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THE DEVELOPING COMPLEXITY OF THE HEROINE  
IN SELECTED NOVELS OF THOMAS HARDY

by

Rebecca Casey

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in English  
Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville  
July, 1968

Thesis Committee:

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the members of the English department who generously gave their time to aid me in this project. I am grateful to Dr. William C. Slattery and Dr. Leslie M. Thompson, who served on my thesis committee. I am especially indebted to Dr. John I. Ades with whom I have been privileged to work. Without his valuable advice and encouragement, this thesis could not have materialized.

--Rebecca Casey

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice---these are the stuff out of which Hardy wrought his fiction . . . and these are the values which last.

--Richard Carpenter from Thomas Hardy

Thomas Hardy stands as a major transitional figure between the Victorians and the twentieth century. Living "in" that earlier era, but not actually being "of" that time, he thought and wrote more like a man of the next century. The ground of Hardy's appeal to twentieth century readers is that, while he struggled to please and to entertain at the start, he gradually assumed the role of a serious visionary; and by the end of his career as a novelist, strikingly modern themes occur in his work: the constant struggle between rural simplicity and urban-aristocratic complexity; the problems of marriage and mis-marriage; the tensions of the restless and isolated modern ego; the anxieties of sexual maladjustment; the chronic problem of self-destruction. Upon these and other uncomfortably familiar grounds, Hardy makes his extraordinary appeal to modern readers.

The present study is concerned with Hardy's power of characterization of women. It will attempt to show that this character delineation in selected novels moves from comparative simplicity to comparative complexity; that earlier heroines are generally more passive, more inhibited, and more naively romantic

than later heroines who are individualistic and aggressive; and that this progression of characterization is both evident and significant.

The paper will be organized in seven chapters. The first will present an overview of Hardy as a creator of memorable women and of the devices he employs to create such characters. Chapter II through Chapter VI will contain careful scrutinies of the particular women under consideration: Elfride, from A Pair of Blue Eyes; Bathsheba, from Far from the Madding Crowd; Eustacia, from The Return of the Native; Tess, from Tess of the d'Urbervilles; and Sue and Arabella, from Jude the Obscure. The concluding chapter will summarize the character progression.

These particular novels were selected for several reasons: first of all, these six women are generally considered by scholars to be Hardy's best; secondly, they offer valid representation of Hardy's increasing intensity of characterization; and thirdly, they best substantiate the stated premise of progression from simplicity to complexity.

Hardy's keen observations of the realities around him enabled him to people his novels with individuals of beauty and interest. His characterizations of such individuals suggest the omniscience of a serious visionary, sensitive to man's appalling limitations. He combines the absurd with the commonplace, the unreasonable with the plausible, and laces his characters with tensions and perplexities; he embroiders his tales with complex psychological insight, as well as with touches of the macabre,

the grotesque, and the ironic. As he stated himself in 1885, "The business of the poet and novelist is to show the sorriness underlying the grandest things and the grandeur underlying the sorriest things."<sup>1</sup>

Hardy's aim as a novelist might be summarized thus: to combine realism of character and strangeness of event; to subject ordinary, well-meaning people to extraordinary and even malign circumstances; and to include some strangeness beyond the banal and everyday. Having no patience with the comfortable belief that man's life is spent in a divinely ordered universe where everything happens for the best, he refuses to offer the reader only the documentary and drab.

One of the greatest creators of female characters in nineteenth century English fiction, Hardy records a variety of personalities, but his special talent lies in dramatizing "feminine capriciousness"<sup>2</sup> and in his "powerful, profound, consistent grasp of the fundamental bottom of human nature."<sup>3</sup> He presents simple, resolute, and powerful souls, somewhat pagan, always grand. Lionel Johnson states that Hardy's characters possess minds "burning with passion, but strong to restrain it: . . . touched to . . . depths by the appeals of nature and of mankind, but disdainful of

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<sup>1</sup>Florence Emily Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1891 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), p. 223.

<sup>2</sup>Albert J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy, The Novels and Stories (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Lascelles Aberbrombie, Thomas Hardy, A Critical Study (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), p. 215.

all light answers: . . . enamoured of meditation, but impatient of mere dreams."<sup>4</sup> And R. A. Scott-James, writing in Modernism and Romance, says Hardy's leading characters are "fully developed, . . . , sensitive to impressions, capable of cherishing some sort of personal ideal and of being prostrated by the unintelligible cruelty of their lot."<sup>5</sup>

Hardy tends to articulate his view through a central figure who is usually a woman.<sup>6</sup> As the novels follow one another, these women become more and more complex. While the earlier women may be categorized as weak and traditional, the later heroines offer evidence of aggressiveness and even masochism. Hardy's is a literary world of young women and girls. He is fascinated by them, but because he can prevent his head from following his heart, his scrutinies are analytical and aloof. He is, however, generally sympathetic toward the sex even though he has been accused of calumniating the female by those who apparently do not understand his theories;<sup>7</sup> and so he simultaneously stresses the frailty, sweetness, submissiveness, coquetry, and capriciousness of women.<sup>8</sup> D. H. Lawrence suggests that often, when Hardy's plot is working,

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<sup>4</sup>Lionel Johnson, The Art of Thomas Hardy (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965), p. 167.

<sup>5</sup>Herbert B. Grimsditch, Character and Environment in the Novels of Thomas Hardy (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1962), p. 54.

<sup>6</sup>Albert Pettigrew Elliott, Fatalism in the Works of Thomas Hardy (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), p. 90.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Rolfe A. Scott-James, Thomas Hardy (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1961), p. 43.



there are hardly any characters at all. In other words, individuality of character is sacrificed for plot. The plot manipulates the characters rather than the plot becoming secondary to the development of the character. Such plot domination is less obvious as the novels progress. The characters become more important, and as each new heroine appears, she assumes a more complicated role. Hardy portrays woman as an instrument of Fate. He does not detest her, but he does recognize in her a source of much of man's misery.<sup>9</sup> "In the life of Hardy's man, Woman operates for evil. But she does so not willingly, but as an instrument, which has endowed her with a volatile nature."<sup>10</sup> Carl Weber, in Hardy of Wessex, recalls Hardy's remark:

"I myself, I must confess, have no great liking for the perfect woman of fiction. . . . The majority of 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 at fault.

"I had an idea that Bathsheba, with all her errors, was not devoid of honesty of this kind; it is however a point for readers to decide. I must add that no satire on the sex is intended in any case by the imperfections of my heroines, those qualities being merely portrayed in the regular course of an art which depends rather on picturesqueness than perfect symmetry for its effects."<sup>11</sup>

Upon observation, however, one can see that the women move ever increasingly toward complexity. They become more difficult to analyze; they fail to understand themselves; they

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<sup>9</sup>Elliott, Fatalism, p. 90.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Carl J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 64.

advance toward a view of life that recognizes humanity's inability to understand life.

Scholars and critics are in general agreement that Hardy's women are more plausible characters than his men.<sup>12</sup> Most of them, even the earlier ones--the ingenues--are alive and interesting. They become progressively more active characters, not merely functioning within the plot, but causing the plot to revolve around them. The result of obvious psychological imagination and insight, the women gradually become complex individuals, dramatic, enigmatic--in short, human.

In addition, a major concern of Hardy's throughout the novels is the frailty of human nature when exposed to the elements. These frailties are frequently an ingredient in the unusual predicament in which woman finds herself. From earlier novels to late, this predicament becomes more and more tangled, more and more complex. Because woman may be frail and somewhat passive, she is dependent to some extent on fate; yet it is this very fate that will overtake her and lead her to tragedy. Her frailties become an intense part of her personality, and progressively, her problems become compounded. As a result, basic physical drives control her, and her tragedy is inevitable. Earlier heroines fail on a small scale, but later ones, as Hardy's power of characterization increased, are doomed to immeasurable tragedy. Their

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<sup>12</sup>With the exception of Michael Henchard and Jude Fawley, Hardy's men blend into the rural background; perhaps this obscurity occurs because of their own weakness, but more likely it happens because of the presence of powerful women. Those few who manage to exhibit some individuality are still wooden.

failure correlates with the idea that Hardy's themes become more massive as he became a more experienced writer. The grander the theme, the grander the woman--and therefore a "grander" failure is inevitable. Since their dilemmas increase as the profundity of the theme increases, Elfride's pining away in A Pair of Blue Eyes is recognizably of relative insignificance when compared with Sue's masochism in Jude the Obscure.

To Hardy, love is woman's whole existence.<sup>13</sup> It is her deepest concern and her motivating passion for life.<sup>14</sup> This element is obvious in all five novels under consideration. As the novels progress, love becomes more demanding, more consuming, until it finally surpasses the characters' recognition and understanding. Throughout the novels Hardy uses love, especially sexual attraction, as a chief motive. Because its passionate force brings out in the individual the more uncontrolled revolt against the social norm, it exposes a woman for what she may really be: a flirt, a seducer, a despot, an innocent, a victim. Because it embodies the conflict of reason and intuition, it enables one to analyze and understand the characters in their simplest form.<sup>15</sup>

In his "Study of Thomas Hardy" (in Phoenix, 1922), D. H. Lawrence writes that "the first and chiefest factor is the struggle

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<sup>13</sup>Scott-James, Thomas Hardy, p. 43.

<sup>14</sup>Elliot, Fatalism, p. 90.

<sup>15</sup>Samuel C. Chew, Thomas Hardy, Poet and Novelist (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1928), p. 135.

into love and the struggle with love: by love, meaning the love of a man for a woman and a woman for a man."<sup>16</sup> Hardy himself admits, "There is no reconciliation between Love and the Law. The spirit of Love must always succumb before the blind, stupid, but overwhelming power of the Law."<sup>17</sup> This statement suggests that man and woman are like magnets, capable of alternately attracting and repelling. Lawrence maintains that ". . . they (man and woman) are complements, yet they destroy each other."<sup>18</sup>

Hardy's women hold several things in common: they must possess Man, whether by seduction, deception, or innocent charm; they are frequently blinded by the happiness of the moment to the "hypothetical disaster of the morrow";<sup>19</sup> they usually possess an "unrestrained passion with its chief supplement of indecision,"<sup>20</sup> (which, incidentally, Hardy regarded as a most basic quality in woman's nature.)<sup>21</sup> From novel to novel these characteristics become increasingly more complex and intense. To the last, however, Hardy's women never lose their feminine frailties and this very necessity is, ironically, their own undoing.

As the novels progress, the dominance of women over men

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<sup>16</sup>D. H. Lawrence, in Selected Literary Criticism, ed. by Anthony Beale (New York: Viking Press, 1956), p. 167.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>18</sup>Elliott, Fatalism, p. 93.

<sup>19</sup>Chew, Thomas Hardy, Poet and Novelist, p. 135.

<sup>20</sup>Elliott, Fatalism, p. 94.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

becomes more powerful and more concentrated. How is this possible? Hardy reasons that women suffer more because women are weaker. He feels that the ordinary woman is inferior to the ordinary man; therefore, his women become extraordinary.<sup>22</sup> Hardy considers his women from the outside, "coolly, and as the sum of their illogical evasions."<sup>23</sup> They seem to have some weakness that ultimately precipitates their tragedy. It may be an error in judgment, an instinct gone awry, or an inherent disability; but they all possess a force of passion that directs them toward their undoing. They are not wholly victimized by situation, but partially prostrated by their own nature. Many times they become almost sinister agents in the novels; but tempering this disturbance with tenderness and mercy, Hardy enables them to emerge as victors despite losses and as heroines despite failure.

Lawrence's analysis of the struggles of Hardy characters is particularly appropriate here: Hardy's characters might be compared to men leaving a walled city to live in the wild, outside. By trying to break with convention, they die, either of fear, exhaustion, or exposure to attacks. Hardy's tragedy, therefore, is the tragedy of such "pioneers" who have died in their attempt to escape so called walled "security" in search of freedom. As Lawrence says, the theme of novel after novel stays the same:

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<sup>22</sup>Henry Charles Duffin, Thomas Hardy, A Study of the Wessex Novels, the Poems, and The Dynasts (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1962), p. 238.

<sup>23</sup>Guerard, Thomas Hardy, The Novels and the Stories, p. 129.

remain quite within the convention, and you are good, safe, and happy in the long run, though you never have the vivid pang of sympathy on your side: or, on the other hand, be passionate, individual, wilful, you will find the security of the convention a walled prison, you will escape, and you will die, either of your own lack of strength to bear the isolation and the exposure, or by the direct revenge from the community, or from both.<sup>24</sup>

In illustrating this conflict between convention and spontaneity, Hardy frequently contrasts rural simplicity and urban-aristocratic complexity and corruption. Here can be seen a distinct significance in the difference between an earlier heroine like Elfride, and a later heroine like Sue. The movement from rural area to urban setting brings with it additional frustrations and complexity. Hardy, although he may not have wanted to do so, must rule against those stepping out of convention:

To do this, however, he must go against himself. His private sympathy is always with the individual against the community: as is the case with the artist. Therefore he will create a more or less blameless individual and, making him seek his own fulfillment, his highest aim, will show him destroyed by the community, or by that in himself which represents the community, or by some close embodiment of the civic idea. Hence the pessimism. To do this, however, he must select his individual with a definite weakness, a certain coldness of temper, inelastic, a certain inevitable and unconquerable adhesion to the community.<sup>25</sup>

Hardy offered to the editors of L'Ermitage in 1893 his own personal remedy for such a dichotomy:

I consider a social system based on individual spontaneity to promise better for happiness than a curbed and uniform one under which all temperaments are bound to shape themselves to a single pattern of life. To this end I would have society divided into groups of temperaments, with a

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<sup>24</sup>Lawrence, Selected Literary Criticism, p. 168.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

different code of observances for each group.<sup>26</sup>

Unfortunately for all his characters, even Sue (as yet unborn), there is no such compact solution, just as realistically there is no such easy remedy. Lawrence crystallizes the plight of humanity when he says:

Upon this vast, incomprehensible pattern of some primal morality greater than even the human mind can grasp, is drawn the little, pathetic pattern of man's moral life and struggle, pathetic, almost ridiculous. The little fold of law and order, the little walled city within which man has to defend himself from the waste enormity of nature, becomes always too small, and the pioneers venturing out with the code of the walled city upon them, die in the bonds of that code, free and yet unfree, preaching the walled city and looking to the waste.<sup>27</sup>

Hardy's novels put that plight on stage for the reader.

The charge of pessimism hurled at Hardy must not be overlooked in this discussion, since there has been much theorizing about Hardy's literary outlook. Albert J. Guerard, in his introduction to Hardy, A Collection of Critical Essays, states that "Hardy the thinker has overwhelmed Hardy the teller of tales." In his essay "The Traditional Basis of Thomas Hardy's Fiction," Donald Davidson attests that Hardy thought like a man of another century. Strangely enough, he (Hardy) has no forerunners and no real followers, but only a few imitators. Davidson claims that what Hardy's intent seems to be is to present life as recognizable, valid, and above all, human; and Lionel Johnson, as early as 1895, in The Art of Thomas Hardy, wrote, "His interest in the modern

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<sup>26</sup>Guerard, Thomas Hardy, The Novels and the Stories, p. 29.

<sup>27</sup>Lawrence, Selected Literary Criticism, pp. 176-7.

subtleties of emotion and of thought is an interest which separates him, as a novelist, from the older novelists."

Hardy describes human beings; he speculates on their dilemmas; and he records his memory of the universe. In doing so, however, he surpasses simple realism and approaches an "anti-realism" with his inclusion of the grotesque and the strange. He feels, however, that such uncommonness should be in event rather than in the individual. He sees chance as controlling, without purpose or design, men's lives, and he dramatizes the forces of such chance and time playing with men's lives in all his works. As his novels increase in creative energy and tension, the characters are enmeshed in situations compounded of their own weaknesses and circumstances, but they manage to retain their individuality and force. Arnold Kettle, in a lecture entitled "Hardy the Novelist: A Reconsideration," maintains that Hardy is not completely deterministic because his people are free to make choices, although they may be the wrong choices. This freedom of choice and freedom to make mistakes insures the characters their license to be human. Guerard, in the work already cited, verifies this statement by suggesting that although Hardy's pessimism is genuine, he cultivates it so that it will be artistically useful. "It is certainly true," says Guerard, "that Hardy had a vision of the cosmic absurd--of man's longing for order and justice outraged by the eternal indifferent drift of things-- . . ."

Hardy, himself, makes several comments about the pessimism



charges. In the General Preface of 1911 he writes this answer:

Differing natures find their tongue in the presence of differing spectacles. Some natures become vocal at tragedy, some are made vocal by comedy, and it seems to me that to whichever of these aspects of life a writer's instinct for expression the more readily responds, to that he should allow it to respond.<sup>28</sup>

He maintains that his works should be called tragic, rather than pessimistic. He admits, though, that there is among his writing that which is grave, positive, and stark.

In his most vigorous defense of his philosophy, Hardy, in his Apology (1922), states that it is actually only "'questionings' in the exploration of reality, and . . . the first step towards the soul's betterment and the body's also."<sup>29</sup> What he seems to indicate is that it is really only a close scrutiny of reality, with special attention paid to the unusual and extraordinary. He looks on the problems of Wessex as raw material for his vision and drama, and in distorting this actuality he achieves a kind of truth. In order to reach full understanding, one must explore reality, he believes, in all its stages. To quote his poem "In Tenebris":

If way to the Better there be,  
it exacts a full look at the Worst:<sup>30</sup>

Hardy knows all great art is a "disproportioning," and because he feels good fiction must be strange, he tends to juxtapose believable

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<sup>28</sup>Weber, Hardy of Wessex, p. 184.

<sup>29</sup>Thomas Hardy, The Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy (New York: Macmillan Co., 1925), p. 526.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

humans with uncommon events. Evelyn Hardy corroborates this tendency:

Hardy's mind was mythopoeic, as well as analytical, and although he continually strove to impose the dictates of reason, his interest in the occult, in the unconscious, and in myth and legend continued to obtrude.<sup>31</sup>

Henry W. Nevinson may have paid Hardy the best tribute when he declared:

No Englishman since Wordsworth has heard the still sad music of humanity with so fine an ear, and none has regarded the men and women of our country with a compassion so profound and yet so stern, as they pass with tears and laughter between the graves and the stars.<sup>32</sup>

The following examination of Hardy's principle heroines will consider Elfride, Bathsheba, Eustacia, Tess, Arabella, and Sue to determine fully the place of each woman in the line of heroines. The analysis of Elfride in A Pair of Blue Eyes will act not only as a point of departure for discussing the other women, but will be a verification of their change from simplicity to complexity.

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<sup>31</sup>Duffin, Thomas Hardy, p. 32.

<sup>32</sup>Weber, Hardy of Wessex, p. 230.

## CHAPTER II

### ELFRIDE--THE GIRL-WOMAN

"Elfride Swancourt was a girl whose emotions lay very near the surface."

The first heroine under consideration in this paper is Elfride, in A Pair of Blue Eyes. Sometimes considered the most Victorian of his novels, this book seems to occupy a special place in Hardy's heart because of its strong suggestion of his own romance. At any rate, the novel stands as something of a Janus in his career: while it is a distinct advance over former novels, even more importantly, it foreshadows the mature Hardy. Through Elfride, Hardy shows a sound knowledge of female temperament. Joseph Warren Beach in The Technique of Thomas Hardy calls Elfride "the first expressive figure in Mr. Hardy's portrait gallery of women."<sup>1</sup>

Elfride, the daughter of Parson Christopher Swancourt, Vicar of Endelstow, is an irresponsible, immature innocent whose very presence ultimately drives four men to distraction. Most obvious in Elfride's character is her shallowness. Hardy's first sentence tells the reader, "Elfride Swancourt was a girl whose emotions lay very near the surface."<sup>2</sup> While she may be called

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Warren Beach, The Technique of Thomas Hardy (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Hardy, A Pair of Blue Eyes (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1905), p. 1. (Subsequent quotations from this novel will be by page number in the text.)

intellectually quick, she is still a creature of impulse, as the forces which direct her actions are not reason, but emotion. As Hardy comments later:

Elfride's emotion was cumulative and after a while would assert itself on a sudden. A slight touch was enough to set it free--a poem, a sunset, a cunningly contrived chord of music, a vague imagining. . . (214).

Early in the novel he suggests that the girl is emotionally motivated and that feelings generated in such fashion tend to be transient and temporary:

Elfride's capacity for being wounded was only surpassed by her capacity for healing, which rightly or wrongly is by some considered an index of transientness of feeling in general (137).

This mercurial nature is evident throughout the first part of the novel; it does not disappear until Elfride makes her first mature decision about whom she loves.

The young Elfride is a socially unconscious young lady, possessing a childish manner and a presence, which Hardy says, in rather uncomplimentary terms, is not "powerful"; he blames this demeanor on the fact that she has lived all her life in the retirement and seclusion of the parsonage. Of her personality Hardy states it "was no more persuasive than a kitten's" (2). A lack of rebelliousness characterizes her young nature, and her charm relies on a freshness compounded by traditional inexperience.

While Elfride's nature is basically gentle, insecure, innocent, and confiding, certain other aspects of her personality must not be overlooked. The same environment which fosters her innocence also engenders in her vanity, evasiveness, and ambiguity.

She is simultaneously pathetic and fascinating.

Elfride's youth is underscored by the arrival at the Vicarage of a guest--a Mr. Stephen Smith. At first the visitor unnerves her completely and her immaturity and lack of self-confidence are evident in her clumsy assuming of the job of hostess. This event, however, plays an important part in the maturing of the young girl:

The point in Elfride Swancourt's life at which a deeper current may be said to have permanently set in was one winter afternoon when she found herself standing, in the character of hostess, face to face with a man whom she had never seen before (2).

This one event has perhaps the most singularly profound influence on the heroine's life.

Elfride must be given credit, however, for her achievements. Within the framework of her narrow environment, she is adept in certain areas and has formulated attitudes based on her limited opportunities: she is industriously working on a novel (a literary form which appealed to her romantic nature); she diligently prepares her father's sermons, laboriously including certain pertinent stage directions for his benefit; and so she is above the average girl of her age in her ability to generalize and express her own ideas. An example of the latter quality is found in her attitude toward men. She expresses this in a conversation with Stephen in which she states she feels that men want to make a world to suit their own happiness; that they are discontent with things as they are; and that they seek perfection.

Two of Elfride's most serious shortcomings, however, are

of a more personal nature. One is her love of being admired. The other is pride. The former--love of admiration--is first obvious to her when Stephen states he could live at the Vicarage always. This unconscious revelation startles Elfrida and, as Hardy puts it, she is amazed to find "her harmonies had fired a small Troy in the shape of Stephen's heart" (21). She confuses love and the love of being loved, and she is fascinated by the fact that she has indescribable power over those obviously more powerful than she.

The second characteristic, pride, is also evident early in the story and is a critical facet of Elfrida's nature. She inherits this pride from her father, and while she is aware that it is partially illogical, it is still an inherent part of her.

Elfrida's pride becomes more apparent as the novel progresses. Partly inherited and partly imbued by the strong influence of her father, it plays an important part in her tragedy. First evidence of the pride is given in her appraisal of young Felix Jethway. She considers herself too good for him and says so: "But I didn't see anything in him. He is not good enough, even if I had loved him"(87). Her pride is not as empty and meaningless as her father's though, for she does not inherit his prejudices and she gradually sees the fallacies in his reasoning. In arguing her right to love and marry Stephen, who is of lower socio-economic class than they, she says, "But he is the same man, papa; the same in every particular; and how can he be less fit for me than he was before?" (95)

The phase of Elfride's life introduced by the arrival of Stephen Smith is significant. Several other attributes of her character, not always complimentary ones, appear. Most noticeable is pouting. This trait exhibits again Elfride's shallowness and selfishness, for the pouting always occurs when her egocentricity has been offended, and she readily learns to use this device as a way to intimidate. An example of this occurs as Stephen offers her his arm in assisting her up an incline during one of their hikes. She refuses his offer, pouts, and replies, "No thank you, Mr. Smith; I can get along better by myself" (48). Something new is happening in her life: until that night masculine attentions had been limited to those received from her father; it is the first time in her life that she has been treated as a grown-up woman. Though she really wants to take Stephen's arm, she still submits to the desire to punish him. Hardy describes this as Elfride's first attempt at browbeating a lover. Elfride also affects wounded pride whenever Stephen breaks his promise to wave at her from the tower. Her tendency to pout recurs when she is involved at a later time with Henry Knight. She attempts to be quite satirical about his review of her romance. What results, however, is more pouting:

Elfride intended to hurl . . . words sarcastically at her invisible enemy, but as she had not more satirical power than a wood pigeon, they merely fell in a pretty murmur from lips shaped to a pout. (173)

Upon the arrival of Stephen, jealousy also appears as a noticeable part of her personality. As she becomes more and more emotionally involved with him, she demands more and more loyalty,

even to the point of being envious of his friends. She charges Smith: "You are not nice now, and you make me as jealous as possible! . . . I know you will never speak to any third person of me as warmly as you do of him" (72). Her jealousy reappears as she exhibits her feelings toward the good friend Smith admires so: Which would he save from drowning if he could only save one?

Elfride's coquettishness is demonstrated by her reaction to Stephen's first expression of his love for her. She demurely "protests" his advances "with a coquettish hauteur of a very transparent nature" (59). Her love of admiration, though, accounts for her enjoying such advances and when Stephen attempts to kiss her she "favors" him by extending a gloved hand. She is suddenly filled with the power that she holds over him, and with the fact that "She was ruling a heart with absolute despotism for the first time in her life. . . . What a proud moment it was for Elfride then!" (64)

Thus, one of the most important aspects of Elfride's young character is her necessity to dominate or control. First evidence of such superiority is seen in her expert horsemanship. Mr. Swancourt proposes a drive in the country, but when the shaft of the carriage is broken, he suggests riding horseback instead--Elfride on her pony, Smith on his (Mr. Swancourt's) nag. When Stephen pleads that he is not an accomplished rider, she ridicules him: "Fancy a man not able to ride!" she said pertly (61). As they prepare to depart on the ride, Stephen attempts to assist Elfride on the horse. As he lifts her, he



he staggers and loses his footing; the horse edges around and Elfride lands on the ground. Upon her father's suggestion that they "try again" she indignantly states, "Indeed, I shan't let him try again; Worm,<sup>3</sup> come here and help me to mount" (62). She concludes her insult by a comment on her amazement at him: "What is so unusual in you is that your knowledge of certain things should be combined with your ignorance of certain other things" (62). And off she rides, displaying her "gallop."

Another illustration of her urge to remain superior occurs during a chess game on one of the evenings of Stephen's second visit at the Vicarage. On this occasion, however, she is forced to accept second place. Elfride soon notices that Stephen is only a novice at the game and ridicules him for the way he handles the chess pieces: "How strangely you handle the men, Mr. Smith! . . . Who taught you to play?" (55). He admits that he had taught himself from a book. As the game continues, Elfride plays almost automatically, while Stephen is forced to concentrate on every move. She decides it would be too cruel, now, to defeat him, so twice in a row she allows him to checkmate her. In the third game he suspects her generosity and is gravely insulted: "You have been trifling with me until now!" he exclaims (58). Instantly, she regrets her mistake and begs his forgiveness, stating that she had not had the heart to defeat him after he had tried so manfully. Her need of superiority is not eradicated, however, and it is in great evidence when her control is severely threatened

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<sup>3</sup>William Worm is the Swancourt's handyman.

later by Knight.

Elfride's sense of superiority suffers its most devastating blow at the hands of Henry Knight, her third lover. When Elfride reads ~~the~~ review of her novel, The Court of Kellyon Castle, printed in the Present by Knight, she wants to retaliate. She decided to write to him so that she (and the book) would not be "misunderstood." When she discovers who the reviewer actually is, she becomes vexed and somewhat embarrassed. Her sensitivity is insulted and she shrinks "perceptibly smaller" after having read the review; she is indignant at being called "silly."

In Elfride's search for superiority, she unconsciously searches for one who is superior and can dominate her. Such a person she finds in Knight. The apex of their rivalry is undoubtedly the chess game. In her initial successful moves, she is almost ruthlessly triumphant. As Knight begins to gain, slowly but surely, she becomes flurried. She cannot accept defeat and after each successive loss she immediately challenges him again. For her, loss is intolerable; it is a fiasco. Her pride prevents her from accepting the handicap of one bishop which he offers. She is so distraught after the first evening of games, she cannot sleep. The next day she challenges him for the third time. Knight chides her for being a poor loser and suggests that there may be just as much merit in being a good loser as there is in being a winner. She declares "vanity is no crime in such a case" (200). In turn, he reminds her that neither is it "hardly a virtue." But the contest begins. When it is over, she is so

completely overcome by her loss that she becomes physically ill and must be confined to bed. She weeps at her disgrace.

Elfride's first experience at love is an awkward one. Her big mistake is that because of her inexperience, she is so astounded by "full-blown love" that she confuses the true emotion with the novelty of that emotion (59). She does not understand that love experienced at eighteen lacks elements of permanence.<sup>4</sup> This misjudgment causes her grief later.

Immaturity and uncertainty are also most apparent during her relationship with Stephen. After she disregards her father's warnings and meets Stephen secretly in London, her hesitancy about the wisdom of the marriage returns. Truthfully, she probably would have liked for Stephen to have made her stay and to have insisted upon their marriage. Superficially, however, she begs him to let her return home. She suggests that she has swallowed much pride in the face of her great love for him and has jeopardized her name and reputation by even coming to London: she suggests that he is ungenerous and unfair to refuse her the pleasure of returning without the ceremony. Stephen recognizes her commitment and dilemma and respects her wishes. He seems to understand that her nerves have revolted at the onset of a completely different life,<sup>5</sup> and he graciously agrees that she return home. The same kind of nervous revolt at the thought of marriage will be complicated and subtilized in a later novel, Jude the Obscure.

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<sup>4</sup>Herbert E. Grimsditch, Character and Environment, pp. 108-9.

<sup>5</sup>Guerard, Thomas Hardy, The Novels and the Stories, p. 137.

Elfride's fickleness appears when the second young man, Henry Knight, arrives as a guest at the Vicarage. When Knight first comes to the home, Elfride is aggressively opposed to him; he has both insulted and embarrassed her. After he spends some time there, however, Elfride finds herself growing more attached to him. The fickleness, so common a trait among Hardy's women, begins to creep into Elfride's personality as she senses that Knight might be challenging Stephen's place in her life. Inconstancy, though, is probably only partly responsible for Henry's replacing Stephen in her affections. Hardy suggests this when he states:

Love frequently dies of time alone--more frequently displacement. With Elfride Swancourt, a powerful reason why the displacement should be successful was that the newcomer was a greater man than the first. By the side of the instructive and piquant snubbings she received from Knight, Stephen's general agreeableness seemed watery; by the side of Knight's spare love-making, Stephen's continual outflow seemed lacadaisical. She had begun to sigh for somebody further on in manhood. Stephen was hardly enough of a man (301).

Perhaps, too, Stephen is somehow responsible for their separation in another way. His tendency to make himself unworthy of praise around her causes her to undervalue him. Gradually, she is embarrassed by Stephen's father's rough hands and Mrs. Smith's dialect. In this respect Elfride is inclined to be much like her father in his attitudes toward class. Alongside Knight, Stephen grows smaller and smaller. Her father's advice seems to become more and more valid, until finally she is "as passionately desirous of following it as she had hitherto been averse" (302). In her final justification of her refusal to keep her appointed

meeting with Stephen she says, "God forgive me--I can't meet Stephen! I don't love him less, but I love Mr. Knight more" (303). By so affirming her resolve not to meet Smith, her fickleness seems to disappear and her resolve seems to be "assuming the complexion of a virtue" (303).

Actually, Elfride's choice of Knight over Smith is a good one.<sup>6</sup> Although her conscience is troubled at first by her apparent faithlessness, she gradually overcomes this preoccupation. Probably, Elfride's "love" of Stephen, although sincere, is shallow. Change, maturity, and the presence of a forceful character in the person of Henry, all joined together in influencing Elfride's final decision to turn from Stephen to Henry. Her love for Knight is probably thoroughly established during the rescue from the cliff. Elfride had walked to Cliff without a Name one day to get a better view of the inlet and the steamer which would bring Stephen home from an extended trip to India. During her walk there, she met Knight. In attempting to recover his hat, which had blown down the side of the cliff, Knight finds he could not climb back up the embankment. A cold, piercing wind and driving rain worsen his situation. Below him at the bottom of the perpendicular cliff is the ocean--above him, the steep cliff's slope. He can not move upward, and a fall downward would have been fatal; he loses strength rapidly. In a final desperate attempt, Elfride braids rope out of her petticoats, throws it to

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<sup>6</sup>Harvey Curtis Webster, On a Darkling Plain (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947), p. 130.

him, ties the other end to her own waist and moves to the opposite side of the cliff. By forming a pulley, she raises Knight from the treacherous incline. She has called upon all her daring and resourcefulness to save his life. After this point in the story there seems to be no doubt about her loyalties. Knight assumes completely the role of wooer in Elfride's life.

With the disappearance of her faithfulness to Smith, however, come the deceitfulness and secretive behavior toward Knight. An obvious reason for her failure to disclose her former lovers is Knight's firm belief that his wife-to-be must be as completely innocent and inexperienced as he. By concealing her past, Elfride only complicates her dilemma. With each passing day and each pressing inquiry on the part of Knight about her innocence, she is aware that any information concerning her past life would be disastrous to their relationship. More than once Elfride intends "to ease her burdened mind by an instant confession" (345). She hopes that if Knight had ever been imprudent himself, he will forgive her. Elfride's deceit is not deliberate; it is more instinctive--a natural reaction to protect and preserve her status quo. Elfride's deceit might better be called indiscretion. Such indiscretions, listed against her by the vicious Widow Jethway, include a combination of circumstance and poor judgment. The charges against Elfride include:

"One who encouraged an honest youth to love her, then slighted him, so that he died. One who next took a man of no birth as a lover, who was forbidden in the house by her father. One who secretly left her home to be married to the man, met him, and went with him to London. One who,

for some reason or other, returned again unmarried. One who, in her after-correspondence with him, went so far as to address him as her husband. One who wrote the enclosed letter to ask me [Mrs. Jethway] who better than anybody else knows the story to keep the scandal a secret" (393-4).

After Henry rejects Elfride as a part of his life and leaves Endelstow, a marked change is evident in her. Upon weighing the alternatives of her problem, she feels that a last attempt on her part to be honest with Henry, beg his forgiveness, and attempt a reconciliation is worth the reputation she might lose and the suffering she might have to endure. A mature and humble Elfride arrives at Knight's London apartment. She is truly grieving and offers even to be his servant if he will only let her remain with him. "I cannot bear it--all the long hours and days and nights going on, and you not there, but away because you hate me!" (404). Her jealousy has disappeared; she is contrite, childlike, desperate in her effort to regain his love. She even predicts that this rejection will be the ultimate cause of her death.

Just as reconciliation seems imminent, Elfride's father breaks in. He admonishes Elfride for not conducting herself like a decent woman and for degrading the family name; accuses Henry of not courting his daughter properly; and implies that Knight's poor judgment has been transferred to Elfride. The vicar's refusal to listen to either Elfride or Henry re-establishes the prejudice and pseudo-pride he possesses; his misapprehension prevents any reconciliation; and most important, he finalizes Elfride's change from a young, capricious girl to a broken, unhappy woman.

Ironically, it is Elfride's very honesty which defeats her. She is foiled by Victorian convention in her final attempt to tell the truth. Knight reads into her honesty her rejection of all proprieties, and although he cannot stop loving her, he resolves never to marry her.

Elfride returns home ill and sick at heart. She expresses little care about what will happen to her in the future and states that she wishes she would die. Upon her arrival she is treated bitterly by her father. Mrs. Swancourt is less harsh with her, but her treatment of the girl assumes the air of politeness rather than sincere sympathy.

Elfride's attitude is one of duty, resignation, and obligation. She expresses a desire to do anything to help her family and to make recompense for her so called mistakes: "Yes, I'll do anything for the benefit of my family, so as to turn my useless life into some practical account" (451). She becomes not so much a wife to Lord Luxellian as a mother to his children. Her attitude is a passive one; it suggests acceptance that does not exclude sincere grief attendant to the loss of meaning in life. The change in Elfride is striking; she is a broken woman, and her death, whether explainable by physical or emotional reasons, is not surprising. Indeed, as Albert Guerard states in Thomas Hardy, The Novels and Stories, Elfride is "more sinned against than sinning" and in her final pathetic state she seems to eventually disappear completely. Elfride, as do other characters, strives for the ideal, the unattainable, and she (as they) is



inevitably disappointed.<sup>7</sup>

Certain aspects of Elfride's personality will be transferred to future heroines. Hardy's favorite device of fickleness will continue to appear even to the last heroine, Sue. The love of being loved, too, will recur in the characters of Bathsheba, Eustacia, and Sue. Good heartedness, such as Elfride possesses, is present in Bathsheba and Tess. Vanity, Hardy's universal comment about womanhood, appears again in Bathsheba, Arabella, and Eustacia. The desire to dominate is obvious in Bathsheba, Eustacia, Arabella, and Sue. Impulsiveness and indecision can be seen in Bathsheba, Eustacia, Tess, and Sue. All the heroines under consideration are emotionally motivated; sincere grief is manifested in Tess and Bathsheba. The intensity of the qualities varies, generally becoming more profound as Hardy became older.

Certain characteristics present in Elfride disappear in later heroines. Although immaturity continues to be a part of heroic make-up, generally characters of the degree of immaturity Elfride possesses are scarce. Innocence remains as an important ingredient, especially in Bathsheba and Tess, but initial passivity, or the retiring female, disappears to a great extent as the heroines exhibit more and more aggressiveness and assume more initiative. A new characteristic which appears is the disregard for social dictates, the most extreme example of which is found in Sue. An increasing intensity in resolve--specifically noticeable in the characters of Bathsheba, Eustacia, Arabella, and

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<sup>7</sup>Webster, On a Darkling Plain, p. 102.

Tess--represents distinct advances over Elfride.

In summary, Elfride may be called a traditional Hardy heroine--she loves, she loses, she pines away. She is primarily a simple character existing in a world that is complicated. Her youth and immaturity are exceptionally obvious, and although her character lacks depth, she is basically genuine and sincere. Her life is victimized to some extent, but she is also somewhat responsible for her own tragedy. Her instability and uncertainty cause her trouble earlier, but gradually her decisions become more resolved, if not more sound. Eventually, she is overcome by circumstances, but not until she has had ample opportunity to display her talents and make her mark upon future Hardy heroines. Although she is a conventional Hardy heroine (she wants the man, she fails to foresee trouble, she is indecisive, and "fate" victimizes her), she foreshadows a more dignified and mature heroine that is yet to come in Hardy's writing. His pessimism is barely visible, and the woman in desperate plight by the end of the novel is not present. Elfride does not have the qualities necessary for a suicide attempt, and she is not powerful enough to cause the deaths of either Smith or Knight. She is just a beginning of more complex women that are yet to appear.

### CHAPTER III

#### BATHSHEBA--THE DESIGNING WOMAN

"Some women only require an emergency to make them fit for one."

Far from the Madding Crowd, published in 1874, marks the beginning of Hardy's ascent to fame. Bathsheba Everdene, the central figure, not only dominates the novel, but also serves as a prototype for future Hardy women in a way Elfride does not. As Joseph Warren Beach indicates in The Technique of Thomas Hardy, Bathsheba is the first of a series of independent women who are able to take hold of life and who can meet men on common ground.

Bathsheba is a sensitive rural intelligent whose lot has consistently been difficult. She herself comments that her childhood had been difficult and that as a result gentleness had left her. The willful, vernal beauty is not without charm, however, and her allure is so great that three men mold their lives around her every action, helplessly under her spell. An almost demonic beauty who looks her best when angered, she intrigues and beguiles those in contact with her, and even the rustics describe her as a fine handsome body which could be "proud as lucifer insides . . . a very vain feymell."<sup>1</sup> If it could be said that Hardy believes

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Hardy, Far from the Madding Crowd (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1961), p. 49. (Subsequent quotations from this novel will be by page number in the text.)

that the ideal woman is a country girl with a dash of culture, then he must surely have loved Bathsheba. Early in the novel Bathsheba exhibits many of the characteristics of a typical Hardy heroine: she is beautiful, she is fickle, she is impulsive, and she is vain. In one of the first glimpses a reader gets of her, she is sitting in a loaded wagon surveying herself attentively in a small looking glass. Gabriel Oak's first comment about her is that, despite her beauty, her greatest fault is vanity; and rumor has it among the laboring villagers that she even looks into the glass to put on her nightcap properly. Her first refusal of a marriage proposal stems from this same fault: Gabriel Oak is not quite good enough for her. (Ironically, this same man, who remains her loyal and trusting friend, becomes, some years later, her devoted husband.) Without doubt, Bathsheba's pride heads her for trouble in her earlier adulthood.

Bathsheba's fickleness, perhaps inherited from her father, is evident early in the novel. It joins with her tendency to tease and ultimately destines her for trouble. One of the best examples of this fickleness occurs in her entanglement with Farmer Boldwood, some sixteen years her senior. When she finds out from Liddy, her maid-companion, that Boldwood is considered one of the most eligible gentlemen of the area, his appeal is increased considerably. The idea that he had been pursued unsuccessfully by girls for miles around intrigues her. This appeal is doubled when Liddy casually tells her that in church, Boldwood seems completely unaware of her, despite the fact that all other eyes were upon

her. Inspired by his neglect, she jokingly agrees to send him a valentine sealed with the words "marry me." Little does she suspect the complications this idle frolic would cause. When Boldwood takes her message seriously, and Bathsheba is fully aware that she has him in her grasp, she is no longer awed by him; indeed, she seeks a way out of her predicament.

Teasing is also demonstrated when she refuses at the first of the novel to tell Gabriel her name, but taunts him to find out for himself; and there is evidence of a degree of despotism when she condescendingly allows him to hold her hand after she has saved his life. (In a display of resourcefulness, she had rescued him from asphyxiation when he leaves the slides closed over the ventilating holes in his hut.)

Actions such as the previously described ones indicate her nature: Hardy describes it as a deliberative aspect with an impulsive nature underneath. He calls her an Elizabeth in brain and a Mary Stuart in spirit:

. . . She often performed actions of the greatest temerity with a manner of extreme discretion. Many of her thoughts were perfect syllogisms; unluckily they always remained thoughts. Only a few were irrational assumptions; but, unfortunately, they were the ones which most frequently grew into deeds (127).

And these few irrationalities were to cause her infinite woe and grief.

Similarly, Bathsheba's spirit is shown early in the story as she is forced to ride to Tewnell Mill to obtain oatmeal for her aunt's cattle. Thinking no one sees her, she promptly mounts the pony astride; people of the economic station of her and her

aunt can afford no sidesaddle, and necessity is not to be outdone by propriety. In another display of her spirit, her temper flares when Gabriel tells her she has done wrong by sending Mr. Boldwood the valentine, and she immediately fires him. What probably prompted the outburst is an indication of her pride:

A woman may be treated with a bitterness which is sweet to her, and with a rudeness which is not offensive. Bathsheba would have submitted to an indignant chastisement for her levity had Gabriel protested that he was loving her at the same time; the impetuosity of passion unrequited is bearable, even if it stings and anathematizes--there is a triumph in the humiliation, and a tenderness in the strife. This was what she had been expecting, and what she had not got. To be lectured because the lecturer saw in her the cold morning light of open-shuttered disillusion was exasperating (131).

This same independence is a marked feature of her character, although it changes in nature as Bathsheba grows older and experiences more of life. She is aware of her capabilities and independent nature and enjoys exhibiting both. In answering Oak's proposal, she tells him, "It wouldn't do, Mr. Oak. I want somebody to tame me; I am too independent; and you could never be able to, I know" (39). Her practicality prompts her advice to him to marry someone with money who could stock a large farm for him. Her honesty is almost cruel, were it not for the fact that it is always combined with her sincerity and complete lack of guile. She tells both Boldwood and Oak that she does not love them and that she has doubt that she could ever be able to do so. Throughout the novel, as Boldwood presses her more and more to become his wife, she firmly maintains that loving him would have nothing to do with her agreement to marry, if she decides to make such an agreement. Crazy as he is, he disregards the absence of her love and supposes

that his own will sustain them. Gabriel, on the other hand, retires more gracefully, keeps his promise never to mention the subject again, and in doing so, makes marked gains in her heart.

Despite all these presumed shortcomings in her nature, Bathsheba does possess admirable qualities. Her innocence is unquestionable, her modesty beyond reproach. Although she can be saucy and almost arrogant, she is forever a lady. Her manner is elegant and her bearing is superb, no matter what a situation might demand of her. This dignity grows as she matures and reaches its apex in her composure at the shooting and eventual death of Troy.

The change from the young Bathsheba to the mature Bathsheba is just as great as the change from Elfride to Bathsheba. This change begins when she suddenly finds herself in charge of her uncle's farm. In place of the young, somewhat haughty country girl, there is a supervising, cool woman. She assumes her responsibilities with the assurance of a thesmothete and amazes the men in her charge. Although one Henery Fray assesses her as a headstrong maid who will be ruined by pride and vanity, another rustic, Billy Smallbury, attests that she must have some real sense and that it would hurt no man to have what is under her bonnet. She establishes her command early as she personally catches the dishonorable Bailiff Pennyways thieving from her, and upon firing him she announces she will be her own "baily." She expects only fairness from the men in her employ and promises that if they serve her well she will do her best by them. In addition, however, she reminds them that they should not underestimate her ability

simply because she is a woman. She further exhibits her independence when she announces that she will no longer have a proxy at the corn market, but will take her place among the men there in selling her grain. The novelty of the whole position seems to inspire her to handle better any situation that should demand anything extra of her. When duty calls, she answers, and her capabilities are myriad: she engages her own shepherd; she audits her own accounts; she rehires her own employees; she sits at the head of the table; she helps Oak cover the wheat ricks before the storm; she arranges Fanny's burial; she takes command of the tragic situation after Troy is shot. She is masterful when need be, and the weaknesses of her nature only serve to underscore that she is a real person. Her indomitable courage in the face of danger and decision complements her impressive personality.

To understand the maturing Bathsheba adequately, it is best to examine her personality in light of each of the three men who fall in love with her. These three form a unique group of suitors: two are attractive to her (one knowingly, the other unknowingly); the third becomes involved in her life because of a careless whim and ill-timed joke. While she is attracted by superior mental and physical force, physical attraction alone is responsible (at least initially) for each man's interest in her. Although she sometimes plays the game of love by the rules of the coquette, she actually does not have the heart of one, and she abandons any such actions to be her genuine self. Perhaps this sincerity partly attributes to her heartbreak. Hardy assures the



reader, however, that Bathsheba is not a trifler with affections:

Bathsheba was no schemer for marriage, nor was she deliberately a trifler with the affections of men, and a censor's experience on seeing an actual flirt after observing her would have been a feeling of surprise that Bathsheba could be so different from such a one, and yet so like what a flirt was supposed to be (121).

The first lover under consideration is the dashing, gallant Sergeant Frank Troy. Described as young and clever, he possessed an opportunistic attitude toward life and a reputation as a flagrant liar to women. His rascality is somehow excusable in light of his potential brilliance and gracious manner. To use Hardy's words:

He never passed the line which divides the spruce vices from the ugly; and hence, though his morals had hardly been applauded, disapproval of them had frequently been tempered with a smile. This treatment had led to his becoming a sort of regreter of other men's gallantries, to his own aggrandizement as a Corinthian, rather than to the moral profit of his hearers (161).

He was fairly well educated, spoke fluently, and possessed a particular adeptness which enabled him to do two totally different things at once: he could in this way be one thing and seem another; for instance, he could speak of love and think of dinner; call on the husband to look at the wife; be eager to pay and intend to owe (161).

Understandably, then Troy's forte is to be a dissembler among women. His philosophy is brutal but accurate; one either curses a woman, or flatters her. There is no alternative. If one treats them fairly, he is lost.

Although Troy is the moral and intellectual inferior of Bathsheba and all the men in her life, she is fascinated by him and

she cannot resist him. She is totally helpless against the assaults of flattery he constantly throws at her, and from the first time he calls her "Beauty" she is under his spell. He tells her how remarkable, how beautiful, how modest she is, all the time creeping closer and closer to her heart. When he reveals his "love" for her, she is completely overcome. Although she pretends doubt, she is already his victim, and when she accepts his dead father's watch, she pleads that he really does not know her and that he is too generous. As he departs, she realizes the gravity of their actions, but she cannot begin to foresee all that will come of their conversation. At one point in the story where he demonstrates his accomplished swordsmanship, he cautions her to be still as a statue; quickly and capably he manuevers the razor-sharp blade around her body. When he had finished flourishing the sword, he showed her the caterpillar he had killed on her breast, and the lock of hair he had shorn from her tresses. Immediately, Bathsheba senses the danger of the sword exercise, and as he explains that she had been within one half inch of being pared alive, she is on the verge of collapse. As Troy prepares to leave the scene, she realizes his control over her:

She felt powerless to withstand or deny him. He was altogether too much for her, and Bathsheba seemed as one who, facing a reviving wind, finds it blow so strongly that it stops the breath. . . . She felt like one who has sinned a great sin (179).

Hardy tells the reader that Bathsheba's loving Troy in such a way doubles her weakness:

Bathsheba loved Troy in a way that only self-reliant women love when they abandon their self-reliance. When a

strong woman recklessly throws away her strength she is worse than a weak woman who has never had any strength to throw away. One source of her inadequacy is the novelty of the occasion. She has never had practice in making the best of such a condition. Weakness is doubly weak by being new (179-80).

He describes her love as genuine, complete, and reckless:

Her love was entire as a child's and though warm as summer it was fresh as spring. Her culpability lay in her making no attempt to control feeling by subtle and careful inquiry into consequences (180).

Despite both Gabriel's and Liddy's warnings to her that Troy is a wild scamp and that stories circulating about him are not wholly complimentary ones, Bathsheba is blinded by the dashing soldier. She begs Liddy to deny the tales and finally coerces her into agreeing that he is not as bad as he is made out to be. Inwardly, however, she realizes his shortcomings and her own weaknesses for her involvement with him. At this point, though, she can no longer think with her head because her heart had taken hold of her reason.

Bathsheba's marriage to Troy is actually a strange combination of her selfishness and her concern for the welfare of others. Troy had joined his regiment at Bath, and after his departure, Farmer Boldwood confronts Bathsheba with the charge that she had jilted him for the glamorous Sergeant Troy. In his rage he curses Troy and declares his vengeance on the soldier. Knowing both parties, and fearing that Boldwood's anger might provoke an attack upon Troy when he returned, she attempts to solve the dilemma. She sets out for Bath to tell Troy she no longer loves him, thereby discouraging his return to Weatherbury.

When she arrives there, in her conversation with Troy she learns that he had seen that very day a woman more beautiful than she, and that his loyalty to her can not be assured unless she marries him right away. As she admits, ". . . between jealousy and distraction I married him" (239). She realizes her folly, but she is aware, too, that she is hopelessly involved.

Finally, though, the glamour of Sergeant Troy begins to wear off. He buys his discharge from his regiment and makes a pretense at being master of Bathsheba's farm. In an effort to ingratiate himself to the help at the farm, he offers "treble-strong" goblets to them at the harvest supper. Bathsheba senses the foolishness of such a move, but she fails to make Troy listen to her. In fact, he dismisses the women folk and invites the men to carouse with him. During the night a fierce storm arises, and while the revellers are deep in their drunken stupor, Gabriel, with Bathsheba's help, works frantically to cover the wheat and barley ricks. In an awkward attempt to apologize for Troy's irresponsibility (and her own rude treatment of Gabriel), she tells him of her hasty marriage. She thanks him for his help and devotion to her. Boldly and cruelly she is made aware of differences in two of the men in her life.

In addition to his lackadaisical farming, Troy takes up gambling and rapidly depletes Bathsheba's funds. When she entreats him to give up such recreation, he chides her for losing her former pluck and sauciness and for becoming chicken-hearted. Reluctantly, she remains silent.

A third cause of her distress with her husband is his suspicious actions and his mysterious "responsibilities": an unusual meeting along a roadside with a vagrant girl agitates Bathsheba noticeably; a request for twenty pounds additional cash worries her; a definite diminishing of his attentions toward her hurts her; and, most of all, the discovery of a curl of golden hair in his watch enrages her. She begs him to burn the curl and when he refuses, she declares her wretched and repentant state:

"I don't want much; bare justice--that's all! Ah! once I felt I could be content with nothing less than the highest homage from the husband I should choose. Now, anything short of cruelty will content me. Yes! the independent and spirited Bathsheba is come to this!" (257)

Her pride suffers its most severe blow. She knows she has been conquered, but she will never admit it. She detests herself for falling so low:

Her pride was indeed brought low by despairing discoveries of her spoilation by marriage with a less pure nature than her own. She chafed to and fro in rebelliousness, like a caged leopard; her whole soul was in arms, and the blood fired her face. Until she had met Troy, Bathsheba had been proud of her position as a woman: it had been a glory to her to know that her lips had been touched by no man's on earth--that her waist had never been encircled by a lover's arms. She hated herself now (257).

The death of Fanny Robin (Fanny had been her uncle's servant) causes the final break between Troy and Bathsheba. Upon learning of Fanny's tragic death, Bathsheba assumes the responsibility of having her coffin transported to her home to await burial. Sitting up alone in the parlor with the coffin and awaiting Troy's return, Bathsheba, in her loneliness and misery, has serious misgivings about the death of the girl: "Bathsheba

had grounds for conjecturing a connection between her own history and the dimly suspected tragedy . . . " (275). Finally, she makes up her mind to find out for herself; she secures a screwdriver and opens the coffin. Distraught by her discovery, she kneels by the coffin; momentarily, Troy appears and is faced with the realization that it is Fanny and his child in the oak box. He admits the connection with Fanny and when he stoops to kiss them, Bathsheba, in her last entreaty to him to remain her husband, flings her arms round his neck and begs him to kiss her, too. The scene is a shattering one:

There was something so abnormal and startling in the child-like pain and simplicity of this appeal from a woman of Bathsheba's calibre and independence, that Troy, loosening her tightly clasped arms from his neck, looked at her in bewilderment. It was such an unexpected revelation of all women being alike at heart, even those so different in their accessories as Fanny and this one beside him, that Troy could hardly seem to believe her to be his proud wife Bathsheba. Fanny's own spirit seemed to be animating her frame. But this was the mood of a few instants only. When the momentary surprise had passed, his expression changed to a silencing imperious gaze (281).

"I will not kiss you!" he says, pushing her away. In his refusal, he tells Bathsheba that she is nothing to him and that despite his legal marriage to her, his moral marriage will always be to Fanny. A crushed and broken-hearted Bathsheba flees from the house, seeking escape and security some place away from Troy.

Even in her grief, though, Bathsheba performs acts of charity; when the gargyle washes away the flowers Troy plants on Fanny's grave, she replants them, and furthermore, directs that the drain be adjusted so that it will not wash the grave any

longer. Though Troy wounds her grievously, she still shows her love for him by tending the grave.

Immediately after Fanny's funeral, Troy disappears. Reports come back to Weatherbury indicating he has drowned, and Bathsheba, although she questions his death, finally goes into proper mourning for him. The mourning actually is only an extension of the general apathy in which she now lives. She runs the farm, gathers the profits, and looks back over her past life as if **she**, too, were dead. Not until some nine months later does she emerge as anything like the woman she had previously been. Troy had provoked a severe emotional crisis in Bathsheba's life, and she would never recover completely from the experience.

Troy's final test of Bathsheba, however, is yet to come. Troy reappears in Weatherbury and upon seeing Bathsheba at the sheep fair, resolves to reclaim what is rightfully his. Since he has heard rumors of the Bathsheba-Boldwood affair, he plans to intrude on the Boldwood Christmas party, create a scene, and "steal" his wife back again. The party turns into a fiasco, though, as Boldwood cuts him down in one shot and then in a last desperate effort, attempts to end his own life. The tragedy is the last crucial one Bathsheba is to face. As panic spreads throughout the house, she quietly and quickly assumes command. Although she understands the hopelessness of the situation, she sends Gabriel to Casterbridge for a surgeon. Before he can return, she transfers Troy to their home, dismisses all servant help, and properly lays out her husband in his grave clothes. The villagers are

amazed at her stoicism, but Bathsheba comments that she merely has the heart of a wife. Then she collapses in a shapeless heap on the floor. No more superhuman strength is required of her, and her grief is now genuine, both for the one who is alive and the one who is dead. She feels responsible for the physical death of Troy, but perhaps even more, she feels guilt for the spiritual death of a man who, although he still lives and breathes, had died even more than Troy. The confrontation affects Bathsheba physically and emotionally and utterly prostrates her for some time. Only with the arrival of spring, does she revive. Even then, she is no longer the independent, self-assured young woman she had been before, but begins to assume the quiet, reticent passivity characteristic of her submission to Gabriel at the end of the novel.

The second man with whom Bathsheba becomes involved is the dignified and aloof Farmer Boldwood. Bathsheba's connection with him is all the result of the impulsively dispatched valentine. The reserved bachelor, never having allowed himself the luxury of interest in women, is completely overwhelmed at the arrival of the valentine sealed with the words "marry me." It fascinates him as he reads and re-reads its message, attempting to decode its mystery. When he discovers that the handwriting is Bathsheba's, he falls even deeper into the trance. The idea of a woman wanting to marry him is overpowering; he had taken no notice of women before:

To Boldwood women had been remote phenomena rather than necessary complements--comets of such uncertain aspect,



movement, and permanence, that whether their orbits were as geometrical, unchangeable, and as subject to laws as his own, or as absolutely erratic as they superficially appeared, he had not deemed it his duty to consider. (115).

Now Bathsheba has entered an arena previously untried.

Boldwood is an individual who deserves some particular consideration, for he is an extraordinary person. Probably the most telling characteristic of his personality is his cool, calculating manner and his serious frame of mind. He does not understand jest, and he is easily offended. Such elements foreshadow his ultimate madness. As Hardy describes him,

his was not an ordinary nature. That stillness, which struck casual observers more than anything else in his character and habit, and seemed so precisely like the rest of inaction, may have been the perfect balance of enormous antagonistic forces--positives and negatives in fine adjustment. His equilibrium disturbed, he was in extremity at once. If an emotion possessed him at all, it ruled him; a feeling not mastering him was entirely latent. Stagnant or rapid, it was never slow. He was always hit mortally, or he was missed.

He had no light and careless touches in his constitution, whether for good or for evil. Stern in the outlines of action, mild in the details, he was serious throughout all. He saw no absurd sides to the follies of life, and thus, though not quite companionable in the eyes of merry men and scoffers, and to those to whom all things show life as a jest, he was not intolerable to the earnest and those acquainted with grief. Being a man who read all the dramas of life seriously, if he failed to please when they were comedies, there was no frivolous treatment to reproach him for when they chanced to end tragically (118).

Had Bathsheba had any idea of the kind of person with which she toyed, she might have been more careful in her jokes, and without doubt she would have been amazed at her power over the quiet, somber man. She does not dream

. . . that the dark and silent shape upon which she had so carelessly thrown a seed was a hotbed of tropic intensity. Had she known Boldwood's moods her blame would have been

fearful, and the stain upon her heart ineradicable. Moreover, had she known her present power for good or evil over this man, she would have trembled at her responsibility. Luckily for her present, unluckily for her future tranquility, her understanding had not yet told her what Boldwood was. Nobody knew entirely; for though it was possible to form guesses concerning his wild capabilities from old floodmarks faintly visible, he had never been seen at the high tides which caused them (119).

Roy Morrell suggests that Boldwood represents to Bathsheba a "social goal . . . , propriety, and respectability."<sup>2</sup> His appeal to her is his inaccessibility; once he declares his interest, she can be bothered no longer. Boldwood attracts because he is a challenge--he is disinterested in women, he arouses her curiosity, and he openly ignores her. The combination is explosive and she cannot resist it.

Throughout the novel Boldwood pursues Bathsheba relentlessly. Always in the way of their marriage is some shadow--Troy, Oak, or her mourning. He begs, he pleads, he humbles himself. He is contented with mere promise of a promise, until he drives her to agree finally that she will marry him if they both live for seven years after Troy's death. Her honesty will not permit her, however, to allow Boldwood to believe that she loves him or ever could love him. In her efforts to cool his attentions, she apologizes endlessly for the valentine, remarking about her thoughtlessness and wantonness, but by that time Boldwood is so enamoured that he loses touch with reality and enters an ethereal world of romance, love, and reciprocal affections. He asks no love from

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<sup>2</sup>Roy Morrell, Thomas Hardy, The Will and the Way (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 60.

her--expects no love. All he requests is that she allow him to love her, shower her with attention, and become a part of her life.

Early in this courtship Bathsheba considers the advantages of such a marriage: her station in life would rise; he is well-to-do and respected; he lives close by; his qualities are "super-rogatory." But the fact remains that although she admires him she does not want him.

After the disappearance of Troy and during Bathsheba's first "mourning," Boldwood presses her to promise him she will marry him. Her ultimate agreement is prompted not by love or the prospect of such love, but by duty. She feels both that she is honor bound to make some recompense for her ill-timed joke, and also that she must somehow assuage her conscience:

"You know . . . that is what I cannot get off my conscience--that I once seriously injured him in sheer idleness. If I had never played a trick upon him, he would never have wanted to marry me. O if I could only pay some heavy damages in money to him for the harm I did, and so get the sin off my soul that way! . . . Well, there's the debt, which can only be discharged in one way, and I believe I am bound to do it if it honestly lies in my power, without any consideration of my own future at all" (331).

Although the marriage never materializes, Bathsheba experiences true grief after Boldwood's sentence. She feels some of the responsibility for the horrible state of his affairs is hers, and that because of her involvement she cannot live. This remorse, coupled with the grief she experiences for the death of her husband, alters her physically and emotionally. Liddy comments that Bathsheba is miserable, and that she has changed radically from the romping girl that moved to Weatherbury two

years before. Her health returns at springtime after the tragedy, but the alteration of her spirit is more permanent. She avoids people and remains alone most of the time, solitary walks replacing her once active presence on the farm. And in the deepest moment of her despair, yet another blow is struck: Gabriel plans to leave her. Now all the world seems against her.

Probably less time is devoted to the actual courtship of Bathsheba and Gabriel Oak than to any other love affair in the book. A reader can easily recognize, however, that this is the union that will endure, even though Hardy may be suggesting that in allying herself to Gabriel, Bathsheba may have been settling down to the dullness and complacency of which society approves. In his almost comic stolidity, Gabriel seems to represent a stability that society demands, and Bathsheba's independent spirit must succumb to it or suffer an annihilation similar to that of other Hardy heroines who move out of conventional paths.

However, Gabriel Oak is a hard-working, reliable young man with sound judgment and good character--the kind of man society regards as a fine Christian. He is moderately ambitious, conscientious, modest, and retiring. While his motions, slow and deliberate, seem to mirror his inner being, he can also react quickly and effectively if a situation demands such.

Bathsheba readily makes "appreciable inroads" upon Gabriel's heart. As Hardy somewhat humorously describes him, Gabriel is a model of patient fidelity:

Love being an extremely exacting usurer (a sense of exorbitant profit, spiritually, by an exchange of hearts,

being at the bottom of pure passions, as that of exorbitant profit, bodily or materially, is at the bottom of those of lower atmosphere), every morning Oak's feelings were as sensitive as the money-market in calculations upon his chances. His dog waited for his meals in a way so like that in which Oak waited for the girl's presence that the farmer was quite struck with the resemblance, felt it lowering, and would not look at the dog. However, he continued to watch through the hedge for her regular coming, and thus his sentiments towards her were deepened without any corresponding effect being produced upon herself. Oak had nothing finished and ready to say as yet, and not being able to frame love phrases . . . he said no word at all (33).

Oak's love for Bathsheba is presented early in the story. Like her other admirers, he too is attracted by her beauty, charm, and spirit; unlike the others, he must wait for the returning of her interest in him. When she refuses his proposal, he calmly and resignedly accepts her answer. Unlike Troy, he possesses no magnetic attraction for her; unlike Boldwood he does not press his attentions on her, but rather waits for the time to come when she at last realizes his intent. In the words of James Wright,

Gabriel . . . has waited for Bathsheba, not because of any priggish assurance that she would come to a most satisfactory grief. In fact he had given her up for lost several times. He has waited simply because he is not in any particular hurry (362).

Although Bathsheba is not attracted to Oak in the beginning of the novel, she still makes a special effort to make him woo her. She taunts him about her name and follows him from her aunt's house to explain that she really has no suitors. In refusing his proposal, she tells Gabriel that he could not possibly cope with her independence and even advises him to find a rich woman who could provide for him.

A stroke of fate is to bring them together, however,

when she manages her uncle's farm and hires him as her shepherd. Gradually, her attitude toward Gabriel changes, and little by little she finds herself dependent upon him. Her affection for Oak grows slowly, silently, until she suddenly discovers she cannot do without him. Paramount is her confidence in his advice and counsel. More than once in a fit of despair or exasperation, she turns to Gabriel for help. Whether it be saving her dying sheep or giving his opinion on the ill-sent valentine, she values his levelheadedness and honesty. She seeks his advice no matter what it costs her in blows to her ego.

Gabriel's character is reinforced in the story by the marked contrast between him and Sergeant Troy. Their differences are many:

Troy's deformities lay deep down from a woman's vision, while his embellishments were upon the very surface; thus contrasting with homely Oak, whose defects were patent to the blindest, and whose virtues were as metals in a mine (180).

Through Gabriel, however, Bathsheba adds a most important element to her character--humility. Painful as it is for her through the different situations, his judgments and criticisms guide her to a better realization of herself and a more tolerant acceptance of life. And Gabriel humbles her often: the reminder of the ride into town astride the pony; the reprimand for sending the valentine; the warning about the rascal Troy; the saving of her sheep; the appraisal of the Boldwood romance--all serve to show that Oak's assessment of Bathsheba is both accurate and personal. He defends her almost automatically when the farm workers introduce her name into idle gossip, and he protects her

interests when he saves her grain ricks from fire early in the novel; some eight months later, he struggles again with the ricks to save them from an approaching storm. His devotion, while unheralded, is ever-present, and though Bathsheba seems not to appreciate his efforts, she unconsciously becomes dependent upon the life of this gentle, unassuming man. Herbert B. Grimsditch suggests that Bathsheba moves through shame, agony, and tragedy, but that she finds her reward in the love of Gabriel.

In describing the love of Gabriel and Bathsheba, Hardy calls it a "substantial affection":

There's was that substantial affection which arises (if any arises at all) when the two who are thrown together begin first by knowing the rougher sides of each other's character, and not the best till further on, the romance growing up in the interstices of a mass of hard prosaic reality. . . . happy circumstances permits its development, the compounded feeling proves itself to be the only love which is strong as death--that love which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown, beside which the passion usually called by the name is evanescent as steam (368).

In an afterword to the novel James Wright summarizes the love of the two characters by describing it as a return to a situation similar to that in which Bathsheba appears at the beginning of the novel. It is a coming home:

And so Bathsheba's return to Oak is also her return to the occasion of life where he had first seen her: a girl alone in a wagon, waiting for her driver to find her hat which had fallen, touching her hair and smiling into herself, surrounded by household goods and window plants. . . . Returning to Oak, she comes home to herself. The other wooers have simply fallen away like dead leaves (382).

In considering Bathsheba alongside Elfride, there can be no doubt that there are similarities. While Bathsheba possesses the same basic qualities, the depth of these qualities is more

noticeable. She inherits Elfride's love of admiration and also a degree of her jealousy. Their despotism is somewhat alike and certainly their basic innocence, moral stance, and gentleness are comparable. Perhaps the attributes they have most in common are their impulsiveness and pride. Impulsiveness leads both characters into situations that they regret: Elfride abandons a hasty marriage attempt; Bathsheba mails a valentine that produces tragedy. Like Elfride, her pride is nearly her downfall, certainly her motivation. Similarly, their humility and their grief, too, are akin. Both women undergo severe emotional and physical change because of the situations they have encountered, and both lives are substantially altered. They each experience grief that affects them physically and emotionally; they change from spirited individuals to more resigned ones. In Elfride's case, the grief might even be said to be responsible for her death.

More pronounced, however, are the differences between the two. Although they are still Hardy sisters, there are striking contrasts in the heroines. Bathsheba is undoubtedly more convincing, more commanding, more alive. Her progress suggests a development, a maturing of character and technique not present in former stories.<sup>3</sup> She is one of the first heroines to represent a change from superficial personality to depth of character. More admirable and more intelligent than Elfride, she is noticeably more adult. She is indicative of the development of Hardy as an artist in considerably better command of his method. Courageous and

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<sup>3</sup>Chew, Thomas Hardy, Poet and Novelist, p. 364.



determined, she eventually emerges as a figure of resourcefulness and endurance.

Probably the greatest difference in Bathsheba and Elfride is Bathsheba's maturing as the novel progresses. Her judgments become more sound and her attitudes more sincere. Her whimsies change to reliable standards as she strives to do right, to repair previous injuries, and to settle old debts. Although responsibility and disaster change Bathsheba, she loses none of her former attractiveness. Her beauty and pride have been tempered with remorse, honesty, and sympathy. Misery has lived with her, but because it has, her love has more capacity. By the end of the novel, her submission has strength it would not have had at the beginning of the story.

Bathsheba, then represents a marked advancement over Elfride. Her thought processes are more thorough, her impulses are more controllable, and most important of all, her character grows and matures as a result of the circumstances and events in her life. Although she sows the seeds of what turn out to be her own grief, her strength of character allows her to rise above her troubles, and her capabilities eventually overcome her weaknesses. Her spirit is not broken, but rather molded to fit a wholesome and more meaningful role. Bathsheba becomes a genuine woman--one of the best Hardy produces early, and upon this foundation other creditable and complicated women are formed.

## CHAPTER IV

### EUSTACIA---THE ENIGMATIC WOMAN

"In heaven she will probably sit between the Heloises and the Cleopatras."

Four years after the publication of Far from the Madding Crowd, one of Thomas Hardy's first truly complex women appears--the beautiful, imperious Eustacia Vye. This heroine represents the arrival of a new kind of Hardy character--she is the first of Hardy's irresponsible and mildly neurotic hedonists.<sup>1</sup> Up to this point, Eustacia is the most complicated woman of Hardy's invention. She borrows only lightly from the characteristics of Elfride and Bathsheba, and instead possesses a whole new variety of personality traits. Interestingly, readers' sympathies are probably stronger for Eustacia than for any heroine so far, because her complexity mystifies all those around her in the novel, all those reading the novel, and indeed even Eustacia herself. Lionel Johnson in The Art of Thomas Hardy, calls Eustacia a "masterpiece of pathetic satire,"<sup>2</sup> and her stature as a controlling character in a novel is unsurpassed. She commands Hardy's collection just as she commands the people in The Return of the Native, and yet she is one of the weakest and most helpless of Hardy's women.

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<sup>1</sup>Albert J. Guerard, Hardy, A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 64.

<sup>2</sup>Lionel Johnson, The Art of Thomas Hardy, pp. 194-5.

Eustacia Vye, the granddaughter of the old Captain Vye is an alien on Egdon Heath. Moving to the country from Budmouth, she remains aloof from both the heath and its inhabitants, an "imperial recluse" of a grandeur equal to the heath itself.<sup>3</sup> Eustacia is an otherwise unexampled type in Hardy fiction--a woman who lived to love, and to love in a blind, hot, lustful way.<sup>4</sup> This most queenly of all the heroines is an unhappy, lonely woman possessed with a passionate, selfish nature that enslaves others and destroys itself. Eustacia is a "woman of rich and stormy passions, pent up in a lonely place, and longing for the larger and livelier movement of the great world,"<sup>5</sup> even if it is only Budmouth. A rich sensuousness is Eustacia's dominant characteristic. According to Henry C. Duffin in Thomas Hardy, A Study of the Wessex Novels, the Poems, and The Dynasts,

the leaven of Eustacia's sensuous passion pervades the book, and is the source or foundation of the dual incongruity that forms the tragedy of her life--her seclusion upon Egdon and her marriage to Clym Yeobright.

This sensuous nature is incapable of thought. She is composed completely of "highly-potentialized feeling--her flesh, glorious and exultant has absorbed her soul. . . ."<sup>6</sup> Her physical attractiveness compels the love of Clym, Wildeve, and even Charley, and similarly, she is drawn to the two former. All are highly

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Henry Charles Duffin, Thomas Hardy, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup>Joseph Warren Beach, Technique, p. 80.

<sup>6</sup>Henry Charles Duffin, Thomas Hardy, p. 226.

dissimilar, but mistakenly believe they are compatible. Joseph Warren Beach in The Technique of Thomas Hardy calls Eustacia "a wonderful creation, a poetic invention of strange exotic beauty, fit to be the wicked queen of tragedy." At odds with life, she seeks to force circumstances into proper accord with the world of her dreams, and desires to be refined above the common life of the earth; her tragedy, therefore, is one of unrealized aspirations. Hardy states that the "shady splendor of her beauty was the real surface of the sad and stifled warmth within her."<sup>7</sup> Because her force is centripetal, she draws others to her and makes their lives tragic, too.

Hardy's conflict between the impulse to create personality and the impulse to create character appears for the last time in The Return of the Native,<sup>8</sup> generally considered the best of his early Wessex novels. The pessimism so typical of Hardy (as discussed in Chapter I) is first found most completely and effectively in this novel, but it still remains as a profound and unbiased study of human nature. For sheer beauty there is no other Hardy woman like Eustacia, for while she is somewhat abnormal and not altogether virtuous, she is dynamic and not without some characteristics that might have been turned into good had the heath not controlled her.

Eustacia is one of the most despotic of Hardy's heroines.

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<sup>7</sup>Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1961), p. 75. (Subsequent quotations from this novel will be by page number in the text.)

<sup>8</sup>Guerard, Thomas Hardy, The Novels and Stories, p. 138.

She commands the men in her life and they are helpless in her grasp: she dispenses favors, for example, Charley's holding hands with her, much as one would dispense wages, and her "love," as it might be called, consumes those around her. This love is selfish and self-centered: she cannot comprehend what love without selfishness might be like. When Diggory Venn states that although he loves Thomasin, he would acquiesce to her love for Wildeve if it made her happy, Eustacia cannot fathom his meaning:

What a strange sort of love, to be entirely free from that quality of selfishness which is frequently the chief constituent of the passion, and sometimes its only one! The reddleman's disinterestedness was so well deserving of respect that it overshot respect by being barely comprehended; and she almost thought it absurd (172).

Eustacia's selfishness is manifested in her designing ways: she has only contempt for the lowly Mummers, yet she condescends to use their play as a means to meet Clym for the first time; she "loves" Wildeve only until something better comes along (much as Henry Knight replaces Stephen Smith in Elfride's affections); she openly plans to conquer Clym because of the probability of his taking her away from the heath and to that which is "called life: music, poetry, passion, war, and all the beating and pulsing that is going on in the great arteries of the world" (80). Eustacia is seldom a schemer, but when she is, Hardy says, "her plans showed the comprehensive strategy of a general . . ." (80).

Just as Eustacia is not altogether unlovable, neither is she completely dishonorable. Her morality, a strange combination

of honor and pride, is not sullied, for even when she despairs of Clym's love for her, she refuses to accept Wildeve's advances because he is the husband of another woman. Again after his fateful visit to her home when Mrs. Yeobright makes her trip for reconciliation, Eustacia tells him that he must never come there again:

"Now, one word, Damon," she remarked as he stepped forth.  
 "This is your first visit here; let it be your last. We have been hot lovers in our time, but it won't do now" (323).

In addition, she feels he is not worth breaking her marriage vows for--he is not great enough for her.

Eustacia is pictured differently by those whose lives she affects and also by the heath with which she comes in contact. The heath is an ever-present observer of Eustacia. Although the heath is directly opposite Eustacia's nature, its attitude toward her is fittingly one of indifference--hence, one of objectivity. Hardy makes the heath his most overwhelming character. Just as Eustacia controls people, the heath controls all, including her. Its personification is both terrible and grand, but most impressive is its might--as Hardy calls it, this "vast tract of unenclosed wild":

The face of the heath by its mere complexion added half an hour to evening; it could in like manner retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread (1).

Likewise it affects Eustacia.

Hardy is careful, though, to make the heath neutral. It is not aggressive; it is abiding. As he tells the reader,

when other things sank brooding to sleep the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen. Every night its Titanic form seemed to await something; but it had waited thus, unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis--the final overthrow (2).

Hardy calls it "a face on which time makes but little impression" (1). Eustacia, assuredly, had little effect on it. The heath is monotony personified:

It was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature--neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly: Neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony. As with some persons who have long lived apart, solitude seemed to look out of its countenance. It had a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities (4).

Foreshadowing the eventual outcome of the novel even more, Hardy adds:

Civilization was its enemy; . . . In its venerable one coat lay a certain vein of satire on human vanity in clothes. . . . The sea changed, the fields changed, the rivers, the villages, and the people changed, yet Egdon remained (4-5).

The heath is not predatory, but perpetual. Its gloom does not seek and destroy the alien, but instead exists and destroys him.

Eustacia is a bold, fearless young woman who craves the fullness of life. Unreconciled to the restrictions that the heath puts upon her, her view of life is that formed by her environment, plus her nature. She seeks the impossible; the heath, therefore, is her deterrent, her "hades"; she yearns for that which she cannot have. She longs for a grand passion beyond her reach. It would seem that in some ways she would be fit to rule the abode of Egdon, but the "smouldering fire of her darkly-beautiful soul is intensified by a great . . . hatred of this

austere monster that holds her relentlessly back from the indulgence of her passions."<sup>9</sup> As H. C. Duffin states, to her the heath is a void--a solitude, oppressive and restraining. She is at absolute variance with her surroundings, although artistically she is remarkably in tune with them. Although she longs for gaiety and opportunity, there is an aesthetic congruity between her dark, unconventional passions and her secluded environment.<sup>10</sup> Lascelles Abercrombie says in Thomas Hardy, A Critical Study that she is her own "incarnate destiny," and her world, the "tragic poetry of her own creation," overcomes her. The whole story is Eustacia's vain attempt to escape the limitations of Egdon through love. Her stifled longing for expansion leads her to play with the love of two different men and ultimately causes her supposed suicide. Her nature is tragic: because she is egocentric, she must be the center of her universe; perverse, but grand, she falls to her own insatiable pride. Her conflict is between stern, limited actualities (the heath) and romantic imaginings; but her predicament is only an exaggeration of the quandary in which Hardy believes intelligent and sensitive human beings find themselves.<sup>11</sup> The heath does not care what happens to humans, just as the forces of Nature are indifferent. It participates "passively in man's slow and unhappy progress through disillusionive centuries. Natural law leads man from one mistake to another; chance, accident, and

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<sup>9</sup>Henry Charles Duffin, Thomas Hardy, p. 129.

<sup>10</sup>Joseph Warren Beach, Technique, p. 103.

<sup>11</sup>Harvey Curtis Webster, On a Darkling Plain, p. 122.



coincidence lend their hands to insure man's unhappiness."<sup>12</sup>

Because Eustacia will not bow to the inscrutable winds of Fate (the heath) she is broken by it. Because she resists vigorously, she is tragic.<sup>13</sup> Ironically, she is seen constantly with the heath as a background; she is almost a part of the landscape, and the gloomy atmosphere of the heath is the same as her gloomy soul. Because of her environment, her would-be charms turn to curses, and she evolves as a dreamer of dreams--a desolate, hungering spirit in magnificent form, wasted on the heath. Sadly, the subtle beauty of the heath is lost on her. As Hardy explains,

she only caught its vapors. An environment which would have made a contented woman a poet, a suffering woman a psalmist, even a giddy woman thoughtful, made a rebellious woman saturnine. (79).

The heath is unmerciful to Eustacia because it ignores her. In its awesome majesty, it is not even aware of her presence, but it consumes her just the same.

Eustacia is described by Hardy as Queen of Night, and the imagery of darkness surrounds her constantly. The first time the reader meets her is at night as she stands on Rainbarrow, a mound rising in the loneliest part of the heath. She moves about frequently at night outside on the heath, and even inside her house, she moves in darkness; the rendezvous with Wildeve, and later with Clym, occur most frequently at night. Her majesty is unquestionable; her personality is dark and mysterious, imbued

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>13</sup>Joseph Warren Beach, Technique, p. 130.

by the heath and punctuated by the fieriness of her nature. Hardy tells the reader:

She had Pagan eyes, full of nocturnal mysteries. Their light, as it came and went, and came again, was partially hampered by their oppressive lids and lashes; and of these the under lid was much fuller than it usually is with English women. This enabled her to indulge in reverie without seeming to do so: she might have been believed capable of sleeping without closing them up. Assuming that the souls of men and women were visible essences, you could fancy the color of Eustacia's soul to be flame-like. The sparks from it that rose into her dark pupils gave the same impression (74).

He describes her voice as a viola and her beauty as sad and stifled warmth. He comments that her regal bearing triumphs over realms and hearts she never actually possesses and suggests that her demeanor approaches the god-like:

Eustacia Vye was the raw material of a divinity. On Olympus she would have done well with a little preparation. She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman (73).

Her one great desire is to be loved to madness. Love is one thing that could assuage the grief of monotony of everyday--any particular lover does not seem to matter, but she longs for abstract love--passionate love. Fidelity in such love is maintained not for fidelity's sake, but because of love's grip. Her prayer, brought on by Egdon's love-famine, is "O deliver my heart to fearful gloom and loneliness; send me love from somewhere, else I shall die"(78). She is extremely lonely, and she senses her melancholy might have been inborn, and this same loneliness only deepens her desire and serves to make her affirm that she would snatch an hour's passion from wherever it might come. She is fearless and forward, but she hates change; she tolerates the heath, but

despises it and accepts it as banishment from the brilliance and beauty she imagines exists elsewhere. She forecasts that it will be her ruin--and her ruin it is, spiritually and physically.

The next character with whom the reader sees Eustacia is Damon Wildeve. Eustacia controls Wildeve completely: it is as simple as lighting a fire--he is drawn to her as surely as the moths to flames. As he tells her, "she gives him no peace." Even on the night of his attempted wedding to Thomasin, she lights the fire on Rainbarrow and Wildeve must go there. When he arrives, her attitude is one of triumphant pleasure--she tells him that she knows he loves her best--that the marriage-attempt failed partly because he could not give her up. He replies,

"Yes, or why should I have come? . . . Not that fidelity will be any great merit in me after your kind speech about my unworthiness, which should have been said by myself if by anybody, and comes with an ill grace from you. However, the curse of inflammability is upon me, and I must live under it, and take any snub from a woman. It has brought me down from engineering to innkeeping: what lower stage it has in store for me I have yet to learn"(70).

In reply she taunts him by saying that in all his travels he has never seen more beautiful than she, and he must admit she is right. Wildeve suggests, however, the duality of their involvement:

"I know you too well, my Eustacia; I know you too well. There isn't a note in you which I don't know; and that hot little bosom couldn't play such a cold-blooded trick to save its life. I saw a woman on Rainbarrow at dusk looking down towards my house. I think I drew you out before you drew out me"(72).

They are equally involved.

Similarly, Wildeve and Eustacia possess natures that

intentionally hurt the ones they "love." Her "love" for him is relative: when someone else wants him, so does she; when another does not want him, and he is hers, she is not so sure of her sentiments:

What curious feeling was this coming over her? Was it really possible that her interest in Wildeve had been so entirely the result of antagonism that the glory and the dream departed from the man with the first sound that he was no longer coveted by her rival? She was, then, secure of him at last. Thomasin no longer required him. What a humiliating victory! He loved her best, she thought; and yet--dared she to murmur such reacherous criticism ever so softly?--what was the man worth whom a woman inferior to herself did not value? The sentiment which lurks more or less in all animate nature--that of not desiring the undesired of others--was lively as a passion in the supersubtle, epicurean heart of Eustacia. Her social superiority over him, which before had scarcely ever impressed her, became unpleasantly insistent, and for the first time she felt that she had stooped in loving him (115-116).

Disillusioned after making plans for another meeting on the heath, Eustacia decides that she may have over-estimated Wildeve,

for to perceive his mediocrity now was to admit her own great folly heretofore. And the discovery that she was the owner of a disposition so purely that of a dog in the manger, had something in it which at first made her ashamed. . . . Her lover was no longer to her an exciting man whom many women strove for, and herself could only retain by striving with them. He was a superfluity. . . . To be conscious that the end of the dream is approaching, and yet has not absolutely come, is one of the most wearisome as well as the most curious stages along the course between the beginning of a passion and its end (117-118).

She promotes Thomasin's marriage to Wildeve (through Diggory Venn) because of the arrival of Clym; she even acts as witness; he (Wildeve) marries Thomasin to hurt her. Yet they are magnetically attracted: each wants the other when a third party stands between them. As Joseph Warren Beach states in The Technique of Thomas Hardy, "Wildeve and Eustacia are ruthless players of the game of

love, drawn together and repelled according to the pagan laws of jealousy, vanity, and pique." When Eustacia, in her despair of the life to which Clym subjects her, goes dancing, she meets Wildeve with surprise, but delight:

How near she was to Wildeve! it was terrible to think of. she could feel his breathing, and he, of course, could feel hers. How badly she had treated him! yet, here they were treading one measure. The enchantment of the dance surprised her. A clear line of difference divided like a tangible fence her experience within this maze of motion from her experience without it. Her beginning to dance had been like a change of atmosphere; outside, she had been steeped in arctic frigidity by comparison with the tropical sensations here. She had entered the dance from the troubled hours of her late life as one might enter a brilliant chamber after a night walk in a wood. Wildeve by himself would have been merely agitation; Wildeve added to the dance, and the moonlight, and the secrecy, began to be a delight. Whether his personality supplied the greater part of this sweetly compounded feeling, or whether the dance and the scene weighed the more therein, was a nice point upon which Eustacia herself was entirely in a cloud (297).

Even in their deaths they attract each other. Eustacia appeals to him to help her get to Budmouth and then on to Paris. Wildeve cannot be content merely to assist her in her escape, but filches his family savings from Thomasin, and unknown to Eustacia, sets out to accompany her to Paris. He, too, plunges into the weir. Their violent, disconnected lives end together on an ironically harmonious note.

Importantly, Wildeve is responsible to some extent for Eustacia's attitude toward the heath as a cruel taskmaster. When Clym assumes the job as furze-cutter, he reminds her continually that the heath (or Fate) has been unkind to her. Again when he visits her at her home, he suggests that the fates have not been kind to her. When Charley lights the bonfire and Wildeve mistakes

it as a signal from Eustacia and comes to meet her, he reminds her again that she did not deserve what she had been dealt. At last, only minutes before her death, she declares what he had been telling her for months: "How destiny has been against me! . . . I do not deserve my lot" (404).

The relationship of Eustacia and Clym Yeobright is a tragic one. From the very beginning the reader is warned of their opposing natures: Eustacia hates the heath--Clym returns to it because there he finds peace and solace. Although she is attracted to him, Eustacia wonders about "the tastes of such a man . . . who saw friendliness and geniality in these shaggy hills" (131). Hardy explains, "Take all the varying hates felt by Eustacia Vye towards the heath, and translate them into loves, and you have the heart of Clym" (196). The two are destined for conflict.

Part of Clym's appeal to Eustacia lies in the mystery surrounding his personality. Here in the midst of the heath that suffocated her is a breath of fresh air--one who aspires to high thinking, one who had travelled and moved outside the realm of the simple, bucolic heath people. The ethereal and unfortunately opportunistic side of Eustacia's nature sees in Clym a solution to her problem; Clym represents the elegance and luxury for which she longs; he can give her the liberal life she desires. Clym, however, wholly noble and disgusted with selfish and low aims in life, desires to bring culture and dignity to the countryside. Hardy tells the reader that

in returning to labor in this sequestered spot he had anticipated an escape from the chafing of social necessities; yet

behold they were here also. More than ever he longed to be in some world where personal ambition was not the only recognized form of progress--such, perhaps, as might have been the case at some time or other in the silvery globe then shining upon him (221).

As Hardy describes him,

he was a John the Baptist who took ennoblement rather than repentance for his text. Mentally he was in a provincial future, that is, he was in many points abreast with the central town thinkers of his date. Much of this development he may have owed to his studious life in Paris, where he had become acquainted with ethical systems popular at the time. . . . Yeobright might have been called unfortunate. The rural world was not ripe for him. A man should be only partially before his time: to be completely to the vanward in aspirations is fatal to fame (195).

Clym falls victim to Eustacia, despite the fact that his gentle, affectionate nature is not totally in tune with hers. While she warns him that in meeting her against his mother's wishes he is working toward his own ruin, she continues to bewitch him as her plan to escape from the heath develops. She admits that there is not in her that "which will make a good homespun wife" (226). Clym senses their differences, calls her luxurious, and declares that perhaps in order to make her happy, she should be of the same vein as he. She promises him that, while she liked Paris, she loved him for himself alone and would live anywhere with him. Later, however, when Clym's life alters so miserably, she tells Wildeve that although she did love Clym, she does not deny that part of that love might have been because she saw a promise of another life in him.

Clym's tragedy in loving Eustacia is intensified, because in loving her, he alienates himself from his mother. Mrs. Yeobright, who has no use for Eustacia, warns him that she is no good for him.

In choosing Eustacia against his mother's wishes, Clym's dilemma is magnified; not only is he not returning to Paris to continue his work there, but he is adopting another life to which his mother is bitterly opposed:

Three antagonistic growths had to be kept alive: his mother's trust in him, his plan for becoming a teacher, and Eustacia's happiness. His fervid nature could not afford to relinquish one of these, though two of the three were as many as he could hope to preserve. Though his love was as chaste as that of Petrarch for his Laura, it had made fetters of what previously was only a difficulty. A position which was not too simple when he stood whole hearted had become indescribably complicated by the addition of Eustacia. Just when his mother was beginning to tolerate one scheme he had introduced another still bitterer than the first, and the combination was more than she could bear (229).

He loved Eustacia, though, as he says, "past all compass and description . . . to oppressiveness" (223), and this only widened the breach between him and his mother.

Eustacia entices Clym into committing himself to marry her by using the argument that his mother will keep them apart. In a moment of haste and passion, he promises her that they will be married at once. Almost immediately, he regrets the statement, but it is too late to retract it. In rising to the challenge Eustacia had offered, he had to abide now by the game. Whether Eustacia is to add one other to the list of those who love too hotly to love long and well, only their marriage will tell (237).

The marriage, unfortunately, is a plague to both Clym and Eustacia. When he accepts his lot of obscurity, blindness, and even her so complacently, she is angered and hurt, and perhaps justifiably so. Clym's passive acceptance of his misfortune and his relegation to mediocrity is offensive to Eustacia. She is



bewildered by his acceptance of his fate with so little protest; as she tells Wildeve when he visits her, she sees in Clym now the failure of all youthful dreams. Now she is alone. In her despair she seeks comfort, ironically, from the heath, and returns to it, where she met Wildeve. At first she looks upon the marriage as no misfortune, and as she tells Wildeve, "It is simply the accident which has happened since that has been the cause of my ruin. I have certainly got thistles for figs in a worldly sense, but how could I tell what time would bring forth" (320). Later, however, when her despair is deeper, she tells Clym himself that he is no longer a part of her life, as perhaps he never has been:

"You are nothing to me in future, and the past side of the story may as well remain untold. I have lost all through you, but I have not complained. Your blunders and misfortunes may have been a sorrow to you, but they have been a wrong to me since I sank into the mire of marriage. Is this your cherishing--to put me into a hut like this, and keep me like the wife of a hind? You deceived me--not by words, but by appearances, which are less seen through than words. But the place will serve as well as any other--as somewhere to pass from--into my grave" (374-5).

The plan that she so laboriously organized had fallen to pieces around her. In her grief she leaves her home and turns toward her grandfather's house. She wishes for night to cloak her misery and ruin, and by the time she reaches the home, her anguish is noticeable to others. As she moves through the house her grandfather's brace of pistols took on new significance. Charley, however, observes her strange state, and as a precautionary move, takes the pistols and locks them up. She rebukes him for his action, and in doing so gives the reader first evidence of her eventual fate:

"Why should I not die if I wish?" she said tremulously. "I have made a bad bargain with life, and I am weary of it--weary. And now you have hindered my escape. O, why did you, Charley! What makes death painful except the thought of other's grief?--and that is absent in my case, for not a sigh would follow me" (382).

Eustacia's estimation of her own worth at this point of the story is significant, for it illustrates the depths of her despair.

A more uncomplimentary picture of Eustacia may be seen from the viewpoint of Mrs. Yeobright, mother of Clym. Throughout the first part of the novel she is diametrically opposed to Eustacia, even before Clym becomes involved with her. Early in the story in a conversation with Sam, the turf cutter, regarding Eustacia's being charged as a witch, she criticizes her strongly. When Sam remarks that Eustacia seems to be possessed with far away thoughts of lords and ladies and mansions she will never see, Mrs. Yeobright responds acidly, "Miss Vye is to my mind too idle to be charming. I have never heard that she is of any use to herself or to other people. Good girls don't get treated as witches even on Egdon" (203). Hardy suggests that Mrs. Yeobright's critical summation of her son's lover might be intuitive, but regardless of its origin, her opinion is intense and she maintains it firmly until Diggory convinces her some time after the marriage that perhaps she has been unfair, if not to Eustacia, at least to Clym. She looks upon Eustacia as a challenge--a threat to the relationship of son and mother--and as the main reason for Clym's sacrificing his life abroad for menial labor on the heath. To Mrs. Yeobright, Eustacia is a witch, whether physically or spiritually, by nature or by intent, and she is a bad influence on

all she contacts. She calls Eustacia lazy and dissatisfied, and when Clym suggests that he might marry her, his mother's protests become even stronger:

"You are blinded, Clym. . . . It was a bad day for you when you first set eyes on her. And your scheme is merely a castle in the air built on purpose to justify this folly which has seized you, and to salve your conscience on the irrational situation you are in"(219).

She professes her desire to save him from sorrow and accuses Eustacia, "that hussy," of undermining their relationship. Continually, she refers to Eustacia as a "bad" girl, and she openly affirms to Clym that Eustacia was responsible for something queer between her and Wildeve before his marriage to Thomasin. In her final charge, she warns him, ". . . if she makes you a good wife, there has never been a bad one" (231). She feels that in making such a choice, Clym is revealing the fact that he actually does not know what is good for him. She is sure the marriage will turn out badly, not so much from the standpoint that Clym will fail Eustacia, but rather that she will prove no good for him. Her basic concern seems to be one of propriety: Eustacia's mysterious connection with Wildeve, the accusation of witchery, her strange nocturnal wanderings, all contribute to her opinion of the girl.

Finally, after Clym's marriage to Eustacia, Mrs. Yeobright is persuaded by Diggory Venn to settle the differences incurred between the two houses partly because of the wedding and partly because of the misunderstanding about the money Mrs. Yeobright had sent to Clym and Thomasin. Her questioning of Eustacia about whether she took the money and the implications ensuing from the

question had made an even wider breach between the families. As she approaches the house she notices a visitor at the gate. When she sees Eustacia at the window, yet can rouse no one in the house, she leaves, supposing that Eustacia has refused to let Clym invite her in. She weeps; she dies without reconciliation, blaming both Clym and Eustacia: "Tis too much--Clym, how can he bear to do it! He is at home; and yet he lets her shut the door against me!" (324). She is convinced that Eustacia has turned Clym against her, at last:

"If they had only shown signs of meeting my advances half-way how well it might have been done! But there is no chance. Shut out! She must have set him against me. Can there be beautiful bodies without hearts inside? I think so. I would not have done it against a neighbor's cat on such a fiery day as this!" (324-5).

Another pessimistic view of Eustacia is given by Susan Nunsuch, who accuses Eustacia of bewitching her son Johnny. She feels so strongly that when she sees an opportunity, she stabs Eustacia with a long stocking-needle so as to draw blood and put an end to the bewitching of her children. Shortly before Eustacia's death at the end of the story, the old woman again attempts to "counteract" Eustacia's "spell." The boy is ill, and Susan attributes it to Eustacia's presence nearby. She molds a wax image of the girl, pierces it with pins, and carefully melts it over a fire. She repeats a strange jargon--the Lord's Prayer backwards, designed for obtaining "unhallowed assistance against an enemy" (406). She who accuses Eustacia of witchery resorts to the same to relieve her problem.

Another person on the heath offers a different picture of Eustacia--the boy Charley. Charley appears early in the novel,

and for the favor of holding her hand, allows Eustacia to play his part in the mummer's Christmas play. Eustacia's despotic power over Charley is total. He relishes her presence so much he decides not to use all his "hand holding" time at once, but to spread it out for longer enjoyment. Hardy calls him the "half-forgotten one" because although Eustacia bewitches him just as surely as she does Wildeve or Clym, she is totally oblivious that he is affected by her. Still, Charley remembers, and in Eustacia's despair at the end of her marriage he senses that something is wrong. He is terrified by her helplessness and longs to aid her. To him she is an unreachable goal:

Charley had always regarded Eustacia as Eustacia had regarded Clym when she first beheld him--as a romantic and sweet vision, scarcely incarnate. He had been so shot off from her by the dignity of her look and the pride of her speech, except at that one blissful interval when he was allowed to hold her hand, that he had hardly deemed her a woman, wingless and earthly, subject to household conditions and domestic jars. The inner details of her life he had only conjectured. She had been a lovely wonder, predestined to an orbit in which the whole of his own was but a point; and this sight of her leaning like a helpless, despairing creature against a wild wet bank, filled him with an amazed horror. He could no longer remain where he was. Leaping over, he came up, touched her with his finger, and said tenderly, "What can I do, ma'am? You're poorly" (378).

Fearful that she would do something desperate, he hides the pistols belonging to old Captain Vye. He watches her constantly:

Charley's attentions to his former mistress were unbounded. The only solace to his own trouble lay in his attempts to relieve hers. Hour after hour he considered her wants: he thought of her presence there with a sort of gratitude, and, while uttering imprecations on the cause of her unhappiness, in some measure blessed the result. Perhaps she would always remain there, he thought, and then he would be as happy as he had been before. His dread was lest she should think it fit to return to Alderworth, and in that dread his eyes, with

all the inquisitiveness of affection, frequently sought her face when she was not observing him, as he would have watched the head of a stock dove to learn if it contemplated flight. Having once really succored her, and possibly preserved her from the rashest of acts, he mentally assumed in addition a guardian's responsibility for her welfare.

For this reason he busily endeavored to provide her with pleasant distractions . . . (382-3).

In a special effort to make her happy, he builds a bonfire on the night of November 5, and in doing so, ironically, arranges for her doom, for Wildeve sees the fire, answers Eustacia's "call", and they make the plans for their last fateful journey together.

The broken Eustacia is one of Hardy's best tragic pictures. She is lonely, as always, and in her last moments, alone. Still, in her death she brings another down with her, is indirectly responsible for the death of her adversary, Mrs. Yeobright, and almost destroys Clym. Her death, presumably suicidal, is not unexpected because truly she has no place to turn, no one to turn to.

Eustacia can also be observed through her own eyes, and from this viewpoint the reader can hold nothing but sympathy for her. Transported to a region where she is a stranger, with no friends, she senses that something is working aggressively toward her doom. One must empathize with her when her marital expectations are so radically destroyed. A nature sensitive, though selfish, is tortured by forces she cannot control. The heath and her fate are just as deadly to Eustacia as Eustacia is to those she consumes. Both forces--Eustacia and the heath--are overpowering, but matched against each other, Eustacia is crushed.

She moans:

"I must drag on next year, as I have dragged on this year, and the year after that as before. How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me! . . . I do not deserve my lot! . . . O, the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control! O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all" (404).

In this last speech, Hardy presents her as a solitary failure-- her dreams unfulfilled, her spirit crushed, her ideals shattered-- and the blame placed, as usual, on the world which failed to let her live and love.

In discussing Eustacia in relation to the previously mentioned Hardy heroines, one can see that there are some similarities. She, too, is the victim of an overwhelming amount of pride, which is significantly responsible for her tragedy. She is also beautiful and captivates those around her. Eustacia is also fickle, though her fickleness tends to be more opportunistic than that of her predecessors. She is a tease when she does not tell Clym who she really is the night of the mummer's play. She is exceedingly independent, but her independence leads her toward unhappiness. She is approximately the same age as the other two heroines, but she seems much older than either.

More noticeable than the similarities, are the differences between Eustacia and Elfrida and Bathsheba. A more complicated writing style, and a more pessimistic attitude make this novel markedly different from the first two discussed. The variations are many: unlike her predecessors, Eustacia is a basically unhappy,

discontented individual; she is restless and confused, and constantly in search of that which will make her happy, though she really has no idea what it might be. She tends to be impractical and is inclined to dream. While she is still a captivating and powerful creature, she takes almost unfair advantage of others with her charms, and she is selfish and designing with other people's lives. Although Eustacia, like Elfride and Bathsheba, is a rural, she is really a displaced urbanite, and one can see that she is therefore an alien in the land. This dislocation is partly responsible for her misery, as is her dark and brooding nature.

Another basic difference between the three women is that Eustacia's misery tends to bring misery to others: she transmits her loneliness and desolation to Clym, Wildeve, and Mrs. Yeobright. In her total despair at the end of the novel she cannot salvage her life or the lives of those she touches. Unlike Elfride and Bathsheba, her concern is centered only around herself and her misery; she is wholly selfish.

Adding to her misery, Eustacia, unlike her predecessors, has some specific enemies--or at least the novel contains characters who move directly against her. Diggory Venn, an almost omnipresent inhabitant of the heath, is continually manipulating circumstances in Eustacia's life, particularly in connection with Thomasin and Wildeve. Although he is seldom seen actually with Eustacia, he is ever there when critical situations exist, and she even comments that he is her enemy. More apparent is her struggle with Mrs. Yeobright. Despite the fact that all Eustacia



ever does intentionally against the widow is to marry Clym, the old woman at times seems to have a personal vendetta against the girl. She convinces herself of Eustacia's "badness" and even at the end of the novel when she dies without reconciliation with Clym, she feels Eustacia is responsible for the break between her and her son. If Eustacia's "evil" is equalled, it is surely in the person of Mrs. Yeobright.

Most important in the differences of heroines is the fact that Eustacia is a more complex individual than either Bethsheba or Elfride. Here, for the first time, Hardy injects elements of hedonism, possible witchery, and neuroticism into his story. Eustacia's abnormal adjustment and her general dissatisfaction with life set her apart from the other two women, and her pathetic yearning for something that is never to be hers seems to make comment about Hardy's belief in the struggle between rural simplicity and urban-aristocratic sophistication. Eustacia seems to suggest a bridge between such: she exists in neither world. She is unhappy in the rural one, and she can never attain the romantic one. She reflects the universal plight of the human longing for that which is inaccessible; and as she struggles against the convention, the death, it overcomes her.

## CHAPTER V

### TESS--THE PURE WOMAN

"Tess Durbeyfield . . . was a mere vessel of emotion untinged by experience."

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, the story of a pure woman who suffers unjustly, introduces one of Hardy's most well-rounded characters. Seduced at sixteen by the unscrupulous Alec Stoke-d'Urberville, Tess Durbeyfield is destined for a life of misery and tragedy punctuated by desertion, brokenheartedness, murder, and death. Tess has been called the most sublime figure in all of Hardy's novels. She combines supreme beauty with a nobility that elevates the whole conception of human nature.<sup>1</sup>

The complexity of Tess moves in a different direction from that of previously examined heroines. Here, it broadens in scope. Tess is not made more complex simply by the addition of more qualities to her character. Instead, she is a combination of qualities seen in the three previous heroines, plus certain characteristics which are new and significant. The proportions in which all the qualities are joined make Tess very different from Elfrida, Bathsheba, and Eustacia. The qualities are fused together carefully and deliberately; because of the variants included, a totally new person emerges.

Tess dominates the story. Hardy gives the reader his

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Charles Duffin, Thomas Hardy, p. 58.

attitude toward her by titling the novel "A Pure Woman," and throughout the story he re-emphasizes her innocence by surrounding her with opposites: the sordid condition of her family, the miserable Trantridge experience, the despicable Alec, the grotesque Flintcomb-Ash Farm, the hideous murder at the end of the novel. By far she is the most admirable character in the book, and while she undergoes considerable change as the story progresses, she remains consistently in character throughout. She possesses an "unselfish and conscientious mind, pure motives and strength of character,"<sup>2</sup> but tragically she lives in a society that has no respect for any of these. Joseph Warren Beach in The Technique of Thomas Hardy claims that Tess is the crown of all Hardy's women. While there is nothing exotic about her, she still possesses a force of passion that commands admiration and attention. She is unaffected, uneducated, sensuous, enduring, and natural.<sup>3</sup> She knows no real deceit, but is staunch in character--a pure soul struggling with the inscrutable evils of existence.<sup>4</sup> Noble and generous of sentiment, this last peasant heroine might easily be labelled the most lovable of Hardy's women, as Hardy's method of sympathy is more elaborate and without doubt more effective in Tess of the d'Urbervilles than in any other major novel.

Hardy's special aim was to present a seduced girl who was heroic. In order to do so he had to reverse convention. The

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<sup>2</sup>Herbert B. Grimsditch, Character and Environment, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup>Albert J. Guerard, Hardy, A Collection, p. 67.

<sup>4</sup>Richard G. Carpenter, Thomas Hardy (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1964), p. 138.

situation is not dissimilar to that of Eustacia. Tess is actually nobility (of character) in a peasant world; Clare, too, moves against the conventional culture and alienates himself from his family. The results of both are tragic discord. As Hardy strikes out boldly against society's tendency to label the "impure," he is really attempting to show the necessity and possibility of amelioration between one situation "created by an opposing environment . . . of things inherent in the universe and another created by an opposing environment of human institutions."<sup>5</sup> In other words, he pits the individual (namely Tess) against society and its rules--and society mercilessly overcomes. The figure of Tess is a tragic one "moving across the stage 'in all the pomp of exquisite distress' with sorrows full of dignity,"<sup>6</sup> and she endures a stark destiny.

This discussion of Tess is arranged in phases, much as Hardy divides the book. The first phase concerns itself with Tess's initial innocence, up to her encounter with d'Urberville; the second includes her return home, her grief over her child's death and her ultimate retreat to Talbothays. In the third phase the paper discusses her marriage to Angel Clare. The fourth deals with her betrayal and all the tragic events following Angel's departure, up to his return. The final phase includes her murdering Alec, her flight with Angel, and her eventual surrender and sacrifice to authorities.

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<sup>5</sup>Harvey Curtis Webster, On a Darkling Plain, p. 171.

<sup>6</sup>Lionel Johnson, The Art of Thomas Hardy, p. 52.

Tess's tragedy is set into motion by means of a trivial and ludicrous beginning: Jack Durbeyfield's discovery that he is actually a descendent of the ancient and knightly family of the d'Urbervilles. Impressed by the possibility of financial advancement and social dignity that the title might hold, the family compels Tess to identify herself to the d'Urbervilles, thus putting herself in the way of a grand marriage and benefitting all the Durbeyfields. This plan illustrates both Tess's sensitivity and her unselfishness. Her refusal to allow her family to intimidate her indicates her strong moral judgment. Her unselfishness is made apparent when she accidentally kills the horse and then assumes the responsibility for the trip:

The oppressive sense of the harm she had done led Tess to be more deferential than she might otherwise have been to the maternal wish; but she could not understand why her mother should find such satisfaction in contemplating an enterprise of, to her, such doubtful profit. Her mother might have made inquiries and have discovered that this Mrs. d'Urberville was a lady of unequalled virtues and charity. But Tess's pride made the part of poor relation one of particular distaste to her.<sup>7</sup>

The limitations she puts on her visit illustrate her deep sense of responsibility:

"Well, as I killed the horse, Mother," she said mournfully, "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. And don't go thinking about her making a match for me--it is silly." (47).

In time it is arranged that Tess should work for the family.

During the weeks that follow, Tess performs her assigned

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<sup>7</sup>Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1964), p. 47. (Subsequent quotations from this novel will be by page number in the text.)

duties at the estate, all the while evading the constant advances of Alec. On the particular night she falls victim to him, she is forced to accept his offer of help as the only way to escape a fight of drunken women of the village. Disguising his intentions under the pretense of accompanying her home safely, he lures her into a deserted area of the woods where, as Hardy states, "It was to be." (89).

Spiritually, Tess is inviolate.<sup>8</sup> She is morally stainless. Hardy conditions the reader early in the story for Tess's fall: she is badly parented, she is badly reared, and she is young. The conditions of her home life are really the beginnings of her sorrow, just as they are the conditions for her final surrender to Alec at the end of the story. The unlucky oldest child of the shiftless family, she is made to live in a situation where there is little self-control, industry, or common sense. Coupled with these disadvantages, Tess's own nature lends itself to being betrayed--she is unusually sensitive and trusting, and her innocence serves to make her betrayal easier. Henry C. Duffin in Thomas Hardy, A Study of the Wessex Novels, the Poems, and The Dynasts states that of all Hardy's women "only poor Tess faces life in the full naked loneliness of ignorance absolute, with no shred of borrowed accomplishment to clothe her simple country mind." The inheritance of her mother's looks and appeal and a slight touch of her father's incautiousness of character add to her woes.

This particular stage of Tess's life is characterized by

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<sup>8</sup>Henry Charles Duffin, Thomas Hardy, p. 242.

innocence and trust. She is extremely responsible and the concern for her family that is foremost in her mind is only a shade of the concern she feels by the end of the story.<sup>9</sup> Tess's unsullied state is indicative of wholesomeness and confidence in people. Alec is her first encounter with corrupt human nature.

After her defilement, Tess returns home in a state of melancholy such as she had never known before. She feels alone in humanity, sadder, if possible, even than the sad October surrounding her. Ironically, her mother's only concern is over her failure to take advantage of the d'Urberville name to do some good for the family. The thought of marrying Alec indeed had never occurred to Tess:

Get Alec d'Urberville to marry her! He marry her! On matrimony he had never once said a word. And what if he had? How a convulsive snatching at social salvation might have impelled her to answer him she could not say. But her poor foolish mother little knew her present feeling towards this man. Perhaps it was unusual in the circumstances, unlucky, unaccountable; but there it was; and this, as she had said, was what made her detest herself. She had never wholly cared for him; she did not at all care for him now. She had dreaded him, winced before him, succumbed to adroit advantages he took of her helplessness; then, temporarily blinded by his ardent manners, had been stirred to confused surrender awhile, had suddenly despised him and disliked him, and had run away. That was all. Hate him she did not quite; but he was dust and ashes to her, and even for her name's sake she scarcely wished to marry him (97-8).

When her mother admonishes her for her carelessness, Tess makes her plea for clemency by stating the most understandable reason for her fall:

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<sup>9</sup>At the end of the story the concern moves her closer and closer to her doom, for it is only because of their need that she submits to Alec's proposal of marriage. She has no selfish designs in mind; her motives are only charitable ones.

"Oh, Mother, my Mother!" cried the agonized girl, turning passionately upon her parent as if her poor heart would break. "How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house four months ago. Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn't you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance of learning in that way, and you did not help me!" (98).

And so Tess's long despondency begins. She sees before her, in Hardy's words, "a long and stony highway which she had to tread, without aid and with little sympathy. Her depression is terrible, and she could have hidden herself in a tomb" (99). She seeks refuge in the dark and in solitary twilight; these ask no questions of her, demand no explanation, seek no retribution:

The only exercise that Tess took at this time was after dark; and it was then, when out in the woods, that she seemed least solitary. She knew how to hit to a hair's-breadth that moment of evening when the light and the darkness are so evenly balanced that the constraint of day and the suspense of night neutralize each other, leaving absolute mental liberty. It is then that the plight of being alive becomes attenuated to its least-possible dimensions. She had no fear of the shadows; her sole idea seemed to be to shun mankind--or rather that cold accretion called the world, which, so terrible in the mass, is so unformidable, even pitiable, in its units. (100).

While she finds refuge in nature, she feels it simultaneously rebukes her:

At times her whimsical fancy would intensify natural processes around her till they seemed a part of her own story. Rather they became a part of it; for the world is only a psychological phenomenon, and what they seemed they were. The midnight airs and gusts, moaning amongst the tightly wrapped buds and bark of the winter twigs, were formulae of bitter reproach. A wet day was the expression of irremediable grief at her weakness in the mind of some vague ethical being whom she could not class definitely as the God of her childhood and

But this encompassment of her own characterization, based on shreds of convention, peopled by phantoms and voices antipathetic to her, was a sorry and mistaken creation of Tess's fancy--a cloud of moral hobgoblins by which she was terrified without reason. It was they that were out of harmony with



the actual world, not she. Walking among the sleeping birds in the hedges, watching the skipping rabbits on a moonlit warren, or standing under a pheasant-laden bough, she looked upon herself as a figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence. But all the while, she was making a distinction where there was no difference. Feeling herself in antagonism, she was quite in accord. She had been made to break an accepted law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly. (101).

Hardy contends that it is after the birth and subsequent death of her child that Tess undergoes the most noticeable and significant change in her short existence:

Almost at a leap, Tess changed from simple girl to complex woman. Symbols of reflectiveness passed into her face and a note of tragedy at times into her voice. Her eyes grew larger and more eloquent. She became what would have been called a fine creature; her aspect was fair and arresting; her soul that of a woman whom the turbulent experiences of the last year or two had quite failed to demoralize. But for the world's opinion those experiences would have been simply a liberal education. (115).

Much like the moral growth of Hawthorne's Hester Prynne,<sup>10</sup> Tess finds courage and hope in her future. She decides to travel to another area of the countryside where she can escape the d'Urber-ville dreams that plague her life:

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 unexpanded youth, surging up anew after its temporary check and bringing with it hope and the invincible instinct towards self-delight. (116).

And so she travels to Talbothays, where she will be a dairymaid.

As Hardy says,

her hopes mingled with the sunshine in an ideal photosphere which surrounded her as she bounded along against the soft

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<sup>10</sup>Hester Prynne is Nathaniel Hawthorne's heroine in The Scarlet Letter; she finds moral growth after an adulterous relationship with Arthur Dimmesdale, a local Puritan minister.

south wind. She heard a pleasant voice in every breeze, and in every bird's note seemed to lurk a joy. (101)

Talbothays is the dairy paradise where Tess obtained employment, board, and lodging. After the dismal trip from Marlott through Egdon Heath, the Valley of the Great Dairies is like moving from dark to daylight. The valley is rich and lush, the water clear and bracing, the air bright and cheerful. It is welcome relief after times of trouble and heartbreak, and it is indicative of a short period in Tess's life that was free from woe. As Hardy describes the inhabitants,

Dairyman Crick's household of maids and men lived on comfortably, placidly, even merrily. Their position was perhaps the happiest of all positions in the social scale, being above the line at which neediness ends, and below the line at which the convenances begin to cramp natural feeling and the stress of threadbare modishness makes too little of enough (145).

Ironically, here at Talbothays, though, begins the period of her life in which Tess would suffer the most severe pain and grave tragedy. This tragedy begins when she meets Angel Clare, a young man from Emminster who is also a resident at the farm. Clare is the joy of all the dairymaids, and while Tess resolves that she must never allow herself to become interested in any way in a man, she notices Clare's attentions toward her. Even the other employees, including Dairyman Crick and Tess's close companions Izz, Marian, and Retty, recognize that there seems to be a silent communion of spirits between the beautiful new dairymaid and the aspiring farmer.

In order to understand Angel Clare's connection with Tess's tragedy, one must consider his personality. Clare was the son

of an Eminster Low Church parson. His two older brothers had unquestioningly followed their father into the ministry, but Angel had not joined their ranks. He is educated, reserved, but differing. Hardy suggests that his future plans might have been as nebulous to Angel, himself, as they are to the reader. Indecisive and vague, he wants to "practice" farming at Talbothays, with a view of either colonial aspirations or a home-farm tenure. He and his father had had pronounced disagreements in regard to philosophical and theological matters, and hence their mutual assent that Angel should not attend Cambridge as his brothers had done. His intent seems to be to strike out against established social forms: he hated "good old families," modern town life, and certain aspects of his Evangelical faith. So at twenty-six Clare is somewhat restless, a student of kine at Talbothays, where he works, reads, and unexpectedly finds that he is actually liking the outdoor life for its own sake.

Dropped suddenly into the midst of this bucolic splendor is Tess. To Tess, Angel is more intelligence than man; to Angel, Tess is not a milkmaid, but the "visionary essence of woman--a whole sex condensed into one typical form" (147); and perhaps therein lay their error--their failure to recognize each other as humans:

There was hardly a touch of earth in her love for Clare. To her sublime trustfulness he was all that goodness could be--knew all that a guide, philosopher, and friend should know. She thought every line in the contour of his person the perfection of masculine beauty, his soul the soul of a saint, his intellect that of a seer. The wisdom of her love for him, as love, sustained her dignity; she seemed to be wearing a crown. The compassion of his love for her, as she

saw it, made her lift up her heart to him in devotion. He would sometimes catch her large, worshipful eyes, that had no bottom to them, looking at him from their depths, as if she saw something immortal before her (209-10).

Similarly, "Clare's love for her is ethereal to a fault, imaginative to impracticality"(261-2).

As time passes and they acknowledge their love for each other, Tess protests the arrangement. In vain she begs Angel to forget her, but finally after relentless persuasion she agrees to marry him. She attempts several times to tell him of her tragedy for she is sure it will alter his opinion of her, but each time something occurs to prevent her revelation. And so they are married.

On their wedding night, Tess resolves that she must tell Angel of her Sorrow. When he paves the way by telling her of his own dissipated involvement with a London woman, she enters into her own sordid, unhappy confession, thinking that because Angel has failed upon occasion, he will understand her plight. Here is evidence of a return of her former trusting nature. But his reaction plunges Tess into the next phase of her seemingly misspent life--his betrayal of her. He charges that she has deceived him and that it is not she, but some other "Tess" he loves. Although he forgives her, as he says, "forgiveness is not all" (49). Her sobs, Hardy says, would have broken down any man, except Angel Clare. Bound by the very convention he seeks to escape, he condemns her, not personally, but upon principle:

Within the remote depths of his constitution, so gentle and affectionate as he was in general, there lay hidden a hard, logical deposit, like a vein of metal in a soft loam, which turned the edge of everything that attempted to traverse it. It had blocked his acceptance of the Church: it blocked his

acceptance of Tess. Moreover, his affection itself was less fire than radiance, and with regard to the other sex, when he ceased to believe he ceased to follow--contrasting in this with many impressionable natures, who remain sensuously infatuated with what they intellectually despise.

"I wish half the women in England were as respectable as you," he said in an ebullition of bitterness against woman-kind in general. "It isn't a question of respectability, but one of principle!" (258).

#### Tess realizes

that her sense of guilt (and Angel's accusation) is based on nothing more tangible than condemnation by an arbitrary law with no foundation in nature. It seems as though maidenhood is the only thing which Nature has denied recuperative powers. As a result she must suffer.<sup>11</sup>

There is no doubt in the reader's mind that Clare still loves Tess. Hardy asserts over and over that he does. During their estranged stay at the manor house, more than once Angel gives evidence of his love for Tess--he wishes he had spoken more kindly; he wishes he had kissed her once, at least; he leaves not realizing that he loves her still; and probably most apparent of all, his subconscious asserts itself in his sleepwalking scene. His tragedy lies in the fact that his true sentiments are blinded by his adherence to convention; he convinces himself and Tess that remaining with her would only bring additional heartaches later on. Surely, separation is the only logical and moral thing to do:

He knew, and she knew, that though the fascination which each had exercised over the other--on her part independently of accomplishments--would probably in the first days of their separation be even more potent than ever, time must attenuate that effect; the practical arguments against accepting her as a housemate might pronounce themselves more strongly in the boreal light of a remoter view. Moreover, when two people are once parted--have abandoned a common domicile and a common environment--new growths insensibly bud upward to fill each

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<sup>11</sup>Harvey Curtis Webster, On a Darkling Plain, p. 179.

vacated place; unforeseen accidents hinder intentions, and old plans are forgotten (263).

Tess is amazed at the determination hidden in this man she thought she knew--"the will to subdue the grosser to the subtler emotion, the substance to the conception, the flesh to the spirit" (263). Promising her that there is no anger in his heart, he leaves, vowing that he will try to bring himself to endure her situation, and that if he can, he will return. He cautions her, though, not to try to come to him. Once more Tess's lot has become increasingly more tragic than before, and amidst grief and heartache the fourth phase of her life begins.

After Clare's departure Tess finally makes her way to an upland farm where Marian, a former companion at Talbothays had been working. Her life during this period is dull and senseless. Hardy calls her mental state "utter stagnation," and her labors only intensify it. One occurrence, however, lifts Tess's spirits, at least momentarily, and exhibits that her unselfishness is still present, despite persecution. On her way to Flintcomb-Ash Farm, she is forced to seek refuge during the night among hedges where a number of pheasants had also hidden. Driven there by hunters, they suffer and some mercifully die during the night. From them Tess took inspiration about her own hopeless state:

"Poor darlings--to suppose myself the most miserable being on earth in the sight o' such misery as yours!" she exclaimed, her tears running down . . . . "And not a twinge of bodily pain about me! I be not mangled, and I be not bleeding, and I have two hands to feed and clothe me." She was ashamed of herself for her gloom of the night, based on nothing more tangible than a sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society which had no foundation in nature" (297).

Her service at Flintcomb-Ash Farm is to represent an even gloomier period of her life. The labor is relentless---turnip-hacking, swede-trimming, reed-drawing, and an archaic form of wheat-threshing. To add to her woes, the farmer himself harasses her frequently. At this point in her life Tess again encounters Alec d'Urberville and learns he had become a sort of itinerant preacher. She cannot fathom the change he had obviously undergone. An even greater change occurs, however, when he recognizes her:

The effect upon her old lover was electric, far stronger than the effect of his presence upon her. His fire, the tumultuous ring of his eloquence, seemed to go out of him. His lip struggled and trembled under the words that lay upon it, but deliver them it could not as long as she faced him. His eyes, after their first glance upon her face, hung confusedly in every other direction but hers, but came back in a desperate leap every few seconds. This paralysis lasted, however, but a short time; for Tess's energies returned with the atrophy of his, and she walked as fast as she was able past the barn and onward.

As soon as she could reflect, it appalled her, this change in their relative platforms. He who had wrought her undoing was now on the side of the Spirit, while she remained unregenerate. And, as in the legend, it had resulted that her Cyprian image had suddenly appeared upon his altar, whereby the fire of the priest had been well nigh extinguished (325).

Tess's troubles multiply simultaneously: the owner of the farm continues to harass her; Marian tells her that in his distraught state Angel had asked Izz to accompany him to Brazil; word comes of her mother's severe illness; and Alec appears at the farm repeatedly, begging Tess's hand and seeking to make reparation for his offense against her. She refuses him, for he is repulsive to her. During her stay at Flintcomb-Ash, Tess's despair is evidenced by two letters written to Angel imploring his aid and mercy on her sorrowful state. They suggest complete humility,

pathos, resignation, and desolation. They express her ecstatic state in his presence and her utter despair at his absence. She signs herself "heartbroken" and though she pushes on, dependent upon no one, her crushed spirit is ever present.

In the very throes of her tribulations, Tess returns home because of her mother's critical illness, but shortly after her arrival, her father dies. So begins Tess's last few crucial days. The family sets out on Old Lady-Day for Kingsbere, but by night-fall, must take shelter in the only available place--their family burial vault. Again Alec comes to haunt her and to offer aid in turn for her hand. In a fit of despair Tess wishes herself dead and on the other side of the family vaults.

While Tess's despair and troubles grow deeper and deeper, changes are also occurring in Angel. During his stay in Brazil, he had severe misgivings about his condemnation of Tess. In failing health, he resolves to return to England and to Tess, if she will forgive him and take him back. His attitude undergoes pronounced change:

During this time of absence he had mentally aged a dozen years. What arrested him now as of value in life was less its beauty than its pathos. Having long discredited the old systems of mysticism, he now began to discredit the old appraisements of morality. He thought they wanted readjusting. Who was the moral man? Still more pertinently, who was the moral woman? The beauty or ugliness of a character lay not only in its achievements, but in its aims and impulses; its true history lay not among things done, but among things willed (359).

Her letter, joined with Izz's statement that Tess alone would be willing to give up her life for him and a conversation with a stranger who blatantly told him he was wrong in his stand, serves



to alter his opinion:

Thus, from being her critic he grew to be her advocate. Cynical things he had uttered to himself about her; but no man can always be a cynic and live; and he withdrew them. The mistake of expressing them had arisen from his allowing himself to be influenced by general principles to the disregard of the particular instance. . . . Clare had been too harsh towards her; there is no doubt of it (361).

Having established Clare's final decision, Hardy delivers his crowning ironic blow. Angel returns and finds Tess in Sandbourne, only to discover that in her despair for her family's grave condition, she has succumbed to Alec's entreaties and has married him. His pleas that he has come to reclaim her because he has learned from his mistake fall on deaf ears, as Tess, herself, tells him, "It is too late, too late!" She reveals that in addition to Alec's offer to provide for her poor family, he has also assured her repeatedly (from a man's point of view, of course) that Angel would never return. Her indifferent feeling toward Alec now turns to hate and she disappears from the room bound for the mission that will eventually end both their lives together.

Slowly and deliberately, she charges him with his crime: he had tricked her, he had used her, he had taunted her, and in return she would kill him:

"And then my dear, dear husband came home to me--and I did not know it! . . . And you had used your cruel persuasion upon me--you did not stop using it--no--you did not stop! My sisters and brothers and my mother's needs--they were the things you moved me by--and you said my husband would never come back--never; and you taunted me and said what a simpleton I was to expect him! . . . And then he came back! Now he is gone. Gone a second time, and I have lost him forever--and he will not love me the littlest bit ever any more--only hate me! . . . Oh, yes, I have lost him now--again because of--you! . . . And he is dying--he looks as if

he is dying! . . . And my sin will kill him and not kill me! . . . Oh, you have torn my life all to pieces--made me be what I prayed you in pity not to make me be again! . . . My own true husband will never, never,--oh, God--I can't bear this! I cannot!" (402).

Here, in a soliloquy turned into a dirge, Tess demonstrates her justification, her hatred, and her fury.

Tess spends the last few hours of her life with Angel in utter abandon and complete contentment. In their refuge of Bramshurst Court there is peace; outside only is there trouble. Though Angel hopes to leave the country, Tess realizes the immediacy of her capture and death. After two nights in the old mansion they leave, walking until sometime after midnight when Tess falls asleep on the fallen pillars of Stonehenge. There on the sacrificial altar the sixteen find her the next morning. Quietly and gently she surrenders, reasoning that her ecstasy with Angel could not have lasted much longer:

"It is as it should be," she murmured. "Angel, I am almost glad--yes, glad! This happiness could not have lasted. It was too much. I have had enough, and now I shall not live for you to despise me!" (417).

The thing that must be called happiness for Tess and Angel is over.

Hardy suggests frequently throughout the novel that a force bigger and stronger than any other character in the story seems to be in control, particularly of Tess. Early in the story Tess tells her younger brother Abraham that they live on a "blighted star." Among things she suggests that might have changed had they "pitched on a sound one" were her father's health, his tendency to drink, and her mother's perpetual tardiness. Aaby adds, "And you

would have been a rich lady ready-made and not have had to be made rich by marrying a gentleman?" (42-3). In addition, once Tess begins to decline, Chance, as the character might be called, seems to relentlessly delight in furthering her misery.<sup>12</sup> Then in closing his story, Hardy states that "Justice was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess" (419). Because Tess is a victim of fate, she can represent all mankind. Forces defeating her are beyond her comprehension. Her courage and respect gain the reader's admiration and her noble nature prevents her from becoming pitiful. Her "fight" has value and she is therefore truly tragic. Amazingly, one who is such a stolid and passive sufferer still appears attractive.

Tess's tragedy has been called a specimen syllogism in the cruel reasoning of universal fate. Sensitive and tortured, she is continually in conflict with theological conventions that serve to increase her confusion and sense of injustice.<sup>13</sup> For such a "pure woman" to be crushed into impurity is a Soul's Tragedy that has no equal in horror.<sup>14</sup> According to Duffin, Tess's real tragedy, though, is not so much in her desertion, her struggle to live, or her death, but rather in "her bewilderment of soul at Clare's behavior and the intensifying agony of her despair." Joseph Warren Beach states in The Technique of Thomas Hardy that

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<sup>12</sup>Harvey Curtis Webster, On a Darkling Plain, p. 179.

<sup>13</sup>Herbert B. Grimsditch, Character and Environment, p. 141.

<sup>14</sup>Henry Charles Duffin, Thomas Hardy, p. 80.

pathos in Tess of the d'Urbervilles is great because "she is a grown woman--a responsible moral being--with intense desires, high aspirations, liable to temptation, and fearfully liable to suffering." Because of her personal strength and beauty the story is doubly moving, and a reader can have only compassion for the pitiful frustration of her happiness. A reader

can almost forget the pain of the story in its loveliness. The rage and indignation pass; the tenderness remains. And if we say, how pitiful! it is to say, in the next breath, how beautiful!"<sup>15</sup>

In giving his readers Tess, Hardy presents a character clearly different from any he had drawn before. Although she manifests selected characteristics of former heroines, Tess's personality is so designed that she is no mere copy--she is a completely new entity, fashioned partly from the things Elfride, Bathsheba, and Eustacia were made of, but exhibiting a basically new metal.

Like former heroines, Tess is potentially adept and resourceful, but her opportunities for displaying her initiative and ability are limited by circumstances which overwhelmed her. Although she had not had the benefit of much formal schooling, she learns quickly from others, especially in assuming acceptable social mannerisms and graces. Much like Eustacia, her lot in life is unhappy the majority of the time. Unlike her, however, Tess is at peace with herself and with mankind. Despite her

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<sup>15</sup> Joseph Warren Beach, Technique, p. 217.

misery, she gives to others and cares for their welfare; she does not allow her own dissatisfaction, though it is certainly present, to stand in the way of the happiness of others. Instead, she sacrifices for them.

In her resignation Tess is much like Elfride (at the end of A Pair of Blue Eyes), but probably even more like Bathsheba. Death touches them both--Tess experiences the heart-breaking death of her own child, and Bathsheba sees two men die, one literally and one figuratively. They are again similar in their assuming of responsibility in time of great stress.

Tess also holds another unusual trait in common with all three former heroines. The trait is her sensuousness. Although she is modest and extremely unpretentious, she, too, like Elfride, Bathsheba, and Eustacia attracts first because of her good looks. Her appearance and mannerisms, although unintentional, bring her great distress with Alec d'Urberville, just as Elfride, Bathsheba, and Eustacia are hurt because their beauty attracted men. Angel Clare, too, although he probably doesn't realize it, is attracted to the physical Tess, long before he knows the spiritual Tess he finally comes to love. Probably, she is even more female, more sexual, and more passionate than her predecessors, but all these qualities are combined with innocence, gentleness, and loyalty--and these things make her memorable.<sup>16</sup> Of course, she is tested far more than any other heroine and has more moral and physical endurance than the others. Like Bathsheba, she is close to the

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<sup>16</sup>Richard C. Carpenter, Thomas Hardy, p. 129.

earth; unlike Eustacia this closeness is not her bane. Much of her bearing and dignity can be seen earlier in Bathsheba, but she tends to be somewhat helpless and more a victim of her economy than the girl from Weatherbury is. Her desertion by Angel is probably of the same type as Elfride's betrayal by Henry Knight, though Tess's is a much more mature working of the tragedy. Like Eustacia her situation worsens steadily as the novel progresses, until it reaches a point where death is the only possible solution.

The character of Tess Durbeyfield may be better explained, however, in ways in which she is not like former heroines--in short, in the new character Hardy creates. A very noticeable change is her pride. Tess is a proud girl, necessarily so, but her pride does not wear the cloak of vanity. Instead, it is wholesome and meaningful, especially in regard to her honor and dignity. Another apparent change in character is evidenced in the absence of coquetry or flirtatiousness in her personality. She is probably the most genuine of Hardy's heroines. There is no pretense surrounding her--her appeal, while commanding, is straightforward and natural. She relies on no tricks or devices to ensnare anyone. She possesses also an extreme loyalty to her family and a sense of duty that will stop at no sacrifice. This responsibility is the cause of her first tragedy and of her final submission to Alec. She is probably the most unselfish woman Hardy creates. Her selflessness leads her to do anything for those she loves--sacrifice, slave, kill.

Tess displays several other qualities: though she has

every capacity and every opportunity to be so, she is not despotic; her patience is limitless and is tested immeasurably; her devotion to the one and only man she loves is unbelievable. She, too, much like Eustacia, exists in a world that seems to work against her continually. The difference between them, then, is that Eustacia is opposed to the heath; Tess is a part of her world; she is defeated by products of the same society which produces her. Too, Tess has no enemies. Even the detestable Alec is not her avowed enemy throughout the book. Until the very last, she maintains cold indifference toward him; only when he deliberately separates her from Angel does she boldly rebel.

Through the character of Tess, Hardy writes one of the finest novels of the nineteenth century. In it he elevates a wronged peasant girl to the realms of tragedy. In doing so he wrote, in the greatest magnitude, the story of a wronged and suffering humanity. Although he probably does not intend for Tess of the d'Urbervilles to be a social tract, Richard Carpenter states that "Hardy drew blood when he tried to write a serious story about a basic moral issue."<sup>17</sup> Once again, as D. H. Lawrence would say, a character has moved out of the walled city of security and has perished. Tess is aptly described by Donald Hall in an "Afterword" to the novel:

But surely more than any generalization we are left with the sense of a particular girl, a woman finally; one's sense of this novel is one's sense of her. She dances on the green at sixteen. . . . She buries her child in secret. She milks a cow named Dumpling. She hacks turnips on a

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<sup>17</sup>Richard C. Carpenter, Thomas Hardy, p. 129.

barren farm. She hides with her ancestors. She stabs a man. She hides in an old house with her lover. She wakes to a circle of police, to a noose in the morning (430).

In conclusion,

In *Tess*, Hardy created no standard Victorian heroine, but a woman whose intense vitality flares unforgettably against the bleak background of a dying rural society. Shaped by an acute sense of social injustice and by a vision of human fate cosmic in scope, her story is a singular blending of harsh realism and indelibly poignant beauty (434).



## CHAPTER VI

### SUE--THE HALF-WOMAN

"I know I am a poor miserable creature."

Jude the Obscure closes Thomas Hardy's career as a novelist in 1894. This shocking and perceptive work reveals several changes in Hardy's fictional techniques. Missing from the story is Hardy's use of fate or hap as a major element; gone is the Wessex setting and its characteristic people. Replacing these is an urban setting filled with city people and city happenings, the conflict ensuing when traditionally rural, unsophisticated characters arrive on the scene.

Although Jude the Obscure is not considered a typical Hardy novel, it is one in which Hardy faces new struggles and pursues themes significant to the latter nineteenth century. Without doubt it is his most ambitious and most courageous work, remarkable for its juxtaposition of the old fashioned and the modern. Fittingly, several novelties appear: the main character under consideration here is not the title character in the novel, although Jude is pivotal; the preponderance of plot domination by outside forces disappears and motivation stems from within the characters themselves; and the pessimism especially noticeable in The Return of the Native and in Tess of the d'Urbervilles will become increasingly heavy and desperate, indicative, perhaps, of Hardy's comment about the approaching century. So different is

the novel from previous ones that one may wonder at Hardy's ability to create two characters so close together in time and yet so far apart in delineation as Tess Durbeyfield and Sue Bridehead.

In Jude the Obscure, Hardy deals with the disease of modernism--"with the fret and fever, derision and disaster,"<sup>1</sup> and relates to the disease the plight of Sue Bridehead. Sue represents the modern woman, slowly emerging, and his intent in characterizing her is to "recognize love as a passion, spiritual in nature though generally bound up with the animal instincts of sex."<sup>2</sup> In Jude the Obscure, Hardy faces squarely the fact that "circumstantial will" against enjoyment continually frustrates the inherent will to enjoy.<sup>3</sup> In a preface to Jude the Obscure written in April, 1912, Hardy summarizes a German reviewer's description of Sue as

the first delineation in fiction of the woman who was coming into notice . . . the woman of the feminist sic movement--the slight, pale "bachelor" girl--the intellectualized, emancipated bundle of nerves that modern conditions were producing, mainly in cities as yet; who does not recognize the necessity for most of her sex to follow marriage as a profession, and boast themselves a superior people because they are licensed to be loved on the premises.<sup>4</sup>

Hardy's tragic expression becomes more insistent and more effective in Jude the Obscure. The humor lessens noticeably, the irony turns harsh and bitter, and the background of nature seems

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1959), p. 7. (Subsequent quotations from this novel will be by page number in the text.)

<sup>2</sup>Henry Charles Duffin, Thomas Hardy, p. 223.

<sup>3</sup>Albert J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy, The Novels and Stories, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

to exist chiefly as a spectacular variation of human moods.<sup>5</sup> Most importantly here, the complexity of character is increased, and Hardy does this in a unique way--by separating character traits so that more than one character is necessary to make a whole person. Examined in the reverse, this separation generates the production of half-people--people who must join with others before they are whole and meaningful. It is in the light of this situation that the discussion of *Jude the Obscure* can begin.

Although Jude Fawley is not primarily under examination here, it is only through him that the character Sue Bridehead may be adequately discussed. Sue, in so much as she is capable, falls in love with Jude. Through their relationship, a reader comes to understand her. Accordingly, Jude is periodically involved with Arabella Donn, and through their union, insight into Sue is also gained. First, therefore, one must consider Arabella.

Arabella, the daughter of a pig breeder at Marygreen, is a part of Jude Fawley, and hence a part of Sue Bridehead. Interestingly, she is the part of Sue that is missing--the part of Sue that does not exist. All that Arabella is, Sue is not. Arabella represents profane, physical love. Thoroughly coarse and brutish, Arabella is a simple, uneducated, sensuously ample young woman. She might be described as sex incarnate, for she awakens in Jude a completely new dimension. She is crude and vulgar, in the sense that she is common and unrefined. Hardy himself describes her

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<sup>5</sup>Lascelles Abercrombie, Thomas Hardy, A Critical Study, p. 44.

as "the female animal":

She whom he addressed was a fine dark-eyed girl, not exactly handsome, but capable of passing as such at a little distance, despite some coarseness of skin and fibre. She had a round and prominent bosom, full lips, perfect teeth, and the rich complexion of a Cochin hen's egg. She was a complete and substantial female animal--no more, no less; and Jude was almost certain that to her was attributable the enterprise of attracting his attention from dreams of the humaner letters to what was simmering in the minds around him (44).

In Jude's battle between physical lust and intellectual aspiration, Arabella is the victor. She prevails upon trickery and the baser parts of Jude's nature in order to obtain a proposal, and the entire setting of her wooing, minus all glamor and sentiment, re-emphasizes the sordidness of their relationship. Arabella is animalistic and the animalism which controls her destroys Jude.

While Arabella has been called the weed in the garden of Wessex, she is nonetheless a very important part of it. She is "a tool of the Will-to-Live";<sup>6</sup> therefore, she is free of prudent reserves which retard the love instinct in the educated woman. Because she is base, she does not worry about morality and her life is uncluttered by social mores and obligations. "She is charged," Lascelles Abercrombie says in Thomas Hardy, A Critical Study, "with sinister and incalculable potency." She is unscrupulous and scheming and she sets out to catch Jude by sexual excitements and cheats him into marrying her by false representations. Her world is immediate and completely physical. Alone as a character she is wholly uncomplicated. She is cunning and flirtatious. (Hardy notes frequently her use of a wig and her

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<sup>6</sup>Samuel C. Chew, Thomas Hardy, Poet and Novelist, p. 136.

ability to make dimples appear in her cheeks when she feels they would be helpful to her cause.) She is calculating as she manipulates Jude's life; time and time again, he returns to her, much as Wildeve returns to Eustacia; he is helpless under her power. At times she is even abusive to him, but he still succumbs. She is insensitive: she "gives" Sue and Jude her child because he is too much trouble to her, just as easily as she slaughters the pigs in the first part of the story. She is practicality made human. Even Hardy indicates her physical common sense as he allows her to make the final comment about the tragedy, an acute and amazingly objective observation of Sue's final state.

Why, then, does Hardy include such a character? The answer is apparent: Arabella's coarseness and animal depravity are a contrast to Sue's fineness and spirituality. Arabella is flesh and blood; Sue is elusive and ethereal. Arabella captures Jude's body, Sue, his soul. They are each an inherent part of him, and as William E. Buckler observes in an introduction to the novel, Jude is made "paralytic and immobile by two unintegrated parts of himself" (8). Neither woman could go beyond her boundaries. The two added together make one bride. As D. H. Lawrence describes their relationships, through Arabella, Jude took the first steps of a sexual male. He went nowhere, however, in knowledge or self-knowledge. In the physically impotent Sue, though, he found spiritual potency. She fulfilled his wish for essentializing knowledge. Therefore, his experience with Arabella, plus his experience with Sue in incandescent realization made one complete

marriage.<sup>7</sup>

Sue Bridehead is a strange and elusive child of Hardy. She is the subtlest and most complicated feminine achievement of his psychological imagination. Sue is a naturally charming, sensitive, and exceptionally impulsive young girl. When the reader first meets her, she would appear as the usual Hardy heroine: she is delicate and fastidious:

He Jude could perceive that though she was a country-girl at bottom, a latter girlhood of some years in London, and a womanhood here, had taken all rawness out of her. . . . she was not a large figure, . . . she was light and slight, of the type dubbed elegant. . . . There was nothing statuesque in her; all was nervous motion. She was mobile, living, yet a painter might not have called her handsome or beautiful. But the much that she was surprised him. She was quite a long way removed from the rusticity that was his. How could one of his cross-grained, unfortunate, almost accursed stock, have contrived to reach this pitch of niceness. London had done it, he supposed. (95).

She is recognizably motivated by the same forces that control other Hardy heroines. She is capricious--in her relationship with Jude she alternately encourages and forbids his interest in her. As a result, part of the time he is so confused that he actually fails to understand her attitudes. At one point during such a scene, he charges her with being a flirt. Hardy instills in her a love of being loved much like that found in Elfride and Bathsheba, except that Sue's capriciousness is less deliberate and more at the mercy of her whims. She is completely emotionally motivated, and because she is, her actions are erratic and unpredictable. In answer to his charge of "flirt," she tells Jude:

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<sup>7</sup>Albert J. Guerard, Hardy, A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 75-6.

"O Jude, it was cruel to say that! Yet I can't tell you the truth--I should shock you by letting you know how I give way to my impulses, and how much I feel that I shouldn't have been provided with attractiveness unless it were meant to be exercised! Some women's love of being loved is insatiable; and so, often, is their love of loving; and in the last case they may find that they can't give it continuously to the chamber-officer appointed by the bishop's license to receive it. But you are so straightforward, Jude, that you can't understand me!" (210).

Her alternations of passion and discretion bewilder and confuse Jude. She explains her taunting to him late in the novel:

"At first I did not love you, Jude; that I own. When I first knew you I merely wanted you to love me. I did not exactly flirt with you; but that inborn craving which undermines some women's morals almost more than unbridled passion--the craving to attract and captivate, regardless of the injury it may do the man--was in me; and when I found I had caught you, I was frightened. And then--I don't know how it was--I couldn't bear to let you go--possibly to Arabella again--and so I got to love you, Jude. But you see, however fondly it ended, it began in the selfish and cruel wish to make your heart ache for me without letting mine ache for you" (359-60).

Like some other heroines she is exceptionally jealous, so jealous in fact, that she even forces herself to marry another man to avenge Jude's attentions to Arabella. She is extremely selfish and self-centered. Though she is not intentionally vicious, her love is responsible for the destruction of three men: two--a student with whom she came in contact, and Jude, himself--die because of it; a third, Richard Phillotson, whom she twice marries, is made to suffer endless mortification because of her neurotic and egocentric nature. Yet she is a character for whom a reader can find sympathy.

Most significant in the discussion of Sue's character are certain innovations she displays in the Hardy heroine, all of

which complicate her character and some of which are far from complimentary: she is a completely ethereal character; she affects intellectuality; she is sexless; she has pronounced and unconventional views on marriage; and she has decided masochistic tendencies. Each of these items must be examined more fully to understand her character.

The opposite of the very physical Arabella, Sue is completely ethereal. Henry C. Duffin in Thomas Hardy, A Study of the Wessex Novels, the Poems and The Dynasts, calls Sue "Ariel, all spirit and fire, incapable of being caught, held, pinned down." Herbert B. Grimsditch in Character and Environment in the Novels of Thomas Hardy describes her as a lovely, bright-souled, ethereal creature, half woman and half spirit, a masterly study in abnormal psychology. In the novel itself Hardy repeatedly refers to her spirit-like qualities. Jude views her one morning after he has just experienced an untimely meeting with Arabella:

Looking at his loved one as she appeared to him now, in his tender thought the sweetest and most disinterested comrade that he had ever had, living largely in vivid imaginings, so ethereal a creature that her spirit could be seen trembling through her limbs, he felt heartily ashamed of his earthliness in spending the hours he had spent in Arabella's company (193).

Another time he addresses her as such:

"You spirit, you disembodied creature, you dear, sweet, tantalizing phantom--hardly flesh at all; so that when I put my arms round you I almost expect them to pass through you as through air!" (251).

Toward the end of the story, when Sue's neuroticism forces Jude to live apart from her, he charges her with not actually loving him and suggests she is incapable of love because of her extreme



ethereality:

"You have never loved me as I love you--never--never! Yours is not a passionate heart--your heart does not burn in a flame! You are, upon the whole, a sort of fay, or sprite--not a woman!" (359).

Arabella notices this quality in her, too, and states that Jude is charmed by her as if she were some fairy. Even Mrs. Edlin, the old widow who cares for Jude and Sue's aunt in her last illness, recognizes Sue's problem. When Sue chastizes her body for leading her to ruin, the old woman replies, "Pshoo--you've got no body to speak of! You put me more in mind of a sperrit" (401). In her spirituality, Sue's personality and character coincide. "Her bird-like mannerisms and mobile features are a true index to her nervous disorders. These in turn are a considerable part of her character."<sup>8</sup> This spirituality is closely united to the two following aspects of Sue's personality: her intellectuality and her sexlessness.

Sue is Hardy's most highly developed woman from an intellectual point of view. She has gone further in free thought than even Angel Clare, according to Herbert B. Grimsditch:

Her rationalism, like his, originates in admiration for pagan thought and institutions rather than in a feeling that science and philosophy have sapped the foundations of the old faith; but she is much more iconoclastic than he in her dealings with tradition.<sup>9</sup>

Her adventures in thought are intellectually far in advance of Jude. At one point in the story, Richard Phillotson, Sue's husband,

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<sup>8</sup>Albert J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy, The Novels and Stories, p. 136.

<sup>9</sup>Herbert B. Grimsditch, Character and Environment, p. 132.

remarks about Sue's unusual reasoning capabilities:

"I cannot answer her arguments--she has read ten times as much as I. Her intellect sparkles like diamonds, while mine smoulders like brown paper. . . . She's one too many for me!" (236).

Sue's earlier intellectual attitudes symbolize modern restlessness and unfaith. Later, for her, they signify a woman with harrowing sexual difficulties, and perhaps here, then, is the key to such intellectualism. This aspect of Sue represents a substitution for physical acts which repulse her. In her desire to escape the physical, she turns to the spiritual and the mental. The sincerity of her religious ponderings and the validity of her intellectuality are questionable in light of her aversion to sex.

Her intellectualism, which might be called pseudo-intellectualism, manifests itself in her purchasing the heathen statues of Venus and Apollo and in her books, among them a volume of Gibbon. Curiously alien to the Gothic-frame crucifix picture that hung in her room and directly opposed to the text illuminations she does for Miss Fontover, her employer, these interests ultimately cause her to lose her job at the little shop. Her work as an artist-designer of religious objects is purely superficial; she feels no real religion. As Richard Carpenter states in Thomas Hardy,

she pretends to shocking skepticism pronouncing Jerusalem inferior to Athens, Rome and Alexandria, rearranging her Bible in chronological order; and saying that she thinks it "humbug . . . to plaster over with ecclesiastical abstractions such ecstatic, natural, human love as lies in that great passionate song" which is Solomon's.

Ironically, Sue and Jude reverse their attitudes by the end of

the book, and Sue assumes the view of orthodox, dogmatic Christianity--almost to the point of being Puritanical--as she looks upon the death of her children as a judgment for her own indiscretions. In neither state, religious or paganistic, does she find solace, but her life is continually tormented.

The most important, interesting, and distinctive element in Sue's nature is her sexlessness. Grimsditch calls this her "curious unconsciousness of gender." Sue herself refuses to admit to sexlessness; she prefers to call herself "self-contained." D. H. Lawrence is much more emphatic, however, in his analysis of her condition, when he states, "Her body was as insentient as hoar-frost."<sup>10</sup> He claims that the senses did not exist in her. She was merely a consciousness. Unhappy all her life, "she felt the ghastly sickness of dissolution upon her; she was a void unto herself."<sup>11</sup> Lawrence maintains that Sue "lived" only in the mind. From actual physical encounter she always would shrink. Any suggestion of the physical threw her into utter confusion.

Sue's sexlessness is not so simple, however. Joined with her distaste for any physical manifestation of affection is her amazing loveableness and her natural tendency to excite desire in others. Arnold Kettle, in Hardy the Novelist: A Reconsideration, regards her as an intellectual version of a strip-tease girl. While she wants to live entirely out of reach of sex, she still appeals sexually. As Guerard suggests in Thomas Hardy, The Novels

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<sup>10</sup>Albert J. Guerard, Hardy, A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 75-6.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

and Stories, over and over again the same pattern is visible in Sue: she lives with a man in an ostensibly sexless and fraternal intimacy; she arouses his desire; she leads him on; and then she rejects him. (Completing this cycle is the last phase of penance she imposes upon herself for his suffering.) Sue's difficulty, says Lawrence, was this:

To find a man whose vitality could infuse her and make her live, and who would not, at the same time, demand of her a return . . . of the female impulse into him. What man could receive this drainage, receiving nothing back again? He must either die, or revolt.<sup>12</sup>

Emotionally, she is a murderer. One male-companion, the young student whom she mentions occasionally, dies because she forces upon him such a pseudo-Platonic arrangement; she literally frustrates him to death. Another, Jude, suffers throughout his life, partially being accepted by her but ultimately rejected. Richard Phillotson, her husband, is twice forced to abide by her celibate rules. In Phillotson's case, she reveals her distaste for his overtures by hiding in a closet amid darkness and spiders rather than sleep with him. The second and most extreme example of her frigidity occurs when he accidentally enters her room late one night. So horrible is her fear of his presence there that she jumps out the window and falls to the gravel below. Their grotesque relationship is accentuated by Richard's remark to her: "You ought to lock your door. Then no one could intrude by accident" (233). Her reply, "I have tried--it won't lock. All the doors are out of order," indicates that she had already attempted

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

to insure her security. In addition, he loses his position as schoolmaster because of her scandalous conduct in returning to live, unmarried with Jude. He summarizes his desperation to Gillingham, his close friend:

"She's another man's except in name and law. And I have been thinking--it was suggested to me by a conversation I had with her--that, in kindness to her, I ought to dissolve the legal tie altogether; which, singularly enough, I think I can do, now she has been back and refused my request to stay after I said I had forgiven her. I believe the fact would afford me opportunity of doing it, though I did not see it at the moment. What's the use of keeping her chained on to me if she doesn't belong to me? I know--I feel absolutely certain--that she would welcome my taking such a step as the greatest charity to her. For though as a fellow-creature she sympathizes with, and pities me--she loathes me--there's no use mincing words--she loathes me, and my only manly, and dignified and merciful course is to complete what I have for her to be independent. I have hopelessly ruined my prospects because of my decision as to what was best for us, though she does not know it; I see only dire poverty ahead from my feet to the grave; for I can be accepted as teacher no more. I shall probably have enough to do to make both ends meet during the remainder of my life, now my occupation's gone; and I shall be better able to bear it alone. I may as well tell you that what has suggested my letting her go is some news she brought me--the news that Fawley is doing the same (259-60).

In due time, the divorce is made absolute. Later, after the death of her children, Sue returns to Phillotson. Sensing that her repulsion of him is still present, he informs her that he will continue to respect her personal privacy just as he did in their previous marriage. Once again she victimizes another with her neuroticism.

Not only from Phillotson does Sue exact the inhuman, but she exercises this restraint upon Jude at the end of the novel. She begins to suggest such a strained relationship shortly after the children have been buried. She suggests self-abnegation as

the higher road and mortification of the flesh as the only remedy for their previous vain self-delight. At first Jude protests:

"Sue--my own too suffering dear!--there's no evil woman in you. Your natural instincts are perfectly healthy; not quite so impassioned, perhaps, as I could wish; but good, and dear, and pure. And as I have often said, you are absolutely the most ethereal, least sensual woman I ever knew to exist without inhuman sexlessness. Why do you talk in such a way? We have not been selfish, except when no one could profit by our being otherwise. You used to say that human nature was noble and long-suffering, not vile and corrupt, . . . " (351).

In desperation he pleads for his own salvation, which he fears will be jeopardized if she turns him out:

"O Sue! Do not do an immoral thing for moral reasons! You have been my social salvation. Stay with me for humanity's sake! You know what a weak fellow I am. My two Arch Enemies you know--my weakness for womankind and my impulse to strong liquor. Don't abandon me to them, Sue, to save your own soul only! They have been kept entirely at a distance since you became my guardian-angel! Since I have had you I have been able to go into any temptations of that sort, without risk. Isn't my safety worth a little sacrifice of dogmatic principle? I am in terror lest, if you leave me, it will be with me another case of the pig that was washed turning back to his wallowing in the mire!" (360).

In answer she tells him she will pray for him, and unmovingly turns him out.

Sue is one of the most impressive examples of a neurotic and sexually maladjusted woman in all fiction. Hardy himself said, "Sue is the type of woman which has always had an attraction for me, but the difficulty of drawing the type has kept me from attempting to create it till now."<sup>13</sup> Guerard suggests that Hardy may have attempted to create Sue because she was an unconscious

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<sup>13</sup>Albert J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy, The Novels and Stories, p. 109.

evolution of conglomerate earlier heroines, rather than a single anomalous creation of epicene nature.

Interestingly, Hardy uses Sue to set forth his own views about stultified and loveless marriage. She lends herself most conveniently to his criticism. Truly, marriage is the chief mischief-maker for both Sue and Jude. Her avoidance of it indicates her aversion. To Sue marriage is a submission, a service, a slavery. She openly admits it is repugnant to her. In telling Jude of her unhappiness with Phillotson, she says, "What tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes, good as he is morally!--the dreadful contract to feel a particular way in a matter whose essence is its voluntariness!" (218). In pleading with Phillotson to free her from her attachments to him, she indicates her belief that foisting social institutions upon some individuals is torture:

"Domestic laws should be made according to temperaments, which should be classified. If people are at all peculiar in character they have to suffer from the very rules that produce comfort in others!" (228).

She maintains that living married with one you do not love is more sinful than another alternative might be: "For a man and woman to live on intimate terms when one feels as I do is adultery, in any circumstances, however legal" (228). She refers to marriage as an iron contract that would extinguish tenderness merely because it legally obligated partners to each other. Speaking to Jude 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?" (277). The

sordidness repulsed her:

"Should be two dissatisfied ones linked together, which would be twice as bad as before. . . . I think I should begin to be afraid of you, Jude, the moment you had contracted to cherish me under a Government stamp, and I was licensed to be loved on the premises by you--Ugh, how horrible and sordid!" (264).

Shortly before their proposed marriage ceremony, Sue tells Jude, "What Arabella has been saying to me has made me feel more than ever how hopelessly vulgar an institution legal marriage is--a sort of trap to catch a man--I can't bear to think of it" (276).

If this was Sue's attitude toward marriage and if she could be called sexless as discussed previously, why then does Hardy permit her relationship with Jude and her marriage to Phillotson? The answers are inseparable. The love of Jude and Sue most nearly approaches the ideal love. They are as one unit. They could hardly do anything of importance unless in the presence of each other. What keeps their relationship alive is the fact that they are never legally contracted. Their partnership is not irrevocable, and therefore not suffocating to her. Because she is less bound by convention, she proposes a marriageless union. Therefore, she is neither his wife nor his mistress, but a strange combination that might be both or might be neither. Some critics claim that she is more a part of Jude. Even Phillotson exclaims, "I have been struck with these two facts; the extraordinary sympathy, or similarity, between the pair. . . . They seem to be one person split in two!" (236). Sue describes their relationship as a "mental communion." Phillotson explains the relationship even better in speaking to Gillingham:



"To the best of my understanding it is not an ignoble, merely animal, feeling between the two: that is the worst of it; because it makes me think their affection will be enduring. . . . I found from their manner an extraordinary affinity, or sympathy, entered into their attachment, which somehow took away all flavour of grossness. Their supreme desire is to be together--to share each other's emotions, and fancies, and dreams. . . . Shelleyan would be nearer to it. They remind me of--what are their names--Laon and Cythna" (238).

Hardy clarifies the situation best in an explanation in a preface he wrote himself. He defends Sue's nature against perversion and elaborates on their union, saying:

"You are quite right; there is nothing perverted or depraved in Sue's nature. The abnormalism consists in disproportion, not in inversion, her sexual instinct being healthy as far as it goes, but unusually weak and fastidious. Her sensibilities remain painfully alert notwithstanding, as they do in nature with such women. One point illustrating this I could not dwell upon: that, though she has children, her intimacies with Jude have never been more than occasional, even when they were living together . . . and one of her reasons for fearing the marriage ceremony is that she fears it would be breaking faith with Jude to withhold herself at pleasure, or altogether, after it; though while uncontracted she feels at liberty to yield herself as seldom as she chooses."<sup>14</sup>

Sue's second marriage to Phillotson may be best explained by examining the final element of her character--her tendency toward masochism. Hardy portrayed the persecuted many times before, and in differing degrees in all the heroines discussed, but never before did he introduce a character who enjoyed torturing herself.

Sue's masochistic tendencies, which are closely allied with her religious philosophies, undergo three phases. Early in the story evidence of self-persecution can be seen when she asks Jude to give her away when she marries Phillotson. (Here, too,

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

there is an indication of her enjoyment in torturing others, particularly Jude. She simultaneously tortures herself by allowing him to give her away.)

After the death of her children, Sue looks upon her loss as a judgment of her ill-spent life. She tells Jude that they have been selfish, careless, impious, and that they should spend the rest of their lives trying to purify their souls. She cries, "Self-renunciation--that's everything! I cannot humiliate myself too much. I should like to prick myself all over with pins and bleed out the badness that's in me!" (351). She returns, in her confusion, to church, where she seeks comfort in rites and ceremonies. She is suddenly obsessed with the fact that it is her "duty" to return to Richard, since he was her legal husband. Whether she likes it or not, that is what she thinks she must do. This illustrates, as Jude points out, a complete reversal in her philosophy about marriage:

"Sue, Sue--affliction has brought you to this unreasonable state! After converting me to your views on so many things, to find you suddenly turn to the right--about like this--for no reason whatever, confounding all you have formerly said through sentiment merely! You root out of me what little affection and reverence I had left in me for the Church as an old acquaintance. . . . What I can't understand in you is your extraordinary blindness now to your old logic. Is it peculiar to you, or is it common to woman? Is a woman a thinking unit, at all, or a fraction always wanting its integer? How you argued that marriage was only a clumsy contract--which it is--how you showed all the objections to it--all the absurdities! If two and two made four when we were happy together, surely they make four now? I can't understand it, I repeat!" (357).

She looks upon herself as vile and worthless. Jude warns her that she does not love Phillotson and that a union with him at

that time would be little more than fanatic prostitution. Still, she persists, and she returns to Marygreen and to Phillotson. Her nobility, however, is assuaged somewhat, by Phillotson's previously mentioned choice to live with her in name only.

Still, Sue is haunted by ghosts of guilt and threats of future punishment. Because she has seen Jude once more, in a last desperate attempt for catharsis, she demands, as a final penance, that Phillotson share his bed with her. Once again Sue not only punishes herself, but someone else, for in her tortured submission to Phillotson, she persecutes Jude, also. She denies him herself, denies herself him, and hands him over to Arabella and damnation. She must, as she puts it, "drink the dregs." Somehow she reasons that this life with Richard will blot out her "mistakes" of the past. Jude ponders their tragedy in a talk with Mrs. Edlin:

"Strange difference of sex, that time and circumstance, which enlarge the views of most men, narrow the views of women almost invariably. And now the ultimate horror has come--her giving herself like this to what she loathes, in her enslavement to forms!--she so sensitive, so shrinking, that the very wind seemed to blow on her with a touch of deference. . . . 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!" (407-8).

Richard Carpenter's Thomas Hardy calls Jude the Obscure the nadir of Hardy's pessimism. Certainly, Hardy plunges into areas untouched before. In Jude the Obscure, Hardy leaves the reader with no hope, no cleansing of passions. There is only unrelieved darkness. As Arabella points out at the end of the

novel, Sue, with or without Jude, finds no rest:

"She may swear that on her knees to the holy cross upon her necklace till she's hoarse, but it won't be true! She's never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she's as he is now" (416).

Sue and Jude may be described as the "stunted growth of modern life, all its maladjustment, discontent, and restless, craving intellectuality."<sup>15</sup> D. H. Lawrence labels Sue as "the production of the long selection by man of the woman in whom the female is subordinated to the male principle."<sup>16</sup> As Duffin states, her soul is wasted away by sorrow, fear, and error. What results is a "shrivelled, maniac thing, too pitiful to be thought upon."

In reconsidering Sue's characteristics, many are obvious borrowings from former heroines. Once again capriciousness, inconsistency, and despotism are evident. Although she probably acts more on impulse than any other heroine, previous ones have also been emotionally motivated. Like Elfrida, Bathsheba, and Eustacia she is self-centered, and accordingly she victimizes those around her unintentionally. Unlike Elfrida and Bathsheba she knows very little happiness. Again like them she is attractive and provocative.

More noticeable, however, are the differences in Sue and her "ancestors." First of all, she is the only Hardy character who has a definite segment of her personality missing and yet present in another character in the novel. There is no other

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<sup>15</sup> Joseph Warren Beach, Technique, p. 243.

<sup>16</sup> Albert J. Guerard, A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 71.

"Arabella-Sue" before her. Secondly, she is the first suggestion of a female intellectual that Hardy introduces. This does not mean that intelligent women were not present--they certainly were. But Sue is an entirely new kind of intellect. Another difference occurs in Sue's unconventional views about marriage. Frequently, Hardy spoke out about love and through love, but Sue is the first spokesman against marriage. Likewise, she is the first character introduced as bodiless, ethereal, nebulous. The uncertainty of her philosophies and the vacillation of her attitudes serve to complicate her for herself, her associates, and her readers. Probably more apparent, though, is her masochistic tendency. Previous heroines exhibit simple resignation. Elfride desires to make something of worth of her broken life, and Bathsheba humbles herself and bows to Oak; but never before has a character deliberately sought punishment for her life. Another significant difference in Sue and other heroines is her situation at the end of the novel. She, alone, is left seemingly without a solution to her problem. Each previous woman, through some Hardy plot device, is allowed to "escape" her final dilemma: Elfride pines away and dies, thus finding release from her life without Henry Knight; Bathsheba settles down to a more or less complacent dullness with Gabriel Oak and evades the pursuits of both Troy and Boldwood; Eustacia commits suicide and thereby escapes the Heath and its grip upon her; and Tess is condemned to the gallows and avoids a life of misery with Alec. Sue, bound to Phillotson, is forced to resume her life without Jude. The picture of Sue as

she struggles futilely against fate reinforces the theme of Jude the Obscure as a "tragedy of unfulfilled aims" (9).

Sue is both innovation and conclusion for Hardy. Through her he opens new insights into the complexity of man and woman, and by her he closes the doors with the case yet unsolved. Through her and Jude he attempts to "anatomize the modern world" (11).

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

It is safe to say Hardy was a great English novelist who looked life unflinchingly in the face.

--Richard Carpenter from Thomas Hardy

The study presented here attempts to describe and assess Thomas Hardy's ability to create female character of increasing intensity and complexity. While not every aspect of Hardy's power can be examined rationally, the analysis of the women selected here offers ample evidence of the movement of his characterization from simplicity to complexity. Just as Hardy is aware of many outside forces affecting individual lives, so does the study consider a variety of circumstances which makes each single character and individual different in design from her predecessors, yet still an interesting combination of many of their qualities.

By starting with Elfride Swancourt in A Pair of Blue Eyes the reader can see where Hardy began. Elfride, in comparison with Eustacia or Sue, is simple, unsophisticated, and traditional. The complications arising in her world come from outside sources--her father's obsession with genealogy, the visit to the Vicarage by an eligible young architectural student, the chance reviewing of her novel by a friend who turns out to be a lover. Coincidence still plays a major part in the novel, although certain characters, especially Elfride, do begin to move against complete control by chance and exhibit some degree

of individuality. By the end of the story, though, Elfride settles down to a very conventional life and ultimately dies in a rather limp gesture of resignation.

Hardy's second heroine, Bathsheba Everdene in Far from the Madding Crowd, offers an example of a major step down the path of individuality and complexity. A most recognizable difference in Bathsheba and Elfride is Bathsheba's resourcefulness and independence. While she consistently retains her femininity, Bathsheba exhibits a practicality and an intellect that is new to Hardy heroines, and one which will be extended later in the characters of Arabella and Sue. A foremost contribution that Bathsheba makes to the Hardy heroine is the degree of maturity she possesses. The girlishness in the heroine disappears in Bathsheba and self-assurance and responsibility replace it. Bathsheba's life is still controlled to a large extent by outside forces--the inheritance of her uncle's farm, the chance meeting with Sergeant Troy, her hiring of Gabriel Oak as her shepherd--but her strength of character and her strong endurance compete actively against the plot as a motivating device, and she represents a foundation for more complicated characters that will follow.

The introduction of Eustacia Vye represents a major change from simplicity to complexity of character for Hardy. Although Eustacia appears to be "fated" by her surroundings, she still exhibits specific qualities not seen in previous heroines: restlessness, dissatisfaction with her state in life,



a sensuousness more powerful than that ever evident before in a heroine, and a mysteriousness that pervades the entire novel. Here for the first time Hardy introduces the struggle between the rural and urban society, for Eustacia is an alien in a rural setting; and because she moves outside the boundaries to which she is accustomed, she must suffer. Here, too, for the first time Hardy introduces a character who is unhappy most of her life. Elfride's unhappiness occurs at the end of the novel, after her distressing love affair with Henry Knight, but Eustacia is restless and sad when she first appears in the story. Her general dissatisfaction with life makes her a pawn before the world and acquires for her the reader's sympathy.

The creation of Tess Durbeyfield in Tess of the d'Urbervilles, probably Hardy's most well-rounded character, marks a high point in the characters studied. This tender and pure woman represents a complete assimilation of many of the characteristics of previous heroines, yet the compilation produces a more wholesome, genuine person than has been examined before. Tess is an interesting example of character delineation, for her personality exhibits a new kind of complexity. Not only does her character acquire new identities not present in former heroines, but it also gathers together salient features of preceding heroines. What results then is a fusion of many characteristics, both old and new, presenting finally a character with a much wider range of complexities than any discussed before. In creating this tragic girl, Hardy combines admirable traits of former women

with an environment of unsympathetic human institutions and in doing so he wreaked unbelievable doom upon her. Her power moves unforgettably against the obstacles that surround her, and while she is ultimately overcome, she leaves behind her a sense of vital and indelible beauty.

Finally, Hardy presents the character of Sue and her alter-ego, the vulgar and voluptuous Arabella in Jude the Obscure. In his last novel, Hardy ignores Victorian convention and propriety and startles the world by the introduction of his most complex and intriguing woman--the unhappy, unconventional Sue Bridehead. In his presentation of Sue, Hardy seems to abandon all reservations and courageously offers the reading public a testimony to the coming age. Although she is no more memorable than Tess, Sue embodies characteristics that make her one of the most enigmatic and misunderstood characters in Victorian fiction. Her ethereal nature and striking intellectualism, joined with her neuroticism, offer a bold study of the Victorian woman, and just as she is alienated from her society, so does she alienate Hardy from his readers and from the society of nineteenth century England.

Finally, one can see that Hardy moves from the very traditional to the extremely untraditional, yet he is equally at home with each type. All five heroines, assessed by critics to be his five greatest women, are presented carefully and sympathetically, with a sensitivity and understanding for which he is well known. He fills their lives with situations that

both make and destroy them; most of all though, he makes them live--he captures the real essence of womanhood. To use the words of Henry C. Duffin one last time:

What Hardy could do for his women, he did--he made them full of beauty, interest, fascinating and lovable qualities of all kinds, he gave them parts to play, and let them, generally, play those parts well. His estimate of women is high, but tempered and conditioned by keen observation of the realities around him. He has the necessary ideals of her as a creature nobly planned and bright with angelic radiance, but he knows also that it is only in rare cases that she is found free, undimmed, ideal. . . . And so Hardy, through all his dissatisfaction at the often sorry show that woman makes, manages to 'hold fast, hope hard in the subtle thing' that is the spirit of woman.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Charles Duffin, Thomas Hardy, p. 238.

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