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## Thomas Hardy, John Stuart Mill and Feminism

Farzaneh Mayabadi  
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**Thomas Hardy, John Stuart Mill and Feminism**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

Master of Arts (Research)

By

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2012



## **Thesis Certification**

I, Farzaneh Mayabadi, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts (Research), in the school of English Literatures and Philosophy, University of Wollongong and that it is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Farzaneh Mayabadi

Date: / / 2012

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## **Abstract**

This study will investigate the relations to liberal feminism of Thomas Hardy's novels *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). I argue against those who believe Tess and Sue are victims, introducing them as proto-feminists by reading these two novels along with John Stuart Mill's liberal feminist arguments. This study is consolidated by demonstrating how Hardy's tragic novelistic form in these two works is connected to feminist content. The death of the female protagonists shows the difficulty of accommodating liberal feminist ideas within late Victorian society.

## **Acknowledgment**

I would like to convey my sincerest gratitude and appreciation to my supervisor, Dr Guy Davidson, for his insightful supervision and simultaneous encouragement. I appreciate his contribution of time and ideas to make my thesis productive. I am so thankful to my co-supervisor, Professor Leigh Dale, for her valuable comments and suggestions. Also, my deepest gratitude goes to my family. To my Dad and Mum whose unconditional love and support will never be forgotten.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

This thesis investigates to what extent the representations of the characters Tess and Sue, in Thomas Hardy's novels *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, correspond with the theories of liberal proto-feminism. The most appropriate way of thinking about feminist ideas in these two novels by Hardy is related to liberal feminism. Liberal feminism evolved out of liberalism, a political philosophy which emerged in the eighteenth century in Europe. At that time, it was a movement toward democracy and equality which historically concentrated on men. Liberal feminism is a version of liberalism that claims a similar kind of individual rights for women. Tess and Sue are depicted as women who have their own principles and stand up for their rights as individuals, in a society which tends to deny their status as individuals. I will illustrate that they are liberal proto-feminists who consciously decide the direction of their lives. I will compare and contrast these two characters who both have feminist views. The feminist view of the novels is also evident in the form that Hardy uses. I examine how Hardy used different features of tragic form and links them to feminism. Tess and Sue suffer greatly: Tess dies, and although Sue is alive, her life is like a living death. This shows the inability of society, at that time, to support feminist behaviour.

The purpose of this research is to find out to what extent these two characters correspond with liberal feminism, particularly Mill's liberal thoughts, by considering different aspects of feminism in their behaviour. I will show how Mill's liberal ideas, such as following their own perception and avoiding imitation, autonomy and individuality emerge in their day-to-day life. I will aim to show how Tess is being contrasted with Sue while still sharing common proto-



feminist views. I will also illustrate the differences between Mill's and Hardy's viewpoints and draw out the significance of these differences.

Many critics consider Tess and Sue to be powerless women who do not have any role or agency in shaping their life. Others believe that Hardy is a misogynist and enjoys killing off female characters. I argue, by contrast, that they are determined characters who consciously choose to be different from people around them, with the hope of achieving a better life. To build up my argument, I study Hardy's fictions along with John Stuart Mill's arguments, particularly as they are outlined in *The Subjection of Women*, to draw out the salient similarities as well as the differences between these two writers in terms of their views of liberal feminism. I want to differentiate between victim and exploitee, and introduce Tess and Sue as exploitees. To clarify my argument, I consider different forces of exploitation like patriarchy, capitalism and the social system, and the ways in which these affect Tess and Sue. I will demonstrate that it is not only Tess and Sue who suffer from these forces in society, but also that both sexes are harmed because of them. Also, they are not victims as their agency can be seen through their actions; they are more successful in responding to these negative forces than other characters. Another critical aspect of this research is to illustrate the connection between the tragic form of these two novels and their feminist content. I will make clear that late Victorian society could not accommodate feminism. However, there are meaning and values to Tess's and Sue's tragic ends: instead of confirming the condition of their subjugation by accepting the conventions, they prefer to resist them.

Thomas Hardy depicts female characters like Tess and Sue who suffer in

their lives and in the end both enter into a kind of death: Tess actually does die, and Sue lives a life that is like a living death. There are many critics who call Tess and Sue victims, of various kinds. Among them is F.B. Pinion, who in his book *A Hardy Companion* calls Tess “the victim of circumstance” (47). Martin Seymour-Smith believes that Hardy presents a kind of world that victimized Tess (433). Ellen Rooney calls Tess “a victim of her sexuality” (478). Kun Yu states that “Tess is virtually a victim of injustices” and her tragic end is because of the “unfair capitalist society” (74). Another critic’s view on Sue is that, she is “the victim of her own sexuality” and “nature’s law” (Brady 99). Manjit Kaur believes that Sue is “the victim of the conventional codes of morality” (71). Kranidis refers to Sue as an inadequate character who “fails in the capacity of female and/or sexual liberator”. She adds that “Sue Bridehead is sexually impotent” (125). Other critics believe that Hardy depicts women characters who are powerless and lack self-determination. Susan David Bernstein believes that Tess suffers because of no fault of her own (159). John Holloway believes that Hardy’s novels reject human choice and effort and whatever happens in the lives of characters is predetermined (17-18). In sum, these critics represent Tess and Sue as powerless and voiceless women who do not have any role in their destiny. This kind of interpretation diminishes any sense of the self-determination and autonomy which are essential to feminism, including liberal feminism.

There are some critics who refer to the positive aspects of the way Hardy represents these two characters. Margaret Higonnet’s view is that “Hardy opposed his heroine’s individual voice to the unnatural law and maxims of men”. At the same time, he is attempting to “singularize his heroine” to “differentiate her voice

from stereotypes of the feminine” (17). Kranidis refers to a kind of sexual liberation in Sue, arguing that “Hardy has often been applauded as the main liberator of female sexuality in fiction” (123). Lloyd Fernando likewise argues that “the struggle of the Victorian heroine in late nineteenth-century fiction for liberation from her traditional role and personality comes to a climax in Sue Bridehead” (142). He argues that Sue is “Hardy’s only real intellectual heroine” (143). He adds that Sue possesses “the complete self-knowledge and independence of spirit for which a generation of New Women had striven” (143). Kathleen Blake argues that “in Sue Bridehead [Hardy] dramatizes a daring and plausible try at personal liberation” (“Sue” 726).

Much feminist literary-critical debate has concentrated on the issue of whether a male narrator is able to represent women’s language or voice. What can it mean for a man, as a part of the dominant power, to represent the feelings and voices of women? Feminists like Elaine Showalter believe that women should find their culture and history by reading and analysing the works of women writers. Other feminists like Judith Fetterley encourage women “to become ‘resisting readers’ - to notice how biased most of the classic texts by male authors are in their language, subjects and attitude” (Murfin 443). As Rita S. Kranidis in *Subversive Discourse* points out, some critics argue that “Hardy did not convey or even have a sufficient understanding of woman’s nature, and as a result mischaracterized women in novels such as *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*” (115). However, my belief is that Hardy shows his sympathy with women. Kristin Brady, in “Thomas Hardy and Matters of Gender”, points out that Havelock Ellis “summarized an aspect of Hardy’s writing that was endlessly intriguing to

Victorian readers: here was a male writer offering a style of writing and of plot construction that was considered to be exclusively female” (95). Hardy, in a letter to Millicent Fawcett, who was planning to publish a pamphlet devoted to the views of eminent men on the issue of women’s suffrage, writes that “I have for a long time been in favour of women-suffrage... because the tendency of the woman’s vote will be to break up the present pernicious conventions in respect of manners, customs, religion, illegitimacy, the stereotyped household”. He adds that by asserting themselves, women “will loosen the tongues of men who have not liked to speak out on such subjects, while women have been their helpless dependants” (*Selected Letters* 192). In my thesis, I will investigate to what extent Hardy was successful in representing women’s voices and language in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* by comparing and contrasting his view with John Stuart Mill, who was a liberal feminist.

While some critics speak of Tess and Sue as victims and others refer to Hardy’s liberation of women, particularly in *Jude*, very few critics discuss specifically the relation between liberal feminism and liberalism, which were among the most important movements of the day at the time of writing *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. This is what I am going to do in this thesis. I have chosen these two novels because they are most indicative of and most extensively concerned with Hardy’s relationship to feminism and liberalism. I will challenge the idea that Tess and Sue are victims, by introducing arguments that they are liberal feminist subjects. I make a claim that Tess and Sue are not victims but proto-feminists, who consciously decide the way to live their lives. Tess does not behave based on a rational feminism, but rather based on her innate sense of

feminism, a sense which arises from her emotions and mind, and appears in her day-to-day struggle for autonomy. Liberalism as a philosophy requires the belief that there is a sense of liberty in all individuals. I will refer to what I see as an innate sense of power in *Tess* which I will argue reflects Hardy's attempt to portray an innate sense of proto-feminism. Sue also is a part this movement, but she is more educated than Tess. Her feminism partly emerges out of her knowledge of Mill and other philosophers, and she explicitly criticises social conventions and institutions.

To support my idea that Tess and Sue are not victims, as they are not powerless, I will be making a distinction between victimisation and exploitation. Victimhood is a term that is often applied to or adopted by women. They call themselves victims because of injustices which may happen to them more often than to men. To describe themselves, women use terms like victims of injustice, victims of abuse or rape, or victims of patriarchy. Critics usually talk about exploitation in terms of victimhood in the sense that exploitation necessarily leads to victimisation. This means that they do not consider "exploitation" or "exploitee" and "victimisation" or "victim" to be different concepts which require different terms. However, I want to make a distinction between these terms. Exploitation is the unfair treatment of someone or an unjust use of a situation, for selfish purposes, in order to gain profit. It is morally objectionable although sometimes does not seem so (Valdman 551). Exploitation is a debateable and divisive term. A person may be responsible for her exploitation. However, victimhood is not debatable: it is an absolute experience, the meaning of which is not in question. The term victim refers to a person who is completely innocent and

powerless; if not, she is not a victim. Victimisation is a term with negative connotations which refers to the treatment of a powerless person. In other words, ascribing victim status to a person represents disempowerment. However, in using exploitation as a term to describe an unfair relation between people, there can be a sense of power in the use of the word exploitee.

Related to different definitions implied from victimhood and exploitation, there has been a debate among feminists about whether women should be primarily seen as subjugated by forces beyond their control, or whether they should be primarily seen as being able to respond to forces which are oppressive. Alison M. Heru is a psychiatrist who writes about the general experiences of gender. She believes that victimhood “is synonymous with being female” and “identification as a victim may be the only initial way to get one’s needs recognized and meet” (14-15). However, Naomi Wolf challenges this view about women. She condemns critics who try to keep women’s status in society as that of a victim (147). Sharon Lamb, in “Constructing the Victim”, writes that keeping women under the sign of victim is not an answer to the social problems of women. She asserts, “Sick girls can not fight back. Empowered girls can” (134).

The Victorian era had a patriarchal social structure. In that time, women were considered dependants, members of a weaker sex. They did not have equal treatment before the common law of England. Before marriage, they were under the control of their father and after marriage they were under the control of their husband. Not only the law, but also, the society and culture were against women. The common discourse encouraged patriarchal dominance: for example, Anthony Trollope believed that novels should not concern themselves with issues which

might harm the purity of women readers.

However, there was a change in the outlook of some novelists and others who intended to change women's status in society. In the 1880s and 1890s, novelists like Sarah Grand, Henry James and Thomas Hardy introduced "The New Woman" in their novels. Hardy represents the notion of The New Woman by depicting characters like Tess, Sue, and Bathsheba in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Ideas related to the representation of The New Woman questioned the matter of gender, sexuality, marriage and equal treatment before the law of England. Deresiewicz writes that, in contrast to the Victorian stereotype, "The New Woman was intelligent, well-read, independent, strong-willed, idealistic, and outspoken, consciously defying convention and assertively speaking for advanced ideas about woman's place in society" (59). Penny Boumelha argues that *Tess* belongs to the category of New Woman fiction because it is "offering new elements of polemic" about "sex roles" and "the double standard" (119). Gillian Beer likewise believes that "Tess is a possible form for the 'new' woman —both survivor and intelligent forerunner" (240).

Some critics explicitly make connections between the Victorian New Woman and proto-feminism. Among them, Elizabeth Walls argues that The New Woman novelists of the nineteenth century developed domestic feminism. She asserts that the New Woman novelists of the nineteenth century were proto-feminists who criticised marriage and society (226). By "domestic feminism", she means "a new mode of activism for Victorian women that enabled them to proffer critique about marriage and society, although from within the home" (229). Another critic, Ann L. Ardis, writes, "The new woman novel gives us an

opportunity to reflect on the history of feminist criticism” (Introduction 8-9). She adds that by naming “the New Woman” contemporary critics makes a distinction between her and other women “who either were or were not ‘revolting’ against the Victorian sex, gender and class system” (13). However, some critics make a distinction between The New Woman and feminism. The New Woman is seen as indicative of a new ideology and new ideas, whereas being a feminist is being a part of a movement. In contrast to a feminist, the New Woman does not take part in political agitation. While Geoffrey Harvey acknowledges that Sue is an intellectual character, he argues that “Sue Bridehead is regarded as belonging to the New Woman tradition in fiction, rather than to feminism” (184).

In my research, I will investigate to what extent Tess and Sue, as examples of The New Women of the Victorian age, can be associated with feminism. I will clarify my claim by studying Tess and Sue in relation to a critic’s view of the feminism of The New Woman in the nineteenth century. This will be done with reference to Hardy’s novelistic form, since this bears on any assessment of his feminism or representation of proto-feminism through his protagonists. The tragic endings of Hardy’s novels are a controversial issue among critics. Kaja Silverman in “History, Figuration and Female Subjectivity in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*” makes an argument against the final section of *Tess* that Hardy titled “Fulfilment”. She believes that there is no point towards “a happier and more complete state” at the end of the novel. She offers an assessment of Hardy as someone whose writing is “associated with a terrifying coercion of people and events-- with deterioration rather than amelioration, constraint rather than liberation” (15). Gittings describes Hardy’s “abnormal interest in the hanging of women” and his interest in depicting



“a woman in death” (216). Roy Morrell believes that by depicting unhappy endings, Hardy affirms that “a quiet enjoyment of life was possible for a person who did not demand too much” (11). All of these critics argue that Hardy was a cruel novelist especially with his portrayal of women.

The tragic ends of both Tess and Sue are “INEVITABLE” as they choose to be different but still are “WORTHY” (Florence Emily Hardy 14). This shows a kind of feminist worth that emerges out of their death, which is an effect of the inability of the society to accommodate feminist behaviours. In my research, I will explore the relationship between Hardy’s proto-feminism and tragedy, as Hardy’s novelistic form, demonstrated in two novels. This part of my argument in Chapter Four is crucial to my arguments in Chapter Two and Three. My argument is that the unhappy ending, as an inevitable end of tragedy, refers to the fact that society cannot cultivate even a primary sense of feminism. At the same time, Tess’s death is meaningful, as she does not accept subjugation. In other words, this kind of society is not able to satisfy nascent feminist desires and views. It does not allow women to do what they choose to do and consequently is not able to provide a happy ending for the female characters.

### **Mill and Liberalism**

Liberalism is a political philosophy which emerged in the eighteenth century in Europe. Some pioneers of liberalism were John Locke (1632), Charles Louis Secondat (1689), Adam Smith (1723), John Stuart Mill (1806) and Thomas Hill Green (1836). Massimo Salvadori, in *The Liberal Heresy*, defines liberalism as a “political movement trying to reshape society” or “the institutions through which the state had to be restructured” (Introduction 1). He adds that liberalism is

looking for “institutions that enable individuals to have a wide range of autonomous action, to use the creativity with which all are endowed, in the limits of what is feasible without disrupting society” (36).

There is a debate among critics about what liberalism is. However, there are some basic ideas which are the foundation of liberalism such as “individual autonomy”, “freedom of choice”, “equality”, “intuitive perception and ideas”. In defining individual autonomy, Ben Colburn argues that individual autonomy is the “intuitive heart of the ideal” of liberalism (Introduction 1). He adds that we should decide what is valuable for us and behave based on our decision, “to live autonomous lives” (Introduction 2), or as Wendy Donner and Richard Fumerton point out, to have a life which is “authentic to our character and feeling” (65). A part of individual autonomy is that we are independent individuals and we should be able to build our life in a way we choose, as long as we do not harm others and take responsibility for our choice. Liberalism encourages people to behave based on their own principles, rather than following customs. Donner and Fumerton, in *Mill*, state that “autonomous choice must be exercised to make choices in favour of what is in harmony with the person’s own nature, rather than what others wish for us. Custom may be fine for customary characters, but customs do not serve as models for highly individual, creative, and even eccentric people” (64).

Elshtain in *Public Man, Private Woman* argues that liberalism “turns on the public-private distinction” (342), and there is a belief among liberals that government and other public institutions should not interfere in our right to make our decision. Duncan Kelly says that liberalism is linked to what modern philosophers call “agency-freedom”, which is “the capacity of individuals to

choose between alternative courses of action internally, and act on their choices both in private and in public, and to be recognized or judged as being responsible for those actions” (Introduction 1). About the responsibility of our choice, Salvadori argues that “Individual autonomy means that individuals are responsible for establishing their own goals and policies to achieve them” (12). While he emphasises our “right and duty to act on the basis of one’s own initiative”, he also emphasises the individual’s “responsibility for what one does”, and “the duty to maintain conditions that enable people to continue to act on the basis of their own initiative” (27-28). “Intuitive perception” means that people should use their inner conviction and their own principles in making a choice. This element is linked to individuality, as it encourages people to “make their decision”, and “act on the basis of these decisions”. It also refers to “an inner process of which all are capable, even if not all use it” (26).

Liberal feminism evolved out of liberalism. It is a version of liberalism that claims a similar kind of individual rights for women. Feminism during the Victorian era was based on liberal ideas, such as autonomy and individuality. It emphasised the personal relationship between men and women. For example, marriage was based on equality, as a firm basis for the progress of a society (Collini 39). Liberal feminism includes concepts and principles of liberal feminism, such as equality, autonomy, justice, self-development, women’s emancipation and the law of marriage.

One of the most eminent exponents of liberal feminism is John Stuart Mill (1806). Mill is a nineteenth-century British philosopher and the writer of *On Liberty* (1859) and *The Subjection of Women* (1869), identified by Stefan Collini

as the most famous representation of feminism in nineteenth century Britain (34). Joyce Pedersen argues that Mill's views, "anticipated in important respects by Mary Wollstonecraft at the end of the last century, were widely shared amongst Victorian feminists of liberal persuasion" (42). Being a part of liberalism, liberal feminism emphasises "women's emancipation with an eye both to extending women's opportunities for self-development and to encouraging socially responsible attitudes" (Pedersen 44). It is clear that Hardy felt an affinity with Mill. In a letter to Ernest Brennecke in 1924, Hardy wrote that, "My pages show harmony of view with Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Comte, Hume, Mill, and others" (*Selected Letters* 386). In 1865, when he was a young man, Hardy met Mill, who was speaking to the public in London. On 21 May 1906, the 100th anniversary of John Stuart Mill's birth, Hardy wrote a letter about Mill that was printed in *The Times*. In this letter Hardy writes that Mill is one of the profoundest thinkers of the last century, and says that he knew Mill's *On Liberty* "almost by heart" (Hardy and Hardy 340).

The affinity between Mill and Hardy may be related to the question of women. Ellen Lew Sprechman argues that "in his novels, Hardy like John Stuart Mill, attacks the subjection of women, making a powerful case against the hypocritical mores that compel a woman to make an advantageous marriage in order to better her life, and against standards that view a seduced woman as a 'fallen' one" (5). She adds that "Of more recent writers, [Sue's] idol is John Stuart Mill, followed closely by Shelley, whom she sees as an intellectual rebel... and it is such thinking that contributes to her ambivalence concerning the traditional role of women in marriage and society"(116). Robert Schweik in "The Influence of

Religion, Science, and Philosophy on Hardy's Writings” considers Mill as one “of those write who most notably influenced Hardy” (64).

In their writings, Hardy and Mill comment on the current condition of society and suggest how the world ought to be. They attempt to give people a new perspective on the lives and relationship between men and women, and women’s appropriate position in society. Hardy, in a letter to the novelist and dramatist Arnold Bennett, writes, “I think better of the world, as a meliorist. The instinct of self-preservation, & an ultimate common-sense at present obscured, will I think hinder the evils foretold from arising” (*Selected Letters* 327). In another place, Hardy writes about *Jude the Obscure* that, “there is something the world ought to be shown, and I am the one to show it to them” (Hardy and Hardy 214). Hardy is talking about ideas. By writing a work of fiction, he expresses the kind of ideas that readers and writers of the time rarely thought about, to the extent that R.P. Draper believes that Hardy is “a distinctively modern author”. He explains, *Jude the Obscure* is “the novel in which Hardy finally breaks with the conventional prejudices of the Victorian reading public and allows himself to step forward as a distinctively modern author” (21). In other words, Mill and Hardy are arguing about how society might be changed, but in two different kinds of texts and in different ways.

Both Mill and Hardy reject the dominant discourse on gender. One of the important ways in which ideas about gender were expressed in the nineteenth century was through the material which was held in circulating libraries, which were very powerful institutions. They had an important role in shaping people’s thinking on gender. One aspect of the libraries’ morality was protecting women’s

“purity”. Libraries imposed their power over novelists to protect female virtuousness by rejecting those novels which were seen as going beyond moral boundaries and could stain the purity of women (Kaur 130). As Stubbs points out Anthony Trollope, a successful writer, “was particularly worried that girls might be corrupted by novels. He points in his autobiography to the predominantly female readership of fiction and warns aspiring novelists against ‘the peril of doing harm’ in characterizing ‘spuriously passionate’” (17) women. Through this censorship, men were able to keep women under their own control, in the guise of maintaining perfect moral values. Women, also, generally accepted the idea of taking responsibility for maintaining sexual virtue. However, Thomas Hardy found that libraries and literary representations of female virtue did not actually protect women and, in fact, misrepresented them. He challenged their power, believing that fiction influenced by circulating libraries was “a literature of quackery” (*Personal Writings* 126), and therefore was a social and psychological barrier for women. In a letter to H.W. Massingham in 1891, after writing *Tess*, Hardy says that “I have felt that the doll of English fiction must be demolished, if England is to have a school of fiction at all” (*Selected Letters* 67). By comparing “English fiction” with a “doll”, Hardy implies the artificiality of it. In his novels, Hardy is arguing against the idea that women were supposed to be virtuous and have no sexual desires. In other words, Hardy criticises the novels of the day, and the injustice represented by the social code related to men and women, in the dominant discourses of the Victorian age. At the same time, he criticises the representation of women when he writes his novels. Mill has the same view, writing that “What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial

thing” (*The Subjection of Women* 238). Both Mill and Hardy are attacking the idea of womanhood as something artificial, but in different ways.

Hardy represents issues that Mill, as a liberal philosopher, considers in his books, such as marriage, sexual morality and equality. The affinity between the two writers can be seen through the liberal behaviour of Hardy’s fictional characters, including Sue and Tess, who show autonomy and self-determination. They choose the way of their life: there is an agency that encourages them to be different and to make decisions based on their own understanding. In contrast with her mother’s advice, Tess chooses to confess her past to Angel, whereas other women in her place would be advised not to confess. She consciously decides to kill Alec, because there is not any sense of regret; in fact, it seems that she is glad of her act and says to Angel, “I owed it to you and to myself” (372). Alongside of this quite dramatic act of self-determination, Tess’s emotional autonomy is indicative of her proto-feminism. She has a kind of autonomy in expressing her feeling and rejects Alec by saying “I don’t love you” (90) or, “You know I have no affection for you” (310). As Rosemarie Morgan argues, Tess is not a passive victim but has “a sexually vital consciousness” that shows a capacity to be responsible for herself (*Women and Sexuality* 84). She explains that,

Hardy retains, then, for Tess, with her emotional generosity, sexual vitality and moral strength, the capacity to rise above her fall and, ultimately, to redeem the man who, bearing the values and sexual prejudices and double-standards of the society, fail to rise above them in the hour of need. Nor does Tess’s last hour find her bereft of will, self-determination and courage. In knifing the heart of the

man who so remorselessly hunts her down, she turns her own life round yet again; but this time with readiness, she says, to face her executioner. (*Women and Sexuality* 109)

Sue, also a character who looks for emotional autonomy, leaves Phillotson as their sexual relationship, for her, is a kind of “torture” (267) or “adultery” (279). She is a character who determines her own fate.

Tess and Sue bravely reject the men who they do not love and cannot live with as a wife, although the society prescribes that women must stay with the men they marry. As Mill argues that,

When the opinions of masses of merely average men are everywhere become or becoming the dominant power, the counterpoise and corrective to that tendency would be the more and more pronounced individuality of those who stand on the higher eminences of thought. It is in these circumstances most especially, that exceptional individuals, instead of being deterred, should be encouraged in acting differently from the mass. (*On Liberty* 131)

Similarly, in Hardy’s novel we see that Sue and Tess do not imitate others. In *Jude*, Sue says that, “I am certain one ought to be allowed to undo what one had done so ignorantly! I daresay it happens to lots of women, only they submit, and I kick” (270). Tess also emphasises her agency in making a decision different from what other women do. When her mother tells her to marry Angel and “Any woman would have done it but you, after that!” (101), Tess answers that “Perhaps any woman would except me” (101). This shows that both, as proto-feminists, are daring and courageous enough to behave “differently from the mass”, acting on



their own sense of right and wrong.

Tess and Sue reject conventional marriage. Sprechman argues that in the Victorian era “A woman who lived happily and submissively with her husband was the ideal; one who rebelled, especially if she did so successfully, was feared, despised, and castigated” (2). In contrast to the kind of submissive women that Sprechman describes, Tess and Sue are not characters whose ideals include subjugation. They choose to be different. Tess resists conventional marriage and looks for a marriage based on love, intimacy and affection, rather than patriarchal rule and subjugation. She prefers her relationship with men being based on friendship as she feels more liberty and freedom. Friendship, for her, is a more equal relationship than marriage.

Mill and Hardy criticise the double standard of morality. As Mary Lyndon Shanley points out, Mill “was adamant that the double standard was wrong in policy and unjust in principle” (245 n.20). Similarly, Tess as an indicator of her embodiment of liberal thought, criticises it. When she forgives Angel for his past deeds, she expects him to forgive her and says, “Forgive me as you are forgiven” (232). Mill in *On Liberty* argues that,

In our times, from the highest class of society down to the lowest, every one lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship. Not only in what concerns others, but in what concerns only themselves, the individual, or the family, do not ask themselves--what do I prefer? or, what would suit my character and disposition? or, what would allow the best and highest in me to have fair play, and enable it to grow and thrive? ... Thus the mind

itself is bowed to the yoke: even in what people do for pleasure, conformity is the first thing thought of; they like in crowds; they exercise choice only among things commonly done: peculiarity of taste, eccentricity of conduct, are shunned equally with crimes: until by dint of not following their own nature, they have no nature to follow: their human capacities are withered and starved: they become incapable of any strong wishes or native pleasures, and are generally without either opinions or feelings of home growth, or properly their own. (126)

Tess, as a working class woman, and Sue, as a middle class woman, do not accept the “dreaded censorship” imposed on them in a patriarchal and conservative society. They are in opposition to the crowds. They do not look for conformity to the conventions; they ask themselves, what would suit them as women. Their preferences are so important for them that they are ready to undergo much suffering for them. Their choice is against what others would choose in a patriarchal society. They could accept the conventions of the society and live like other Victorian women, such as Tess’s mother, but instead of conforming to the conventions, they confront them. Hence, their wishes are strong and authentic.

Although they share a liberal perspective, there are some differences between these two characters. In *Tess*, Hardy mostly emphasises what Mill calls the “intuitive perception” (*The Subjection* 273). Mill compares human beings with a tree “which requires growing and developing itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing” (*On Liberty* 124). Tess makes decisions based on her “Intuitive perception” or “inward forces” apart

from custom accepted and followed by others. For example, she is the product of educational reform. Relating to her level of education, Hardy writes that “Mrs Durbeyfield habitually spoke the dialect; her daughter, who had passed the sixth standard in the national school under a London-trained mistress, spoke two languages: the dialect at home, more or less; ordinary English abroad and to persons of quality (44). But she does not have a great deal of education and is not aware of feminist theories. It is her intuitive perception that connects her to liberal feminism. She does pursue her own view of life and analyses the experiences of life based on her own perception. Mill argues that this kind of perception encourages people to find the truth based on their own observation and enhancing their faculties.

Sue is more educated than Tess and is familiar with liberal thoughts and philosophers of the time. She is a teacher. She reads “Lemprière, Catullus, Martial, Juvenal, Lucian, Beaumont and Fletcher, Boccaccio, Scarron, De Brantôme, Sterne, De Foe, Smollett, Fielding, Shakespeare, the Bible, and other such; and found that all interest in the unwholesome part of those books ended with its mystery” (182). She knows the grammar of Latin and Greek through translations. Her familiarity with the philosophers helps her to question strongly the marriage system. Proto-feminism can be inferred from the behaviour of Tess; however Sue directly talks about feminist issues like marriage and sexuality. In other words, as Sprechman argues,

Tess’s experiences in life were limited to a simple rural existence; she knew little of social issues. Sue, on the other hand, has her education and this gives her greater possibilities. For this reason,

Hardy is able to show that she possesses a strong will, which allows her to take a much stronger stance against marriage. (112)

Perhaps the kind of difference that Hardy represents between these two characters shows that although education has a role in understanding of liberal ideas, there is an innate tendency to liberalism in some individuals.

Another implication is possible from this contrast. The kind of education they received in school was influenced by the conventions of the time. As Susan Hekman points out, Mill believes that the kind of education women received during his era made them “incapable of persisting long in the same continuous effort” (“John Stuart Mill” 683). Although Sue struggles to reject the conventional impact of education and behaves in ways based on her own principles, she fails in following her own way. She is more influenced by the books she has read that are based on law and conventions. Toward the end of the novel, Phillotson says to Gillingham about Sue: “She's affected by Christminster sentiment and teaching. I can see her views on the indissolubility of marriage well enough” (452). As she is teacher, she is more familiar with conventional books. However Tess, being less educated, learns things from her experiences apart from what books tell her. Consequently, she is less influenced and actually more successful in resisting convention.

Hardy shows another difference between these two characters related to the issue of education. In *Jude*, Sue expresses the view that she does not need to know about men and their books. Sue refers to her particular attitude and says,

My life has been entirely shaped by what people call a peculiarity in me. I have no fear of men, as such, nor of their books. I have

mixed with them—one or two of them particularly—almost as one of their own sex. I mean I have not felt about them as most women are taught to feel—to be on their guard against attacks on their virtue. (182)

Tess, on the other hand, at the beginning of the novel, complains to her mother that she has not told her about men-folk. She says to her mother that other girls knew about these things because they read novels: “why did not you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why did not you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o' learning in that way, and you did not help me!” (102). This shows the apparent influence of popular novels in shaping ideas about how men and women might behave, or the problems they might experience. Although at the beginning of the novel Tess shows her need to know about men's issues, her general behaviour throughout shows that she does not act on what had been said in the novels. Also, in the later stages of her life, through the process of self-development (which is an idea of liberal feminism), Tess does not accept the offer to begin formal education. Her lover Angel Clare asks her “Would you like to take up any course of study—history, for example?” and she answers, “Sometimes I feel I don't want to know anything more about it than I know already ... that's what books will not tell me... Because what's the use of learning that I am one of a long row only—finding out that there is set down in some old book somebody just like me, and to know that I shall only act her part; making me sad, that's all” (142). She does not want to behave like most people in the past but rather wants to follow her own desires and nature. This view of Tess is similar to Mill's liberal

view about avoiding imitating what others do and follow. She wants to experience life with a new outlook, which is expressed in her desire to undertake a kind of growth and individual autonomy by creating her own norms and her own definition of life.

Hardy presents a contrast in these two novels with regard to the personal relationship between the two sexes. In *Tess*, not only the private relationship between sexes is problematic, but also society causes restriction. Hardy shows problems in Tess's relationship with Angel and Alec. However, at the end of the novel, Hardy shows the reconciliation of the two sexes by rejoining Angel and Liza-Lu. This reconciliation between the two sexes is continued in *Jude*, a novel in which it seems that the two sexes do not have a problem with relating. Individual and private relationships are good if the public does not interfere in private issues. Jude loves Sue. He knows that Sue is going to marry Phillotson, but does not try to prevent her. Perhaps he wants Sue to act based on her own decisions and feelings. After her marriage, when Sue feels that she made a mistake in her decision about marrying Phillotson, Phillotson allows her to go and live with Jude. Sue admits Phillotson was kind to her and gave her "every liberty". The lifestyle differences that Hardy writes of in these two novels imply that in order to have a liberal society, it is not enough for men to give up their patriarchal positions: there is also a need to reform laws. From the differences between these two characters who both have liberal thoughts, Hardy shows how Mill's liberal ideas can appear in different forms in different classes of society.

Alongside of all the similarities between Mill and Hardy, there are differences between them because they have written two different kinds of text.

Mill is writing nonfiction and making arguments about social and political life, whereas Hardy is writing fictions and stories that work with emotion and impression. In the preface to the fifth and later editions of *Tess*, Hardy writes, “let me repeat that a novel is an impression, not an argument” (26). Hardy claims to be working at the level of emotions rather than appealing to his readers’ intellects, appealing to ‘pathos’, for impression refers to emotion rather than pure intellect. Contrastingly Mill appeals to ‘logos’ for his essays are arguments and are aimed at reaching people’s intellects or capacity for reason.

One of the most important differences between Mill and Hardy is their view on the place of human beings in universe, a difference which produced additional differences between them. Neither believed in God - Margaret Schabas argues that Mill “did not believe in a world designed by God or in a morality grounded in the laws of nature” (19), while Hardy “wrote about Victorian religious doubt” and “what eventually came to be known as the death of God” (Riquelme 6-7). Although both Mill and Hardy reject the existence of God, they have different views on the relationship between humans and nature. Hardy makes arguments about changing rules to fit in human nature, particularly people’s sexual nature. Contrastingly, Mill believes that human beings should overcome nature.

Mill believed that human beings should not simply imitate what others do or accept other people’s values and opinions. He had a similar view on human relations to nature. He makes an argument that human beings should not imitate Nature but confront it. For Mill, “the ways of Nature are to be conquered, not obeyed... her powers are often towards man in the position of enemies” (*Collected*

*Works* 10, 393).<sup>1</sup> He adds that “if Nature and Man are both works of a Being of perfect goodness, that Being intended Nature as a scheme to be amended, not imitated, by man” (*CW* 10: 401). He argues that the order of nature is something that humans should overcome by making law. Mill’s view on virtues, as Margaret Schabas points out, is that they “come only through effort and reform. Apparently, we have planted within us the capacity for such virtues as honesty, courage and benevolence” (131). This shows that he does not believe in the inevitability of the virtuousness of Nature but that these virtues should be obtained through “effort and reform”. Mill explains that, “whatever man does to improve his condition is in so much a censure and a thwarting of the spontaneous order of Nature” (*CW* 10: 394). He calls this “thwarting of the spontaneous order of Nature” a kind of artificial nature, but one it is “commendable to follow”. He explains that, “this artificially created or at least artificially perfected nature of the best and noblest human beings, is the only nature which it is ever commendable to follow” (*CW* 10: 406).

However, Hardy believes in following what Mill calls the “spontaneous order of Nature”, which is the notion that laws and conventions should change to fit human nature. Hardy, in his novels, represents a world in which people have to adjust their natures based on man-made law. These laws are in contrast with human nature, especially human sexual nature. In *Tess*, Hardy refers to “The circumstantial will against enjoyment” (282), a contrast between human nature and law. Elsewhere in the novel, Hardy says that Tess “had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly” (105). He shows that the problem is with social codes



1- Here after refer to as *CW*. I have used the page number of the PDF ( See Works Cited)

which are against human nature, as he says about Tess that, “Most of the misery had been generated by her conventional aspect, and not by her innate sensations” (110). Hardy’s texts essentially present a case in support of human nature, and cannot find any misery in it. Hardy believes that rules should be made in a way to match human nature. In the dairy, Angel says to himself about Tess, “What a fresh and virginal daughter of Nature that milkmaid is!” (137).

In *On Liberty*, Mill contended with the view of Wilhelm von Humboldt that a marriage contract should be ended by “the declared will of either party to dissolve it” (164). As Mill points out, Humboldt’s conviction is that:

engagements which involve personal relations or services should never be legally binding beyond a limited duration of time; and that the most important of these engagements, marriage, having the peculiarity that its objects are frustrated unless the feelings of both the parties are in harmony with it, should require nothing more than the declared will of either party to dissolve it. (*On Liberty* 164)

Hardy has a similar view to Humboldt, one which is in contrast with Mill’s. In the postscript to *Jude the Obscure* he states that “a marriage should be dissolvable as soon as it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties — being then essentially and morally no marriage” (np). In response to this view and Humboldt’s conception, Mill argues that,

When a person, either by express promise or by conduct, has encouraged another to rely upon his continuing to act in a certain way—to build expectations and calculations, and stake any part of

his plan of life upon that supposition—a new series of moral obligations arises on his part towards that person, which may possibly be overruled, but cannot be ignored. And again, if the relation between two contracting parties has been followed by consequences to others; if it has placed third parties in any peculiar position, or, as in the case of marriage, has even called third parties into existence, obligations arise on the part of both the contracting parties towards those third persons, the fulfilment of which, or at all events the mode of fulfilment, must be greatly affected by the continuance or disruption of the relation between the original parties to the contract. (*On Liberty* 164-65)

Hardy's argument is that when there is no love in a relationship, "morally" there is no marriage. However, Mill disagrees with divorce because of "moral" principles and obligations, like the commitment of each party to the other and children.

Their different view on marriage is linked to their major difference in regard to human beings' relationship to nature. In reference to his view that human beings should overcome nature, Mill is saying that marriage is a social institution through which people reach a higher level of morality and a high standard of behaviour. They should overcome their sexual nature and look for a kind of higher morality. For Mill, marriage does not just entail acting on natural instinct (sexual desires), but is about high moral conduct and maintaining a contract to another person. People are responsible for the marriage as a contract, and cannot dissolve it whenever they want, because the contract usually affects other parties. In contrast, Hardy's view is more that marriage is an institution that

is based on sexuality and attraction between people; if it does not work out, it should be easily dissolved.

Hardy and Mill have a similar view on bringing a human being carelessly into the world. Mill considers this action “a crime”. He explains that,

The fact itself, of causing the existence of a human being, is one of the most responsible actions in the range of human life. To undertake this responsibility—to bestow a life which may be either a curse or a blessing—unless the being on which it is to be bestowed will have at least the ordinary chances of a desirable existence, is a crime against that being. (*On Liberty* 168)

Hardy echoes this idea through the speech of Father Time. When he sees the miserable condition of Jude and Sue because of their children, he says, “ought not to be born, ought I?” (418); “It would be better to be out o' the world than in it, wouldn't it?” (419); “I think that whenever children be born that are not wanted they should be killed directly, before their souls come to 'em, and not allowed to grow big and walk about!” (420) and “If we children was gone there'd be no trouble at all” (421). Moreover, when Sue says that another child is on the way, he says, “How ever could you, mother, be so wicked and cruel as this, when you needn't have done it till we was better off, and father well! — To bring us all into *more* trouble” (421). In another part of the novel, Sue says to Arabella that, “It is not that I am ashamed—not as you think! But it seems such a terribly tragic thing to bring beings into the world—so presumptuous—that I question my right to do it sometimes!” (392). Like Tess, she is not ashamed of having children out of wedlock. However, she considers bringing children to the world in conditions

where they cannot be taken care of as a “terribly tragic thing” (392). Hardy expresses his liberal ideas about children through Father Time. At the same time, he shows that Sue and Jude behave in opposition to those liberal views and consequently encounter tragedy. For Hardy, children function as a part of tragedy and the cause of terrible consequences that they encountered at the end. After their death, Sue leaves Jude and lives a living death. Hardy writes, “Sue was convalescent, though she had hoped for death” (431). Jude also dies in loneliness.

Another implication of this different view on bringing children into the world is related to Hardy’s and Mill’s different views on humans and nature. As I mentioned before, Mill argues that humans should control nature and believes that humans should control their sexuality. However, Hardy’s view on following human nature, including human sexuality, leads to children being brought into the world, and he represents Jude and Sue as doing that carelessly. When Father Time is criticising Sue he says that “I think that whenever children be born that are not wanted they should be killed directly, before their souls come to 'em, and not allowed to grow big and walk about” (420). This leaves Sue “doubtfully pondering how to treat this too reflective child”. And when Father Time says “if children make so much trouble, why do people have 'em”, Sue replies that “because it is a law of nature” (420). In this respect, Hardy shows that life can not necessarily run according to some intelligent plan as Mill argues – his novel show the complexity of life, but also seek to establish drama. In other words, in his novels, which are not reality but represent reality, Hardy presents how complicated real life is.

## **Outline of Chapters**

In Chapter Two, I will concentrate on *Tess*. I will consider different forces of exploitation and Tess's response to these forces. I want to make it clear that she is not a victim as she is not powerless. Then, I will illustrate different aspects of liberal feminism, in her behaviour, to find out to what extent she is indicative of a liberal feminist view, especially the work of John Stuart Mill. I will compare Tess's responses with Joan's and Angel's attitude to convention. In Chapter Three, I will concentrate on *Jude the Obscure*. I will show that Sue is not a victim because she can resist the conventional. Her agency can be seen through her action and her motto is "as I choose". At the same time, I will show Hardy's feminist view that both sexes are harmed because of the attitude of society. To clarify this claim, I will show how Jude and Phillotson are adversely affected by the conventions of the time. Then, I will study Sue, along with Mill's philosophy, to illustrate to what extent she is representative of liberal feminism. In Chapter Four, which is very important to my arguments in previous chapters, I will show how Hardy's novelistic form is related to its content. I will illuminate what kind of connection there is between the feminist content of these two novels and their tragic form.

## **Chapter Two: *Tess of the d'Urbervilles***

Some critics present Tess as a powerless and voiceless woman who does not have any role in her destiny. Bernstein believes that Tess is a “country girl who falls upon hard times through no fault of her own” (156). Other critics believe that Hardy depicts women characters who are powerless and lack self-determination. Holloway believes that Hardy’s novels reject the idea of human choice and effort and whatever happens in the lives of characters is predetermined (17-18). These critics do not consider any sense of feminist self-determination and autonomy for Tess. I believe that Hardy was an open minded novelist for his time and tried to enhance the consciousness of women by depicting characters like Tess and Sue. Like a feminist Tess chooses to struggle for autonomy. She, as a proto-feminist, chooses the way of her life. She is aware of what she wants in the society and tries to achieve her purposes.

In support of my claim, that Tess is not a victim but a proto-feminist who consciously decides the way of her life, I will examine to what extent Tess’s actions correspond with the theories of Victorian liberal feminists, especially John Stuart Mill. Tess as a peasant girl who does not have bookish knowledge of feminist theories has an innate sense of feminism in line with liberal theories of an individual’s innate sense of justice. I will also compare Joan Durbeyfield with Tess, to clarify my claim that Tess is not a victim but a proto- feminist. Although Tess’ mother is one of the minor characters in the novel, the role of Tess is not clear without considering her mother’s role. Regarding the question about the response of women characters to the restrictions of the society, I will consider

Tess's mother's behaviour as a typical Victorian woman, asking, what can a character like Tess's mother do for this kind of society when she accepts all the restrictions? She does not struggle for her right, but tries to keep to those conventions and traditions which are against women.

Barbara Rowland-Serdar and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea make an argument about the contemporary situation of liberal feminists and explain that, "autonomy is best regarded as a process characterised by growth of an ability to respond to people and situations rather than to react... Reacting means that a woman's choices are structured largely by beliefs, perspectives, and perceptions belonging to others" (616). However, regarding the definition of response, Lerner suggests that it "allows women to act from knowledge of themselves, their values, and their priorities" (qtd in Rowland-Serdar and Schwartz-Shea 616). They believe that "The choice of response is perhaps the most basic psychological freedom, but it is also a heavy and painful burden which most people fear, preferring familiar pain, the pain generated by reacting and remaining stuck in old patterns of powerlessness" (616-17). I feel that this is an appropriate way of thinking about Tess.

Thomas Hardy's female characters are looking for autonomy. Tess is a character who responds to the conventions and her situation. As a peasant girl, her decisions are based on her personal values and preferences, despite strong social barriers. In this regard, it is worth noting that Mill as a liberal philosopher believes that, "Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires growing and developing itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces

which make it a living thing” (*On Liberty* 124). Tess is a character whose “tendency of inward forces” make her a living woman. Her inward tendency is to respond to the conventions and bear the “painful burden”. On the other hand, her mother prefers “familiar pain” and remains “stuck in old patterns of powerlessness”.

Regarding the feminist issue of women’s autonomy, Tess is able to make her own laws and behaves in ways based on her own decisions. In the novel, Hardy calls Tess an “independent character” and says, “Her independent character” desires “nothing by way of favour or pity to which she was not entitled on a fair consideration of her deserts. She had set herself to stand or fall by her qualities” (291-92). Tess herself is responsible for the delay in her confession. When she is going to marry Angel, her mother sends her a letter and tells her, “on no account do you say a word of your Bygone Trouble to him” (199). Tess does not accept her mother’s advice and her view of the world. Although her mother advises her to conceal the truth of past, Tess decides to write a letter to Angel and confess her past. As Collini points out, Mill believes in “the pursuit of truth” in marriage (36). Tess, too, believes in pursuing the truth in her marriage and this belief motivates her to confess. Her decision to confess is rooted in a kind of moral conscience which tells her that by concealing her past, she is cheating her husband. If not, she might not have confessed and would have lived with Angel happily. In other words, concealing the truth is a destructive convention of the Victorian age that Hardy is attempting to criticise.

Tess writes all the events of her past in a letter and puts it under the door. But Angel does not find it because it goes under the rug. At this point, it is



debatable if this event is shown as being due to chance or fate. Clarice Short believes that it is because of chance and coincidence that the letter of confession slipped under the rug (50). However, I believe that, at this part of her life, chance helps Tess to avoid her misfortune. Tess finds out that Angel has not received the letter before they get married, and not after. Hence, she still has time to confess. If she thought that Angel had got the letter and they got married, it would be chance that had brought misfortune for Tess. However, she becomes aware that Angel did not get the letter before their marriage. Then, she has another opportunity to confess but instead she delays. Hence, it is Tess's mistake to delay the confession and not the work of chance or fate. A possible reason for her delay is that her mother's advice creates a kind of hesitation in Tess, that her confession might have led to losing her lover. Moreover, Angel depicts himself as a man who rejects religion and believes in good morals like Tess. Tess might have thought her past would not be important for Angel. Tess here does give into timidity. Despite the strength of her character and the force of her agency, which Hardy emphasises elsewhere, she is not consistent in her decision to confess.

With regard to the issue of autonomy, she consciously decides to kill Alec. Morrell, in response to Holloway who believes that Hardy depicts "a whole determined sequence of things," writes that Tess, herself, contributed to her end. Holloway believes that Hardy's novels reject human choice and effort and that whatever happens in the lives of his characters is predetermined (Morrell 17-18). Although some critics mention that it is fate or her emotions which lead her to kill Alec, it is worth mentioning that there is no sense of regret at the end of the novel. It seems that Tess is satisfied with killing Alec. After killing Alec she goes to meet

Angel, while she is “fully dressed now in the walking costume of well-to-do young lady” (370). She finds Angels and says “do you know what I have been running after you for? To tell you that I have killed him... I have done it... still I owed it to you and to myself” (372). Understanding that Alec told her lies, was a motivation for her to perform the deed. Tess says, “I feared long ago, when I struck him on the mouth with my glove, that I might do it some day for the trap he set for me in my simple youth, and his wrong to you through me ... and now he can never do it any more” (372). It is not an overflow of emotions that causes Tess to kill Alec; it is her decision to do that.

Alongside of self-determination and her ability to make a decision based on her on principles, Tess is an honest character when expressing her feelings. She does not accept her mother’s advice, to conceal the truth of her past, when she is going to marry Angel. She bravely rejects Alec’s love. In the novel, before they get lost in the fog Alec asks Tess, “Why do you always dislike my kissing you?” She honestly replies “because I don’t love you” (90). When Angel leaves Tess, Alec appears and asks Tess to marry him, here again Tess honestly says, “You know I have no affection for you” (310). However, Patricia Stubbs believes that Tess is the “victim of her own high moral standards” (66). She adds that Tess “has embraced the ideology of purity and passivity and is left defenceless because of it. Yet even though Hardy recognises that this is what happens to Tess, he still asks us to admire her patience and meekness” (82). Why does Hardy ask readers to admire Tess’s patience? Perhaps Hardy represents something in her calm manner which worth admiration and that is her feminist nature.

In the novel, when Angel “enclosed [Tess’s] waist with his arm”, Tess “gave him a little push from her” (91). Tess is trying to stop whatever she does not like. This is a kind of emotional autonomy. As Morgan argues this behaviour of Tess “is not dumb, passive yielding self-determined, volatile resistance” (*Women and Sexuality* 93). Although Tess continuously criticises society, Hardy depicts Tess’s mother as a person who not only does not complain about society, but also is someone who supports and accepts social conventions as they are. In fact, Hardy criticises women who accept oppression. Similarly, as Mary Warnock points out, Mill and Wollstonecraft recognised that “women themselves, except for a small minority of pioneers, just as much as men, supported the existing system” (ix). Mill argues that a conventional wife is “sinking her own existence in her husband”, “having no will (or persuading him that she has no will) but his” because the only thing that she knows is “what will bring in money or invitations, give her husband a title, her son a place, or her daughter a good marriage” (*The Subjection* 255). Joan Durbeyfield has no will and idea of her own. Her concern is “what will bring money” and “a good marriage” for Tess, and so she sends her daughter to the farm. She is a follower of conventional patriarchal values. She also encourages her daughter to accept these oppressions. Joan Durbeyfield does not agree with the drinking habit of her husband but never complains about it and accepts it. When Tess asks her mother about her father, Mrs Durbeyfield says, “Now don't you be bursting out angry! The poor man—he felt so rafted after his uplifting by the pa'son's news—that he went up to Rolliver's half an hour ago. He do want to get up his strength”. Tess while “the tears welling to her eyes” says, “Get up his strength!”... “O my God! Go to a public-house to get up his strength!

And you as well agreed as he, mother!" Her mother says "No... I be not agreed" (45). Her mother disagrees with drinking but does not criticise it and also asks her daughter to accept it, "don't you be bursting out angry". However, it is not acceptable for Tess to the extent that "tears [are] welling to her eyes" (45).

Moreover, when Tess does not accept her mother's words to go to the d'Urbervilles' farm, she says to her husband, "Durbeyfield, you can settle it... If you say she ought to go, she will go" (58). Once again, Mrs Durbeyfield supports patriarchy. However, Tess does not go to the d'Urbervilles' farm because of her parents' word, but because of taking responsibility for Prince's death. She explains that to her parents as the reason for going to the farm. "Well, as I killed the horse... I ought to do something" (58). Hence, unlike Tess, Mrs Durbeyfield helps conventions to keep going without any intention or desire for change in the society. At the same time, it shows that she accepts that she is powerless and it is her husband who has power. Her mother wants to use Tess's father to control the situation. Besides, Joan Durbeyfield knows that it is wrong to send her daughter to the farm because of money. After sending Tess to the farm, she says, "Oh, I don't know exactly...I was thinking that perhaps it would ha' been better if Tess had not gone... well, 'tis a chance for the maid—still, if 'twere the doing again, I wouldn't let her go till I had found out whether the gentleman is really a good-hearted young man and choice over her as his kinswoman" (73). Her feminine sense inspires her to tell that she must not send her daughter to the farm of a man who she does not know. However, as she is influenced by the conventions of the male dominated society, she is not able to follow her own principles and values.

Hardy criticises the structure of society. In this structure, Hardy depicts Tess who is self-determined and takes responsibility for her actions. In contrast with Tess, Hardy depicts Tess's mother as a character who is careless and does not take responsibility for her actions. Instead, she is a victim who passively suffers, does not accept the consequences of her situation and shifts the blame to other reasons, like nature. She is a thoughtless character and does not tell anything about men to her daughter. However, when Tess returns home while she is pregnant, instead of considering her own carelessness, she says "Tis nater, after all, and what do please God" (102). Hence, in this society Tess and Sue are active characters who represent the ideal of gender equality, while Tess's mother represents a common type of gender role.

Mill believes in "the pursuit of truth" in marriage (Collini 38). In the preface to the fifth edition of *Tess*, Hardy criticises his critics who "pervert plain meaning and grow personal under the name of practicing the great historical method" (27). Hardy calls them "sworn discouragers" and "professed literary boxers" who "may have causes to advance, privileges to guard, tradition to keep going". Then, it seems that Hardy is not a novelist who "pervert(s) plain meaning" and causes "tradition to keep going". As Hekman points out, Mill believes that "the position of women rests not on a reasoned analysis of their situation, but, rather, on tradition and the use of force" ("John Stuart Mill" 682). Similarly, Hardy represents concepts and attitudes that people are not familiar with and tries to give consciousness to women and men about the appropriate position of women and their role in the society.

Regarding Hardy's self-censorship, as Higonnet points out, Franz Stanzel

believes that “Hardy censored his own text to prevent readers from reaching an independent (negative) opinion of his heroine” (24). However, I believe that this view of Hardy’s self-censorship is in contrast with Hardy’s definition of truth. It is true that in the *Graphic* Hardy deletes parts of his story which are offensive for readers of the Victorian age, but, it does not mean that he intended to “prevent” readers. Hardy self-censored because otherwise he would not have been able to publish his story at all. Before self-censoring, Hardy tried to publish a complete version of his story but it was rejected by editors. Furthermore, if he really intended to hide the independence of his heroine why does he insert the deleted parts in the novel edition of the story?

Hardy is trying to bring the hidden truth of Victorian society to the surface. This kind of truth was denied by society and it bothers male and religious authorities. By depicting Tess, Hardy shows how the society and religion struggle to conceal the truth. At the same time, Hardy is awakening women as to how they ought to be instead of accepting all oppressions. Hardy is trying to uncover a concealed truth. As he quotes in the explanatory note to the first edition of *Tess*, “if an offence comes out of the truth, better is it that the offence comes than that the truth be concealed” (25).

Thomas Hardy depicts a character like Tess as a woman who comments, discloses and talks about the status quo of male domination and abuses of women by men. She talks about things that have not been mentioned before in Victorian society. At the end of the novel, she sacrifices herself. However, there are many critics who call Tess a victim of society or circumstances. In *Tess*, Hardy depicts women who belong to the working class in a male-dominated society. The

situation was the same for all women: they had to live with the pressures and restrictions, of the conventions imposed on them by the male dominated society. Now, the question is how did they respond to these restrictions? In comparison with these women, Tess behaves differently. In a society in which oppression and patriarchy appear natural to women, an innate consciousness gives Tess the power to resist the convention of society. Tess does not accept subjugation.

In this chapter, I argue against those who call Tess a victim. In *Tess*, the main forces of exploitation are industrialisation, patriarchy and social conventions. It is clear that Tess is exploited and she suffers a lot in her life. However, I wish to question whether her exploitation led to her victimisation. Does she deserve to be called a victim, or not? Is she completely powerless, and innocent, or is there a sense of empowerment and self-determination in her? At the same time, I will show how different forces of exploitation destroy both men and women, for Tess is not the only character who is exploited. Exploitation causes suffering for men and women in different ways. I will contend that exploitation alone is not an appropriate reason to call a person a victim – if that were the case, most of Hardy's characters in these two novels could be called victims. At the same time, I will consider Tess's behaviour as a proto-feminist in responding to the forces of exploitation.

One of the important forces of exploitation in the novel is patriarchy and the patriarchal family. Patriarchy is a social organisation in which men have key roles in the society, and keep women under their control (Bennett 55). Consequently, a patriarchal family is one in which the father is the head and the most authoritative figure. Patriarchy can lead to a kind of exploitation that allows

men to rule over women. Mill and Hardy criticise the patriarchal family. Mill emphasises the important role of family in human life and refers to “equal justice” between members: “the moral regeneration of mankind will only really commence, when the most fundamental of the social relations is placed under the rule of equal justice, and when human beings learn to cultivate their strongest sympathy with an equal in rights and in cultivation” (CW 21: 336). At the same time, he criticises the kind of family that is “a school of obedience for the children” and “of command for the parents”. In Mill’s view, family “should be a school of sympathy in equality, of living together in love, without power on one side or obedience on the other” (*The Subjection* 260-61). Hardy has a similar view on the vital role of family and depicts the destructive impact on families in which children have to obey their parents. He presents a male dominated society where parents play a role in destroying the lives of their children. However, as many feminists have argued, patriarchy can cause suffering for both sexes, and in *Tess*, both Angel and Tess are harmed by the conventions their parents imposed on them. They have new ideas and a new outlook towards life, meaning that not only society but also their parents are unable to understand them.

It seems that Angel is an idealistic character, and his idealism runs against the tenor of society. He rejects the orthodox views of his father and his unconventional views lead him to leave home. However, he is not able to act on his unconventional ideas when faced with a real test of his views. Tess confesses “her story of her acquaintance with Alec d’Urberville and its results” (231). Angel is upset and says to Tess “the woman I have been loving is not you” (232). It appears that the impact of his father and his orthodox views on Angel are rooted



in him to the extent that he is able to reject them only mentally, not in practice. Hardy says that, “With all his attempted independence of judgement this advanced and well-meaning young man, a sample product of the last five-and-twenty years, was yet the slave to custom and conventionality when surprised back into his early teachings” (265). In attacking patriarchy, as Donner and Fumerton point out, Mill argues that “the corrupting power of despotic males... cow them [children] into submission” (111). A kind of conventional prejudice was rooted in Angel’s personality by his father.

On the farm, when Tess says to him “ I am not worthy of you” Angel replies, “Distinction does not consist in the facile use of a contemptible set of conventions, but in being numbered among those who are true, and honest, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report—as you are, my Tess” (203). Moreover, he claims that “I do hate the aristocratic principle of blood before everything, and do think that as reasoners the only pedigrees we ought to respect are those spiritual ones of the wise and virtuous, without regard to corporal paternity” (196). However, when Tess confesses, which is a sign of her honesty, he calls her “an unapprehending peasant woman” (236). Angel returns to “his early teaching” (265) because that is how he was brought up. Patriarchy not only creates suffering for Tess as a woman of the society, but proves harmful and destructive for Angel as a man. Sprechman argues that Hardy depicts a character like Angel who is a hypocritical and “when his philosophies are put to the test—when Tess tells him that she, like him, has had a transgression—his liberal and intellectual views fail him, and he deserts Tess... His weakness contrasts strongly with Tess’s strength” (19). Nevertheless, Angel suffers because he cannot get

away from the conventions of the society which tell him how to be as a man. Although he makes an attempt to detach himself from the conventions, he is not able to do so.

Because of the patriarchal structure of the society, Tess is taken advantage of by Alec. In this instance, however, her rape does not mean that she is a helpless victim. First of all, as I already mentioned, victimisation is not a negotiable experience, and a person can not take part in her own victimisation. A victim does not have agency. She is completely powerless or she is not a victim. In the case of Tess, critics believe that Hardy does not clearly depict what happens in *The Chase*. Ellen Rooney believes that Hardy makes a “contradictory argument-- Tess is pure because she ... [had] been raped against her will, *and* Tess is pure because she remains ‘unsmirched’, despite her seduction” (464). Rooney states that Hardy’s argument is ambiguous. I believe that this ambiguity shows the uncertain situation and consequently supports the idea that Tess is not a powerless and voiceless victim. Hardy would not have wanted to be explicit in representing Tess. We can interpret her as a participant in the sexual experience and also as being raped.

One way of understanding Tess is that she participates in the sex. Hardy refers to Tess’s seductive physical appearance when he says, “The lip-shapes that had meant seductiveness” (300) or “Tess's sense of her striking appearance had given her a flush of excitement, which was yet not happiness” (226). Tess is aware of her pleasing appearance. Before she goes to the d’Urbervilles’ farm, she accepts her mother’s advice to put her “best side outward” (70). Moreover, when she goes to the Chalk-Newton Inn for breakfast Hardy says,

Several young men were troublesomely complimentary to her good looks. Somehow she felt hopeful, for was it not possible that her husband also might say these same things to her even yet? She was bound to take care of herself on the chance of it, and keep off these casual lovers. To this end, Tess resolved to run no further risks from her appearance. (278)

Tess, intentionally or unintentionally, plays a role in the action taken by Angel in *The Chase*. Perhaps, by representing Tess in this way, Hardy wants readers to feel her rape was caused by her and shows that she is a proto-feminist who, like Angle, lapses into patriarchy in extreme situations. Hardy refers to agency in Tess and suggests sympathy toward her because she is pure and not at fault. However, he refers also to her seductiveness, which might be an anti-feminist view. There is a controversial idea among feminists about rape and women being responsible for that. As Rooney argues, “Rape and Seduction collapse into each other—at best, the project of distinguishing them clearly is a fruitless one” (469). So, as Rooney argues, the issue of rape in *Tess* is undecidable. Hardy is deliberately unclear about representing Tess. Hardy chose to be ambiguous because that is an important part of a literary novel.

There is a difference between Tess and the other characters in that she is courageous enough to take a stand against social conventions and to follow her own ideas and desires. Tess is not a victim in this patriarchal society because she embodies the possibility of standing against this system: she is not a fatalistically submitting character. Tess’s view of society is not of a straight forwardly male dominated world – she believes there is a possibility of standing up for herself. In

fact, as a woman, she has more courage to react against the social conventions than Angel does. In comparing Tess's and Angel's attitudes toward patriarchal restrictions, their ability to follow their own ideas and resist conventional morality, it is clear that Tess has more courage than Angel. Even with all of the problems that her family cause for her, and being rejected by society, she still follows her purpose. She remains critical of conventions and does not go back to the lifestyle that her mother supports and encourage her to follow. Sprechman argues that "Hardy has chosen a woman as the central, unifying character, and has no hesitation in depicting her as strong and independent, as well as sympathetic" (19).

Another dominant force of exploitation in the novel is industrialisation. Poverty and the economic crisis of the working class, in the Victorian age, are rooted in industrialisation. Industrialisation not only exploits women, but all people who belong to the working class. In his novels, Hardy shows the impact of industrialisation in the life of working-class people - as George Wotton notes, for Hardy "the Industrial Revolution was a monster that destroyed the traditions and meaning of country life" (206). Lois Bethe Schoenfeld argues that Hardy shows how nineteenth-century industrialisation destroys Victorian families. She argues that, "in order to amplify the ramifications of the cultural-economical changes, Hardy used fictional families to signify the basic losses suffered and experienced by the rural working class" (29).

In the novel, it is because of poverty that Tess's parents send her to the d'Urbervilles' farm. While there, Tess seems to surrender to Alec partly because of her family's financial problems. In Marxist philosophy, exploitation occurs

when someone is oppressed by economic circumstances. Tess is a symbol of the destruction of the peasantry in the nineteenth century. Hardy criticises Angel when he says to Tess you are “an unapprehending peasant woman” (236). For Hardy being a peasant is not a bad thing. Hardy is not on Angel’s side, he is setting up a gap between himself and Angel. Mill as a liberal individualist and socialist believes that the problem with the working class “is not what their interest is, but what they suppose it to be” (CW 19: 107). He believes that the working class acts based on what the ruling class identifies for them, and are not able to look beyond it and consider their own interests. Hence, as with the issue of women’s role in society, there is a psychological censorship that leads members of the working class to accept the interest of others, against their own will. It was not only women that men dictated to how they ought to be; the ruling economic class identified how the working class ought to be. Like Hardy, as Donner and Fumerton point out, Mill criticises “class exploitation and economic dependency” and believes that it causes suffering for members of the working class (108). Industrialisation caused destruction and exploitation for all the poor. It had a negative effect on all of them. Hence, industrialisation is not an appropriate reason for calling Tess, as a working class girl who struggles for change, a victim. Two critics in *The Remaking of the British Working Class* make an argument against the “lingering image of nineteenth-century workers which presents them as helpless victims”. They state that “in recent years historians have shown that this view is misleading” and “the Victorian working class maintained a real independence from direct control in the working place” (Savage and Miles 41-42). Although her economic class identifies her as a member of rural poor, Tess at least

“hoped to be a teacher at the school” (69). This hope and ambition is a positive point and shows her self-belief.

Tess as a member of the working class does not consider herself a victim and helpless. When she is working hard with the threshing machines, she says to Alec “I like doing it - it is for my father” (341). This could be related to what Marx calls “false consciousness” which means that people just believe that they are working and behaving in specific ways of their own free will. According to Marx the whole economic system is set up to force people to work, and that economic and its related social system control people. One of the significant issues about the threshing machine is the way Hardy writes about Tess. She becomes mechanised and part of the machine, perhaps exemplifying the dehumanisation brought about by industrial capitalism. Hardy writes that, “the threshing-machine started afresh; and amid the renewed rustle of the straw Tess resumed her position by the buzzing drum as one in a dream, untying sheaf after sheaf in endless succession” (325). Hardy’s view of Tess is distracting from the sense she is entirely independent, thus demonstrating some inconsistency on his part about Tess’s agency.

Another reason that some writers feel that Tess is a victim, and it is a crucial one in the novel, is her death by hanging. After her death, Hardy shows that Liza-Lu and Angel join hands. In fact, as I will discuss in detail in Chapter Four, her death is meaningful and valuable. Hillel Matthew Daleski believes that Tess is a victim because she summarises her life by saying, “Once victim, always victim—that’s the law!” (152). However, I believe that sentence has an ironic meaning, for she says this when she is angry. She speaks in response to Alec

saying that “You have been the cause of my backsliding... you should be willing to ... leave that mule you call husband for ever” (324). In fact, she is criticising the society, and so her statement can be read as meaning that she wants to resist the norms and values of the Victorian age. Hardy shows Tess’s idea this way when he says, “Was once lost always lost really true of chastity? She would ask herself. She might prove it false if she could veil by-gones” (117). In fact, she does not prove it false by veiling by-gones, because concealment is against her honesty

A common feature among feminists is that they aim to emancipate women from suffering because of their sex. Feminists attempt to “reappraise the position of women in society” (Evan 2). Among different brands of feminism, liberal feminism is one of the oldest brands. It emphasises individual rights, self-development, self-determination and equality. Liberal feminism believes that “feminists must criticise the continuing presence of barriers, prejudice, discrimination, and inequality” (Rowland-Serdar and Schwartz-Shea 606). Similarly, Tess as a proto-feminist is criticising the problems of social conventions, forces of exploitation and patriarchy, reasons for all of her suffering. All of these boundaries and obstacles are rooted in conventions and traditions that are not favourable to women.

Tess has a feminist view on the issue of marriage. She rejects patriarchal marriage and believes instead in a marriage based on equality and love. Mill writes about marriage based on equality, love and friendship and considers it an important factor in the progress of human society. Mill praises marriage if it is a union of “two persons of cultivated faculties, identical in opinions and purposes, between whom there exists that best kind of equality, similarity of powers and

capacities with reciprocal superiority in them” (*The Subjection* 311). This indicates an idealism on Mill’s part that Hardy as a novelist cannot partake of: there is no dramatic tension in a marriage of perfect equals. Mill refers to the perfect ideality, whereas Hardy is showing the complexity of reality.

In *Tess*, we can see aspects of a double standard of morality. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the cultural norm was that men were allowed to have a sexual relationship with more than one woman, however women could have sex only with their husband. However, one of the feminist concerns was sexual autonomy which involved challenging the double standard of sexual morality. In addition, questioning the double standard was an important theme of feminist writing from the seventeenth century. For example, Mary Wollstonecraft referred to “women’s oppression” and “sexual slavery”. Her work was a groundwork for organising campaigns which challenged the double standard in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Jackson 24). As Margaret Jackson states, these campaigns aimed at “breaking the conspiracy of silence which served to keep women in ignorance of what feminist referred to as ‘the real facts of life’” (24). An example which shows the pervasive nature of double sexual morality was The *Matrimonial Causes Act* of 1857. Shanley writes that “The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, as the divorce measure was known, allowed men to divorce their wives for adultery, but women had to establish that their husbands were guilty of either cruelty or desertion in addition to adultery in order to obtain a separation” (245 n.20). Mill criticises this Act and “was adamant that the double standard was wrong in policy and unjust in principle” (Shanley 245, n.20). Hardy implicitly criticises this double morality in his novels. *Tess* is



looking for equal social responsibility for the guilt of sexual relationship out of wedlock. If a certain behaviour is wrong in the context of the society it should have similar consequences for the life of both men and women of that society. Both Angel and Alec had premarital affairs. Before Tess confesses her past affairs, she says to Angel that it is “just the same” (230). When she hears and forgives Angel for being “plunged into eight-and-forty hours’ dissipation with a stranger” (230), she expects Angel to forgive her, but he does not. She does not accept this inequality and says, “Forgive me as you are forgiven! I forgive you, Angel” (232). At this point, she is trying to express her view that men and women should have equal status. For Tess, equality is a part of the identity and autonomy she is struggling for. Hence, she protests against this situation in society that a single act can bring about different consequences for herself as a woman, than Alec and Angel had to deal with as men. At the same time, she is trying to show her opinion and ideas by criticising and clarifying how men ought to be. Thus, Tess is continuously going against the patriarchal structure of the society and resists conventions. She challenges what Hardy in the preface of his novel calls “avowed Conventions” (25).

Another example of feminist ideas that can be found in Tess is that she tries to achieve her rights in patriarchal society. Joan Perkin in *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England* points out that “working-class women were almost wholly beyond the reach of the civil law” (115). She says that, in the Victorian age, “married women had no legal existence” (13). When the Common Law of the Victorian age did not even recognise “legal existence” for women, it diminished their sense of identity. Lack of understanding of the law is explicit in

John Durbeyfield. Although Angel says to Tess, after her confession, that “You don’t understand the law- you don’t understand!” (241), Tess criticises the double standard of sexual morality. She does not accept this condition of society which keeps women outside the scope of the law and defends her right. Mill argues that for a woman, “the law, not determining her rights, but theoretically allowing her none at all, practically declares that the measure of what she has a right to, is what she can contrive to get” (*The Subjection* 256). Tess is a character who “can contrive to get” her right. After understanding Alec’s lies regarding his family name and the impossibility of Angel’s return, she says, “you have torn my life all in to pieces” (369). She answers Alec’s behaviour in the same way and destroys his life by killing him. Hence, in the condition that the law was ineffective in helping women, Tess does not keep silent. She makes proto-feminist attempts to defend her spoiled “legal existence” as a woman.

Related to the condition of women, Mill says that,

All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men, not self-will and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others.... that is their nature, to live for others, to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affection”. (*CW* 21: 269)

In contrast with a type of woman that Mill describes, subjugation is not the “nature” of Tess. Higonnet believes that “Hardy opposed his heroine’s individual voice to the unnatural law and maxims of men”. At the same time, he is attempting to “singularize his heroine” to “differentiate her voice from stereotypes

of the feminine” (17). I believe that Tess’s “voice” operates in opposition to “the unnatural law” which seems natural for others and therefore is a kind of feminist voice. She resists power through what Michel Foucault calls “counterdiscourses” (Hekman, “Truth and Method” 345). Tess is trying to build meaning by criticising the current discourse and what is seen as real or natural. Mill also believes that, “unnatural generally means only uncustomary, and that everything which is usual appears natural. The subjection of women to men being a universal custom, any departure from it quite naturally appears unnatural” (*The Subjection* 230). In fact, for Tess’s mother, subjugation is natural and she supports and accepts these injustices. However, Tess’s innate sense of feminism gives her consciousness about the unnaturalness of patriarchal domination.

After her rape, Tess is able to adapt and cope with the new situation. Tess does not feel ashamed of being raped, she is not even ashamed of her child who is born out of wedlock, and she bravely defends his rights. Hardy says, “The baby’s offence against society in coming into the world was forgotten by the girl-mother; her soul’s desire was to continue that offence by preserving the life of the child” (111). Hardy refers to her innate sense of feminism by pointing out “her soul’s desire”. Moreover, when she goes to call on the parson to baptise her child, her father whose “sense of the antique nobility of his family was highest” (111-12) locks the door because “no parson should come inside his door... prying into his affairs, just then, when, by her shame, it had become more necessary than ever to hide them” (112). She resists this patriarchal behaviour of her father by baptising her child. The next day when she meets the parson to ask for a Christian burial, although it was a taboo to have child out of wedlock, she speaks “freely” and

“earnestly”. The parson also rejects her request but she ignores his denial of permission and buries the baby in the graveyard. In other words, her sense of justice does not allow her to deny her child’s right. She baptises him, gives him a name and identity, and buries him. Perhaps Hardy depicts this baptism of the child by Tess as her way of changing social attitudes. When Tess’s story was serialized in the *Graphic*, the baptism section was omitted by Hardy, to protect himself from censorship. However, when it was published in the form of the novel, Hardy added this section. The baptism section was critical of the church and the society, and publishing it put Hardy in professional danger. In this relation, Margaret Elvy argues that Tess “subverts patriarchy by taking her child’s baptism into her own hands. She goes against her father, the vicar, and the whole church with her self-made baptism” (22). Against the convention, that sexual relationship before marriage was a stigma and that women had to give up children born out of wedlock, Tess keeps her child and baptises him. In other words, Tess, like a liberal feminist, attempts to break down this norm of society, and wants to make fatherless children socially acceptable.

Her rape turns into a step for her to cultivate her innate sense of feminism. After Tess has been raped by Alec, Hardy says, “an immeasurable social chasm was to divide our heroine’s personality thereafter from that previous self of her, who stepped from her mother’s door to try her fortune at Trantridge” (95). In fact, “an immeasurable social chasm” motivates her to defend her position and responses to the constraints of society more seriously, under a process of self development. Such self awareness is an important aspect of liberal feminism. For example, before being raped, when she is going to the farm, as a typical Victorian

girl she trusts her family and says, “Very well; I suppose you know best... Do what you like with me, mother (70). However, after being raped she criticises her mother, on the basis that she does not give her enough knowledge about being a woman. She says, “why did not you tell me there was danger in men-folk? ... I never had the chance o’ learning in that way, and you did not help me” (102). She now understands the harm done by the lack of open discussion of sexuality in the conventional Victorian family. Hence, her exploitation does not make her a victim but a proto-feminist, one who eagerly struggles to find her identity in society.

Tess does not feel disappointed. She has a positive view on life, rather than being a hopeless dependent person. Hardy says about Tess that for her “The irresistible, universal, automatic tendency to find sweet pleasure somewhere.... her spirits, and her thankfulness, and her hopes, rose higher and higher” (121). At this point also, Hardy refers to a kind of “automatic tendency” which I call innate “feminism”. This “innate sensation” as a feminist helps her to face her problems: when other women whisper about her and she has to work hard in the field, she behaves bravely and hopefully. In the novel Hardy says,

If she could have been but just created, to discover herself as a spouseless mother, with no experience of life except as the parent of a nameless child, would the position have caused her to despair; No. She would have taken it calmly, and found pleasure therein. Most of the misery has been generated by her conventional aspect, and not by her innate sensation. (110)

I believe not only that Tess’s misery has not been generated by her innate sensation, but that her desire as a feminist motivates her to live and defend her

child. She is an optimistic character who takes responsibility for her unconventional deeds with courage and dignity. She makes an attempt to find her autonomy and self-development by herself. Hardy writes “Tess’s passing corporeal blight had been her mental harvest” (140). In this regard King says that “neither her lovers nor the society which Hardy postulates within and beyond the novel have this understanding” (*Tragedy* 112). This shows that her suffering brings about mental emancipation for her and does not mean that because she suffers she is a victim.

Tess is looking for a kind of happiness which emerges out of autonomy. She undergoes much suffering yet there is a sense of “self-delight” in her, and she does not feel disappointed about her life. In describing Tess’s feeling in Talbothays, Hardy writes, “All the while she wondered if any strange good thing might come of her being in her ancestral land; and some spirit within her rose automatically as the sap in the twigs. It was unexpected youth, surging up a new after its temporary check, and bringing with it hope, and the invincible instinct towards self-delight” (118). Her positive outlook leads her to look for pleasure within misery, which is not easy. Hardy says, “Some spirit had induced her to dress herself up neatly as she had formerly done” (110). This spirit exemplifies the impulse in Tess that encourages her to fight against the obstacles in her life. Pamela Jekel argues that, “in spite of her hardships, Tess weaves a continuous thread of optimism and fortitude through out the novel” (159). Perhaps, she is happy because she feels that she is attempting to make a better condition of life for herself as a woman. She does not look for happiness in the way that her mother does, by conformity to convention. In another part of the novel, when Tess

is in the field, Hardy says, “She felt that she would do well to be useful again—to taste a new sweet independence at any price” (110). She does not simply speak about being “useful” and her “independence”. She is eager to achieve her ideas and express her self “at any price” and she does.

Autonomy and individuality are aspects of the theories of liberalism. One aspect of individual autonomy is having intuitive ideas. Mill writes about “intuitive perception” which means “a rapid and correct insight into present fact. It has nothing to do with general principles” (*The Subjection* 273). He explains that for men and women, “What is called their intuitive sagacity makes them peculiarly apt in gathering such general truths as can be collected from their individual means of observation... With equality of experience and of general faculties, a woman usually sees much more than a man of what is immediately before her” (*The Subjection* 274). In another place, Mill says, “It is the privilege and proper condition of a human being, arrived at the maturity of his faculties, to use and interpret experience in his own way. It is for him to find out what part of recorded experience is properly applicable to his own circumstances and character” (*On Liberty* 123).

At the very beginning of *The Subjection of Women*, Mill writes that his social and political ideas have been “constantly growing stronger by the progress of reflection and the experience of life” (219). It seems that Hardy was influenced by Mill in this respect. As Robert Schweik states, “Mill’s confident secular individualism ...encouraged Hardy in the independent pursuit of his own world view” (66). Tess clearly expresses the important role of experience in her self-development and autonomy. She is trying to learn from the events of her life and

does not blame herself. In *Tess*, Hardy says, “She felt that she would do well to be useful again—to taste anew sweet independence at any price. The past was past; whatever it had been, it was no more at hand” (110). When Alec asks Tess who taught her to speak so fluently, she says, “I have learnt things in my troubles” (305). In fact, she has a positive outlook about her troubles and sees them as a way of learning. It seems that Tess’s sexual oppression undermines her sense of identity and self-worth. For Tess being raped, although it was an event which leads to a virtual ending of her hope, was an experience that “had quite failed to demoralise” (117) her. It turns into a way for her to protest against cultural oppressions and conventions. Hence, in the novel, Hardy refers to a kind of innate sense and sprit in Tess that even with all of her difficulties gives her a zest for life.

As a proto-feminist, Tess takes the responsibility of her choices to go against conventions. Liberal feminists consider a connection between one’s autonomous self and taking responsibility. They believe the “autonomous self is capable of taking responsibility for her actions and choices” (Rowland-Serdar and Schwartz-Shea 617). Mill also refers to this idea in *On Liberty*, “But if he refrains from molesting others in what concerns them, and merely acts according to his own inclination and judgment in things which concern himself, the same reasons which show that opinion should be free, prove also that he should be allowed, without molestation, to carry his opinions into practice at his own cost” (121). Unlike other characters that are not able to take the responsibility of their deeds, Tess, like a feminist, is capable of taking responsibility. She clearly takes the responsibility for killing Alec, and her utterance at the end of the novel, “I am ready” (382), illustrates her readiness to take the responsibility for her choice to



react against the social conventions. Hence, as a proto-feminist, she is able to accept the consequences of her decisions. However, she also has to take the responsibility for events that she cannot fully control. First of all, Prince dies because “Tess was not skilful in the management of a horse, but she thought that she could” be (54). After his death she feels guilty and takes the responsibility, saying “as I killed the horse, mother... I suppose I ought to do something. I don't mind going and seeing her, but you must leave it to me about asking for help” (58). She takes the responsibility because she knows that her family needs her financial help. Secondly, she bravely takes the responsibility for her child who is not accepted by society.

Tess not only takes the responsibility for her unconventional choices, she takes responsibility for herself. For liberal feminists, “responsibility to self means caring for oneself as a valuable human being and engaging in the struggle for the autonomous self by working through one's own issues and clarifying one's own beliefs and values” (Rowland-Serdar and Schwartz-Shea 620). It seems that Tess's definition of responsibility to self is similar to the definition of liberal feminists. Tess's mother believes that the only quality of women is their beauty - when Tess is going to the d'Urbervilles' farm, her mother says, “I think it will be wiser of 'ee to put your best side outward” (70). Among the women in the society that Hardy portrays, Tess appears to be the only woman caring for herself as a valuable human being. She considers her ability as a woman and her own self worth.

First of all, the quality that Tess celebrates is her feminine power and abilities rather than her beauty. Kun Yu believes that “it was Alec's ability to provide for the family that brought Tess to ‘sell’ herself to him at the close of the

book” (71). If she used her beauty and sold her beauty at the beginning stage, as some women might have done, her life might well have turned out differently. After being raped by Alec, he wants to cure the wound he caused with money but Tess strongly rejects him. She says, “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!” (97). Moreover, Angel has left Tess and she is working in the farm when Alec appears. He proposes marriage and wants to help her family financially, but Tess rejects him. Tess tries to be faithful to her husband and sends him a letter about the troubles Alec is causing for her. Even in the difficult condition of her father's death, which has left her family homeless, she continues to look for a way to solve the problem instead of accepting Alec's offer. I believe that the condition of her family was not the main reason for accepting Alec's offer. She accepts it because Alec deceives her by telling her that Angel will never come back. If she had thought that her husband would come back, Hardy's representation of her suggests that she should have waited for him and asked him to help her family. At the end of the novel, when Angel comes back, Tess tells him that Alec was kind to her and to her mother. But now she hates him because he told her a lie. She says to Alec “you said my husband would never come back--- never; and you taunted me, and said what a simpleton I was to expect him... And at last I believed you and gave away!” (369). Hence, Tess resists Alec and does not easily surrender to him because her values are important for her. She accepts Alec's offer only when she is misled about Angel's return.

Tess is a character who follows her heart and desires and does not attempt to overcome her sexual nature. At the same time, Hardy shows that she is not at

fault in doing this. He highlights her purity by using the “pure woman” as a subtitle. This point refers to Hardy’s view on human nature, mentioned in the introduction. As Morgan argues “there is no fall, for Tess, that renders her impure, just as there is nothing to render her impure by association” (*Women and Sexuality* 86). As Hardy presents her, Tess does not believe in controlling human nature by law. In this way, she is trying to change the social law to fit human nature. Perhaps by doing so, Hardy attempts to remove the degradation from sex, saying instead that people are free to follow their sexual desires. Unlike the people around her, Tess does not consider her action as wrong. Hardy is emphasising the destructive role of conventions and social attitudes by undermining the separation between good and bad, fallen and virtuous women rather than the matter of purity. At the end of the novel, when Angel returns, Tess kills Alec to pursue her beliefs and desires and defend those rights that society does not care for.

Hardy criticises male power which forces women to sell their bodies as a means of economic survival. Josephine Butler, a prominent campaigner for women in the nineteenth century, not only criticises the double standard of morality but also the matter of prostitution. She argued that “male sexual control over women’s bodies and the male-controlled legal, economic, political ideological structures” led women “to sell their body as a means of economic survival (Jackson 25). In the case of Tess, it is patriarchy and the economic power of Alec which finally lead her to sell her body to be able to survive. Her father dies and her family is in a very bad financial situation. She sends a letter to Angel and his family asking for financial help but she does not get a response. Finally she has to surrender Alec, be under his protection and be his mistress. Moreover,

Alec's sexual desire leads him to rape Tess and force her to surrender him. Perhaps Hardy blames men and says they should curb their sexual desires instead of forcing women into prostitution.

Tess as a proto-feminist, who views herself as a valuable human being, is looking for a man who will love her for what she is. This shows that she clearly knows who her ideal lover is. Before her marriage, she writes a letter and slips it under his door. The next day, when Angel behaves as before, Hardy says "could it be that he loved her for what she was, just as she was" (216). Moreover, before their marriage, she asks Angel to listen to her past. "But my history. I want you to know it— you must let me tell you —you will not like me so well" (196). Here, again, Angel does not take her words seriously and they get married. When Angel rejects Tess after her confession, Tess says "I thought, Angel, that you loved me —me, my very self! I love you for ever because you are yourself" (232). Hence, her ideal man is a person who loves her for what she is. At the end of the novel, she achieves her feminist desire. When Angel comes back to her, he says, "I did not think rightly of you—I did not see you as you were!" he continued to plead. "I have learnt to since, dearest Tessy mine!" (366). In fact, at this point in the novel, Angel loves her for what she is. Now he loves and supports Tess, who was not only raped, but is also a killer. At the end of the novel, when Tess kills Alec and then accompanies Angel, he says, "I will not desert you! I will protect you by every means in my power, dearest love, whatever you may have done or not have done!" (373). Regarding Tess's feeling for Angel, Hardy says, "to her he was, as of old, all that was perfection, personally and mentally" (373). She sees herself as a unique person and wants Angel to respect her personal identity and uniqueness.

When Angel “called her Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names”, she does not like it and says “Call me Tess” (146).

Hardy’s representation of Tess as an empowered and developed person is another aspect of feminism. Liberal feminists believe that empowerment “explicitly includes development of self” (Rowland-Serdar and Schwartz-Shea 607). Experience has a great role in the process of self development and self-improvement in Tess. Under the process of self-development her religious view changes because of her experiences. At first, she believes in church and Christianity, finding it necessary to get to the church. When she goes there, people whisper to each other and Tess knows that what they whisper about. She feels “she could come to church no more” (104). However, she still believes in religious rites. She baptises her child to save him from hell. She goes to the priest and asks him if it is the same for her child as if the priest had baptized him. Furthermore, it is important for her that the priest does a Christian burial for her child. When the priest refuses to honour her request, Tess says “Then I don't like you... and I'll never come to your church no more!”(115). Perhaps, at this point Tess finds the church and priest a part of unjust society and rejects them. When she talks to Angel at the farm, she is still confused about her religious beliefs. Hardy says “Tess's ideas on the views of the parish clergyman, whom she heard every week, seemed to be rather vaguer than Clare's, who had never heard him at all” (182). She is suffering because of this confusion, and as a proto-feminist is looking for her own ideas and understanding of the world. She says to Angel “I wish I could fix my mind on what I hear there more firmly than I do... It is often a great sorrow to me” (182). At the same time, this shows that Tess behaves based

on her experiences. She is trying to have a fixed idea by listening to the parish clergyman and then achieves a firm idea about it. At the end of the novel it seems that she achieves a view about clergymen She says to Alec, “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... a better man than you does not believe in such” (297-98).

At the end of the novel, it seems that she is successful in developing and improving her “self”. When Alec wounds Tess, he says “I am ready to pay to the uttermost farthing” (97). In fact, class and society allow Alec to be himself. After Tess kills Alec, men come to take her to the court. She quietly says “I am ready”. It seems that at this point of her life she is able to express herself. Her last words represent the maximum self awareness in Tess, although it comes at a high price. She expresses herself through language which reflects on the matter of gender and agency. It is Tess, a woman, who killed Alec, a man, in a patriarchal social system. Responsibility to others is another aspect of feminism represented by Tess. Victorian liberal feminists believed that “individuals were obliged not only to assume responsibility for their own choices, but also to take cognisance of the opinions and circumstances of others” (Pedersen 46). The feminist movement’s purpose is to bring about better conditions for women in the society. Tess remains concerned for her sister’s life, even though she is going to be hanged. She asks Alec, who Tess believes is a person who loves women for what they are, to marry her sister. In other words, she wants her sister to experiences a better kind of life,

apart from the suffering Tess endured in her life.

During the nineteenth century, both fiction and non-fiction represented an ideal woman based on the desires of men. This made sure that women were kept in their expected place in a male dominated society. For example, scientific issues were interpreted ideologically in a way to keep women down instead of defining basic differences between sexes. In 1887, George Romanes claimed to have found that there was a five ounce difference in weight of men and women's brain. He considers this difference "a marked inferiority of intellectual power" in women and concluded that women can not be equal to men mentally (Spender 11). Susan Sleeth Mosedale writes about Romanes' view and believes that nineteenth-century biologists "drew social, one might say moral, conclusions from the combination of prejudice and scientific theory, deducing justifications for the past and present social status of woman and prescriptions restricting her future role in society" (54). Mill also criticises this kind of interpretation which is not really due to the inferiority of women's mental capacity, but rather the attempt of society to keep women down. He explains,

I believe that their disabilities elsewhere are only clung to in order to maintain their subordination in domestic life; because the generality of the male sex cannot yet tolerate the idea of living with an equal... In the last two centuries, when... any reason beyond the mere existence of the fact was thought to be required to justify the disabilities of women, people seldom assigned as a reason their inferior mental capacity; which, in times when there was a real trial of personal faculties ... in the struggles of public life, no one really

believed in. The reason given in those days was not women's unfitness, but the interest of society... In the present day, power holds a smoother language and whomsoever it oppresses, always pretends to do so for their own good: accordingly, when anything is forbidden to women, it is thought necessary to say, and desirable to believe, that they are incapable of doing it, and that they depart from their real path of success and happiness when they aspire to it... Now... many women have proved themselves capable of everything. (*The Subjection* 266-67)

Mill and Hardy stress the importance of women's knowledge, especially in a context in which men predetermined how women ought to be. Hardy believes that "women are quite worthy enough in nature to satisfy any reasonable being, but I venture to think that they too frequently do not exhibit that nature truly and simply and thus the nature is condemned by their critics when the form of its manifestation only is in fault" (*Selected Letters* 15). In a letter to Florence Hardy he writes that, "My impression is that you do not know your own view. You feel the need of emotional expression of some sort, and being surrounded by the conventional society form of such expression you have mechanically adopted it" (*Selected Letters* 84). In his letter, Hardy refers to women's "nature" and "emotional expression" which can not be truly manifested because of the conventional society. Hardy depicts Tess as someone who wants to follow her own nature and express her emotions. A sense of feminism and intuitive perception motivated her to use her own experiences as a woman and react against conventions against women.



Hardy attempted to know more about women through what women themselves have to say. In a letter to May Sinclair, he writes, “I am much interested in learning from the female characters the things that go on at the back of women’s mind— the invisible rays of their thought which are beyond the direct sight or intuition of man (*Selected Letters* 237). Also, in a letter to Mrs Smith, Hardy writes that knowledge and experiences of women “teaches men what cannot be acquired from books” (*Selected Letters* 13). Mill has a similar view on men’s knowledge about women. He argues that, “We may safely assert that the knowledge which men can acquire of women, even as they have been and are, without reference to what they might be, is wretchedly imperfect and superficial, and always will be so, until women themselves have told all that they have to tell” (*The Subjection* 242). Hence, although they are men who writes about women, they emphasise the role of women themselves in men’s understanding of women voice.

By depicting Tess as a character who is different from others, Hardy is showing that women themselves are partly responsible for their oppression. Tess’s mother supports male conventions and accepts staying under the control of men. In fact, it is more appropriate to call her mother a victim than Tess, who bravely responds to the elements of oppression and sacrifices herself to find her identity and position in the society. Regarding women conforming to the status quo, Hare-Mustin believes, “habituation swallows even the grossest violations of persons (qtd in Lamb 131). Tess is not a victim but a proto-feminist whose innate sense of feminism motivates her to stand firm and stable against society. A modern feminist believes that she “learns best from those who live their lives by personal

principles of feminism...They remain ... the change-agents, the creators of new ones” (Nabulivou 3). It shows that Tess is in tune with modern feminists. She is a “change agent” and “the creator of new ideas”.

### Chapter Three: *Jude the Obscure*

In the previous chapters, I illustrated the differences between exploitation and victimisation and in response to those critics who believe that Tess is a victim; I argued that she is not a victim because she is not a powerless character. In this chapter, I will argue that the same view is correct in the case of Sue and Jude. Again, some critics believe that Sue is a victim and she can not be a feminist. Brady in “Hardy’s Narrator on Women” writes that Sue is “the victim of her own sexuality” and “nature’s law” (99). Kaur believes that Sue is “the victim of the conventional codes of morality” (71). However, my conception is that she is not a victim but a proto-feminist as Sue is not powerless. She behaves in ways based on what she chooses to do, and in fact her motto is “I shall do as I choose” (191). My argument is that Sue is not a victim because her claims to agency are borne out by her acts of self-determination. She is not a powerless character who accepts all oppression, but, like Jude (and like Tess), she resists social institutions and consequently is harmed. At the same time, to clarify Hardy’s feminist view that both sexes are adversely affected by social institutions like marriage and education, I will show how Phillotson and Jude both suffer. Phillotson says, “Still, Sue, it is no worse for the woman than for the man. That’s what some women fail to see, and instead of protesting against the conditions they protest against the man” and Sue replies that, “Yes—some are like that, instead of uniting with the man against the common enemy, coercion” (360). In fact, by depicting the destruction oppression of both sexes because of the social convention, Hardy illustrates his feminist view.

Autonomy is one of the classic liberal ideas. Self-determination is a part of

autonomy. Liberal feminists believe that women should use their own knowledge and principles in making a decision. Mill, as a liberal feminist, emphasises self-determination in women and criticises their submission to men. He explains, “All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission and yielding to the control of others” (*The Subjection* 232). In reviewing Mill’s works, Donner and Fumerton argue that, “Individuality involves developing an identity that is authentic to the person and autonomy is clearly essential for this project. To be autonomous is to be self-determining and free from the dominating will of others” (62). Mill believes that customs are great enemies of humans. He explains,

Conform to custom, merely as custom, does not educate or develop in him any of the qualities which are the distinctive endowment of a human being. The human faculties of perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference, are exercised only in making a choice. He who does anything because it is the custom, makes no choice. He gains no practice either in discerning or in desiring what is best... The faculties are called into no exercise by doing a thing merely because others believe it. (*On Liberty* 124)

This quotation shows the importance of will in Mill’s view. He encourages people to make decisions based on their own “faculties of perception” and avoid imitating and following customs. In another part of *On Liberty*, he emphasises this idea and adds that,

He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties. He must use observation to see, reasoning and judgment to foresee, activity to gather material for decision, discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision. And these qualities he requires and exercises exactly in proportion as the part of his conduct which he determines according to his own judgment and feelings is a large one. (124)

Like Mill who contests imitating customary behaviour, Hardy's characters, Sue and Tess, do not imitate what other people do. They do not follow and act based on customs simply because other men and women do. They act based on their own choice and sense of right and wrong to develop a life which is "authentic" to their characters. Mill argues that those who do not follow their own feeling and do not have any idea of themselves have no character. He says, "A person whose desires and impulses are his own — are the expression of his own nature, as it has been developed and modified by his own culture — is said to have a character. One whose desires and impulses are not his own, has no character, no more than a steam-engine has a character" (CW 18: 264).

In a society in which women are subjugated by men, Hardy depicts a character like Sue who is self-willed and attempts to have control over her destiny. She is a character who is looking for autonomy. As Patrica Ingham argues, "Sue is marked out from the other women in Hardy's novels, and immediately identifiable

as a New Woman, by her explicit awareness of herself as a member of an oppressed sex rightly seeking autonomy” (75). In her speech with Phillotson to persuade him to let her go and to show her sense of individuality and self-determination, she quotes from the third chapter of Mill’s *On Liberty*, ‘Of Individuality’ and says,

“And do you mean, by living away from me, living by yourself?”

“Well, if you insisted, yes. But I meant living with Jude”.

“As his wife?”

“As I choose”.

Philotson writhed.

Sue continued: “She, or he, 'who lets the world or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation.' J. S. Mill's words, those are. I have been reading it up. Why can't you act upon them? I wish to, always.”

“What do I care about J. S. Mill!” moaned he. “I only want to lead a quiet life!” (280)

This quotation shows Sue’s view on the importance of individuality in the sense that people should not imitate others and use their own perception and understanding in making a decision. In the novel, when Jude asks her if she cares for him, Hardy describes her feeling that, “It was a question which in the circumstances Sue did not choose to answer” (206). The morning after jumping out of the window and coming to Jude, she says about her feeling that, “I hope he'll forgive me” and when Jude says: “I'll go to him and explain—”, Sue replies

that “Oh no, you shan't. I don't care for him! He may think what he likes—I shall do just as I choose!” (191). As Hardy says, “She feels at liberty to yield herself as seldom as she chooses” (*Selected Letters* 104). Sue is looking for freedom and independence. In the novel, she says that she wants “an occupation in which I shall be more independent” (125). As Sprechman argues, “Sue was the standard-bearer for Hardy’s causes, and holds up admirably well. She remains a symbol of the early feminist who retains not only her free will and independence despite the difficulties it causes her, but her contradictions, unpredictability, and inconsistencies combine with intelligence and determination to make her the most intriguing hero in Hardy’s fiction” (120).

One of the important features of liberalism, and subsequently of liberal feminism is self-development. Donner and Fumerton argue that, “self-development is the core of well-being for both sexes, and so the basic rights protected by liberalism must extend to women, since it is an essential ingredient of all people’s happiness” (110). As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Mill refers to “intuitive perception”. He believes that a human being, should “use and interpret experience in his own way” to have an authentic existence and be able to develop himself. Hardy manifests this liberal idea of Mill’s in Sue. At the beginning of her relationship with Jude, she is very conservative in social interactions. She was worried about their friendship and society’s view of it. When Jude wants to know about the reason for not replying his letter, Sue says, “she did not answer directly”(194) because she might lose her job at school as “somebody has sent them baseless reports about us, and they say you and I ought to marry as soon as possible, for the sake of my reputation” (195). Also, when Jude confesses his

marriage with Arabella, once again Sue talks about people's view on their relationship and says that they can not continue even in a "friendly way" because other people's view of the relationship between sexes is restricted (208). However, she does begin a relationship with Jude although she is married to Phillotson. When Phillotson writes to Sue that by living with her lover she "would lose everybody's respect and regard", she replies that, "I don't want to be respectable! To produce 'Human development in its richest diversity' (to quote your Humboldt) is to my mind far above respectability" (281-82).

In the postscript (1912) of *Jude*, Hardy, purporting to quote "a German reviewer", went so far as to claim that, "Sue Bridehead, the heroine, was the first delineation in fiction of the woman who was coming into notice in her thousands every year—the woman of the feminist movement—the slight, pale 'bachelor' girl—the intellectualised, emancipated bundles of nerves that modern conditions were producing, mainly in cities as yet" (np). And there are critics who support Hardy in his own assessment of the significance of the novel for feminism. In contrast to those who emphasise the weakness or victim status of his female protagonists, Kranidis argues that "Hardy has often been applauded as the main liberator of female sexuality in fiction" (123). And Sprenchman in *Seeing Women as Men* argues, "it would be difficult to find another book of that time which brings to light so many important issues of the day, among them social problems that arose out of the changing urban-rural scene—including the class system, inequality of education opportunity, sexual morality, and the question of marriage" (102). Likewise Fernando, in "*New women*" in *the Late Victorian Novel*, argues that "the struggle of the Victorian heroine in late nineteenth-century



fiction for liberation from her traditional role and personality comes to a climax in Sue Bridehead” (142). He argues that Sue is “Hardy’s only real intellectual heroine... her opinions, attitudes, and reactions combine to make her one of the best artistic representation of one of the most influential character ideals of the age” (143). He says that, “Sue possesses ...the complete self-knowledge and independence of spirit for which a generation of New Women had striven” (143). Perhaps most emphatically, Blake argues that “in Sue Bridehead [Hardy] dramatizes a daring and plausible try at personal liberation” (“Sue” 726). Although critics talk about Sue as a “liberator of female sexuality” and an intellectual and independent character, hardly any one considers her in the context of liberal feminism. In this chapter I will study Sue’s relationship with liberal feminist thought, especially Mill’s liberal ideas.

In the nineteenth century, because of the traditional separation between men and women, the male-female relationship was corrupted, especially in marriage. Mill and Hardy criticised this situation and believed that the progress of human society depended on the equality and union of men and women. Mill argues that the progress of human society,

afford not only no presumption in favour of this system of inequality of rights, but a strong one against it; and that, so far as the whole course of human improvement up to this time, the whole stream of modern tendencies, warrants any inference on the subject, it is, that this relic of the past is discordant with the future, and must necessarily disappear. (*The Subjection* 233)

Every step in improvement has been so invariably

accompanied by a step made in raising the social position of women, that historians and philosophers have been led to adopt their elevation or debasement as on the whole the surest test and most correct measure of the civilization of a people or an age. (*The Subjection* 238)

Mill makes a direct connection between “the social position of women” and the improvement of society. Marriage as a conventional institution brings about suffering for Sue, Jude and Phillotson. Jude is an ambitious character, however, he falls in love with Arabella and has to marry her because she says that she is pregnant. Later, Arabella leaves Jude and goes to Australia and Jude is then able to leave his home village for Christminster, to follow his ambitions. Sue marries Phillotson but after her marriage she finds that it was a big mistake: she can not have a physical relationship with Phillotson and suffers a lot. She wants to leave Phillotson and he accepts, but after this he loses his job. Sue then lives with Jude but this causes suffering for both of them, because they are unmarried. Because they had children out of wedlock, they could not rent a house. In fact, Hardy shows that marriage as a social and sexual arrangement has brought about mental suffering for both Jude and for Phillotson.

Hardy also emphasises the position of women by referring to Sue’s desire to be associated with a man with “high aims”: Sue says to Jude, “But I did want and long to ennoble some man to high aims; and when I saw you, and knew you wanted to be my comrade, I—shall I confess it?—thought that man might be you. But you take so much tradition on trust that I don't know what to say” (189). Sue shows that that her own “high aims” are undone by Jude’s adherence to

“tradition”. In the novel, in emphasising the important impact of Sue on Jude’s life, Hardy tells the reader, “With Sue as companion he could have renounced his ambitions with a smile. Without her it was inevitable that the reaction from the long strain to which he had subjected himself should affect him disastrously” (142). In this regard, Dale Kramer argues that “evidences in the manuscript indicate that the part of the early plot dealing with Phillotson and Christminster... was inserted into a narrative that stresses Sue’s presence in Christminster as the motivation for Jude’s ambitions; an accompanying concern, with the status of young women in the employment and marriage markets, suggests gender does not invert social critique but intensifies it” (“Hardy and Readers” 169). In fact, Sue’s whole aim is not only to achieve higher goals for herself, but for men and for society as a whole.

Jude is a working-class boy who values the higher education system, but it does not value him and he is not allowed to have access to it. Through his self-tuition, he challenges the way higher education is restricted to the rich. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Mill believes that the problem with the working class is what they are told what they are supposed to be. Hardy clearly depicts a similar idea to Mill’s in the case of Jude. He illustrates Jude’s attempt to educate himself and enter university, to emphasise that Jude’s problems are not an effect of his capacity to learn or what he wants to be. Instead, his problems arise from the nature of the education system which determines what he is supposed to be.

As a working-class boy, Jude struggles to change his situation by educating himself. He is inspired to go to Christminster by Phillotson, believing

that Christminster is “a city of light”, that “the tree of knowledge grows there” and that “it would just suit me” (25). He says to Dr. Vilbert, “I want to learn Latin and Greek myself” (27). He starts learning the grammar books that Phillotson sent for him then goes to Christminster and writes letters to five professors, asking them to accept him as a student. However, he is rejected and advised to stay in his own “sphere” and job. One of the professors writes, “I venture to think that you will have a much better chance of success in life by remaining in your own sphere and sticking to your trade than by adopting any other course” (143).

In order to clarify that Jude’s failure to be admitted to study was not because of his lack of ability, Hardy explains, “Only a wall divided him from those happy young contemporaries of his with whom he shared a common mental life; men who had nothing to do from morning till night but to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest. Only a wall—but what a wall!” (102). Jude also refers to his poverty: “It was my poverty and not my will that consented to be beaten” (411). At the end of the novel, he tells Arabella about his mental abilities: “you think you are the stronger; and so you are, in a physical sense, now... But I am not so weak in another way as you think” (494). Jude is character who is represented in terms of liberal principles, in that he strives for self-development. As Kramer argues, Jude “insists on sticking with the principles he comes to after hard effort, rigorous thought, and frustration; the strain of his effort to live honestly and to advance himself causes him frequently to accept, usually with disastrous consequences, either strong drink or sex, or both” (“Hardy and Readers” 172).

Hardy criticises the law of marriage and emphasises equality and women’s autonomy and self-development. Just as Jude is a character who struggles for his

own advancement and autonomy, so Sue is an autonomous and independent character who stands up for her individual rights. Critics like Michael Steig and Lesley Goodman argue that Sue is a character who changes her mind, which seems to be true. When Jude asks Sue if Phillotson wants to marry her, she replies, “Now don’t be such a silly boy!” and calls Phillotson “an old man” (163). However, when she learns that Jude is to marry, she hastily and without explanation marries Phillotson. In describing the marriage, Hardy says that “in taking Phillotson as a husband, Sue felt that she had done what she ought not to have done” (237). Later, Sue looks for freedom by leaving Phillotson and living with Jude. In the morning after jumping out of the window she says, “I hope he’ll [Phillotson] forgive me”, but in the next sentence says, “I don’t care for him! He may think what he likes-I shall do just as I choose!” (191). Sue rejects Christianity but returns to its conventions at the end of the novel. Blake writes that Hardy shows Sue as a “free woman but a repressive personality, sophisticated but infantile, passionate but sexless, independent but needing men, unconventional but conventional, a feminist but a flirt” (“Sue” 706). At the same time, she says that “Sue Bridehead wants to free herself of the worst of a woman’s fate” (706). While Blake acknowledges Sue’s changes of mind, she stresses her feminist behaviour which motivates her “to free herself of the worst of a woman’s fate” (706).

Sprechman suggests that Sue’s dichotomy is “perhaps because of Hardy’s uncertainty about how to handle the idea of a woman’s sexual free will” (112). Because of this changeability, some critics, like Maria A. Dibattista, call Sue an “enigmatic figure” (168). Kranidis also argues that the “author is unclear about

late Victorian feminist philosophy” (124). She refers to Sue as a character who lacks the capacity for self-determination because of her changeability, that detaches her from the feminist movement. She calls Sue an inadequate character who “fails in the capacity of female and / or sexual liberator” (125). She argues that “while Hardy can still be credited for his frank discussions affirming the existence of female sexuality (as he does in *Tess*) and thereby enhancing the New sexualized female identity promoted by the feminists, Sue Bridehead is sexually impotent” (125). However, I contend that this changeability shows that she cannot completely detach herself from the conservative society. There is a sense in her that motivates her to transgress; in her personality there is a challenge between what she wants to be and what she ought to be. This motivation is rooted in her proto-feminism.

There is a kind of self consciousness in Sue which is not there in other women represented in Hardy’s novel. An innate sense tells her about an undefined identity that no one else can understand, but she struggles to find it. This sense motivates her to find a true self in society, based on her own perception and a desire to detach herself from social conventions. I believe that this changeability is related to what Mikhail Bakhtin calls “authoritative word” and “internally persuasive word”. He makes a distinction between these two terms and explains that,

An individual’s becoming, an ideological process, is characterized precisely by a sharp gap between these two categories: in one, the authoritative word (religious, political, moral; the word of a father, of adults and of teachers, etc.) that does not know internal

persuasiveness, in the other internally persuasive word that is denied all privilege, backed up by no authority at all, and is frequently not even acknowledged in society (not by public opinion, not by scholarly norms, nor by criticism), not even in the legal code. The struggle and dialogic interrelationship of these categories of ideological discourse are what usually determine the history of an individual ideological consciousness. (342)

Internally persuasive discourse—as opposed to one that is externally authoritative—is, as it is affirmed through assimilation, tightly interwoven with “one’s one word.” In the every day rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else’s. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes the mass of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new context... (345-46)

Bakhtin’s point can be illustrated with reference to *Jude the Obscure*, and will be below, but it is worth noting first that in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, Angel’s sleep walking could be read as indicating a tension between the “authoritative word” and “internally persuasive word”. When he is awake, he rejects Tess and is not able to forgive her because of her past. However, when he is sleepwalking, he loves Tess and admires her by saying, “My poor, poor Tess—my dearest, darling

Tess! So sweet, so good, so true!" (249). This implies that there is a duality in his personality. On the one hand, he is attached to the convention. On the other hand, he has a desire to go against it which he cannot fulfil.

Sue struggles to find an identity against the forms permitted by the world she inhabits. Her "[i]nternally persuasive discourse" encourages her to seek individual rights in a society that wants to deny them. Bakhtin believes that in the gap between these two worlds, there is the possibility of exercising control over one's destiny and individual choice. As a proto-feminist, Sue decides to use her own "[i]nternal persuasive discourse" which is "freely" "developed", using it to find "new material" and "new conditions". Like Tess, Sue uses her own principles to "respond" to a society that is not able to "acknowledge" feminism and consequently leads to her death. If she did not feel this way, she could accept silence and live with Phillotson.

In fact, then, we can explain the changeability or inconsistency in Sue's behaviour as reflecting the conflict between her own proto-feminism and the pressures of the society. Millett argues that "Hardy is to be commended for creating in Sue an intelligent rebel against sexual politics and in understanding the forces which defeat such a rebel" (134). In other words, there is a kind of challenge between what Bakhtin calls the "authoritative word" and the "internally persuasive word". At the end of the novel, when Sue returns to conventions, she says to Jude, "there is something external to us which says, 'you shan't! First it said, 'You shan't learn!' Then it said, 'you shan't labour!' Now it says, 'you shan't love'" (426). She refers to the force of "authoritative word" which comes over her "internally persuasive word". She tries to follow her own principles and does not



care for what people might think. However, at the end of the novel the pressure of the society is so strong that she can not survive. Her return to a conventional life style does not detract from the feminist nature of her actions beforehand, but shows how strong the society was against feminist views, a strength that leads to her living death.

It seems that Hardy also anticipates Bakhtin's view by making a distinction between "principles" and "instincts". In the novel, Phillotson refers to a similar kind of belief by saying that he can find a kind of the tension between "principle", and his "instincts" which once "had allowed him to give Sue her liberty and now enabled him to regard her as none the worse for her life with Jude" (451). Penny Boumelha argues that because of tension between "individual sexual experience and its public discourses, whether scientific or moral", "'I can't explain' becomes a kind of motto ... particularly in relation to sex" (140) for Jude and Sue. "I can't explain" illustrates a kind of confusion which causes changeability in Sue, which can be linked back to Bakhtin's notion of the "struggle and dialogic interrelationship of ... categories of discourse" which, in this case, cannot easily be reconciled.

Finally, although the pressure of society forces Sue to return to conventions, she maintains her unconventional beliefs. Kranidis argues that,

Hardy's treatment of Sue Bridehead reveals that he was familiar with the feminist agenda but less with its underpinnings... she lacks the self determination that distinguished New Women from other women socially, and recoils from the burden of responsibility such self-command requires... as a woman ready and willing to

subordinate her own desire to societal norms, Sue may serve as a model of Hardy's own view of, and puzzlement over, the New Woman. (124)

Kranidis overstates Sue's willingness: I contend that she is not "willing to subordinate her own desire to societal norms". It is obvious that she goes back to the conventions, but there is no sense of willingness or desire in her to return to the church. In fact, there is a conflict, for she still has a kind of feeling towards Jude, at the same time that she gives up her former defiance. At the end of the novel, when she is going to live with Phillotson, she says to Jude, "I love you as much as ever! Only--I ought not to love you—any more. Oh I must not anymore" (442). And when Phillotson tells her, "under the affection of independent views you are as enslaved to the social code as any woman I know!" Sue replies, "Not mentally. But I have not the courage of my views" (302). In fact, she is not "willing to subordinate" and is not mentally enslaved, but while it is true that she returns to the church and conventions, she at least tries to escape from the common fate of women. In other words, while characters like Tess's mother are "ready and willing to subordinate her own desire to social norms", Sue is not.

Robert B. Heilman in his article "Hardy's Sue Bridehead" refers to the changeability in Sue's behaviour and says that "Hardy identifies, as a natural accompaniment of her shifting of attitude and mood, a tendency to shift ground under pressure" (311). He adds that, "like traditional tragic heroes, she believes that she can dictate terms and clothe herself in special immunities; like them, she has finally to reckon with neglected elements in herself and in the order of life" (315). Although Heilman refers to the pressure of society as a reason for her

changeability, he states that at the end of the novel, Sue not only finds a neglected element in herself but also “comes into some remarkable self-knowledge” (315-16). However, I believe that the pressures of the social conventions and narrative events are so strong that they lead her to return to the church. What Sue comes into at the end is not “self-knowledge” but public and patriarchal knowledge. Self-knowledge, in the case of Sue, is whatever she did before returning to the norm, a kind of knowledge that she acquires by herself and from her own observation of life but that she is not able to sustain her faith in.

During the Victorian age, middle-class women were discouraged from working outside their homes and “forced into economic dependence upon men”. Sometime they prefer to stay with the “abuser rather than face the poverty that would follow any attempt at independent life” (Donner and Fumerton 114). In contrast with other members of the middle class, Sue is a character struggling to find a kind of financial independence as part of her struggle for emotional and intellectual independence. Mill believes that, “The power of earning is essential to the dignity of a woman, if she has not independent property” (*The Subjection* 264). Before Sue marries Phillotson, Jude asks him to give Sue a job at school, and Phillotson asks him, “Does she really think of adopting teaching as a profession?” Jude answers that “she was disposed to do so” (126). Although Phillotson says that “her time would be wasted quite, the salary being merely nominal” (126), Sue is so ambitious in finding a job that she accepts the job. This shows that to be financially independent and to find her autonomy, she accepts a job even with a low salary.

Sue struggles to be an autonomous character, and a key part of this is her

struggle for sexual and emotional autonomy. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the Victorian feminist campaign aimed at emancipating women from “sex slavery” involved questioning the double standard of sexual morality that Hardy implicitly refers to in *Tess*. One of the crucial principles of these feminist campaigns was “the assertion of a woman’s right to control her own body” (Jackson 25). In relation to sexual autonomy during the Victorian age, Shanley in “Marital Slavery and Friendship” says “the law of marriage deprived a woman of many of the normal powers of autonomous adults, from... defending her bodily autonomy by resisting unwanted sexual relationship” (234). Mill calls this action “human function” and explains a marriage in which the husband could “Claim from her and enforce the lowest degradation of a human being, that of being made the instrument of an animal function contrary to her inclinations... she is held in this worst description of slavery as to her own person” (*The Subjection* 248). As Shanley points out, Mill criticises a system in which after marriage, “The legal personality of the woman was subsumed in that of her husband; and the abuses of human dignity permitted by custom and law within marriage were egregious (231). Hardy shared the same view, criticising the law of marriage in which women do not have control over their body. Thus Sprechman argues that, “much like John Stuart Mill, [Sue] sees a wife’s duty of submission as akin to slavery” (111).

Sue considers her sexual relationship with Phillotson a “torture” and “adultery”. She says, “What tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes, good as he is morally” (267). At another point, she says to Phillotson, “For a man and woman to live on intimate

terms when one feels as I do is adultery ... however legal” (279). Donner and Fumerton call this “legalized marital rape” (112). At the end of the novel, when Sue decides to marry Phillotson against her wish, and in circumstance in which she loves another, Jude calls it “a fanatic prostitution” (455). Morgan in *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* refers to Sue’s consciousness about rights over her body, arguing that “Sue does keep the physical facts of life in constant prominence, and this heightens her consciousness of a woman’s right to sole control over her own body” (125). Hence, both Mill and Hardy believe that being forced to have an unwanted sexual relationship within marriage diminishes any sense of sexual and emotional autonomy in women, becoming instead a kind of prostitution.

More broadly, Mill refers to the negative effect of public interference in the private life of individuals. He argues that, “The strongest of all the arguments against the interference of the public with purely personal conduct, is that when it does interfere, the odds are that it interferes wrongly, and in the wrong place” (*On Liberty* 146). Like Mill, Hardy illustrates how the interference of public opinion adversely affects the private life of Jude and Sue. As a result of interference from the public, both Jude and Sue are dismissed from their job of restoring the Ten Commandments painted on the wall of the church. Hardy says of their restoration work that, “The visitors gave one more glance, as if to see whether Jude and Sue had left the ‘nots’ out likewise and then severally left the church” (380). Sue says, “I can’t *bear* that they, and everybody, should think people wicked because they may have chosen to live their own way! It is really these opinions that make the best intentioned people reckless, and actually become immoral!”(380). When Jude

and Sue sit down to lunch, the contractor Willis comes and says, “Here—I’ve just had a complaint about this... I am afraid I must ask you and her to leave off, and let somebody else finish this! It is best, to avoid all unpleasantness” (381). This also contributes to their tragic end.

The interference of people in their lives causes difficulty for them in finding accommodation. When they find a place, the landlady asks Sue, “Are you really a married woman?”, and Sue explains that for them,

her husband and herself had each been unhappy in their first marriages, after which, terrified at the thought of a second irrevocable union, and lest the conditions of the contract should kill their love, yet wishing to be together, they had literally not found the courage to repeat it, though they had attempted it two or three times. (417)

Hardy explains that, “Though in her own sense of the words she was a married woman, in the landlady’s sense she was not”. And when landlord understands their condition he says, “Now who wants such a woman here?”(417).

Interference from the public in personal lives is a part of a common system of sexual morality that denies people’s right to make their own decision about their sexual life. Consequently, the fact that Jude and Sue are living together unmarried has implications for basic aspects of life such as finding a place to live. The tragedy of Sue and Jude is partly because of what Hardy calls “the triumph of the crowd over the hero, of the commonplace majority over the exceptional few” (quoted in Jacobus 317).

In Chapter Two, I referred to the views of liberal feminists, who believe

that “feminists must criticize the continuing presence of barriers, prejudice, discrimination, and inequality” (Rowland-Serdar and Schwartz-Shea 606). Mill believes that customs are the great enemy of human beings (Collini 36). Sue, like Tess, is a liberal proto-feminist who criticises different aspects of conventional society such as Christianity and the institution of marriage. Sue calls these conventions “barbarous” (270), saying to Jude that, “When people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times that we have the unhappiness to live in, what will they say” (270). Sue smokes cigarettes, which at the time was common for men but not women. Ann Ardis writes that, “The gesture of smoking a cigarette may seem ridiculously insignificant” (26), but, “As the new woman questions the naturalness of gender roles through even this small gesture of lighting a cigarette”, the New Woman criticises the “naturalness” of “gender-based division of labor”, “the ideal of the bourgeois home” (26). Similarly, by smoking cigarettes and wearing Jude’s clothes, Sue criticises the conventional and patriarchal society.

Apart from smoking, Sue wears Jude’s clothes to question what Ardis calls the “naturalness” of the “gender-based division of labor” (26). In this way, she is attempting to show a kind of equality between the sexes. Rod Edmond argues that in late nineteenth-century feminism there was a tendency towards transvestitism. He adds that this tendency was “nicely captured by a Du Maurier cartoon in *Punch* in 1891, in which a young woman wearing her brother’s shirt, tie, coat, and hat” (109). Edmond argues that in nineteenth-century writings, “the frequent recurrence of the androgyny theme, its realization in terms of transvestism, and the blurring of gender lines it expresses, suggest a deep anxiety

about gender in nineteenth-century Britain” (109). He adds that transvestism, for the New Woman, was a way of resisting the “increasing emphasis on gender difference” and “the passive, home- and child-oriented stereotype” (109). One of the examples that Edmond uses for his argument is Sue who wears Jude’s clothes. Marjorie Garber also in a study about the historical significants of cross-dressing, in *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety*, argues about cross-dressing that,

One of the most important aspects of cross-dressing is the way in which it offers a challenge to the easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of ‘female’ and ‘male’ whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural. (10)

Thus Morgan argues that this act of Sue’s shows that, “she wishes gender boundaries to be dissolved and reconfigured” (*The Ashgate* 400). Therefore, Sue as a Victorian woman who represents liberal ideas, is attempting to cross the border of male and female gender.

Thomas Hardy had a different view on marriage in his time. He was married twice but was not happy with either marriage. Hardy’s view on marriage is to some extent based on his own experiences. Hardy fell in love with Emma Lavinia Gifford and married her in 1873. However, they separated after a while as Hardy fell out of love with her. After Gifford’s death, Hardy married Florence Emily Dugdale, in 1914, who had been his secretary. In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy criticises what he calls “a permanent contract on a temporary feeling” (81). In the novel, Jude thinks about his life with Arabella that, “Their lives were ruined ... ruined by the fundamental error of their matrimonial union: that of having based a



permanent contract on a temporary feeling which had no necessary connection with affinities that alone render a lifelong comradeship tolerable” (81). When Phillotson says to Sue that “you vowed to love me”, she says, “It is as culpable to bind yourself to love always as to believe a creed always, and as silly as to vow always to like a particular food or drink” (280). Sue resists the idea of conventional marriage, and by depicting characters like Sue and Tess, Hardy seems to be supporting liberalisation of the marriage law for women. Walls argues that, “The New Woman novels, enlivening reform rhetoric even while operating within the boundaries of conformist culture, created a new mode of activism for Victorian women that enable them to proffer critique about marriage and society, although (and often sadly) from within the home: a tactic I term ‘domestic feminism’” (229).

For Sue, marriage is a hierarchical relationship when compared with friendship; it is a contract between men as superiors and women as dependants. As a proto-feminist, she criticises the marriage system “within the boundaries of conformist culture”. In the circumstance in which conventional marriage was based on a hierarchical relationship, Sue does not “regard marriage as a sacrament” (207). Kate Millett also believes that *Jude the Obscure* has made “a significant contribution to the literature of the sexual revolution... for its savage criticism of institutions—marriage and sexual ownership—its impassioned plea for easy divorce” (133).

Mill and Hardy both criticise the hierarchal relationship in marriage. Mill emphasises that a “perfect equality” should be located between the sexes, and explains that,

The principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong in itself, and now one of chief hindrances to human improvement; and . . . it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other. (*The Subjection* 219)

Nothing more is needed for the complete removal of [the almost despotic power of husbands over wives] than that wives should have the same rights and should receive the same protection of law in the same manner, as all other persons. (*CW* 18: 298)

In criticising the inequality between the sexes, Hardy shows that Sue attacks the institution of marriage which allows a man to have dominance over his wife. Sue has to behave based on her husband's will. Morgan says that Phillotson “can spend until midnight ‘balancing the school register’” and ... he can ascend to the nuptial chambers quite as if sexual intercourse with his wife were just part of the day's functions” (*Women and Sexuality* 121).

An argument that Mill and Hardy make in supporting sexual equality is that there can be a kind of agreement between the sexes which does not support the law of the strongest. Mill believes that neither law nor experience show that “Any theoretical inequality of power should exist between the partners or that the partnership should have any other conditions than what they may themselves appoint by their articles of agreement” (*The Subjection* 256). After her marriage, when Sue feels that she has made a mistake in her decision about marrying

Phillotson, he allows her to go and live with Jude. Sue admits Phillotson was kind to her and gave her “every liberty” (277).

One of the important aspects of liberal feminism is “responsibility to self [which] means caring for oneself as a valuable human being” (Rowland-Serdar and Schwartz-Shea 620). Sue cares for herself as a valuable human being. She criticises a marriage system which humiliates women. She compares the role of women in this system with that of a domestic animal. She says to Jude that,

I have been looking at the marriage service in the prayer-book, and it seems to me very humiliating that a giver-away should be required at all. According to the ceremony as there printed, my bridegroom chooses me of his own will and pleasure; but I don't choose him. Somebody gives me to him, like a she-ass or she-goat, or any other domestic animal. (211)

It seems that Sue understands a women's position in the marriage institution, which is based on the choices of men and degrades women. This is similar to Mill's view. Mill compares women's conditions in conventional and patriarchal marriage with slavery. He argues that, “it is the primitive state of slavery lasting on, through successive mitigations and modifications occasioned by the same causes which have softened the general manners, and brought all human relations more under the control of justice and the influence of humanity. It has not lost the taint of its brutal origin” (*The Subjection* 222).

Mill believes that, “The law of servitude in marriage is a monstrous contradiction to all the principles of the modern world, and to all the experience through which those principles have been slowly and painfully worked out” (*The*

*Subjection* 295). He adds that “marriage is the only actual bondage known to our law. There remain no legal slaves, except the mistress of every house” (*The Subjection* 295). He explains that after marriage, a woman “vows a lifelong obedience to him” and “She can do no act whatever but by his permission”; he concludes that “In this respect the wife's position under the common law of England is worse than that of slaves in the laws of many countries” (*The Subjection* 246-47). Hardy has a similar view on marriage and represents the marriage contract as a trap. Blake notes that Sue “speaks of sex and marriage as the opposite of freedom” (“Sue” 715). In the novel, Hardy shows Jude’s feeling of being “caught” and says,

He was inclined to inquire what he had done, or she lost, for that matter, that he deserved to be caught in a gin which would cripple him, if not her also, for the rest of a lifetime? There was perhaps something fortunate in the fact that the immediate reason of his marriage had proved to be non-existent. But the marriage remained. (72)

Sue also refers to the legal marriage as a trap. She says, “how hopelessly vulgar an institution legal marriage is—a sort of trap to catch a man—I can't bear to think of it” (340). In another part of the novel she says that, “what others may feel confident in I feel doubts of—my being proof against the sordid conditions of a business contract again!” (358). She is even unhappy because of her first marriage and “terrified at the thought of a second irrevocable union, and lest the conditions of the contract should kill their love” (317).

Mill emphasises the importance of reforming the law of marriage along

with changing people's opinions. He believes that the subjection of women cannot be ended without such changes. He argues that for society to progress, apart from changing the law, men also need to give up the patriarchal position that society gives them from childhood. Mill says that men, "worship their own will as such a grand thing that it is actually the law for another rational being. There is nothing which men so easily learn as this self-worship: all privileged persons, and all privileged classes, have had it" (*The Subjection* 258). In another place, he explains that, "I believe that their [women's] disabilities are only clung to in order to maintain their subordination in domestic life; because the generality of the male sex cannot yet tolerate the idea of living with an equal" (Warnock X).

Hardy refers to the artificiality, "immorality" and "tragic dramas" of human law in relation to marriage. In a letter to Edward Clodd, Hardy writes about *Jude* that it "makes only an objective use of marriage & its superstitions a one, & only one, of the antagonistic forces in the tragedy... I can only state (most imperfectly, alas!) cases in which natural & human laws create tragic dramas" (*Selected Letters* 100-01). Sue loves Jude but refuses to marry him. In a letter to Edmund Gosse, who published his second review of *Jude* in *Cosmopolis*, Hardy writes that "one reason for fearing the marriage ceremony is that she fears it wd be breaking faith with Jude... while uncontracted she feels at liberty to yield herself as seldom as she chooses" (104). In the novel, Sue says to Jude that her problem with Phillotson was because of the law of marriage as a contract between them. She says, "Don't you dread the attitude that insensibly arises out of legal obligation? Don't you think it is destructive to a passion whose essence is its gratuitousness?" (341-42). In another part of the novel, Jude says to Sue, "the

artificial system of things, under which the normal sex-impulses are turned into devilish domestic gins and springs to noose and hold back those who want to progress” (272). In a letter to Maurice Hewlett, a novelist and poet, Hardy writes that “what we call immorality, irreligion. &c, are often true morality, true religion, quite freely to the end” (*Selected Letters* 224).

Hardy represents true morality in Tess and Sue as they follow their nature and what they think is the right thing to do, although their behaviour seems immoral and irregular from the perspective of the public. In a letter to Roden Noel, Hardy writes about Tess that, “reading over the story after it was finished, the conviction was thrust upon me, without any straining or wish for it on my own part—rather, indeed, with some surprise—that the heroine was essentially pure—purer than many a so-called unsullied virgin; therefore I call her so” (*Selected Letters* 76). Regarding Sue, Jude says that, “I believe you are as innocent as you are unconventional” (178). Although they are immoral in their views of society, to represent them as moral characters, Hardy spiritualises both Tess and Sue. Jude believes that Sue is “a sort of fay, or sprite—not a woman!” (445) and refers to her “phantasmal, bodiless creature” (325). He also spiritualises Tess in the form of her sister Liza-Lu. Perhaps by doing so, he refers to a kind of higher moral quality in them in comparison with people who consider them fallen women.

Mill believes that the condition of women occurs not only because of the “actual law” but also because of “custom equivalent to law” (CW 21: 366). Hardy represents a similar view by depicting different conditions in his novels. As I referred, in *Tess*, both social institutions or “actual law” and the personal relationship between sexes or customs are problematic, causing suffering for Tess.

Neither Angel nor Alec is able to understand Tess's situation and thoughts; society also rejects her in different ways. However, in *Jude* the problem is not related to the mutual understanding between sexes; it is the social institution which is not able to understand them. Jude and Phillotson give up their patriarchal positions. Jude loves Sue. He knows that Sue is going to marry Phillotson but does not try to prevent her from marrying him. After their marriage, Sue asks Phillotson to let her go and he does. Hardy shows that Phillotson has a kind of understanding. In his speech to his friend, Gillingham, Phillotson says that, "Now when a woman jumps out of window without caring whether she breaks her neck or no, she's not to be mistaken; and this being the case I have come to a conclusion: that it is wrong to so torture a fellow-creature any longer; and I won't be the inhuman wretch to do it, cost what it may!" (288). He wants Sue to behave based on her own decisions. At the end of novel, when Sue decides to remarry Phillotson, Jude says to her, "I loved you, and you loved me; and we closed with each other; and that made the marriage. We still love—you as well as I—know it, Sue! Therefore our marriage is not cancelled" (454). However, all characters suffer because of laws. In other words, in *Tess*, Hardy represents the destructive effect of dominant customs in the life of both sexes. In *Jude*, Hardy solves the problem of patriarchal customs but not the actual law which causes the characters to suffer. This shows that, for the progress of a society, the reform of both law and custom is needed.

William Deresiewicz writes that, "as standard social practice as well as social ideology, friendship between the sexes appears to have been nonexistent before the 19th century", and the reason for this was "the subordination of women to men; the separation of male and female spheres; the confinement of women to

the roles of daughter, wife and mother” (56). One of the important phases of liberalism, in the late Victorian age, was cultural changing in the relationship between both the two sexes. As noted, for Sue marriage is a “vulgar” institution, “a business contract” and “irrevocable union”. Sue “chooses” to follow her own understanding of a relationship between men and women. She says to Jude, “Fewer women like marriage than you suppose, only they enter into it for the dignity it is assumed to confer, and the social advantages it gains them sometimes—a dignity and an advantage that I am quite wiling to do without” (312). Rejecting marriage and seeking a kind of freedom in friendship shows her individuality and independence. As Elizabeth Langland argues,

Sue’s attitudes toward sex and marriage provide the clearest measure of the distance separating her ambitions and desires from social possibilities shaping her self-realization. They provide the clearest measure of her cohesive personality. Her feeling about marriage and sex derive from a sense of her individuality and independence, which seem to her threatened by sexual or formal commitment. Sue wants an identity of her own. She does not see marriage as her ultimate goal in life. She is fearful of submerging her identity in that of another or worse, of becoming a kind of chattel. (22)

Hardy questions marriage as a goal for women, asking “whether marriage, as we at present understand it, is such a desirable goal for all women as it is assumed to be” (quoted in “Sue the Obscure” 310).

Sprechman argues that “Sue never espouses the idea that marriage is



women's greatest ally, a concept prevalent in Victorian society, but, instead, that it kills desire and love" (119). Although they have different views on divorce, that I mentioned in the Introduction, the view of Hardy and Mill on marriage as a destination for women is to some extent similar. Mill criticises marriage which is a "destination appointed by society for women, the prospect they are brought up to, and the object which it is intended should be sought by all of them" (*The Subjection* 246). He agrees that in a context in which "men are determined that the law of marriage shall be a law of despotism", "all women of spirit and capacity should prefer doing most anything else, not in their own eyes degrading, rather than marry, when marrying is giving themselves a master and a master too of all their earthy possessions" (*The Subjection* 245).

Sue lives with an undergraduate and has a "friendly intimacy" (182) with him but she does not wish to marry him. After Jude confesses his past marriage, she hastily marries Phillotson but cannot accept a sexual relationship with him. Then, she leaves Phillotson to live with Jude out of wedlock. She is looking for a kind of unconventional relationship. Her desired relationship with men is a friendship status in which she has more freedom, as opposed to a conventional married state as a wife who is subjugated by a man. She feels more liberty and freedom in friendship than in marriage. When she is attempting to convince Phillotson to let her go with Jude, she says "be my friend and have pity" (279). She asks him "Why can't we agree to free each other? We made the compact, and surely we can cancel it—not legally of course; but we can morally... Then we might be friends, and meet without pain to either" (279). In a response to Jude, she speaks "with the freedom of a friend" (121). She considers Jude as a friend

and not as a person who possesses her. She says, “Jude, please still keep me as your friend and associate” (197). She considers herself equal with men. As noted, in the novel, she says, “My life has been entirely shaped by what people call a peculiarity in me. I have no fear of men, as such, nor of their books. I have mixed with them—one or two of them particularly—almost as one of their own sex” (182).

Sue is not a powerless character as she does not accept subjugation. She has courage enough openly to criticise conventional systems like marriage and religion. The changeability of her behaviour, for example, leaving the church and returning to it at the end of the novel, refers to a challenge between what Bakhtin calls the “authoritative word” and “internally persuasive word”. The pressure of society which defines the “authoritative word” is so strong that it overcomes Sue’s feminism which is the “internally persuasive word”. The victory of the “authoritative word” does not detract from the feminist effectiveness of her actions beforehand, however, although it does illustrate how strong the pressure of society was on the feminist view. It was so strong that it causes a kind of death for Sue. In the next chapter, I will investigate Hardy’s novelistic form and its relation to feminism and social criticism. I will illustrate the significance of Tess and Sue’s death. Although the end of Hardy’s novels are unhappy, the deaths of the protagonists are valuable and meaningful.

## Chapter Four: Hardy's Novelistic Form

The form that Hardy uses in *Tess* and *Jude* is tragedy. He chooses to depict the death of his character at the end of his novel because a happy ending would have weakened the tragic form of his novels. At the same time, his novels end with an important message and create sympathy in the readers. Hardy was familiar with Shakespeare's plays and read them in his youth. Critics believe that his definition of tragedy was influenced by Shakespearian and Aristotelian tragedy. In the Postscript to *Jude the Obscure*, in April 1912, Hardy refers to "Aristotelian qualities" (np) in tragedy. Apart from Shakespearian and Aristotelian tragedy, Jakob Lothe, in a study of variants on genre in Hardy's novels, says that Hardy was influenced by the common definition of tragedy in the Victorian era (114). Jeannette King in *Tragedy in the Victorian Novel* argues that "in fiction, as in life, it usually meant death or some equally final disaster" which suggested "a vision of life" and "a tragic philosophy" (2). Hardy's "vision of life" and "philosophy" involved proto-feminism, the tragic aspect of which is that society is not able to accept behaviours which are seen as lying beyond patriarchy; his characters, in the end, are not able to cultivate even a primary sense of feminism.

The only way that either Tess or Sue could escape a tragic end would have been by accepting the common fate, like many other Victorian women. In that sense, Hardy's novels confirm Mill's observation that there is a convention of accepting fate: "it will be said, the rule of men over women differs from all these others in not being a rule of force: it is accepted voluntarily; women make no complaint, and are consenting parties to it" (*The Subjection* 231). However, a kind of self-belief motivates Hardy's protagonists in these novels to resist what they

find wrong, although common or legal. Tess could accept marriage to Angel and Sue could stay with Phillotson. They would then escape from their tragic end, but also destroy their own emotions and desires as women. In this chapter, I will show how tragedy as the form of these two novels is connected to their feminist content.

Before 1860, as Dale Kramer argues, for Victorians the tragic art was a “reflector of essential qualities of their culture” (*Tess* 71). He adds that,

Whereas in the early decades of Victoria’s reign Greek exempla are used as models, and thus provide an aura of intellectuality and rationality, after 1860 the example of Greek tragedy became less influential... and the Victorians’ ideas that tragedy needed to be based on stable conditions became less sustainable. The “decline” of Greek models as a standard occurs. (*Tess* 73)

Kramer suggests, then that Victorians “accept[ed] unquestioningly certain features of life and social existence” because they relied on the Greek form of tragedy, which presumed the value of social stability and conventions (*Tess* 72). However, after 1860, “conventionality as never before became a liability to ‘seeing things as they really are’ and a roadblock to progress” (*Tess* 72).

Kramer writes that Hardy “was able to exploit and undercut conventionality in *Tess*” (*Tess* 73). Although he exploits the conventionality for dramatic purpose, he supports the ideas that Tess and Sue are representing. In this way, Hardy is encouraging people to think beyond convention. Their resistance goes along with suffering and pain. I believe that the kind of suffering that emerges out of their resistance is meaningful - unlike Greek tragedy, these two novels do not show the writer as a supporter of convention. By rejecting the

conventional, perhaps Hardy is encouraging women to resist conventions which tend to control them.

On tragedy itself, Hardy argues, “A plot, or tragedy, should arise from the gradual closing in of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices, and ambitions, by reason of the characters taking no trouble to ward off the disastrous events produced by the said passions, prejudices, and ambitions” (Hardy and Hardy 122). By placing “plot” and “tragedy” as equivalent to each other, Hardy is suggesting the centrality of tragedy to his novelistic practice. Related to this view of Hardy on tragedy, Lothe argues that “Hardy conceives tragedy as partaking of narrative form as well as content”. Lothe adds that the word “ordinary is interestingly related to ‘situation’ which can be uncommon and challenging” (115). This is related to my argument, in the previous chapter, about the unnatural condition which seems to be natural: Hardy depicts characters who are aware of the unnaturalness of what sounds natural. King argues that “Tragedy arises out of the gap between what the character is — his true self — and what he does — the identity he presents to the outside world” (*Tragedy* 116). However, I want to argue a slightly different point: that the tragedy of Hardy’s characters emerges from the gap between what they want to be and what they are allowed to be, a gap between what Bakhtin calls “authoritative word” and the “internally persuasive word”. As King states, the tragedy in Hardy’s novels is created by a conflict between “things inherent” and “human institutions” (*Tragedy* 21). Hardy’s own definition of “the best tragedy... is that of the WORTHY encompassed by the INEVITABLE” (Florence Emily Hardy 14). The tragic end of both Tess and Sue is inevitable because they are “worthy” and choose to be

different. Apart from the inevitable tragic end, the patriarchal system is also inevitable because Tess and Sue, who are worthy, cannot defeat it.

The unhappy ending in Hardy's novels is a controversial issue among critics. We feel sympathy for Tess at the end of the novel. In the preface to the fifth and later editions, Hardy writes that, "let me repeat that a novel is an impression, not an argument" (26). This refers to a distinction that Hardy made between emotion and intellects. At the same time, the impression of sympathy which is created in readers of the Victorian age can help them to think about what Tess did in her life and try to do something for themselves. Also, they might have thought that the characters' fatal ends are the result of rejecting conventions, and consider the novels to be indicating support for social conventions. Sue feels regret and believes that her way and ideas were a big mistake, and because of that returns to the church. But still she is not sure about her stand. Probably, this sense of regret might have had a negative effect on the reader, who might have criticised Sue for destroying Jude's and her life. At the same time, by giving up her ideas, she might have brought the idea to readers that it is not possible to resist convention in such a society. In other words, in a context in which women are supportive of male conventions, readers were not able to consider Sue as a feminist. Heilman argues that, "a Christian apologist might argue that her history shows the inescapability of Christian thought; an anti-Christian, that she is the victim of wrong ideas without which she would have been saved" (317). Hence, some readers and critics may interpret Sue and Tess from a conventional perspective and say that a kind of fatal punishment comes to their life because of their rebellion. This kind of view point leads to see Hardy as an anti-feminist.

However, my view is that Hardy has a feminist perspective on Sue's plight. Although she is defeated by social conventions, she at least does strive to follow her own beliefs in a society where people cannot accept her ideas. This is better than accepting the taboos and restrictions in a male dominated society. In a letter to Lady Jeune, Hardy writes, "My only fear having been that it was too much a book of moral teaching ... I felt that by heroine's recantation of all her views, at the end of the story, & becoming a penance-seeking Christian, I was almost too High-Churchy" (*Selected Letters* 103).

Hardy, like Sue and Tess, is a feminist who wants women to look at their world in a different way from what they have been permitted. By depicting a character like Tess, he is trying to motivate women to fight for their freedom. He wants to show them a new kind of world. In other words, Hardy is trying to invite women to challenge all the permitted norms and rules. Hardy's purpose is not simply showing the oppression of women in society; he is trying to encourage women to resist oppression instead of accepting it. In a letter, Hardy writes about *Tess* that "the intention of the book is honest and good" (*Selected Letters* 105). He adds that "'Paradoxical morality' may have a very great deal to say for itself, especially in a work of fiction" (*Selected Letters* 76).

Some critics believe that the tragic end of Tess and Sue is because of fate or heredity. While King acknowledges Tess's aspiration for a better life, she argues that her past deeds and heredity is the cause of her tragedy. She explains,

Hardy defines tragedy in relation to the principle of *peripeteia* or reversal... the reversal is commonly highlighted in a 'recognition scene', in which the tragic hero is brought face to face with the past

he tried to scape... after the death of her illegitimate child, the offspring of her seduction by Alec d'Urberville, Tess finds hope in the seasonal renewal of life, and is inspired to go on in search of a better life by the belief that the past and its consequences would be swallowed up with the passage of time. But she forgets that this natural rhythm is cyclical. The 'phase' of the novel called 'The Consequences' shows her suffering to be a consequence not only of her seduction, but of her father's vainglorious attempts to reclaim his former aristocratic ancestry... The structure of tragedy emphasises that 'our evil actions do not remain isolated in the past'.  
*(Tragedy 97)*

King emphasises that the tragedy of Tess is brought about by the past. However, I contend that these are not the main reasons for her tragedy. After being seduced by Alec, he proposes to her but she does not accept. Her confession is also against the common behaviour of the time. After the publication of *Tess*, Hardy got letters from women with similar experiences who said that they had never confessed their past to their husbands. Hence, my conception is that Tess's tragedy is caused because of what she wants to be and makes an attempt to be. Tess is looking for her identity and autonomous self which is evidence of her feminism. However, society is not able to accommodate it, and this leads to her tragedy. In support of my concept, Mill argues,

The majority, being satisfied with the ways of mankind as they now are (for it is they who make them what they are), cannot comprehend why those ways should not be good enough for



everybody; and what is more, spontaneity forms no part of the ideal of the majority of moral and social reformers, but is rather looked on with jealousy, as a troublesome and perhaps rebellious obstruction to the general acceptance of what these reformers, in their own judgment, think would be best for mankind. (*On Liberty* 122)

The tragedy of Tess and Sue is related to what Mill says: most in Victorian society “can not comprehend” the new feminist ideas and consider such views as an obstacle to the acceptance of the belief of the majority. At the end of the novel, Sue says that, “Perhaps as we couldn’t conscientiously marry at first in the old-fashioned way, we ought to have parted. Perhaps the world is not illuminated enough for such experiments as ours! Who were we, to think we could act as pioneers” (444). Jude also says, “As for Sue and me when we were at our own best, long ago—when our minds were clear, and our love of truth fearless—the time was not ripe for us! Our ideas were fifty years too soon to be any good to us. And so the resistance they met with brought reaction in her, and recklessness and ruin on me!”(505). Their tragedy is because of their choice to be different; it is society which can not keep up with them.

Mill explains that “when the opinions of masses of merely averaged men are everywhere become or becoming the dominant power... the mere example of nonconformity, the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service” (*On Liberty* 131). Although Tess and Sue are defeated at the end, their “refusal to bend the knee to custom” is a kind of service that I call feminism. Mary Jacobus argues that, “sex with love has brought only the death of [Sue’s] children: sex

without love now brings the death of her deepest self” (322). She says that Sue’s final submission is, “the subjection of the female to a covertly sadistic sexual code which demands the total surrender of her consciousness, individuality, and specialness” (322). In fact, even if Sue did what was customary and had stayed with Phillotson from the very beginning, she still would have had a tragic end, the “death of her deepest self”.

Throughout *Tess*, as I clarified in Chapter Two, Hardy shows his sympathy with Tess and depicts her as a character who has agency. This is in a context where the ideal woman was a submissive and passive creature who had the roles of mother, daughter or wife, was thought unable to think rationally. A raped woman like Tess, who has a child out of wedlock, is considered a fallen woman, but Hardy depicts Tess as the opposite of all these ideas. In 1891, as Terence R. Wright says, the novel was called “as profoundly immoral and dangerous a book as a young person can read” (182). In his letter to Mr Harrison, positivist thinker and prolific writer, Hardy adds that “in this country the girls who made the mistake of Tess almost invariably lead chaste lives thereafter, even under strong temptation” (*Selected Letters* 68). Hardy emphasises the matter of agency by saying “the mistake of Tess”: it was “her mistake” and no-one else’s. However, at the end of the novel when she is hanged, Hardy says “the president of Immortals had ended his sport with Tess” (384). At this point Hardy is talking about the work of fate and heredity, the fact that people are not in control of their actions. Although there is inconsistency in *Tess* and Hardy represents Tess as having agency and not having agency, as being at fault and not being at fault, I believe that the weight of the novel is ultimately in favour of agency.

Religion also plays a part in the tragic end of Hardy's characters. Tess and Sue want to be free from relation to the church and its codes. However, society does not allow them to behave in ways based on their own desires. Freedom of thought is an example of individuality which is one of the basic tenets of liberalism. Liberalism allows people to believe in what they want, it allows them to believe in God or not. Hardy shows the loss or absence of faith that he experienced in his life, in his characters. Although Tess believes in religion, she rejects her faith at the end of the novel. She finds that she could not find the kind of freedom she is looking for in religion. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, when she goes to the church while she is pregnant, people whisper to each other and Tess knows that what they whisper about. She feels "she could come to church no more" (104). She believes in religious rites and on that basis she baptises her child to save him from hell. In contrast with Tess who has a shift from being a believer to being a non believer, Sue turns from being a non believer into a believer. However, the kind of belief she has at the end is because of the force of society, which does not allow people to have freedom within religion, nor to behave in ways based on what they desire. From the beginning of the novel, Sue is an unorthodox character. She criticises churches. Her critical behaviour can be seen when she buys a statue of two pagans and says, "Well, anything is better than those everlasting church fallals!" (113). Sue sees religion as a barrier and, like a feminist, she criticises what is a barrier for human development. At the end of the novel, when she returns to church, although not mentally, she loses the kind of freedom she looked for.

Oppressive nature of religion causes different consequences in Sue and

Jude, but has a similar impact on Tess and Jude. At the beginning of the novel, Jude is very conventional and believes in orthodox rules. He wishes to become a clergyman and says to Sue, "I am absorbed in theology" (136). However, at the end of the novel he says to Sue, "It was so preposterous of me to think of being a curate" (333). He burns all of his religious books. Jude expresses his hatred of Christianity to Sue, because "it's that which has caused this deterioration in you. That a woman-poet, a woman-seer, a woman whose soul shone like a diamond--whom all the wise of the world would have been proud of, if they could have known you--should degrade herself like this! I am glad I had nothing to do with Divinity--damn glad--if it's going to ruin you in this way" (113). The contrast between a kind of liberty that Hardy's characters are looking for and the inability of the society to understand and accommodate this liberty brings about their tragic end. In relation to a tragic hero Sands argues that

Tragic actors are morally faulted, yet in a way that could not have been avoided. And when we behold that fault and judge it, we simultaneously partake in it. So the faultedness, for all of us, is also an injustice we suffer. This is heart of tragic fault: to affirm our value is at once to stand against ourselves and to affirm the world is at once to stand against it. (43)

In Hardy's tragedies, Tess and Sue are morally faulted and suffer because of the injustice of society. To affirm their values, they stand against themselves in the sense that they sacrifice themselves and bear a heavy burden to express their beliefs. To affirm an ideal world in which women are equal to men, they resist the real world.

The emotional impact of Tess's ending is not positive; it is about loss and death. However, the tragic ending is valuable and meaningful. Sands in "Tragedy, Theology and Feminism" argues that tragedy is "telling of suffering". She adds that "to define tragedy—to explain what makes a tragedy 'successful'—is to discern what make profound suffering good to tell" (42) . She writes that "tragedies record the fundamental contradiction between reality and ideality: life is not as it should be: we are not as we should be" (43). The tragedy of Hardy's characters emerges out of a conflict between ideality, what Tess and Sue are representing, and the reality of Victorian society which is not able to accommodate their liberal ideas. In a letter to Katharine S. MacQuoid (a prolific novelist and travel writer), related to the heroines of his novels, Hardy confesses that he has no "liking for the perfect woman of fiction" but rather for "the woman of real life". He adds that "women are quite worthy enough in nature to satisfy any reasonable being, but I venture to think that they too frequently do not exhibit that nature truly and simply and thus the nature is condemned by their critics when the form of its manifestation only is in fault" (*Selected Letters* 15). Hardy believes in the nature of women and says that they can "satisfy any reasonable being" by nature but they are not as they should be. In *Jude* and *Tess*, he is referring to the true nature of women who follow their own principles.

Kathleen M. Sand states that "The work of making norms is the work of making worlds, and in this work, loss can be a field in which meaning is found and a material from which it is built. But everything depends on knowing that we have lost and knowing what we have lost" (57). Hardy shares the same idea with Sand about knowing and understanding what we have lost. In a letter to John

Addington Symonds, poet and essayist, Hardy writes “I have come to the conclusion that, the first step towards cure of, or even relief from, any disease being to understand it, the study of tragedy in fiction may possibly here and there be the means of showing how to escape the worst forms of it, at least, in real life” (*Selected Letters* 53). The tragic situations in Hardy’s novels have to do with a kind of discrepancy between an ideal of gender equality and the reality of gender pressure. Hardy understands and is aware of this “disease”. What is lost in the novels are Tess and Sue as characters, and what they represent. Their demise is a loss, but at the same time, it is “a field in which meaning is found”. That meaning is feminism, and the alternative possibilities for life presented by feminism. By introducing Tess as a pure woman, Hardy affirms her feminist behaviour and in this way makes a new “norm” and a new “world”.

Sands believes that “tragedy ought to uncover the grief and the pleasure; ought to be, in other words, not a symptom of melancholia but a vehicle for its healing”. She adds that “to heal is to uncover, not recover, a loss—to recognize the loss precisely as such” (57). By depicting the death of his characters, Hardy uncovers the loss rather than recovering it, and does so in a way that encounters opposition from society. He demonstrates the depth of loss and gives people consciousness of the position of women and the destructive role of conventions to heal the loss. Readers feel Tess’s death and Sue’s capitulation as losses, they feel the loss of them as characters. The sense of the loss of what they represent is all the greater.

Rita S. Kranidis in *Subversive Discourse* argues that,

In *Jude the Obscure*, tragedy lies in an unknown that is frightening

because its source is beyond human understanding. Tragedy and misery come from an idealized past now made utterly impossible... misery also comes from the general disparity between desire and its fulfilment, and in the total absence of control over one's destiny. As Sue Bridehead remains both an "enigma" and a destructive force in this novel, she parallels the many tragic "unknowns" to which Jude falls victim. (125)

However, my conception of Sue's changeability and its role in her tragedy is quite different. The absence of social support for liberal ideas causes tragedy for men and women like Jude and Sue and consequently society. It does not give them the liberty to act on their own "internally persuasive word". As Morgan states,

Critical opinion does not favour Hardy as a champion of those women, who, as critics would have it, "disrupt" the community, the social order, the status quo. [But t]hese disruptive women evidently unsettle more worlds than their own, and Hardy stands, I would argue, firmly behind them. From Elfride's embattled sexual confrontations with Knight to Sue's outrage at the notion that a married woman should be regarded as man's property, Hardy's platform remains consistent and forthright: the world that denies autonomy, identity, purpose and power to women, is to be, on his terms, the loser. (*Women and Sexuality* xvi)

There is a similar kind of conflict in Tess, whose inner conflict is related to disclosing her past to Angel and the possible consequences of it. Conflict is not "a destructive force" in the novel. Instead, it makes Hardy's tragic form strong. In

fact, the kind of conflict that Hardy depicts in his tragedy is an inner conflict – one of the important elements of tragedy – between what Bakhtin calls the “authoritative word” and the “internally persuasive word” that I explained in Chapter Three.

Aristotle, in the *Poetics*, defines tragedy as “the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself” (Abrams 322). Aristotle also states that in analysing any work of tragedy, it is necessary to be aware of the cause of the tragedy and the emotional reaction to it. The causes of tragedy in Hardy’s novels are the “ambition” and “prejudice” (Hardy and Hardy 122) of his protagonists, which cannot be found in other characters. This kind of ambition, that Hardy refers to, is the kind of feminist attitude in Tess and Sue that leads to their tragedy. In his novels, to build up tragedy, Hardy incorporates parts of his experiences to be able to express a feminist view point in his novels.

Aristotle “describes the ideal tragic plot in terms that make it clear that the tragic everyman is, literally, a man” (qtd in Wohl 145). Felski argues that some feminist scholars “dismissed tragedy as a genre preoccupied with the heroics of masculine overreaching” (Introduction 5). Hardy’s tragedy is in contrast with a kind of tragedy that those feminist scholars dismissed. In these two novels, Hardy shows the heroics of Tess and Sue in trying to achieve their desires. They appear to be overreaching in a context which cannot accommodate their desires. In contrast with Aristotle’s view, Hardy represents a woman as the tragic figure. Victoria Wohl in “Tragedy and Feminism” explains that,

Women were almost completely excluded from public life in ancient Athens; considered lifelong minors, they were unable to



vote, own substantial property, or represent themselves in court. While men competed for glory in the public arena, respectable women were largely restricted to the household, where their greatest glory was chastity and silence. On the tragic stage, by contrast, we find an array of strong and active women, women who deliver persuasive public address, enter into debates with men, sacrifice themselves for their families or their countries, even exercise political rule... For many feminist readers, tragedy's dominant women have offered a counterweight of optimism against the pervasive misogyny of Athenian culture, suggesting that either women were not, in fact, as thoroughly marginalized as they appear from other sources or, if they were, at least the culture was capable of thinking critically about its own oppression and exclusions.

(146)

Similarly, Hardy did not represent the kind of women who are restricted to the household. His novels show women who continuously criticise the society. His works are not tragedies of men, but rather tragedies of women. This shows that Hardy was not sadistically interested in depicting women in death. He was against a kind of tragedy which shows females as passive characters, instead showing women as active characters who take the role of men.

Tragedy is a representation of "serious actions which eventuate in a disastrous conclusion for the protagonist". The protagonist suffers as a result of violating "an important moral law" and evokes both "pity and terror". At the end of the tragedy, readers or audiences feel relieved (Abrams 321-22). Related to the

unhappy endings of Hardy's novels, Silverman in "Figuration and Female Subjectivity" argues, "Although the final section of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is titled 'Fulfilment', there is nothing redemptive about the operations of historical meaning in that novel, nothing that points us toward a happier and more complete state" (15). However, I believe that Hardy has chosen an appropriate title for the final section of his novel because there is, in fact, a sense of liberation. In other words, I see Tess's death as valuable and meaningful. I have already referred to the fact that Hardy's tragedies were influenced by Shakespeare's tragedies. Tragedy often ends with the restoration of order: at the end of Shakespeare's tragedies the central character dies and after the death of the hero, another character comes to restore order. For example, in *Hamlet*, Fortinbras comes in to renew the old disrupted order. We don't know that much about Fortinbras. Similarly, we do not know that much about Liza-Lu throughout the novel, but she arrives at the end, after the death of Tess, and reorders the disrupted old order by rejoining Angel. Although readers feel sympathy for Tess, it seems that Hardy does not disappoint readers by spiritualizing Tess in the form of Liza-Lu who Hardy introduces as "a spiritualized image of Tess" (383). However, Tess is dead and it is not a very feminist idea. Moreover, Hardy finishes his novel by saying that when Angel and Liza-Lu "had strength, they arose, joined hands again, and went on" (384). By joining Angel and Liza-Lu, Hardy points us toward a happier and more complete state: men and women of society have strength and join together. It is the liberation of men, women and consequently society. Hence, the tragic form of these two novels and the death of the female characters show that Victorian society can not cultivate feminism. But, there is meaning and value in

Tess's death and the novel's tragic ending, for instead of mitigating the condition of her subjugation by accepting the conventions, Tess chooses to resist them, thereby showing her singularity in the society. In this regard, King argues that, "Tess's whole experience has been of suffering, yet she still believes in that loving-kindness without dogma or reward which makes her even now remember her sister, Liza-Lu, and hope for a better life and a better world for her 'spiritualised image'" (*Tragedy* 116). Thus, the ending of *Tess* points us toward a future in which living according to feminist principles may be possible.

By representing death at the end of his novels, Hardy is criticising what he called the "literature of quackery" (*Personal Writings* 126) of the Victorian age; he wants to reveal truths which were hidden in this kind of literature. He is attempting to say that the truth of the relationship between the sexes is beyond what the fiction of the time shows. Hardy writes that "life being a physiological fact, its honest portrayal must be largely concerned with, for one thing, the relations of the sexes, and the substitution for such catastrophes as favour the false colouring best expressed by the regulation finish that 'they married and were happy even after,' of catastrophes based upon sexual relations as it is" (*Personal Writings*, 127-28). By creating an ending which is in opposition with a "regular finishing", Hardy attempts to show the falseness of the ideology of marital happiness and says that in reality, the relationship between the sexes in the Victorian age does not end with "happy" marriage, as in the dominant fictions of that time. While, according to Hardy, a German reviewer identifies Sue as "the woman of the feminist movement", he express his regret that "the portrait of the newcomer had been left to be drawn by a man, and was not done by one of her

own sex, who would never have allowed her to break down at the end” (*The Postscript 1912, Jude*). However, my view is that if Hardy, as a man who writes about women, had not depicted the tragedy of Tess, Sue and Jude, he would have been like the other common writers of that time who show a happy ending for the relationship between men and women. Unhappy endings show Hardy’s truthfulness.

Hardy believes that a cause of tragedy is human law, and as I have already noted, he believes that human laws should be changed to fit human nature. Related to the cause of tragedy, Hardy writes that in *Jude*, he “makes only an objective use of marriage & its superstitions a one, & only one, of the antagonistic forces in the tragedy... I can only state (most imperfectly, alas!) cases in which natural & human laws create tragic dramas” (*Selected Letters* 100-01). Hardy uses tragedy as a form of social criticism. In his definition of tragedy, Hardy makes plot and tragedy equivalent to each other, which indicates the centrality of tragedy in his novelistic practice. He depicts unhappy endings and the death of characters, and in this way, he shows that the ideology of marital happiness is false. In his novels, loss is what Tess and Sue as feminists are representing. Unlike Aristotle who depicts men as the heroes, Hardy represents women as heroines: they have an active role, and take the same role men do in Aristotelian tragedy. One of the outstanding features of tragedy in *Jude* is inner conflict. For Sue, this conflict emerges between “authoritative word” and “internally persuasive word” which leads to her changeability. In *Tess*, like a Shakespearian tragedy, there is reordering of the disrupted order. Although the ending is unhappy, by the reconciliation of Liza-Lu and Angel, Hardy moves readers toward a future in

which feminist behaviour is possible. Tragedy in *Tess* is strong with positive points toward a better future. However, tragedy in *Jude* is more absolute, and indicates the value of resistance.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

This thesis has analysed the relationship between John Stuart Mill's philosophical ideas and Thomas Hardy's novels, and explored the similarities and differences between them. Thomas Hardy's heroines, Tess and Sue, are often called victims by critics. However, this thesis has moved beyond this common idea and refers to their agency and liberal ideas based on Mill's philosophy of liberalism and liberal feminism. The form of Hardy's novels also reflects his feminist views. Hardy chooses tragedy as a form, and his heroines are tragic. The tragedy of their character comes out of the conflict between reality and ideality, the reality being the conservative society and the ideality the liberal ideas of Tess and Sue. Both protagonists are looking for their liberties, which include individuality, equality and freedom. However, society is not able to understand and fulfill their desires and this consequently leads to their deaths.

For Tess and Sue, their suffering comes out of their conscious resistance, and that distinguishes them from other women. Both of them enter into a kind of death as they "choose" to "respond" the society. As noted, liberal feminists believe that "the choice of response is perhaps the most basic psychological freedom, but it is also a heavy and painful burden which most people fear, preferring familiar pain, the pain generated by reacting and remaining stuck in old patterns of powerlessness" (Rowland-Serdar and Schwartz-Shea 616). Their death is "a heavy and painful burden" for them, but they do not fear. Mary Wollstonecraft, as a liberal feminist, attempted to find her independence. For her "although the situation looked hopeless, yet she was convinced she could never fit herself into the present conventional framework of society" (*Her Life* 13).

Similarly, Tess and Sue do not accept “the present conventional framework of society”. They struggle to find their identity and independence within hopeless situations. Sprechman argues that in the Victorian era, “a woman who lived happily and submissively with her husband was the ideal; one who rebelled, especially if she did so successfully, was feared, despised, and castigated” (2). In this context, Tess sacrifices herself. Sue enters into another kind of death: she resists the convention, but then breaks down at the end of the novel. I believe however that she is not a victim. She at least does struggle to follow her own beliefs in a society where people cannot accept her ideas. She is a positive character who does more than accept the taboos and restrictions of a male dominated society.

In Chapters Two and Three, I illustrated the common liberal views of Mill and Hardy. I showed that Hardy was partly influenced by the liberal thoughts of Mill. I introduced Tess and Sue as liberal feminists whose agency can be seen through their actions. They made an attempt for the liberation of women’s sexuality. Both of them encourage women to use their own knowledge in making decisions and having authentic lives. They criticise those who follow customs and traditions blindly as other people accept them. They comment on marriage as a hierarchal relationship. They believe not only in the reform of the law, but also the reform of the patriarchal culture in society.

Alongside of similarities between Mill and Hardy, there are some dissimilarities as they are writing two different kinds of texts. One of the most important differences in their view is related to human nature. Mill believes human should reform and overcome nature to create an “artificially perfected

nature of the best and noblest human beings” which is “ever commendable to follow” (CW 10: 48). However, Hardy is trying to change and reform human laws to fit human nature, especially human sexual nature. Other differences are rooted in this contradiction. For Mill, a human should overcome his or her nature. Thus, marriage is not based on sexuality but it is a social contract toward higher morality. However, in Hardy’s view, humans should follow his or her instincts and especially their sexual desires. So, for him marriage is a contract based on sexual attraction. Hardy believes that “a marriage should be dissolvable as soon as it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties”. Mill argues that “causing the existence of a human being... is a crime against that being” (*On Liberty* 168). Although Hardy express a similar viewpoint in the speech of Father Time, Sue as a representative of liberal ideas, resists this view of liberalism. Mill believes that humans should overcome Nature, whereas Hardy believes that law should be reformed to fit human nature. Mill does not agree with divorce because of children, who are the third parties. He believes that in any kind of contract between two parties, each one has a “moral obligation” toward the other.

### **The Significant of Differences between Mill and Hardy**

The differences between Mill and Hardy are the differences between their genres. Mill’s essays work at an abstract level and make general and non-specific arguments. He represents an ideal state and the way things might be better between men and women, and in the situation of women. However, Hardy’s novels work within the narrative world. They represent people through individual characters, with their own desires and temperaments. In this respect, a novel is more like real life and in this way, Hardy gives a sense of the reality of his current



situation. Hardy's novels show that ideals can be expressed but cannot be accommodated properly. To some extent, Hardy practices Mill's theories in his novels, which can be seen as representing real life and showing how these theories might work along with other forces of a society. Hardy shows how difficult it is to follow Mill's liberal ideas.

These differences are there because Mill talks about noble ideas and philosophies. His purpose is changing society by representing a set of ideas, whereas Hardy dramatises Mill's liberal philosophies along with different kinds of forces, social, natural and psychological. Hardy shows how the liberal theories of Mill might work in reality. Mill's non-fictions have an informative purpose, introducing opinions and ideas. However, we could say that as there is no ground for testing Mill's liberal ideas, Hardy tests them in his fictions, which are supposed to be representations of reality. Hardy's novels are also informative through their characters. What Hardy did in his novels illustrates the ways in which Mill's ideas might function in practice. Hardy, by contrast, did not show simple and clear ideas and opinions in his novels. He presents characters who embody liberal feminism and he shows how liberal ideas are influenced by other forces like society and the interference of others. In his novels, Hardy challenges the facts that Mill presented in his books to find out to what extent they can be accommodated in society. Differences between them show the impossibility of some of Mill's liberal theories when put into practice.

The contrast between Mill and Hardy shows the differences between theory and reality. Yogi Berra, who is noted for his malapropisms, in this case says something insightful. He states that "in theory, there is no difference between

theory and practice. But, in practice, there is” (np). Mill is writing philosophy. As Hardy’s novels represent the tragedy in the relationship between characters, they are not just about ideas. As Irving Howe says, Hardy emphasises “embattled womanliness” in Tess who “represents herself and not an idea” (qtd in Blake, “Pure Tess” 704). Perhaps by depicting the problems, Hardy refers to the impossibility or difficulty of following some ideas of Mill’s in reality. An example is the issue of bringing children to the world. Father Time expresses the view of Mill about bringing children into the world; however, Jude and Sue as two liberal characters do not agree with that view. In this regard, Dale Kramer argues that,

*Jude the Obscure* is an unmistakably contemporary novel in its concentration on central questions of the late nineteenth century: the difficulties of being a working woman (and of being simply an independent woman), the strain of professional ambition in an increasingly striated society, the loss of religious faith in a conventional society, the revision of class-based university ambitions. (“Hardy and Readers” 169)

The suffering of characters who have liberal ideas refers to their difficulties in actually finding a liberal society. Hardy shows that Mill’s liberal views are necessary but that practicing them, especially in a society not able to understand these ideas, is a burden. And there is always pain before changing society.

I showed that the use of death as an unhappy ending in Hardy’s novels does not reflect to his cruelty. Death is a fundamental element of tragedy; the unhappy endings not only strengthen the tragic form of his novels, but reflect his desire to be realistic. In contrast with those novelists who depict happy endings

for relationships between the two sexes, Hardy uses the unhappy ending to show that these “regular ending” are false.

Death and the liberal ideas that Hardy’s characters represent are a kind of loss which is another vital element of tragedy. However, there is a positive meaning as Hardy is aware of and understands the loss. As Margaret Elvey argues, “the tragedy of Sue and Jude is that there is no social or cultural space in which their special, two-in-one spiritual love can exist, let alone flourish” (145). This shows that they are not the cause of their own tragedy: it is society which can not give space to their new ideas and to Sue’s feminism.

Hardy’s novels have all the elements of tragedy, such as death and loss. However, in contrast with Aristotle or a Shakespearean play, Hardy’s tragic hero is not a noble man from a higher class, but a working class or middle class woman. In his tragedies, it is women who take the role of men in criticizing society and looking for liberty. They are not marginalised or restricted to the household. Sue enters into a philosophical debate with Phillotson and explicitly criticises religion and the institution of marriage. Tess sacrifices herself for her family. As Sprechman says, “it is not the aristocratic d’Urberville heritage that makes Tess a hero; it is her own nobility of spirit that illuminates her being and allows her to fulfill her destiny of tragic hero” (19). All of these points show that Hardy’s tragedies are representing his feminism.

In these ways, this thesis has argued that Hardy is not an anti-feminist who depicts characters who are voiceless. In contrast, he is a feminist who is attempting to change the view of men and women about the position of women in the society and to give women consciousness. He presents a similar world in

fiction with women who live a life different from the style of most women in reality. He presents a kind of world that ordinary women may not even think about it. As Kate Millett explains of *Jude the Obscure*, “The novel’s greatest fascination resides in its demonstration of how very difficult a struggle such a revolution can be not only for its participants, but even for the author who would describe it” (134). Differences between Mill and Hardy refer to the conflict between reality and ideality. And the tragic end of Hardy’s novels also refers to the differences between reality of conservative society and the ideas that Tess and Sue are representing. In other words, Hardy chooses and reworks the conventions of tragedy because this mode works effectively to express the contradictions between the idea of liberal feminism and social reality.

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