is going on at the center stage. As George Levine remarks, Elizabeth-Jane "provides the only other perspective from which we see a large part of the experience" (188).

Hardy's earlier heroines, however, are presented quite differently, as T.R. Wright has demonstrated in his study of Hardy's presentation of women in the early and middle novels:

The heroines of Hardy's early novels are presented primarily as objects of erotic interest not only for the narrators and for the male characters through whom they are observed but also for the implied reader/voyeur. They are described in visual, even pictorial terms as seen through the tinted spectacles of their lovers' fantasies. As characters they tend to be shallow, enigmatic and inconsistent. What they think or feel seems not to matter; the focus of attention is on the feelings they arouse in a variety of men...The novels of Hardy's middle period...continue to present women as objects of male fascination, dwelling on their visual charms as the screen on which erotic fantasy can play...What is interesting about these novels, what distinguishes them from those of his earlier period, is the extent to which women

are seen not only as objects of male desire but as subjects, with wishes and desires of their own, who are quite prepared to use the only power they possess, that of attraction to men, to their own advantage. (34-71)

If the emerging subjectivity of the heroines of the middle novels forecasts the well developed consciousness of Elizabeth-Jane, they are very different in nature. Elizabeth-Jane's desire is largely intellectual rather than simply romantic; she wants to "become a woman of wider knowledge, higher repute" (*Mayor* 20). Such aspiration sets her apart from the romantic type, so that unlike other heroines who are entrapped in emotional turmoil, she tries to be a "waker" in life--to watch in order to "take the universe seriously" (91).

Such seriousness of mind, which Elizabeth first identifies in Farfrae as an admirable quality, characterizes Elizabeth-Jane and is a key element contributing to her final victory. From Farfrae's speech and songs amidst the "wretched humours" of the gathering in the hotel, Elizabeth-Jane concludes "his statements showed him to be no less thoughtful than his fascinating melodies revealed him to be cordial and impassioned" (42). She admires "the serious light in which he looked at serious things", and finds that "he seemed to feel exactly as she felt about life and its surroundings--that they were a 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" (43). This view of life is later confirmed as the characters from the past--Henchard, Susan, Lucetta, the firmity woman--converge in the town of Casterbridge, where the drama is to be played out.

The strength of Elizabeth-Jane's serious attitude towards life is first tested in her new comfortable circumstances brought by her mother's reunion with Henchard. Elizabeth-

Jane's refusal to be transported with unexpected good fortune can be seen clearly in the following narration:

To Elizabeth-Jane the time was a most triumphant one. The freedom she experienced, the indulgence with which she was treated, went beyond her expectations...her gray thoughtful eyes revealed an arch gaiety sometimes; but this was infrequent; the sort of wisdom which looked from their pupils did not readily keep company with these lighter moods. Like all people who have known rough times, light-heartedness seemed to her too irrational and inconsequent to be indulged in except as a reckless dram now and then...she refrained from bursting out like a water-flower that spring, and clothing herself in puffings and knick-knacks, as most of the Casterbridge girls would have done in her circumstances. 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.

(Mayor 66-67)

When Elizabeth-Jane becomes aware that she is being admired as the town beauty as a result of her adornment, "her usual fear of exaggerating appearances" causes her to be sad (74). She realizes the folly of such superficial finery and resolves to pursue internal development--the cultivation of the mind: "If they only knew what an unfinished girl I am--that I can't talk Italian, or use globes, or show any of the accomplishments they learn at boarding-schools, how they would despise me! Better sell all this finery and buy myself grammar-books and dictionaries and a history of all the philosophies!" (74).

The freedom and indulgence Elizabeth-Jane experiences soon ends with the death of Susan and the subsequent discovery by Henchard of the truth concerning the birth of Elizabeth-Jane. He now treats her with a completely different attitude, one dominated by harsh criticism and intense dislike. Ignorant of the true cause of Henchard's harsh treatment of her, Elizabeth-Jane silently endures, believing it is her lack of cultivation that makes Henchard displeased with her. To make up her shortcomings, she reads and takes notes "incessantly, mastering facts with painful laboriousness, but never flinching from her self-imposed task" (*Mayor*101). When Elizabeth-Jane finally wins over Henchard by her genuine kindness, the latter is struck by the "abundance of books lying everywhere" in her humble room and the fact that she indulges "her innate passion so extensively in proportion to the narrowness of their income" (231-2). Through her observations and readings, she gathers knowledge and wisdom, so that she is able to keep her stand as a cool-headed spectator and thinker while others are involved in fierce economic competitions or entrapped in destructive emotional cravings.

Elizabeth-Jane's love of books is consistent with her desire to "become a woman of wider knowledge, higher repute" (*Mayor* 20). To Elizabeth-Jane, reading opens the avenue leading to respectability. Her remarkable preoccupation with respectability plays an important role in her ultimate ascendancy. This characteristic of Elizabeth-Jane is obvious from the very beginning of her presence in Casterbridge. When she and her mother just arrive at the town and the latter attempts to inquire of the furmity woman regarding Henchard's whereabouts, Elizabeth-Jane, having noticed the baseness of the place and the mistress, tries to stop Susan by saying, "Don't speak to her-it isn't respectable!" (17). Her determination not to associate with the unrespectable is made

more explicit when she tells her mother as they leave the furmity tent that it was hardly respectable for Susan to buy refreshments there, because in Elizabeth-Jane's eyes, "none but the lowest do" (18). Her being attracted to Farfrae and friendship with Lucetta are also attributable to her conviction that they are respectable people. These experiences, especially her friendship with Lucetta, enable Elizabeth-Jane to realize the full meaning of respectability, which must present itself not only in an external sense, but more importantly, in the mind.

The process through which Elizabeth-Jane reaches true respectability involves her reassessment of the characters of Farfrae and Lucetta. Contrary to Elizabeth-Jane's initial conviction of his thoughtfulness, Farfrae turns out to be more a technician than a philosopher, more concerned with his capital than his soul. When persuading Farfrae to stay in Casterbridge, Henchard admits that "it isn't all selfishness" that makes him press Farfrae and that he does so also because he likes Farfrae. Farfrae finally accepts Henchard's offer after looking over the "fertile country" stretching beneath them and the "shaded walk reaching to the top of the town" (49). This implies that Farfrae's decision is not made without consideration for advancing his own business interest. As Richard Carpenter remarks, Farfrae "accepts Henchard's bearlike affection because it is necessary if he is to get ahead in business" (109). In a number of incidents in Henchard's grain and hay establishments and in the town, Farfrae outsmarts Henchard, causing the embittered Henchard to dismiss Farfrae as his manager. Soon afterwards, Henchard requests that Farfrae discontinue attentions to his stepdaughter Elizabeth-Jane, which Farfrae promptly complies with. This, however, is not entirely out of Farfrae's deference to his former employer--Farfrae decides not to enact a "Romeo part" as much for his own sake as for

Elizabeth-Jane's (*Mayor* 88). Able and efficient as he is, Farfrae is not generous as a businessman. Abel Whittle, for example, is paid a shilling a week less under him than under Henchard. Unlike Elizabeth-Jane who understands Henchard's nature and helps him in his most unrespectable state, Farfrae cannot, as Richard Carpenter says, comprehend "the passions and needs that sway Henchard" (109). During the Royal visit--a time of extreme elevation for Farfrae as the new mayor--he disregards all his former indebtedness to Henchard and humiliates the latter by dragging him out of the scene. If Farfrae has never deliberately antagonized Henchard, he nonetheless values his own ambition over friendship and remains distant from Henchard who once trusted him to the full. In contrast, Elizabeth-Jane goes out of her way to understand and help Henchard, though she has received unfair treatment from him. She wants to "be allowed to forgive him for his roughness to her, and to help him in his trouble", which she carries out by writing and visiting Henchard, who has been shunning Elizabeth-Jane in his depression.

Not only does Farfrae turn out less thoughtful and affectionate than he appears to be, he also lapses into the common folly of falling for outward adornments when he meets Lucetta, a woman who is vain about her appearance and tries hard to conceal her disreputable past. Elizabeth-Jane once believed Farfrae can see "how plain and homely was the informing spirit of that pretty outside" (*Mayor* 86). Ironically, he is quickly bewitched by the superficial elegance of Lucetta, who outshines Elizabeth-Jane "as one of the 'meaner beauties of the night'" (137). Farfrae's worldly ambitions and matrimony with Lucetta really cause him to lose favors by the townspeople. Coney, a member of the Casterbridge community amazed by Farfrae's quick marriage to Lucetta, reflects on some

difference between Farfrae now and when he sang at Three Mariners, the hotel where Farfrae spent his first night in Casterbridge:

Farfrae was still liked in the community; but it must be owned that, as the Mayor and man of money, engrossed with affairs and ambitions, he had lost in the eyes of the poorer inhabitants something of that wondrous charm which he had had for them as a light-hearted penniless young man, who sang ditties as readily as the birds in the trees. (205)

So when Lucetta's pride engenders resentment from the town folks, which in turn causes them to plot a skimmity-ride against her, the anxiety to keep Farfrae, Lucetta's husband, from annoyance shows "not quite the ardour that would have animated it in former days" (205). The result of that conspiracy is that Lucetta dies in shame and shock. It is only through the tragic loss of life that Farfrae learns "how to estimate his experience of Lucetta--all that it was, and all that it was not" (230). However, by his insightful, brisk, and rapid nature, he soon perceives that "by the death of Lucetta he had exchanged a looming misery for a simple sorrow" (231). Farfrae remains a realistic and acute businessman who prospers upon his skills and modern mindset. Elizabeth-Jane is different from Farfrae in that her pursuit of respectability does not negate, nor obscure her capacity for friendship and affection; therefore, she alone combines reason and feeling, instilling a richer meaning to respectability.

As noted earlier, Elizabeth-Jane's pursuit of respectability also involves learning from her initial, indeed mistaken, assessment of Lucetta's character. The result of this experience is that Elizabeth-Jane changes from a girl admiring external accomplishments to a mature thinker concerned with internal development and the state of the mind. At

first, Elizabeth-Jane was fascinated with “the artistic perfection” of Lucetta’s appearance and admired her “comparatively practised manner” (*Mayor* 103-107). Yet, Elizabeth-Jane is soon to realize how uncomplimentary Lucetta is in reality. Apart from Lucetta’s superficial elegance, as manifested in her dress, gait, and proficiency in French and Italian, there is not much to be said for her internal quality. She is inclined to be artful and manipulative in order to advance her own benefits. For example, she asks Elizabeth-Jane to live with her partly for making it convenient for Henchard to court her. When she feels that Elizabeth-Jane is in the way, she sends the latter off by making up an excuse. Later, Lucetta falls in love with the young, more attractive Farfrae and estranges Henchard despite her previously passionate promise of commitment. In his desperation for gaining love and his antagonism to Farfrae, Henchard exacts a promise of marriage from Lucetta, who is compelled to agree to his demand. However, as soon as she discovers Henchard’s infamous wife-sale, she breaks her word by secretly marrying Farfrae. In the eyes of Elizabeth-Jane, who insists on “correctness of procedure”, Lucetta’s conduct is obviously wrong. Lucetta’s attempt to hide her ignoble past, to appear respectable, ends in vain, because a respectable appearance alone does not amount to true respectability. Her pride and vanity antagonizes some ill-intentioned Casterbridge citizens so much so that they conspire to “topper” her with a skimmity-ride (205). From Lucetta, Elizabeth-Jane learns about the inadequacy of ostensible respectability and the danger of undue elation at times of good fortune. Such experience partly accounts for her persistence in striving for internal development and in remaining unperturbed amidst the riches that come to her hand.

The significance of Elizabeth-Jane's valuing respectability is manifold. Reaching respectability is, first of all, a motivating force in her effort to cultivate the mind. Moreover, Elizabeth-Jane's desire for knowledge and respectability is juxtaposed for the most part with the restriction of her desire for Farfrae. In her endeavor to attain true respectability, she is able to fend off the destructive attrition of obstructed desire. This can be seen by comparing her with Eustacia Vye, the heroine of *The Return of the Native*, who is a perfect match to Elizabeth-Jane in terms of the desire to see the world. While Elizabeth-Jane directs her energy to self-improvement as a means of attaining respectability, Eustacia allows herself, as Patricia Stubbs observes, to become a sexual adventurer:

Eustacia Vye attempts to escape the boredom and lack of fulfillment imposed on her lonely life on Egdon Heath by immersing herself in passionate love affairs. She first takes up with the somewhat satanic Damon Wildeva, and then with the idealistic young Clym Yeobright. She effectively destroys both these men and herself. (71)

Finally, as George Levine points out, Elizabeth-Jane's preoccupation with respectability "indicates her acceptance of the limits society imposes on action and on dreams", and with her, "the acceptance is an act of self-protection" (189). "By staying protected within the limits of respectability", she survives to find "tranquility" (Levine 189). Critics and readers alike tend to view Elizabeth-Jane's limiting her desires as passive and are generally impressed with the tragic struggles of characters like Eustacia or Henchard rather than Elizabeth-Jane's compromise with reality. However, her realistic passivity is really a form of strength coupled with wisdom, because it is a choice made upon careful

observation of real life experiences and realization of the limits and demands of circumstances. Although Elizabeth-Jane never becomes an active player in the competitions in which Henchard, Farfrae, and Lucetta are all involved, she certainly is also struggling on her own battlefield, one that is filled with anguish over bereavement, misunderstanding, unfair treatment, and disappointed love. She struggles to remain a rational spectator of life, to curb unrealistic expectations, and to sacrifice her own benefits for the welfare of others. These choices are not easy because of the tremendous mental and moral strength required and because of the moral complexity in trying to satisfy the demands of all four forces. Elizabeth-Jane is the only character in the novel who subjects all her choices to the call of reason and the accepted moral code. She does not violate any natural or social law, nor does she inadvertently plant the seed of hatred and revenge that will later ruin her reputation or life. Her triumph largely lies in her adapting and adjusting to changing situations and striving to meet the demands of respectability and the moral code, which frequently entails following reason and disciplining personal desires.

Unlike Elizabeth-Jane who champions moral rectitude, Susan, Henchard, and Lucetta are all violators. In her simple-mindedness, Susan accepts the auction sale of her by Henchard as more binding than the marriage law and sows the seed of misery. She dies thinking she has committed a great moral wrong. Henchard's destruction is more complicated, but the exposure by the firmity woman of his past scandalous sale of his wife certainly is a turning point in the descent of his reputation. Lucetta's death is directly related to her loss of respectability, which is caused by the revelation of her affair with Henchard. Throughout, only Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae retain respectability prescribed

by social law and moral code. As the narrator explicitly remarks, Elizabeth-Jane's "craving for correctness of procedure" is almost "vicious": "Any suspicion of impropriety was to Elizabeth-Jane like a red rag to a bull" (*Mayor* 165). With such unyielding hold on propriety and "correctness of procedure", Elizabeth-Jane is not likely to get ensnared in a sexual relationship prior to or outside marriage, or bring upon herself any suspicion of such fatal relationship. "None of Hardy's major female characters is allowed to have premarital or extramarital sexual experience and survive" (Waldoff 148).

Elizabeth-Jane's craving for respectability and insistence on propriety also guarantee the unity of her mental and psychological status. She is not a split or divided subject, as some other Hardy heroines are, most typically Tess and Sue Bridehead. Throughout the vicissitudes of life, she strictly conforms to what she thinks is correct and often is in a position to judge instead of be judged, thereby precluding the possibility of being caught up in the gap between what she is and what others, particularly men, think she is. This unity of consciousness enables her to retain the mental and moral fortitude crucial for survival and success. In terms of the wholeness of being, retention of respectability, and destiny, Elizabeth-Jane precedes Arabella of *Jude the Obscure*. Although drastically different in character--one being virtuous and admirable, the other not--both are survivors. If Elizabeth-Jane is predominantly a mental being, Arabella is close to being all sex, a "complete and substantial female animal - no more, no less" (qtd. in Stubbs, 65). Arabella's triumph, according to Patricia Stubbs, is attributable to her adroit use of her sexuality without apparently damaging her respectability:

Arabella triumphs because she knows how to use her sexuality; she exploits people where they are most vulnerable...she, of all people, always manages to appear

respectable. On the other hand, Sue and Jude who try to establish a truly caring relationship, but outside marriage, are crushed. The moral conventions could accommodate Arabella. (66)

Elizabeth-Jane's unity of being is also achieved through her characteristic inner poise. Neglected by her beloved, Elizabeth-Jane instead of pining away is able to transcend her pain by rationalization and renunciation. Her equanimity enables her to come through painful experience unscathed, as can be seen in the following narration of her response to the confrontation of Henchard, Farfrae, and Lucetta:

The pain she experienced from the almost absolute obliviousness to her existence that was shown by the pair of them became at times half dissipated by her sense of its humorousness...As regarded Farfrae, she thought, after honest reflection, that it was quite natural. What was she beside Lucetta? –as one of the 'meaner beauties of the night,' when the moon had risen in the skies...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...her experience had consisted less in a series of pure disappointments than in a series of substitutions...she viewed with an approach to equanimity the now cancelled days when Donald had been her undeclared lover, and wondered what unwished-for thing Heaven might send her in place of him.

(*Mayor* 137)

In employing renunciation as a survival strategy, Elizabeth-Jane resembles Maggie Tulliver, the heroine of *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot. Merryn Williams makes the following remarks on Maggie's dilemma and choice:

Neither of the men who wants to marry her is acceptable to her family. She cannot

love Philip, who might have helped her to escape, and Stephen, whom she does love, is a commonplace man who likes women to be 'rather insipid'. So she can only turn to a gospel of renunciation based on duties towards the family. (144)

Renunciation, to Maggie, is the light guiding her out of the darkness of life, as can be seen through her articulation of her belief:

We can't choose happiness either for ourselves or for another; we can't tell where that will lie. We can only choose whether we will indulge ourselves in the present moment or whether we will renounce that for the sake of obeying the divine voice within us, for the sake of being true to all the motives that sanctify our lives. I know this belief is hard; it has slipped away from me again and again; but I have felt that if I let it go forever, I should have no light through the darkness of this life.⁶

Eliot's characterization of Maggie may have influenced Hardy's presentation of Elizabeth-Jane. According to F.B. Pinion, Hardy admired George Eliot as a thinker (206). *The Mill on the Floss* was first published in 1861, about two decades before Hardy wrote *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Hardy "noted George Eliot's comments in *The Mill on the Floss* on one of the 'questionable' aphorisms of Novalis that 'character is destiny', and quoted it with approval" in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (Pinion 41). Maggie as a heroine who wisely resorts to renunciation to pull through life's frustrations calls to mind Elizabeth-Jane who survives by the same strategy. Had Elizabeth-Jane not learned to give up desires, she would have come to an impasse that could lead to deeper and more intense frustrations, and finally to destruction, as has been the case with Henchard of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* or Eustacia Vye of *The Return of the Native*.

Despite her renunciation of desires, which makes her appear passive, Elizabeth-Jane is actively engaged in helping those in need. Her conduct wins appreciation and trust from others, which proves mutually beneficial to those helped by her and to herself. Though she suffers from the troubled relationships among Henchard, Farfrae, and Lucetta, who have neglected her all together in their own passions, Elizabeth-Jane remains unbiased, ungrudging, and kind to all of them. When Henchard's enmity toward Farfrae reaches such intensity that he demonstrates signs of retaliation to the younger rival, Elizabeth-Jane resolves to caution Farfrae, her former undeclared lover who by choice has married Lucetta. Elizabeth-Jane tells him that Henchard may be "betrayed into some attempt" to insult or hurt him (183). "Knowing the solidity of her Character," Farfrae does not "treat her hints altogether as idle sounds" (184). At the time of the skimmity-ride, it is Elizabeth-Jane who comes to help Lucetta. It is also Elizabeth-Jane alone who shows affection and kindness toward Henchard when he loses all his properties and respectability. Upon hearing that Henchard has caught cold and is confined to his room, she is "determined not to be denied admittance" (174). She makes the room more comfortable, gives directions to the people below, and by the time she leaves has reconciled her stepfather to her visiting him. Because of her ministrations to Henchard, he quickly recovers, both physically and mentally: "Now things seemed to wear a new color in his eyes. He no longer thought of emigration, and thought more of Elizabeth" (174). When Henchard sees his own effigy discarded after the skimmity-ride--a moment of indescribable despair for the down-and-out former mayor, Elizabeth-Jane comes to his side with enlivening affection: "Father!--I will not leave you alone like this! May I live with you, tend upon you as I used to do? I do not mind your being poor" (229).

Henchard soon relies on the sympathy of Elizabeth-Jane for “his very existence” (230). With Henchard’s acceptance of and dependence on Elizabeth-Jane’s affection, both are moving towards a better life in which neither would have to fight alone for survival.

Though Henchard would not lose Elizabeth-Jane, whom he considers the light of hope, she is bound to move on to a new life of her own, as Henchard is doomed to pay for his past offense. Farfrae, schooled by experience, renews his attention to Elizabeth-Jane. As their courtship continues, Elizabeth-Jane’s real father, Newson, arrives at Casterbridge to look for her. Out of his emotional reliance on Elizabeth-Jane, Henchard lies to Newson, saying she was dead. As it becomes obvious that Newson and Elizabeth-Jane will inevitably reunite and Henchard’s deception will be exposed, Henchard decides to leave Casterbridge for good. Though Elizabeth-Jane feels sorry for his decision, she accepts his choice and recovers her equanimity after his departure. After she is told of Henchard’s deceit, Elizabeth-Jane decides she “ought to forget him” (242). Henchard in his loneliness, however, cannot forget his stepdaughter and decides to “make one more attempt to be near her” (245). He goes to Elizabeth-Jane’s wedding with a caged bird as a wedding gift and token of repentance. Contrary to his wish, his presence and plea for her affection only lead to an outburst of Elizabeth-Jane’s resentment and rejection. Henchard leaves without expressing any regrets or excuses, as “it is part of his nature to extenuate nothing, and live on as one of his own worst accusers” (251). While Elizabeth-Jane’s rejection of Henchard may be justified by her intolerance of lies, it is a fatal blow to Henchard, leading to the collapse of his physical and mental vitality. Though the discovery of the dead caged bird causes Elizabeth-Jane to soften her heart towards Henchard, it is too late--Henchard is already dead. Elizabeth-Jane does regret her unkind

treatment of Henchard at his last visit; however, she accepts what is irreparable as a matter of fact: “there’s no altering—so it must be” (255). As the intensity of her regrets thins out with the passing of time, she has learned and teaches the secret of “making limited opportunities endurable; which she deemed to consist in the cunning enlargement, by a species of microscopic treatment, of those minute forms of satisfaction that offer themselves to everybody not in positive pain” (255)

Elizabeth-Jane’s philosophy is, as George Levine says, “a consequence of the experience of disaster” (189). What enables her to survive the horrors of life and rise to prosperity is the combination of the qualities I have already mentioned. To sum up, Elizabeth-Jane’s triumph is the natural outcome of her intelligence, moral integrity, inner poise, and persistent efforts at improving herself. Besides valuing hard work, which enables her to deal with financial difficulties, she is also willing to “sacrifice her personal comfort and dignity to the common weal” (*Mayor* 33). Free from any public hostility and continuously striving for self-improvement, Elizabeth-Jane finally reaches her heart’s desire--respectability. What guarantees her a life of “equable serenity” amidst fortune and the “unforeseen”, however, is the vision she acquires through her experience of the turbulent events of the past:

Her experience had been of a kind to teach her, rightly or wrongly, that the doubtful honor of a brief transit through a sorry world hardly called for effusiveness, even when the path was suddenly irradiated at some half-way point by daybeams rich as hers. But her strong sense neither she nor any human being deserved less than was given, did not blind her to the fact that there were others receiving less who had deserved much more. And in being forced to class herself

among the fortunate she did not cease to wonder at the persistence of the unforeseen, when the one to whom such unbroken tranquillity had been accorded in the adult stage was she whose youth had seemed to teach that happiness was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain. (255-256)

CHAPTER FOUR

The Tragedy of Tess

Reputed to be Hardy's finest achievement in his novel-writing career, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is the quintessential representation of Hardy's idea of tragedy. According to Hardy, "the best tragedy – highest tragedy in short is that of the WORTHY encompassed by the inevitable" (qtd. in Waldoff, 135). As George Watt remarks,

The novel exposes the heroine to the mystical working of self, religion, society, sex, hereditary gifts and scourges, and universal indifference. The canvas of the novel is broad; however, each of the different aspects of the novel exists within its framework only as it relates to Tess's fate--they converge, each sphere of influence outside Tess moving within her as a dynamic force. (159)

While Tess is encompassed by a number of influences, I think she is fundamentally a victim of class and gender inequality. Tess's sexuality dooms her to be an irresistible object of male desire. Unfortunately she is both sexually desirable and poor, thereby more susceptible to being sexually victimized. Neither of the two men desiring Tess understands her full identity and worth. Alec violates her physically, and Angel, mentally. Tess herself is also torn between the innate desire for love and happiness and internalized cultural values. A poor woman beset by familial, social, and universal forces, Tess is not left much freedom of choice. As Ingham says, "like all fallen women she dies; all she has really been able to choose is the particular form of her death" (89). In examining the development of Tess's tragedy, I shall demonstrate that throughout her ordeal, Tess is not a passive victim, but a strong and independent woman who owns, in

Rosemarie Morgan's words, "the power of will and reason, the self-responsibility and moral integrity" that make her "one of the strongest women in the annals of English literature" (84).

More than any other Hardy heroine, Tess is depicted in an extravagantly sensual way. As T.R. Wright says, "from the passing strangers at the beginning of the novel to the sixteen patient policemen who wait for her to awake at Stonehenge at its end, Tess is the object of the erotic male gaze" (109). Tess first appears as "a fine and handsome girl" with a "mobile peony mouth and large innocent eyes" (*Tess* 11). Her mouth is objectified in particular: the pouted-up deep red mouth "had hardly as yet settled into its definite shape, and her lower lip had a way of thrusting the middle of her top one upward, when they closed together after a word" (12). The narrator reminds us that Tess now is "a mere vessel of emotion untinged by experience" and phases of her childhood still lurks in her aspect: "As she walked along to-day, for all her bouncing handsome womanliness, you could sometimes see her twelfth year in her cheeks, or her ninth sparkling from her eyes; and even her fifth would flit over the curves of her mouth now and then" (12). What matters, however, is her "bouncing handsome womanliness." The potential danger that lies in her physical attractiveness is implied early by a remark of a villager drinking at Rolliver's inn: "Tess is a fine figure o' fun, as I said to myself to-day when I zeed her vamping round parish with the rest, but Joan Durbeyfield must mind that she don't get green malt in floor" (22). Upon encountering Alec d'Urbervilles, Tess immediately becomes the object of his desire. Aroused by her "luxuriance of aspect" and "fullness of growth," Alec rivets his eyes upon Tess (35). Time and time again, he seeks to possess and relish that sexuality. There is validity in Boumelha's remark that "the source of what

is specifically *tragic*” in Tess’s story remains “at the level of nature” (122). “If Tess can be said to have a tragic ‘flaw’,” Boumelha says, “it is her sexuality” (123).

In the face of Alec’s repeated advances, Tess demonstrates both personal integrity and intelligence in her acts of self-defense. When she and Alec descend a slope, Alec takes advantage of Tess’s fear of speeding down:

‘Now then, put your arms round me again, as you did before, my beauty.’

‘Never!’ said Tess independently, holding on as well as she could without touching him.

‘Let me put one little kiss on those holmberry lips, Tess, or even on that warmed cheek, and I’ll stop-on my honor, I will’

Tess, surprised beyond measure, slid farther back still on her seat, at which he urged the horse anew, rocked her the more. (45)

Unable to make Alec relent, Tess apparently resigns to his demand. Yet when Alec is on the point of “imprinting the desired salute,” Tess dodges aside. Exasperated, Alec persists in his demand despite Tess’s imploration. No sooner has Alec given her “the kiss of mastery” than Tess, flushing with shame, takes out her handkerchief and wipes out the spot touched by his lips (45). Impressed with Tess’s being “mighty sensitive for a cottage girl” and provoked by her act of erasing his imprint, Alec continues to be inexorable in his demand. Taking advantage of another descent, Alec threatens Tess: “You shall be made sorry for that! Unless, that is, you agree willingly to let me do it again, and no handkerchief.” Apparently yielding, Tess plays a trick to shun the kiss. She asks to get off the gig to get her hat, which she purposefully let off, and once on the ground, she refuses to go back to the gig. In response to Alec’s anger and curses, Tess bravely asserts herself:

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself for using such wicked words!” “I don’t like’ee at all! I hate and detest you!” (46). Obviously, Tess is not passive and yielding, as she is too often perceived to be, but self-assertive, intelligent, and resourceful.

In the eyes of Alec, Tess is a “temptation as never before fell to mortal man.” His desire for Tess, however, is void of the spiritual component that would allow him to be truly respectful towards Tess as an individual. To win over Tess, he “carefully cultivated” her familiarity with his presence. Owing to her unavoidable dependence upon him, Tess became “more pliable under his hands” (51). What is implied here is that Tess must have consciously subdued her natural pride and temper because of the need to stay on the d’Urbervilles poultry farm to help her family. Although Tess was careful enough to detect Alec’s sneaky presence when she was alone and “had never quite got over her original mistrust of him,” she cannot divine that when opportunity comes, Alec would not refrain from satisfying his desire for her. When Tess falls asleep from physical and mental exhaustion, Alec abandons himself to desire and appropriates Tess’s body without remorse.

There is no reason to expect Tess, as young and innocent as she is, to ward off Alec, “the ‘tragic mischief’ of her drama” (34). Tess’s lack of experience is suggested in the description of her initial journey to the d’Urberville mansion:

She had hardly ever visited the place, only a small tract even of the Vale and its environs being unknown to her by close inspection. Much less had she been far outside the valley. Every contour of the surrounding hills was as personal to her as that of her relatives’ faces; but what lay beyond her judgment was dependent on the teaching of the village school, where she had a leading place at the time of her

leaving, a year or two from before this date. (30)

That Tess's schooling has to be cut short is after all obliged by her family's class position. And the ignorance of danger in men has to be prolonged until after she becomes a sexual victim, because she never had the chance, as ladies do, to read novels that tell them how to protect themselves from men, and her mother did not tell her. Even the temporarily converted Alec admits that Tess is blameless for her fall: "What a blind young thing you were as to possibilities! I say in all earnestness that it is a shame for parents to bring up their girls in such dangerous ignorance of the gins and nets that the wicked may set for them, whether their motive be a good one or the result of simple indifference" (261).

If for a while the innocent Tess could not help being dazed by Alec's ardor, she is determined to leave him as soon as she sees things through, and in due course, her integrity is further revealed. In response to Alec's mocking of her saying "what every woman says," Tess flares up: "Did it never strike your mind that what every woman says some women may feel?" Tess's retort conveys a vital individuality that refuses to be reduced to the norm. Her spirit of independence shines through her outright rejection of Alec's offer of help: "I have said I will not take anything more from you, and I will not—I cannot! I *should* be your creature to go on doing that, and I won't!" (65). So spirited is Tess that Alec cannot help complimenting her: "one would think you were a princess from your manner, in addition to a true and original d'Urberville". In answer to Alec's question of whether Tess loves him, Tess remains honest throughout, even though she knows she could conveniently benefit from lying: "I have never really and truly loved you, and I think I never can. Perhaps, of all things, a lie on this thing would do the most

good to me now, but I have honour enough left, little as 'tis, not to tell that lie. If I did love you I may have the best o'causes for letting you know it, but I don't" (66).

Tess now has to "tread a long and stony highway without aid, and with little sympathy." She feels the monstrosity of guilt and depression and "could have hidden herself in a tomb" (71). The narrator, however, exonerates Tess by dismissing social conventions as "moral hobgoblins" and stressing Tess's oneness with nature:

It was they that were out of harmony with the actual world, not she. Walking among the sleeping birds in the hedges, watching the skipping rabbits on a moonlit warren, or standing under a pheasant-laden bough, she looked upon herself as a figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence. But all the while she was making a distinction where there was no difference. Feeling herself in antagonism she was quite in accord. She had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly.(72-3)

After a long secluded and depressed life, Tess's desire for independence prevails and she comes out of her confinement to help with the harvest. Having just overcome her moral sorrows, Tess has to bear the pain caused by the death of her child Sorrow. In securing salvation for Sorrow, Tess demonstrates great courage and willpower. The significance of Tess baptizing her dying baby is nicely commented on by Rosemarie Morgan: "In her sacramental cleansing of the infant Sorrow's guilt Tess enacts her own desire to liberate the innocent soul from damnation, to 'bury' guilt and sorrow purged of all stain... the woman who usurps the male minister's role, who utters her own form of baptism, gives powerful voice to her longing to govern, to control her own existence" (103).

Tess becomes more inclined to thinking after the death of Sorrow. “She would often clasp her hands behind her head and muse,” and “symbols of reflectiveness” pass into her face. “Almost at a leap”, Tess changes “from simple girl to complex woman” (*Tess* 84). Her inclination to meditate, however, does not preclude her capacity for regeneration and renewal, which finds correspondence in nature. So when spring comes, when “the stir of germination” is “almost audible in the buds”, “some spirit within her” rises “automatically as the sap in the twigs”. Filled with “unexpended youth”, “hope”, and “the invincible instinct towards self-delight”, Tess enters a new phase of life (85). Once again, Tess is described as in harmony with nature. In the burgeoning and fecund nature, Tess and Angel Clare fall in love with each other.

Tess is not merely an object of male desire, but “a sexually vital consciousness” (Morgan 84). From the outset, Tess observes “something educated, reserved, subtle, sad, differing” beneath Angel’s appearance. She is as interested in Angel as he in her: “They were respectively puzzled at what each revealed, and awaited new knowledge of each other’s character and moods without attempting to pry into each other’s history” (106). And she cares about Angel’s opinion of her. Tess is “dejected” by “the distance between her own modest mental standpoint and the unmeasurable, Andean altitude of his” (106). Despite “her hunger for his good opinion”, she cautiously finds out Angel’s view of old families before revealing her knightly ancestry (107). From her findings Tess deduces that Angel’s interest in her was largely due to her “supposed untraditional newness” (109). Tess perceives that “only the slightest ordinary care” is necessary for “holding her own in Angel Clare’s heart” against her friends (116). Though aware of her own charm, Tess refuses to exploit it and gives other girls every chance.

Tess's surrender to passion is seen as a triumph of nature: "The 'appetite for joy' which pervades all creation, that tremendous force which sways humanity to its purpose, as the tide sways the helpless weed, was not to be controlled by vague lucubrations over the social rubric" (161). In love, both Tess and Angel idealize each other. Tess sees Angel as godlike and craves for his tutelage, but she is also deeply disturbed by her feeling: "Her idolatry of this man was such that she herself almost feared it to be ill-omened"; Tess knows that the one Angel loves is not her "real self", but one in her "image", the one she "might have been!" (181). Different from Tess, Angel appears to be quite smug about his own reading of her. He sees Tess as "a visionary essence of woman—a whole sex condensed into one typical form" and calls her "Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names" (111). Angel's idealization of Tess soon proves as disastrous as Tess fears.

Charles P.C. Pettit observes that Hardy stresses Angel's inability to "see the real Tess behind the whole host of stereotypes into which he tries to fit her" (175). Angel's blindness to Tess's individuality and essential purity leads to his inconsistencies in his attitudes towards Tess. Before the wedding, Angel asks himself while looking at Tess "shall I ever neglect her, or hurt her, or even forget to consider her? God forbid such a crime!" (183). However, after Tess's confession of her past, Angel is completely engrossed in his own disillusion and is utterly insensitive to Tess's feeling. He dismisses Tess's plea for forgiveness as irrelevant, telling her "You were one person; now you are another" (191). Seeing Tess as "a species of imposter; a guilty woman in the guise of an innocent one", Angel responds to Tess's self-justification with contempt and bitterness. When Tess reminds him that some men may not mind her past as much as he does, Angel

taunts Tess right in the face: “You almost make me say you are an unapprehending peasant woman, who have never been initiated into the proportions of social things” (195). Tess bravely asserts herself: “I am only a peasant by position, not by nature” (195). This, however, only incites Angel to mock her lineage, which he previously gloated over:

I cannot help associating your decline as a family with this other fact-of your want of firmness. Decrepit families imply decrepit wills, decrepit conduct. Heaven, why did you give me a handle for despising you more by informing me of your descent! Here was I thinking you a new-sprung child of nature; there were you, the belated seedling of an effete aristocracy! (195)

Obsessed with his pain about Tess’s “unintact” state, Angel not only neglects and hurts Tess’s feeling, he is even later tempted to take Izz to Brazil as his mistress because “he feels cynical about women and would be ‘revenged on society’” (Carpenter 131).

Tess, in contrast, remains consistent in her charity despite Angel’s unfair treatment of her. Though she idealizes Angel, Tess nevertheless accepts him as an individual: “Having begun to love you, I love you for ever—in all changes, in all disgraces, because you are yourself” (192). The firmness of Tess’s devotion to Angel, we are told, is “indeed pitiful”: “quick-tempered as she naturally was, nothing that he could say made her unseemly; she sought not her own; was not provoked; thought no evil of his treatment of her. She might just now have been Apostolic Charity herself returned to a self-seeking modern world” (202). The sleepwalking scene is a particularly suspenseful one in which Tess demonstrates an admirable combination of charity and resourcefulness. After laying Tess in an empty stone coffin, the somnambulistic Angel falls deeply asleep. Tess knows it is dangerous for Angel to remain there long because the night is sufficiently cold and

Angel is only half-clothed. Sensitive to Angel's feeling, Tess at first is rather timid about waking him up: "how could she dare to awaken him, and let him know what he had been doing, when it would mortify him to discover his folly in respect of her?" (209). She nevertheless tries to waken him, as she deems it necessary, but only with slight shaking. Her first attempt having failed, Tess hits upon the idea of trying persuasion. She whispers in his ear "Let us walk on, darling", "with as much firmness and decision as she could summon" (209). Taking Angel by the arm, Tess induces him back to safety. The next morning, when Angel's "weariness from the night's effort" almost prompts Tess to tell him about the adventure, Tess refrains from that urge because she is considerate of Angel's feeling:

the reflection that it would anger him, grieve him, stultify him, to know that he had instinctively manifested a fondness for her of which his common-sense did not approve; that his inclination had compromised his dignity when reason slept, again deterred her. It was much like laughing at a man when sober for his erratic deeds during intoxication. (210)

Unable to bear Tess's past, Angel eventually decides to separate from Tess. "Until I come to you," Angel tells Tess, "it will be better that you should not try to come to me"(212). Angel's demand not only seems deadly to Tess, but also manifests his gross denial of Tess's right to choose. His cruel treatment of Tess is rooted in his acceptance of the double standard of sexual morality. Cunningham observes that Hardy "so constructs the circumstances of Clare's sexual past and the movement towards the twin confession on the wedding night as to make Angel seem positively diabolic in his injustice" (100). Angel's affair with the woman in London is a parallel to Tess's relationship with Alec,

for both Angel and Tess are “the victims of partners older and presumably more experienced than themselves”, and “both disengage themselves without emotional regret once the infatuation wears off” (Cunningham 100). On the wedding night, after lightly confessing his past peccadillo, Angel tells Tess’s of his hesitation in concealing the truth:

I did not mention it because I was afraid of endangering my chance of you, darling...I was going to tell you a month ago-at the time you agreed to be mine, but I could not; I thought it might frighten you away from me. I put it off; then I thought I would tell you yesterday, to give you a chance at least of escaping me. But I did not. And I did not this morning, when you proposed our confessing our faults on the landing-the sinner that I was.

Cunningham notes that “this is almost point for point the sequence of Tess’s own attempts to confess” (101). Tess’s first attempt failed because “her instinct of self-preservation was stronger than her candor,” just as Angel feared his past fault might frighten her away. On the morning of the wedding, Tess suggested giving an account of all her faults and blunders, but was cut short by Angel. With his own interest in mind, Angel insisted on reserving the confession “for a dull day.” Tess’s desire for honesty finally overcame her instinct of self-preservation and confessed her past in a letter, which she accidentally put under the carpet and escaped Angel’s notice. Tess forgave Angel for his past blunder as he fully expected, but he could not forgive Tess after he learned of her past relationship with Alec, though the experiences of both were the same in essence.

Tess sees clearly that Angel “could regard her in no other light than that of one who had practiced gross deceit upon him”; she may have even questioned the justice of his decree, but does not contest with him. Patricia Stubbs points out that Tess’s high moral

standard is as much a cause of her tragedy as her exceptional physical charm. It is implied that if Tess could take advantage of her sexuality, she might have won back Angel:

If Tess had been artful, had she made a scene, fainted, wept hysterically, in that lonely lane, notwithstanding the fury of fastidiousness with which he was possessed, he would probably not have withstood her. But her mood of long-suffering made his way easy for him, and she herself was his best advocate... the many effective chords which she could have stirred by an appeal were left untouched. (212)

From her rejection of the best practical course in her relationship with Alec, to her persistent attempts to confess her past to Angel, to her submission to Angel's cruel decree, Tess consistently acts in accordance with her high moral standards.

Unfortunately, she cannot be rewarded for her moral rectitude in a society where men can get away with their moral lapse while women must pay for "falls" that are not even caused by their own faults.

After Angel leaves her, Tess once again is exposed to, in Wright's words, "the dangers of the male-dominated world in which she is reduced to an erotic and economic object" (118). One day, she was troublesomely complimented by several young men for her good looks. In order not to run further risks from her attractiveness and keep off casual lovers, she clipped her eyebrows and covered her face with a handkerchief. But what is becoming increasingly hard for Tess to deal with is the problem of survival. Of the fifty pounds Angel left her, Tess gave half to her parents, and she has as yet spent the other half very little. During a period of wet weather, Tess has to fall back on the scanty

amount of money left. When her money has almost all gone, she hears from her mother about her family's dreadful difficulty and the need for help. Thus Tess is obliged to use up another thirty pounds coming from Angel's bankers, and she is reluctant to turn to Angel's parents for help. At the same time, it becomes increasingly difficult for Tess to get employment because of the season. Finally she ends up doing exhausting physical labor on a farm with her friends Marian and Izz. After hearing Izz's tale about Angel, Tess summons her courage to visit her parents-in-law, with the hope of finding news about Angel and getting support from his father. Unfortunately, when she almost reaches the Clare residence, she overhears the unkind remarks by Angel's brothers and Miss Mercy Chant, which causes Tess to withdraw from her plan at the last moment.

While Tess is struggling to survive, Alec has converted and become an evangelist. Stumbling on Alec at his preaching, Tess observes the "electric" effect she still has on him (Wright 118). Tess is appalled to see the "change in their relative platforms": "He who had wrought her undoing was now on the side of the Spirit, while she remained unregenerate" (254). Such irony is, of course, born of injustice rooted in gender and class inequality. Alec's reappearance also makes Tess realize how impossible it is for her to escape her past:

That hunger for affection too long withheld was for the time displaced by an almost physical sense of an implacable past which still engirdled her. It intensified her consciousness of error to a practical despair; the break of continuity between her earlier and present existence, which she had hoped for, had not, after all, taken place. Bygones would never be complete bygones till she was a bygone herself.
(254)

Having experienced too much harshness of life, Tess is now more discerning and indignant of the injustices in life. In response to Alec's account of his conversion, Tess voices out her outrage against the gross folly represented by Alec and those like him:

I can't believe in such sudden things! I feel indignant with you for talking to me like this, when you know—when you know what harm you've done me! You, and those like you, take your fill of pleasure on earth by making the life of such as me bitter and black with sorrow; and then it is a fine thing, when you have had enough of that, to think of securing your pleasure in heaven by becoming converted! Out upon such—I don't believe in you—I hate it! (256)

Tess is not wrong in her judgment. Alec quickly gives up his conversion for a new pursuit of Tess. Tess is now tormented by both economic exploitation and Alec's renewed desire for her. Compelled by the devastating situation she is entrapped in, Tess writes a passionate appeal to Angel, who has been completely ignorant of Tess's desperation and cannot return home because of illness. Meanwhile, the situation with Tess's family continues to worsen as the agricultural community disintegrates. With the death of her father and because of the ostracism held against Tess, the household is obliged to move out of their dwelling place. When Tess's family has to live literally on the street, Alec offers to help the family out. Again, Alec takes advantage of the circumstance and his economic advantage to bring Tess closer to him.

Tess's second "fall," unlike the first, is an act of self-sacrifice, a conscious choice motivated by her charity and responsibility for her family. In default of Providence and future kingdom, it occurs to Tess that she should do something and be Providence of her little brothers and sisters. As with his first relationship with Tess, Alec does not help

without gain; so Tess must sacrifice herself to provide for her family. The dire reality, the sheer lack of choices for Tess, evokes “a sudden rebellious sense of injustice” in Tess. In her second, also the last, letter to Angel, Tess condemns the man who has unfairly “dealt out hard measure” to her: “O why have you treated me so monstrously, Angel! I do not deserve it. I have thought it all over carefully, and I can never, never forgive you! You know that I did not intend to wrong you—why have you so wronged me? You are cruel, cruel indeed! I will try to forget you. It is all injustice I have received at your hands!”

(295) When Angel does realize his injustice and comes back for Tess, however, it is too late. In extreme anguish and provoked by Alec, Tess stabs him to death. After spending four happy days with Angel, Tess is arrested and executed for murder. Though Tess dies as a consequence of breaching the law, her act of revenge on Alec is really her way of rebelling against the injustices she suffers in life. Even before she kills Alec, Tess is already destroyed in a spiritual sense, for through the eyes of Angel, we see the “original Tess had spiritually ceased to recognize” the body as hers—“allowing it to drift, like a corpse upon the current, in a direction dissociated from its living will” (314). Apparently, Tess is destroyed by the cruelty of men, but it is really the social and cultural basis that upholds gender and class inequality that is the fundamental cause of Tess’s tragedy.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

In studying the characters of Elizabeth-Jane and Tess, my primary aim has been to answer this fundamental question: what causes their differing ends? I have shown that Elizabeth-Jane's triumph is largely determined by her character, while Tess's tragedy is caused fundamentally by class and gender inequality. As one of Hardy's most conspicuous survivors, Elizabeth-Jane has traits important for survival and success. She champions moral rectitude and never violates accepted moral code. Her preoccupation with respectability motivates her to persistent effort at self-improvement and enables her to stay protected within the limits of respectability. Though she values propriety and self-improvement, she also values friendship and hard work, which works to her advantage when she has to make a living by herself. Observant and meditative, she consciously learns about people and events in order to gather wisdom about life. Parallel to the unfolding of the drama in Casterbridge is the revelation of Elizabeth-Jane's remarkable inner poise: she carefully balances herself amidst the vicissitudes of life, neither consumed by miseries imposed upon her nor transported with unexpected good fortunes. Elizabeth-Jane's equanimity is acquired through renunciation of desire based on sensible appraisal of life's limitations and possibilities. The positive effect of Elizabeth-Jane's apparent passivity is explained by O'Dea with Darwin's evolution theory:

it is the creature who adapts and adjusts to changing situations that emerges triumphant, thereby further assuring the continuation of the species. This continuation is assured not by those who would show their strength in opposition

but by those who show strength of mind in properly interpreting the force that demands submission, not defiance. Elizabeth-Jane cooperates with nature, but Henchard and Lucetta try to fulfill personal wishes and desires. When their wishes cannot be carried out, their will to live is vitiated. (36)

Elizabeth-Jane's triumph suggests that reason, restraint, and compliance with a natural and social code are essential for survival and success.

Tess in many respects seems the opposite of Elizabeth-Jane. Most obviously, Hardy attributes to them different degrees of sexuality. While Elizabeth-Jane's sexuality is muted, hardly noticed, Tess is described in an extravagantly sensual way. Her body is, in T.R. Wright's words, "the pure blank surface on which men inscribe or trace a variety of patterns, from Alec's coarse design to Angel's more ethereal portrait" (109). Alec desires Tess only as a physical temptation. Years after the "fall" at the Chase, the temporarily converted Alec claims he was "as firm as a man could be" till he saw Tess's eyes and that mouth again--"surely there never was such a maddening mouth since Eve's!" Alec confesses. Different from Alec, Angel views Tess as a spiritual abstraction, "a visionary essence of woman-a whole sex condensed into one typical form". Angel's idealization of Tess and his inability to see Tess as an individual separate from any stereotype cause him to be unable to realize Tess's essential purity and accept her "unintact" state. Both men fail to appreciate Tess's full identity and worth, and this splitting of Tess as an individual is responsible for Tess's miseries.

But Tess is, as George Watt has pointed out, subject to the concomitant influences of class, heredity, religion, morality, self, and cosmic working. Her situation is continuously aggravated by her class position. Her ill-started journey to the d'Urbervilles is obliged by

her family's material needs. For the same reason, Tess has to become more pliable with Alec. When her family is left without a place to live in, Tess again has to sacrifice herself to help her family. She is also the victim of the unjust sexual morality that has its foundation in and also perpetuates gender inequality. Angel's crude application of double standard not only "rouses our sympathy for Tess, but our rage and indignation" against Clare and the unjust sexual ethic (Cunningham 101). Tess, at once sexually desirable and poor, is a victim of double oppression through gender and class.

My study of Elizabeth-Jane and Tess, as well as my review of Hardy's earlier heroines, suggests that throughout his novel-writing career Hardy's views on women have not been consistent. Part of this inconsistency lies in Hardy's redefinition of women's characters. I have already shown that Hardy's portrayals of Elizabeth-Jane and Tess differ from his earlier depiction of women. Elizabeth-Jane is an example of a new type of woman/the womanly. More than an embodiment of conventional feminine virtue, she is endowed with an intelligence that was not a celebrated characteristic of the female in Hardy's time. She is depicted chiefly through her observation of and reaction to people and events around her rather than the responses, particularly erotic responses, she may have evoked in male subjects. By stressing the dominance of mind over body in Elizabeth-Jane, and particularly, by allowing Elizabeth-Jane to become a philosopher at the end of the novel, Hardy undermines the notion that slights women's power for reason and sound judgment. Even though in *Tess* Hardy reverts to his central concern with sexuality, Tess is no less of a mind than Elizabeth-Jane, and there is ample evidence of her ability to observe, think, and judge. But more importantly, in presenting Elizabeth-Jane and Tess, Hardy seems to have moved beyond simple empathy with women and

towards affirmation of the soundness and superiority of their characters over that of men in the novels. Hardy's presentation of Elizabeth-Jane and Tess as moral authorities is drastically different from his earlier depiction of women in which his heroines have to go through a period of "taming" for moral improvement.

Corresponding to the changes in characterization, Hardy presents the relationship of his narrators and heroines in later novels as different from the one in his earlier works. Specifically, Hardy's early narrators are distant patronizing judges who constantly attribute weaknesses of individual woman to the nature of her sex. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, however, Hardy allows the narrator's point of view to merge with that of Elizabeth-Jane. The narrator also enters Elizabeth-Jane's consciousness so that we see clearly how she responds to life's drama and grows in wisdom. If the narrator merely identifies with Elizabeth-Jane in point of view, *Tess's* narrator goes all out to champion Tess's cause. The narrator's justification and defense of Tess consists as an integral part of the novel's argument. The change of narrator's stand in relation to Hardy's female protagonists has been pointed out by Kathleen Blake:

Hardy does not entirely free himself from masculine language, but his generalizations about women grow less casual and copious as novel follows novel...*Tess* must have prepared the way toward the more fully feminist *Jude the Obscure* (1896). This work still hazards generalizations about women; it speculates as to whether Sue Bridehead succumbs to womanly conventionality, or lack of courage, or irrationality. But the novel renders these generalizations so multiple and contradictory as to throw each other into question if not to cancel each other out.

(214)

This change in the narrator's stand indicates that Hardy's views on women had changed over the course of his novel-writing career. In his last novel *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy presents a heroine whose claim for independence and rejection of marriage make her immediately identifiable with the New Woman. Clearly, *Jude* represents an "apparent development towards a feminist position" (Cunningham 81). As Cunningham says, "to the readers of Hardy's earlier novels nothing would have seemed less likely than that he should end his career in fiction pilloried in the press as a champion of modish feminism" (80).

The inconsistency of Hardy's views on women is attributable to changes both in the culture and in his personal circumstances. Hardy's embracing contemporary sexual ideology about the nature and role of woman is reflected through his depiction of the earlier heroines who, on the whole, want moral firmness and are either tamed or destroyed. But with the women's liberation movement, the dominant ideology about woman's nature and sex roles came under increased scrutiny. The mounting public debates concerning women, marriage, and sexual morality provided the context in which redefinition of women was possible. It is thus understandable that Hardy, as an artist who aimed at truthfully representing life, began to create new images of women--woman who survives by cultivating the mind and disciplining personal desires as well as woman who falls victim to oppressive and unjust social and cultural constructions. Hardy's conception about women was also affected by his personal experience. According to Rosemarie Morgan, Hardy's identification with women stems from their shared experience:

his intense feelings of isolation, his deep sense of alienation from the Victorian middle-class world he had entered as a popular, if controversial, novelist, must

have urged him to a close understanding of the condition of women, in so far as he and they felt, sorely, the impact of the society's institutionalized values; in so far as each had to struggle to be heard, to gain recognition; in so far as oppression by either class or sexual division was the experience of both. (xv)

The presentation of Elizabeth-Jane and Tess as models of intelligence and moral rectitude signifies a major change in Hardy's views on women; nonetheless, in a number of important ways, Hardy's vision of female experience and of human experience on the whole remains consistent. First, as Leon Waldoff argues, "an important consideration in the conception of the female characters, and apparently crucial in the design of their fates, is the degree of sexuality attributed to them" (146). In the case of Elizabeth-Jane, she is not bothered by sexuality. Tess, however, is victimized in part by her very sexuality. This leads to a second theme consistently dealt with in Hardy's fiction--the incompatibility of body and mind, of nature and culture. The dominance of mind seems to be possible only when sexuality is belated or suppressed, as exemplified by Elizabeth-Jane. The clash of nature and culture leads to a split of individual mentality, as has been the case with Tess. Hardy highlights the conflict between flesh and spirit by way of doubling Alec and Angel in *Tess*, and Arabella and Sue Bridehead in *Jude*. Third, Hardy suggests that preserving respectability is important for survival, as my comparison of Elizabeth-Jane and Arabella has shown. The importance of complying with the demands of respectability is independent of the moral worth of the individual. Though Arabella is not a morally commendable woman, she survives, for she always manages to appear respectable. Tess, on the other hand, cannot escape the consequence of her fall--apart from it being the cause of much of her personal misery, Tess's breach of respectability causes her family to

leave its native village years later. Fourth, Hardy shows unease with class transition, though he does present it as possible through either education or marriage. Angel wants to break away from his class, but he cannot give up the values and attitudes associated with that class. Elizabeth-Jane succeeds in rising to the middle class, but with that rise she seems to have lost her previous compassion. Her treatment of Henchard at his last visit taints our prior impression of her. Last but not least, Hardy seems to be appreciative of high passion--the capacity for intensity and depth of feeling, as demonstrated in Henchard and Tess, whose destructions leave us completely dominated by a sense of loss and tragedy; nonetheless he shows, through the demise of Henchard and triumph of Elizabeth-Jane, that renunciation of desire is necessary and is a wisdom to be learned. As George Levine says, Elizabeth-Jane's ultimate vision signifies that realism survives in Hardy as "a discipline to be learned in the containment of the monstrous and the self-divided energies that make of mankind such an anomaly in a hostile universe" (189).

NOTES

1. Most of Hardy's Wessex novels are set vaguely in the present or near past.
2. In his analysis of Hardy's reversal of realism in *the Mayor of Casterbridge*, George Levine remarks that through Elizabeth-Jane "Hardy allows us to return to the conventions of realism with a new understanding of their importance and of their tenuousness" (189). (Levine, George. "Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*: Reversing the Real." Critical Essays on Thomas Hardy: The Novels. Ed. Dale Kramer. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1990); Barbara Hardy mentions Elizabeth-Jane as "one of Hardy's conspicuous survivors" and asserts that "the introduction of Elizabeth-Jane's moderate happiness joins but does not diminish the sense of tragedy" (83). (Hardy, Barbara. "Passion in Context." Critical Essays on Thomas Hardy: The Novels. Ed. Dale Kramer. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1990); J.B. Bullen discusses the clothing and vision of Elizabeth-Jane to illustrate the connection between visual perception and meaning in Hardy's fiction. See the Expressive Eye (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986): 139-168
3. Richard Carpenter writes of Bathsheba of *Far from the Madding Crowd* that "never again, we are sure, will she burst forth in a fine blaze of fury, her black eyes snapping and her cheek flushed; nor will she blush as furiously with love or at her temerity" (87). (Carpenter, Richard. Thomas Hardy. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1964); In Woman and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel 1880-1920, Patricia Stubbs points out that "Hardy's compassion for Eustacia in her dilemma, for her thwarted, frustrated energy, co-exists with Hardy's recognition of her triviality and selfishness. The tension which exists between these two aspects of Eustacia produces both Hardy's ambivalent attitude towards her rebellion, and the complex feelings of loss and waste, coupled with disapproval, which the reader experiences at her death". See Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel 1880-1920 (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1979): 73
4. James K. Robinson, editor of the 1977 Norton Critical Edition of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* notes that this is "probably a variation on George Eliot's 'Character is destiny' (*The Mill on the Floss*, book IV, chapter VI)." Robinson explains that "Eliot's line is a rather free translation from the unfinished novel, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, by Novalis (Baron Friedrich von Hardenberg, 1772-1801)." See *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (Ed. James K. Robinson. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977): 88
5. 1977 Norton Critical Edition of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. (Ed. James K. Robinson)
6. "The Wit and Wisdom of George Eliot--Quotes From Her Works," available online at <http://www.interlog.com/~calex/personal/eliot.html>. 8 Feb. 2000

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