

**HARDY AND WOMEN :  
A STUDY IN AMBIVALENCE**

Thesis submitted for the degree of  
**Doctor of Philosophy**  
at the University of Leicester

by

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**Shanta Dutta**

**ABSTRACT**

This thesis attempts to take a fresh look at the long-running critical debate regarding Hardy's attitude to women as revealed in his prose fiction. Writing in a predominantly male literary tradition, and sharing a Christian ethic which held women responsible for the shattering of Edenic bliss, Hardy's fiction sometimes betrays certain misogynic traits as the author / narrator seems trapped in the gender-stereotyping so characteristic of his age. Reductive generalizations regarding woman's nature, often crudely bio-determined, pepper Hardy's novels even as late as Jude. Conversely, Hardy's sincere sympathy for woman as victim of patriarchal repression and exploitation emerges powerfully not only in Tess but also in those unjustly neglected short stories of the 1890s which reveal certain radically feminist tendencies, e.g. on eugenics.

This study draws on unpublished letters and manuscripts in the Dorset County Museum and also on Hardy's marginalia, his published letters, literary 'Notebooks', and autobiography, as these offer interesting sidelights on authorial intentions and attitudes. The insights from these extra-textual sources are used to complement the textual analysis of one 'minor' and one 'major' prose work from the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s. The study then examines Hardy's attitudes to his two wives vis-a-vis their literary ambitions : his strange unconcern regarding his first wife's creative efforts, in sharp contrast to his active promotion of the careers of his (would-be) second wife and a couple of other aristocratic literary 'pupils'. Following this is a detailed exploration of Hardy's relations with some of his contemporary female writers.

The picture that finally emerges is of an artist who is often unable to transcend the blinkered male attitudes of his age, yet who courageously espouses certain revolutionary ideas on women's rights. This ambivalence is typical of a man who claimed to be content with tentativeness and disavowed any consistent 'philosophy' -- feminist or otherwise.



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**To my Parents**

For all their love, encouragement,  
support and sacrifice.

## CONTENTS

Preface	iv
Acknowledgements	vi
<b>Chapters :</b>	
I. Introduction : The Critics' Debate	1
II. <u>The Hand of Ethelberta</u>	29
III. <u>The Return of the Native</u>	49
IV. <u>Two on a Tower</u>	76
V. <u>The Woodlanders</u>	97
VI. The Short Stories of the 1890s	124
VII. <u>Jude the Obscure</u>	150
VIII. Hardy, his Wives, and his Literary Protégées	180
IX. Hardy and Some Contemporary Female Writers	224
X. Conclusion : 'A Confused Heap of Impressions'	279
<b>Bibliography</b>	310

## Preface

Thomas Hardy's novels have generated interesting debates on many controversial issues and ever since he began publishing his fiction, readers and reviewers alike puzzled over his contradictory responses to his women characters. Modern critics too have tended either to brand him as a misogynist or to appropriate him to the feminist cause. The truth, as always, perhaps lies somewhere in between these two extreme views and this thesis attempts to explore Hardy's richly ambivalent attitude to women -- both in his fiction and in his life.

What emerges is a conflicting picture of a man and artist who espouses certain revolutionary ideas on women's rights but who sometimes fails to transcend the gender-stereotyping so characteristic of his age. Thus, while his sympathy for the wronged, exploited or marginalized woman is forcefully and unequivocally expressed, what is also simultaneously revealed are some of his fears, uncertainties, reservations and tensions which are the natural inheritance of patriarchal ideology and a predominantly male literary tradition.

In discussing the issue I have drawn liberally on the rich collection of unpublished material in the Dorset County Museum, Hardy's letters (published in seven volumes), his disguised autobiography, his various literary 'notebooks', and the recently published letters of his two wives. Selecting the texts to support my thesis presented a dilemma : I could either fall back upon Hardy's own categorization of the novels and select the 'Novels of Character and Environment' (which Hardy quite obviously privileges) or concentrate on the generally accepted 'major' texts, ignoring the 'minor' novels. However, I have tried to be as representative as possible by choosing one 'minor' and one 'major' text from each of the three decades of Hardy's writing career (in prose fiction) thus including both an early comedy like The Hand of Ethelberta and a late tragedy like Jude the Obscure . From the 1870s I have chosen The Hand of Ethelberta and The Return of the Native ; the 1880s are represented by Two on a Tower and The Woodlanders ; and in the 1890s the focus is on the short stories (A Group of Noble Dames and Life's Little Ironies) and Jude the Obscure . A word of explanation for what may seem an important exclusion is perhaps necessary here. A thesis on 'Hardy and Women' which ignores Tess of the d'Urbervilles may seem strange and the only reason why I have not devoted a chapter to this novel is because I cannot personally find any ambivalence here.

Despite modern readings of voyeurism and sado-masochism, Hardy's emotional commitment to Tess is so total, so personal, and so sincere (he even at one time thought of naming the novel 'Tess of the Hardys'), that it seems perverse to question his sympathy.

When referring to a work for the first time, I provide full bibliographical details and page number but for subsequent references I generally use only a short title. However, when the same book / article is referred to in a different 'Chapter' I provide full bibliographical details again (for the first reference) in order to save the reader the trouble of searching backwards endlessly.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission for awarding me the Commonwealth Academic Staff Scholarship. Without this generous three-year grant, I would never have realized my long-cherished dream of coming to England and doing my research in 'Hardy' country. Thanks are also due to the Arts Budget Centre Research Committee of Leicester University for a grant in aid which funded one of my research trips to the Dorset County Museum, Dorchester. In this context, I would like to thank Professor Vincent Newey, Head of the Dept. of English, for recommending my application for a grant. I also take this opportunity of thanking the Vice-Chancellor of my home university, Professor Pabitra Sarkar of Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta, India, for his unfailing support of my candidacy for the Commonwealth Scholarship.

My greatest debt is, of course, to my supervisor Dr Joanne Shattock, Director of the Victorian Studies Centre. I am very grateful to her for her academic support and constructive suggestions, for patiently and critically reading my drafts, for those delightful trips to Stratford, but most of all for her faith in me -- when I was almost losing mine. A word of thanks for my ex-supervisor, Professor Sisir Kumar Das of Calcutta University, under whom I originally began my research, would not be (I trust) out of place here. My sincere gratitude also goes out to Professor Michael Millgate for generously sharing with a novice his vast store of Hardy scholarship and for replying very promptly to my many queries in spite of his busy schedule. I am also very grateful to Dr Roger Ebbatson for giving me an opportunity to present a paper at a Hardy Conference at Worcester, and to Dr Simon Curtis, Editor of The Thomas Hardy Journal, for generously publishing a few of my contributions to the journal despite constraints of space.

Most of the material used in my thesis came in the form of Inter-Library Loans and I take this opportunity to thank the very friendly and cooperative library staff of Leicester University, especially the wonderful ladies at the Inter-Library Loan desk. A special word of thanks also goes out to Mr Peter Woodhead for cheerfully helping me to hunt up recalcitrant sources and for familiarizing me with some of the 'hi-tech' bibliographical tools. I deeply appreciate the help of the staff of the Dorset County Library, especially their willingness to bend rules a little in loaning out items,

which made my Dorchester research trips doubly fruitful. Thanks are also due to Mr Richard de Peyer, Curator of the Dorset County Museum, for granting me access to the manuscripts, unpublished letters, diaries and other items of interest in the 'Thomas Hardy Memorial Collection'; and my special thanks go out to Mrs Lilian Swindall for cheerfully putting up with my ever-expanding list of requested items. I would also like to express my gratitude to Mr William Hemmig of the Beinecke Library for sending me a copyflo of Hardy's annotated copy of Egerton's Keynotes, and to Mr Vincent Giroud, Curator of Modern Books and Manuscripts, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, for granting me formal permission to quote from Hardy's marginalia in this copy.

On the social side, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Dilip Bhattacharyya (Economics Dept.) and his wife for their warm and unstinted hospitality during my three-year sojourn. Sincere thanks also go out to Mrs Sue Lloyd and Mrs Sue Martin for providing the much-needed friendly presence within the department. Finally, but in a very big way, I would like to say a warm 'Thank You' to my friend Dr Nese Elgun for making me 'computer literate'. Without her generous teaching sessions, I would never have had the satisfaction of typing my own thesis.

## Chapter I

### Introduction : The Critics' Debate

In a 1918 review, Virginia Woolf rather sweepingly stated that 'no one will admit that he can possibly mistake a novel written by a man for a novel written by a woman'.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps she was forgetting those numerous anonymous and pseudonymous Victorian novels -- like those by the Brontes and George Eliot -- which puzzled the contemporary reviewer and reader alike, as regards the sex of the author. Faced with the anonymous Desperate Remedies, for instance, the anonymous reviewer in Athenaeum responded cautiously:

We cannot decide, satisfactorily to our own mind, on the sex of the author; for while certain evidence, such as the close acquaintance which he or she appears . . . to possess with the mysteries of the female toilette, would appear to point to its being the work of one of that sex, on the other hand there are certain expressions to be met with in the book so remarkably coarse as to render it almost impossible that it should have come from the pen of an English lady. Yet, again, all the best anonymous novels of the last twenty years -- a dozen instances will at once suggest themselves to the novel- reader -- have been the work of female writers. In this conflict of evidence, we will confine ourselves to the inexpressive 'he' in speaking of our present author, if we chance to need a pronoun.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Women Novelists', Times Literary Supplement, 17 Oct 1918; rpt. in Virginia Woolf, A Woman's Essays, Selected Essays : Volume One, ed. Rachel Bowlby (London : Penguin, 1992), p.13. This essay is also collected in The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Vol. II : 1912 - 1918, ed. Andrew McNeillie ( London : Hogarth Press, 1987), pp.314-17.

<sup>2</sup> Unsigned review in Athenaeum, 1 April 1871, rpt. in R.G. Cox ed. Thomas Hardy : The Critical Heritage (New York : Barnes & Noble, 1970), p.1. This review is also collected in Graham Clarke ed. Thomas Hardy : Critical Assessments, Vol. I : The Contemporary Response (East Sussex : Helm Information Ltd., 1993), p.43. The footnote wrongly ascribes this review to Spectator, 22 Apr 1871; however, the 'Chronological List of Criticism Included', p.29, rectifies this mistake and rightly cites the source as Athenaeum, 1 Apr 1871, and the 'Contents' page of Vol. I (p.vii) also gives the right reference. Subsequent references (e.g. the next footnote) to these two very useful anthologies of contemporary criticism will refer to them by their editors, Cox and Clarke (4 vols), for the sake of brevity.

Happily, the question about the sex of the author of Desperate Remedies has long been settled. What has not been either unanimously or conclusively settled is the attitude of this author towards the 'frail/fair sex'. While most readers would agree with the view that '[n]one of the male characters come quite up to these protagonists among the women',<sup>3</sup> the point at issue is whether these female protagonists are a libel on the sex or whether Hardy presents his female characters in a favourable, positive light. Given that most of the early reviewers were male, critical analyses of the novels soon revolved round the question of whether Hardy's women characters were 'lovable' or not.

Even a superficial survey of the critical response to Hardy shows a sharp schism : on one side of the critical fault-line, Hardy is held up as a champion of women, as a man who genuinely sympathized with their downtrodden condition and who bravely fought to highlight the various social and economic injustices of which they were victims. On the opposite side of the fence are critics who suspect Hardy of being a misogynist at heart, a novelist who may have rejected institutionalized Christianity but who seems not to have outgrown the hereditary Christian notion that it is Eve and her daughters who bring 'woe' to mankind. Perhaps one of the earliest signed reviews to draw attention to Hardy's negative portraiture of women is that by Horace Moule, a personal friend and literary mentor of Hardy. Moule ends his appreciative review of Under the Greenwood Tree with this insight :

The portraiture of Fancy herself conveys a kind of satire on the average character of a girl with good looks, capable of sound and honest affection, but inordinately moved by admiration.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Unsigned review, Saturday Review , 30 Sept 1871, in Cox, p.6 and in Clarke, Vol. I, p.48.

<sup>4</sup> Horace Moule, Saturday Review , 28 Sept 1872, in Cox, p.14 and in Clarke, Vol. I, pp. 59-60.



Later, Bathsheba in Far From the Madding Crowd comes in for more severe treatment at the hands of the anonymous reviewer in The Observer:

The first interview between Troy and Bathsheba represents the latter in so odious a light, if women in whatever rank of society, are supposed to retain any trace of modesty and reserve, that we confess we do not care one straw about her afterwards, and are only sorry that Gabriel Oak was not sufficiently manly to refuse to have anything more to say to such an incorrigible hussy.<sup>5</sup>

The same sentiments are echoed by Henry James in his review of Far From the Madding Crowd in Nation (in a rather ungenerous review which found 'the sheep and the dogs' the 'only things we believe in') :

But we cannot say that we either understand or like Bathsheba. She is a young lady of the inconsequential, wilful, mettlesome type which has lately become so much the fashion for heroines . . . she remains alternately vague and coarse, and seems always artificial.<sup>6</sup>

Bathsheba is seen as being an 'arrant flirt over-flowing with vanity', as 'hard and mercenary', and the anonymous reviewer in Westminster Review unequivocally stated his opinion:

We thoroughly sympathize with him [ i.e. Gabriel Oak ] and pity him, and we must say that he deserved a far better woman for a wife than such a vain and selfish creature as Bathsheba Everdene.<sup>7</sup>

If the strongly individualistic and unconventional Bathsheba aroused such (male) censure, Eustacia Vye faced an even less sympathetic response. The reviewer in Athenaeum shrewdly linked Eustacia with the 'Madame Bovary' type and expressed his disgust at characters who 'know

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<sup>5</sup> Anonymous review, The Observer , 3 Jan 1875, in Clarke, Vol. I, p.72.

<sup>6</sup> Henry James, Nation , 24 Dec 1874, in Cox, pp.30-31 and in Clarke, Vol. I, p.83.

<sup>7</sup> Unsigned review, Westminster Review , Jan 1875, in Cox, p.33 and in Clarke, Vol. I, p.89.

no other law than the gratification of their own passion . . . .<sup>8</sup> This same moral tone is heard in the Spectator review:

His coldly passionate heroine, Eustacia Vye, never reproaches herself for a moment with the inconstancy and poverty of her own affections. On the contrary, she has no feeling that anything which happens within her, has relation to right and wrong at all, or that such a thing as responsibility exists. . . . Hence, in her case, we never really reach the point of tragedy at all.<sup>9</sup>

Even such a toned down heroine as Anne Garland in The Trumpet-Major had to face her share of critical ire. The reviewer in Athenaeum is brutally frank :

It is true, no doubt, that the heroine is, not to put too fine a point upon it, a fool, and the gallant Bob Loveday another; and that the reader cannot help feeling more regard for Matilda of the doubtful reputation than for the correct and ladylike Anne. But Mr Hardy has always inclined to the cynical rather than to the sentimental.<sup>10</sup>

The Spectator review, conceding that Anne is 'personally lovely and attractive . . . amiable, innocent, generous, and tender hearted', expresses a sentiment that perhaps many readers have felt in reading Hardy's novels :  
. . . and yet she makes woeful havoc of the heart of a worthy man. She is selfish, as Mr Hardy's heroines are selfish -- not wilfully or intellectually, but by dint of her inborn, involuntary, unconscious emotional organism. . . . It is Mr Hardy's delight to show his chosen woman doing these things; a hasty criticism might deem him cynical. . . . We are appalled to see what harm these gentle, compassionate, sweet-tempered creatures can do . . . .<sup>11</sup>

This focus on the ruinous potential of women is again evident in the Athenaeum review of A Laodicean :

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<sup>8</sup> Unsigned review, Athenaeum , 23 Nov 1878, in Cox, p.47 and in Clarke, Vol. I, p.106.

<sup>9</sup> Unsigned review, Spectator , 8 Feb 1879, in Cox, p.58 and in Clarke, Vol. I, p.116.

<sup>10</sup> Unsigned review, Athenaeum , 20 Nov 1880, in Cox, p.72 and in Clarke, Vol. I, p.122.

<sup>11</sup> Julian Hawthorne, Spectator , 18 Dec 1880, in Cox, pp.75-6 and in Clarke, Vol. I, p.125.

Mr Hardy would seem to have set before himself the task of illustrating in every conceivable way the Virgilian dictum about the nature of women. His heroines have their stations in many ranks of life; they are diverse in character and in attraction; but all have the common fault of their sex, they cannot make up their minds.<sup>12</sup>

The review ends with a remarkably modern insight :

Without being in the least degree a 'fleshly' writer, Mr Hardy has a way of insisting on the physical attractions of a woman which, if imitated by weaker writers, may prove offensive.<sup>13</sup>

Modern feminist analyses of Hardy which highlight the author/narrator's delight in voyeurism and the reduction of woman to the object of male gaze were anticipated by early comments like the one just quoted and the more graphically expressed view of Mowbray Morris in 1892 :

Poor Tess's sensual qualifications for the part of heroine are paraded over and over again with a persistence like that of a horse-dealer egging on some wavering customer to a deal, or a slave-dealer appraising his wares to some full-blooded pasha.<sup>14</sup>

However, it is with Jude that press reactions reached almost hysterical proportions. In her (in)famous 'The Anti - Marriage League' article in Blackwood's Magazine , Mrs Oliphant uses the sledge-hammer totally to demolish Jude . Although the very vehemence somewhat blunts the edge of her satire, she scores a few telling points which deserve lengthy quotation :

We rather think the author's object must be, having glorified women by the creation of Tess, to show after all what destructive and ruinous creatures they are, in general circumstances and in every development, whether brutal or refined. [ Analysis of Arabella and Sue follows ] . . .

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<sup>12</sup> Unsigned review, Athenaeum , 31 Dec 1881, in Cox, p.95 and in Clarke, Vol. I, p.129.

<sup>13</sup> Cox p.96 and Clarke p.130.

<sup>14</sup> Mowbray Morris, 'Culture and Anarchy', Quarterly Review , Apr 1892, in Cox, p.221 and in Clarke, Vol. I, p.218.

It is the women who are the active agents in all this unsavoury imbroglio : the story is carried on, and life is represented as carried on, entirely by their means. The men are passive, suffering, rather good than otherwise, victims of these and of fate. Not only do they never dominate, but they are quite incapable of holding their own against these remorseless ministers of destiny, these determined operators, managing all the machinery of life so as to secure their own way. . . . But it has now . . . become the method with men, in the hands of many of whom women have returned to the *role* of the temptress given to them by the old monkish sufferers of ancient times, who fled to the desert, like Anthony, to get free of them, but even there barely escaped with their lives from the seductions of the sirens, who were so audacious as to follow them to the very scene of the macerations and miseries into which the unhappy men plunged to escape from their toils. In the books of the younger men, it is now the woman who seduces -- it is no longer the man.<sup>15</sup>

But it was not the attack of Mrs Oliphant, a rival novelist, that galled Hardy. He was more deeply hurt ( and apparently gave up novel - writing in despair ) by the criticism of a life-long friend -- Edmund Gosse. In a review in Cosmopolis -- ( made more famous for its rhetorical question : 'What has Providence done to Mr Hardy that he should rise up in the arable land of Wessex and shake his fist at his Creator ?' ) -- Gosse wrote :

The *vita sexualis* of Sue is the central interest of the book, and enough is told about it to fill the specimen tables of a German specialist. . . . She is a poor, maimed 'degenerate', ignorant of herself and of the perversion of her instincts, full of febrile, amiable illusions, ready to dramatize her empty life, and play at loving though she cannot love. Her adventure with the undergraduate has not taught her what she is . . .<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Mrs Oliphant, 'The Anti - Marriage League', Blackwood's Magazine, Jan 1896, in Cox, pp.258-60 and in Clarke, Vol. I, pp.250-51.

<sup>16</sup> Edmund Gosse, Cosmopolis, Jan 1896, in Cox, pp.268-69 and in Clarke, Vol. I, p.258. This is Gosse's second review of Jude and it is more elaborate and generous than the earlier one which appeared on 8 Nov 1895 in St James's Gazette. Gosse is also supposed to have 'said to [Hardy's] face at the lunch-table at the Savile that Jude was the most indecent novel ever

Such negative views were not confined to the occasional articles/reviews in the periodical press. Of the steady stream of full-length book studies of Hardy that had been gradually emerging since the 1890s, Samuel Chew's Thomas Hardy : Poet and Novelist (1921) perhaps presents a representative summing up, in his chapter entitled 'Men and Women : Peasants' :

On the whole, however, Hardy's attitude towards women is unfavourable ; his opinion of them is bitter. They have many good qualities of heart, but they are fickle and vain, insincere, conscienceless, and seductive. Almost all are passionate, and passion leads invariably to grief.<sup>17</sup>

1928, the year in which Hardy died, saw a flood of articles and obituaries in the English and French press, most of which attempted to present a detached critical estimate of the recently deceased author. Daudet, in two French articles, makes interesting comments which are pertinent to this discussion of Hardy's attitude to women. His views have been summed up as follows :

[1] Hardy's rejection of the female figure as a redemptive force is the underlying cause of his pessimism. In Jude the Obscure , his masterpiece, Sue is the final statement of his disenchantment with womankind.<sup>18</sup>

[2] The pessimist in art is usually a woman-hater, and Ibsen, Schopenhauer, and Hardy are to be pitied for their attitude towards women. The fact that Hardy abandoned the medium of fiction for that of poetry in spite of the fact that he never

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written'. See Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate eds. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 4 : 1909 - 1913, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1984), p.33.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel C. Chew, Thomas Hardy : Poet and Novelist (New York : Alfred Knopf, 1921; rpt. New York : Russell & Russell, 1964), p.133.

<sup>18</sup> Leon Daudet, Ecrivains et Artistes , IV (Writers and Artists , IV), Paris : Editions du Capitole, 1928, pp.83-92. This quotation and the next are taken from the useful summing up provided by Helmut E. Gerber and W. Eugene Davis in Thomas Hardy : An Annotated Bibliography of Writings About Him (Illinois : Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 1973), p.284, item no. 1221.

was a real poet, proves that his 'malaise' was that of the man without women.<sup>19</sup>

But it would be unfair to present only the negative side of the critical response to Hardy's achievement as a portrayer of women. Hardy had his loyal supporters, even across the Atlantic, and F.W.Knickerbocker in The Sewanee Review (1928) went so far as to assert that 'John Stuart Mill and Meredith alone anticipated him [i.e. Hardy] in claiming for women a large freedom to live and love'.<sup>20</sup> Closer home, recalling his personal association with the Hardys, T.P. O'Connor (writing in The Daily Telegraph in 1928) was convinced that Tess was 'the greatest plea for woman that was ever written. Hardy himself wrote the book with some such thought in his mind . . .'.<sup>21</sup> In fact, Tess must have been a watershed and surely it even won over that indignant female reader who, exasperated with Hardy's depiction of women, is supposed to have written on the margin of a circulating library copy : 'Oh, how I hate Thomas Hardy !'<sup>22</sup> That Tess represented a turning point is quite evident from Richard le Gallienne's comment in Star (1891) :

Mr Hardy has heretofore been more inclined to champion man the faithful against woman the coquette, but in Tess he very definitely espouses 'the cause of woman', and devotes himself to show how often in this world -- all, alas, because the best of us is so conventionalized -- when men and women break a law 'the Woman pays'. Of course it is a special pleading, because a novel might be as readily written to show how often a man pays, too.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Leon Daudet, 'Sur Thomas Hardy' ('On Thomas Hardy'), L' Action Francaise , 16 Jan 1928, in Gerber and Davis, p.284, item no.1222. Copies of these two articles reveal that although they were simultaneously published ( on 16 Jan 1928 ) under two different titles, the two essays are the same verbatim -- a curious fact overlooked by Gerber and Davis.

<sup>20</sup> F.W.Knickerbocker, 'The Victorianess of Thomas Hardy', The Sewanee Review , 36 : 3 (July 1928), p.317.

<sup>21</sup> T.P. O'Connor's 1928 article is reprinted as monograph no. 54 in J.Stevens Cox ed. Thomas Hardy : More Materials for a Study of His Life, Times and Works , Vol. II (St Peter Port, Guernsey : Toucan Press, 1971), p.234.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in W.L.Phelps, Essays on Modern Novelists , 1910, in Cox, p.402 and in Clarke, Vol. III, p.127.

<sup>23</sup> Richard le Gallienne, Star , 23 Dec 1891, in Cox, p.180 and in Clarke, Vol. I, p.168.

Perhaps the earliest general survey to speak positively of Hardy's presentation of women was the article in New Quarterly Magazine (1879). While acknowledging the weaknesses of Hardy's women ( 'they never become thoroughly responsible creatures' ), the reviewer is nevertheless warm in his appreciation :

Though the vanity of his heroines is ever present and insatiable, they have none of the meanness which is imputed to feminine vanity by most male and by all female writers who take an exaggerated view of it. Their most universal desire for admiration will coexist with an honest passion for a particular man, and their utmost passion is never dissociated from a nymph-like and perfectly spontaneous purity.<sup>24</sup>

In a landmark essay, Havelock Ellis too recorded his fascination with Hardy's heroines and praised him for presenting :

. . . those instinct-led women, who form a series which, for subtle simplicity, for a certain fascinating and incalculable vivacity which is half ethereal and half homely, can hardly be matched. It is true that they are all sisters. . . . No one, who has once felt the charm of the dream-wrapt faces which Mr Burne Jones loves to delineate, has cared that the artist should seek for fresh types of loveliness ; and it is equally easy to be content with the type of womanhood which Mr Hardy gives us in all its delicate variations. . . . They are never quite bad. . . . They have an instinctive self-respect, an instinctive purity. When they err, it is by caprice, by imagination. Even Eustacia Vye has no impure taint about her.<sup>25</sup>

The most lyrical defence of Hardy's portraiture of women was to come from the poet Coventry Patmore ( who, like Tennyson, greatly admired A Pair of Blue Eyes ) :

It is in his heroines, however, that Hardy is most original and delightful . . . each has the charm of the simplest and most familiar womanhood, and the only character they have in

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<sup>24</sup> Anonymous article, New Quarterly Magazine , Oct 1879, in Cox, pp.62-3 and in Clarke, Vol. III, p.5.

<sup>25</sup> Havelock Ellis, 'Thomas Hardy's Novels', Westminster Review , Apr 1883, in Cox, pp.105-6 and in Clarke, Vol. III, p.29.

common is that of having each some serious defect, which only makes us like them more. Hardy is too good an observer not to know that women are like emeralds and rubies, only those of inferior colour and price being without flaw; and he is too rich in human tenderness not to know that love never glows with its fullest ardour unless it has 'something dreadful to forgive'.<sup>26</sup>

Given these strikingly polar reactions to Hardy's presentation of women in his fiction, a reader unacquainted with English literature might be forgiven for assuming that there must surely be two Hardys in question and hence all this confusion. The inability to pin down Hardy and neatly label and classify him perhaps owes, not a little, to the author's own life-long claim that he was recording only 'impressions' and not 'convictions'. Even in prose, which is less mood-dictated than poetry, Hardy is constantly changing his stance, shifting his sympathies, so that it is difficult to freeze this protean artist into a fixed, static attitude. Thus, recognizing both the cynicism and the tenderness in Hardy's attitude to women, Virginia Woolf wrote in her memorial 1928 essay :

However lovable and charming Bathsheba may be, still she is weak; however stubborn and ill-guided Henchard may be, still he is strong. This is a fundamental part of Hardy's vision; the staple of many of his books. The woman is the weaker and the fleshlier, and she clings to the stronger and obscures his vision. . . . His characters, both men and women, were creatures to him of an infinite attraction. For the women he shows a more tender solicitude than for the men, and in them, perhaps, he takes a keener interest. Vain might their beauty be and terrible their fate, but while the glow of life is in them their step is free, their laughter sweet, and theirs is the power to sink into the breast of Nature and become part of her silence and solemnity, or to rise and put on them the

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<sup>26</sup> Coventry Patmore, *St James's Gazette*, 2 Apr 1887, in Cox, p.148 and in Clarke, Vol. I, p.158.



movement of the clouds and the wildness of the flowering woodlands.<sup>27</sup>

This same recognition of ambivalence marks Abercrombie's entry on Hardy in the 1929 edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica :

He is a fatalist, perhaps rather a determinist, and he studies the workings of fate or law (ruling through inexorable moods or humours), in the chief vivifying and disturbing influence in life, women. His view of women is more French than English; it is subtle, a little cruel, not as tolerant as it seems, thoroughly a man's point of view, and not, as with Meredith, man's and woman's at once. He sees all that is irresponsible for good and evil in a woman's character, all that is untrustworthy in her brain and will, all that is alluring in her variability. He is her apologist, but always with a reserve of private judgement. No one has created more attractive women of a certain class, women whom a man would have been more likely to love or to regret loving. In his earlier books he is somewhat careful over the reputation of his heroines; gradually he allows them more liberty, with a franker treatment of instinct and its consequences. . . . His knowledge of women confirms him in a suspension of judgment . . .<sup>28</sup>

The debate continues but in subsequent criticism the line dividing critics who see Hardy as misogynist and those who consider him an apologist for women has blurred somewhat as writers increasingly recognize the tensions, ambivalences and contradictions in Hardy's writing. Comparing Hardy to John Ford as 'a specialist in women', H.C.Duffin is disturbed by the 'cynical' observations on 'the sex' which run counter to 'Hardy's pictures of womanhood [which] glow with love and

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<sup>27</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Thomas Hardy's Novels', Times Literary Supplement, 19 Jan 1928, revised and rpt. as 'The Novels of Thomas Hardy' in Virginia Woolf, The Common Reader, Second Series, (London : Hogarth Press, 1932); pp.250-51. The revised version is conveniently reprinted in Clarke, Vol. III, pp.230-38, while the original TLS version is collected in The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Vol. IV : 1925 - 1928, ed. Andrew McNeillie ( London : Hogarth Press, 1994), pp.507-19.

<sup>28</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th ed., (London and New York : 1929). See entry on Thomas Hardy, signed 'L.A.', in Vol. XI, p.192.

admiration'. Nevertheless, defending Hardy against the charge of perversely willing suffering on his heroines, Duffin unequivocally declares :

But a just view will not ascribe these melancholy facts to a special pleasure Hardy got out of inflicting torment upon women. After all, he saw life as a very hard school, and if the women suffer more than the men it may be because woman is the weaker vessel. But surely some of the grimness may be due to a hurt idealism -- to Hardy's sense of the gulf between woman's possible best and her actual achievement towards it. The pathetic deficiency seems to have come home to him with appalling force, and his ruthless pictures of woman's folly and suffering are the bitter cry wrung from him by grief. . . . It is not Hardy who treats his women cruelly, but life -- life as Hardy saw it. What Hardy could do for his women he did -- he made them full of beauty, interest, fascinating and lovable qualities of all kinds, he gave them great parts to play, and let them (generally) play those parts well. His estimate of woman is high, but tempered and conditioned by keen observation of the realities round 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. . . . Hardy is no misogynist, but true lover in very deed.<sup>29</sup>

Giving Hardy the credit for presenting us with 'a gallery of charming, impulsive, and dangerously contradictory women', A.J. Guerard considers Hardy 'the greatest dramatist of female character and temperament in a half-century almost monopolized by female novelists'.<sup>30</sup> However, in the final analysis, Hardy is :

. . . a most cynical theorist *de natura feminae* . His attitude progressed . . . from fascinated and unwillingly sympathetic criticism to almost uncritical sympathy, but his view of

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<sup>29</sup> Henry Charles Duffin, *Thomas Hardy : A Study of the Wessex Novels, The Poems, and The Dynasts* (Manchester : Manchester Univ. Press, 1916; 3rd rev. ed. , 1937), p.238.

<sup>30</sup> Albert J. Guerard, *Thomas Hardy : The Novels and Stories* ( London : Geoffrey Cumberlege and Oxford Univ. Press, 1949), p.128. Subsequent page references to Guerard are incorporated into the text.

woman's incorrigible nature long remained unchanged. . . .  
He looked upon his women from the outside coolly and as  
the sum of their illogical evasions. (p.129)

Aligning himself more with Duffin than with Guerard is another strong advocate of Hardy as a 'lover' of women, Irving Howe, who opens his chapter on Tess with the celebrated (and much-quoted) sentence : 'As a writer of novels Thomas Hardy was endowed with a precious gift : he liked women.'<sup>31</sup> While conceding that Hardy was 'quite capable of releasing animus toward his women characters and casting them as figures of destruction' (p.108), Howe nevertheless claims for Hardy a rare 'gift for creeping intuitively into the emotional life of women' (p.109). 'The feminine admixture is very strong in his work' (p.109), and Tess , his greatest achievement, shows in Tess's 'violation, neglect and endurance' 'Hardy's most radical claim for the redemptive power of suffering' (p.110). Hardy 'hovers and watches over Tess, like a stricken father' (p.131), and for Howe :

Tess is one of the greatest examples we have in English literature of how a writer can take hold of a cultural stereotype and, through the sheer intensity of his affection, pare and purify it into something that is morally ennobling. Tess derives from Hardy's involvement with and reaction against the Victorian cult of chastity, which from the beginning of his career he had known to be corrupted by meanness and hysteria. . . . in her incomparable vibrancy and lovingness, she comes to represent a spiritualized transcendence of chastity. . . . She embodies a feeling for the inviolability of the person, as it brings the absolute of chastity nearer to the warming Christian virtue of charity. (p.110)

Ian Gregor speaks in similar accents when he talks of Hardy's 'overwhelming compassion' in Tess :

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<sup>31</sup> Irving Howe, Thomas Hardy (London : Macmillan, 1967; rpt. 1985), p.108. Subsequent page references to Howe are incorporated into the text.

In his novel, it is Tess herself who releases in Hardy a feeling that we can only describe as love -- a love prompted, at least, by the fact that Hardy finds woman expressive, in the purest form, of the human capacity for endurance and the steadfast refusal to be overcome. . . . In her, Hardy has invested his whole imaginative capital.<sup>32</sup>

Discussing the constant authorial revisions to the *Ur-Tess*, made by Hardy in an attempt to 'purify' Tess, Mary Jacobus too speaks of 'Hardy's compassionate identification with his heroine' and of the 'authorial allegiance to a living, breathing, sentient woman [which] evades external standards of judgement'.<sup>33</sup> Hardy's 'intuitive commitment' to Tess leads him to the 'character - assassination of Alec and Angel' (p.325), and his 'imaginative allegiance to Tess does not flinch from her subsequent act of murder . . .' (p.334). In *Jude* too, Hardy 'is imaginatively generous towards both sides of the struggle, but as always his most intense feeling is for the loser',<sup>34</sup> and thus 'Sue's tormented consciousness haunts us more than Jude's bitter oblivion' (p.324). Jacobus concludes :

'She was Sue Bridehead, something very particular. Why was there no place for her ?' is indeed the question Hardy leaves us asking at the end of *Jude the Obscure*. This overwhelming sense of Sue's specialness is at once the basis of Hardy's protest on her behalf, and a measure of his imaginative achievement. The cogency of his general plea combines with his portrayal of Sue's individual 'obscurity'. . . . (p.325)

While Tess and perhaps even Sue are obvious choices to argue Hardy's feminist sympathies, Elaine Showalter quite daringly chooses a

<sup>32</sup> Ian Gregor, *The Great Web : The Form of Hardy's Major Fiction* (London : Faber and Faber, 1974; rpt. 1975), p.203.

<sup>33</sup> Mary Jacobus, 'Tess's Purity', *Essays in Criticism*, 26 : 4 (Oct 1976), p.321. Subsequent page references to this article are incorporated into the text. A revised version of Jacobus's essay entitled 'Tess : The Making of a Pure Woman' appeared in Susan Lipshitz ed. *Tearing the Veil : Essays on Femininity* (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), pp.77-92. This 1978 version is also rpt. in Harold Bloom ed. *Thomas Hardy's 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles'*, 'Modern Critical Interpretations', (New York : Chelsea House, 1987), pp.45-60.

<sup>34</sup> Mary Jacobus, 'Sue the Obscure', *Essays in Criticism*, 25 : 3 (July 1975), p.314. Subsequent page references to this article are incorporated into the text.

self-confessed 'woman-hater', Michael Henchard, because it is 'in the analysis of this New Man, rather than in the evaluation of Hardy's New Women, that the case for Hardy's feminist sympathies may be argued'.<sup>35</sup> Arguing that Hardy 'understood the feminine self as the estranged and essential complement of the male self' (p.101), Showalter charts the process of Henchard's 'unmanning' and shows how his humbling and loss of male power is really an 'educative and ennobling apprenticeship in human sensitivity' (p.113) which forces him to recognize the 'long-repressed "feminine" side of himself' (p.112) and to 'discover his own suppressed or estranged capacity to love' (p.109). Thus Showalter confidently asserts :

The fantasy that women hold men back, drag them down, drain their energy, divert their strength, is nowhere so bleakly rebuked as in Hardy's tale of the 'man of character'. (p.103)

Henchard may be a woman-hater but, surely, not Hardy ! Quoting R. J. White's story of the tavern landlord who smilingly declared : 'Mr Hardy was fond of the Ladies', Rosalind Miles in her study of 'The Women of Wessex' goes on to say : 'Lord David Cecil observed that all Hardy's stories are love stories; and so they are; the story of Hardy's own endless love of women.'<sup>36</sup> Highlighting Hardy's 'poignant concern for women' and his 'guileless and ecstatic response to women in life [which] irradiated his writing at every possible level' (p.26), Miles goes on to speculate :

Despite the overspiritualisation of women which is undeniably a feature of Hardy's treatment it is through his female characters that Hardy mainly communicated his sense of that 'insupportable and touching loss', of the waste of

<sup>35</sup> Elaine Showalter, 'The Unmanning of the Mayor of Casterbridge', in Dale Kramer ed. Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy (London : Macmillan, 1979), p.102. Subsequent page references to this essay are incorporated into the text. This essay can also be found, with slight editorial cuts, in R.P. Draper ed. Thomas Hardy : The Tragic Novels, Casebook Series, (London : Macmillan, 1975; rev. ed. 1989, rpt. 1993), pp.144-57. Showalter's essay is also collected in Harold Bloom ed. Thomas Hardy's 'The Mayor of Casterbridge', 'Modern Critical Interpretations', (New York : Chelsea House Publishers, 1988), pp. 53-68.

<sup>36</sup> Rosalind Miles, 'The Women of Wessex', in Anne Smith ed. The Novels of Thomas Hardy (London : Vision Press, 1979), p.24. Subsequent page references to this essay are incorporated into the text.

human potential and the irrecoverable destruction of innocence. Heart-sick at the world's cruelty, or worse, indifference, Hardy solaced himself by creating feminine softness and constancy. He found a recurrent consolation in rendering with loving exactness, through the medium of these imaginary women, the sensations of the castaway. (p.27)

Claiming that in 'the female condition he [i.e. Hardy] discovered an objective correlative of his own emotional state' (p.38), Miles nevertheless honestly admits in summing up that Hardy is 'alternately moved' by an 'agonised pity' and 'a lingering irritable suspicion of women's worthlessness' (p.41). Hardy's whole tribe of 'crones' or 'anti-females' reveal 'his ambivalent, if not hostile, feelings about the sex' and this combined with his 'sexual pessimism' and 'native distrust of life' can 'sound like an abiding misogyny' (p.33).

Such insights, characteristic of modern feminist readings, mark Penny Boumelha's otherwise appreciative study of Hardy's treatment of women. Calling attention to the 'aphoristic and dismissive generalisations about women' and the 'images of taming' which 'pursue' Bathsheba, Boumelha suggests that 'there is an undercurrent of sexual antagonism towards her, expressed both in the action of the plot and in direct narrative comment'.<sup>37</sup> Later, Hardy's first attempt to write a tragedy (The Return of the Native), which is a 'double tragedy' turning upon marriage, will inaugurate a sexist pattern that will be repeated in the later novels: 'the man's tragedy is primarily intellectual, the woman's sexual' (p.48). And for

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<sup>37</sup> Penny Boumelha, Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form (Sussex: Harvester Press; New Jersey: Barnes & Noble, 1982), pp.32-3. Subsequent page references to Boumelha are incorporated into the text.

The problem with Boumelha's book is, as Peter Widdowson puts it, 'her failure to distinguish clearly whether "Hardy's radicalism" is to be seen as Hardy's own, or whether it is activated in the texts by the strategic reading of a modern feminist critic.' See Peter Widdowson, Hardy in History: A Study in Literary Sociology (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p.43.

all Hardy's attempt to approximate gradually to an 'androgynous' narrative voice, Tess will reveal :

. . . that all the passionate commitment to exhibiting Tess as the subject of her own experience evokes an unusually overt maleness in the narrative voice. The narrator's erotic fantasies of penetration and engulfment enact a pursuit, violation and persecution of Tess in parallel with those she suffers at the hands of her two lovers. (p.120)

Rosemarie Morgan, however, contends that in Hardy's 'subversive method and intentions' 'we are invited to appraise the physical attributes, not only of the female, but also of the male' as in 'Bathsheba's pleasure in Troy's body'.<sup>38</sup> For Morgan, the 'authentic Hardyian voice' is heard in 'his close identification with Bathsheba and, consequently, his impulse to mourn her loss of vitality, sexual verve and bounding self-delight' (p.49).

In the final analysis, it is :

. . . upon Bathsheba's vulnerability, her pain, her passion, [that] Hardy's sympathies turn and turn again. The centre of caring feeling and intense emotion is quintessentially the flow between author and heroine, even at the last, where Bathsheba is but a ghost of her former self. (p.56)

Morgan's conclusion about Hardy's attitudes is quite radical and unequivocal :

For all his sympathies with the underprivileged male in his fiction, there is no doubt that for Hardy it is woman's social condition which requires reassessment and revision. His male characters may show individual strengths and weaknesses, but in their capacities as moral 'overseer', censor or watchdog they are uniformly vigilant in maintaining the conventional premise of the status quo. As such, Hardy treats them with an antipathy only thinly concealed by the narrative texture of the novel's structures. Where he, the author, takes pains to deny himself the right of standing in

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<sup>38</sup> Rosemarie Morgan, Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy (London and New York : Routledge, 1988; rpt. 1991), p.161. Subsequent page references to Morgan are incorporated into the text.

judgement upon his women, so too he refuses to vindicate their male censors -- the pedagogical Knight, the spying Oak, the policing Venn. Each, as moral watchdog, partakes of a world of male domination bordering upon absurdity and menace, a world latently vindictive and tyrannical. (p.162)

An interesting contrast is made by Maggie Humm between the male world and the female world in Tess, represented respectively by Angel's brothers and Tess's dairymaid friends who are all so supportive of Tess and self-effacing in their love for Angel. Humm pointedly remarks :

. . . the juxtaposition in Tess of the d'Urbervilles in the same chapter (44) of caring and supportive female groups with the actions of Angel's less than attractive brothers, 'their voices engaged in earnest discourse' fulminating against their brother's marriage, suggests Hardy's allegiance.<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps this allegiance developed due to Hardy's sensitiveness to rural tragedies centering around the 'ruined' maids in his native Wessex. Highlighting the 'ruined maid' motif in Hardy's prose and verse (e.g. the controversial 'A Sunday Morning Tragedy'), Desmond Hawkins sees in it a proof of Hardy's intense sympathy for the suffering of women :

The unhappy endings in real life, as Hardy witnessed it, were often tragic and brutal -- public disgrace, suicide, crude abortions, infanticide, prostitution. When he visited Lord Portsmouth in Devon in 1885 Hardy's host showed him 'a bridge over which bastards were thrown and drowned, even down to quite recent times'. The traditional price to be paid for the public disgrace of a maiden's ruin and unmarried motherhood was her banishment from the family home and the community, with the expectation that she would probably go 'on the streets' in some town or city. It was these disfigurements and mutilations of the natural sexuality of women that aroused in Hardy a deep feminist sympathy. Illicit unions and illegitimate births -- to use the jargon of

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<sup>39</sup> Maggie Humm, 'Gender and Narrative in Thomas Hardy', The Thomas Hardy Year Book, no. 11, ed. J. Stevens Cox and G. Stevens Cox (Guernsey : Toucan Press, 1984), p.43.



public morality -- were a subject of his continuing meditation.<sup>40</sup>

Hardy's empathy for suffering creatures, human or animal, has been generally acknowledged and it may legitimately account for his sympathy with women who, he realized, received a raw deal from patriarchal society. But another subtle reason may lie behind his identification with women as Seymour-Smith suggests in his recent biography :

He [i.e. Hardy] was throughout his life resentful when he felt that his intellectual background was brought into question. This was undoubtedly a consequence of his extreme sensitivity, but it is also indicative of the great difficulties then faced by any writer who lacked a university background. Since all women were subject to this lack, it may well have put him into even stronger sympathy with them.<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, while recognizing Hardy's 'emotional susceptibility' to women in general and his 'profound sympathy with the victimized women of the lower classes', Millgate realizes that this is not the whole truth. Discussing Hardy's literary friendships and collaborations with women, especially his marginalia in a gift copy of Keynotes by 'George Egerton' ( pseudonym of Mary Chavelita Dunne, later Mrs Clairmonte ), Millgate comments :

The stories in Keynotes had created something of a sensation by the directness with which they treated of the relations between the sexes, and while Hardy's marginal annotations have to be read as contributions to the half-humorous debate being carried on with Mrs Henniker, they nevertheless indicate some hostility towards women in general or, at the least, a tendency to fall back upon the standard male attitudes of his time. <sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Desmond Hawkins, 'Thomas Hardy and the Ruined Maid', The Hatcher Review , Vol. 3 : no. 29 (Spring 1990), pp.421-22.

<sup>41</sup> Martin Seymour-Smith, Hardy (London : Bloomsbury Publishing, 1994), p.71.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Millgate, Thomas Hardy : A Biography (Oxford : Oxford Univ. Press, 1982 ; Clarendon pbk., rev. ed. 1992), p.356.

This 'hostility towards women' is expressed surreptitiously through Michael Henchard who exclaims in exasperation : 'These cursed women -- there's not an inch of straight grain in 'em !'<sup>43</sup> Even Irving Howe, who boldly declared that Hardy 'liked' women, begins his chapter on The Mayor of Casterbridge (entitled 'The Struggles of Men') thus :

To shake loose from one's wife; to discard that drooping rag of a woman, with her mute complaints and maddening passivity; to escape not by a slinking abandonment but through the public sale of her body to a stranger, as horses are sold at a fair; and thus to wrest, through sheer amoral willfulness, a second chance out of life -- it is with this stroke, so insidiously attractive to male fantasy, that The Mayor of Casterbridge begins.<sup>44</sup>

If this 'male fantasy' is limited to Henchard/Hardy, then we need seriously to question Hardy's status as a 'lover' of women; but if this male fantasy is universal, secretly shared by half the world's population, then perhaps we can take a more generous view of Hardy vis-a-vis woman/wife/marriage. Based on textual evidence, the plot structure of The Mayor of Casterbridge certainly seems to suggest, in the words of Frederick Karl, that 'a whole series of re-appearing women seem to doom Henchard, and each time he fails it is almost always over a woman or related to one'. This 1960s perception of the novel is strengthened in Karl's 1975 postscript where he concludes more emphatically : 'Women, for example, are rarely sources of consolation or Victorian mates, but furies and fates, temptresses, hostile creatures struggling to free themselves while entrapping males . . .'.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge, New Wessex Edition, introd. Ian Gregor (London: Macmillan, 1975), Ch. 22, p.168.

<sup>44</sup> Irving Howe, Thomas Hardy, p.84.

<sup>45</sup> Frederick R. Karl, 'The Mayor of Casterbridge : A New Fiction Defined', Modern Fiction Studies, 21 : 3 (Autumn 1975), pp. 416 , 427 (under section entitled 'Then and Now'). The '1960' section of Karl's essay had originally appeared in Modern Fiction Studies, 6 : 3 (Autumn 1960), pp.195-213.

Similarly, Katharine Rogers speaks of '[w]omen's abuse of intelligent, unselfish men' in the world of Hardy's novels and she points out how :

Jude and Sue re-enact one of Hardy's favorite situations, that of a worthy man snubbed and exploited by a woman. In each case, an unselfish man treats the woman he loves with devoted consideration, while she fails to appreciate him. . . .<sup>46</sup>

In her book, The Troublesome Helpmate : A History of Misogyny in Literature (1966), Katharine Rogers does not place Hardy in the misogynic tradition and the only reference to him is in a brief footnote where she calls attention to the Biblical epigraph to Part First of Jude which speaks of how men have 'perished', 'erred', and 'sinned' for women.<sup>47</sup> But Rogers obviously revised her views on Hardy as a 'misogynist' because in her 1975 article on 'Women in Thomas Hardy' ( The Centennial Review ) she emphatically concludes :

In short, these novels show the tenacity of sexist assumptions even in so humane and enlightened a man as Hardy. Rejecting the sexual mores of his patriarchal society, preferring unconventional women to the passive Victorian ideal, consciously sympathizing with women, Hardy still could not quite see them as human beings like himself. His primary sympathy remains focused on the sensitive rational man. Although glib anti-feminist generalizations are less evident in the novels after Far from the Madding Crowd , even Jude shows evidence of the traditional misogynistic stereotypes : that woman exploits deserving men, and that she is, as Aristotle said, an incomplete male ('a fraction always wanting its integer'). [pp. 257-58 ; Rogers's parenthesis]

Such reductive gender stereotyping is seen to operate, for example, in Hardy's portrayal of Viviette in Two on a Tower . According to Mary Childers : 'In the final analysis, Viviette is such a spectacle of confusion

<sup>46</sup> Katharine Rogers, 'Women in Thomas Hardy', The Centennial Review , 19 : 4 (1975), p.252. Subsequent page references to this essay are incorporated into the text.

<sup>47</sup> Katharine M. Rogers, The Troublesome Helpmate : A History of Misogyny in Literature (Seattle and London : Univ. of Washington Press, 1966), p.13n.

because she is female, and Hardy associates traits like lack of will, confusion, indecisiveness and inconstancy with women.'<sup>48</sup> Through 'the selectivity of what he dramatizes', 'the female is constituted as a scapegoat and the male is exonerated from responsibility' (p.110). Such artistic double standards -- which reveal Hardy's 'inadvertent, defensive misogyny' -- are quite blatant in Tess :

Hardy's sexualization of all female activity serves to hide the male subject as well as to constitute the female object . . . The intense and repeated eroticized descriptions of Tess' indecisiveness obscure the reader's sense of Angel as also indecisive. Though Hardy's novels often indicate that female indecisiveness is a response to continuously applied male coercion, it is more often fondly displayed as a function of female nature -- with the consequence that the less dramatic appearance of male indecisiveness becomes almost invisible.

. . .

The precipitousness of male judgements delivered against women is actually proof of the inconstancy of men, but Hardy shares the desire to disguise this fact which he dramatizes. He shields the men by generalizing about the inconstancy of women in a more accusatory way and by making the inconstancy of women one of the prominent structuring devices of his novels.<sup>49</sup>

Childers's conclusion about ' Hardy's uncontrollable wavering between delight and distaste with regard to women' (p.332) perhaps best sums up Hardy's ambivalence as perceived by modern critics. Patricia Stubbs, for instance, talks of the :

. . . tension between idea and received form [which] is especially prominent in Hardy's portrayal of women. Here there is an uneasy co-existence between an intensely modern, even feminist consciousness and what are essentially

<sup>48</sup> Mary Margaret Childers, The Habit of Misogyny (Ph.D. thesis : State University of New York at Buffalo, 1981), p.106. The thesis is available on microfiche -- Order no. 81 - 14658 (Ann Arbor, Mi. : University Microfilms International, 1981). Subsequent page references to the thesis are incorporated into the text.

<sup>49</sup> Mary Childers, 'Thomas Hardy, The Man Who "Liked" Women', Criticism , 23 : 4 (Fall 1981), pp. 329, 332. Subsequent page references to this article are incorporated into the text.

archetypal patterns of feeling and relationship. This contradiction produces some of the strengths as well as some of the weaknesses both of his fiction and of his feminism.<sup>50</sup>

Echoing this is Judith Wittenberg's comment about how Hardy's 'sympathetic portrayals [of women] are subtly qualified by elements that are more ambiguous and problematic'.<sup>51</sup> 'Hardy's much vaunted sympathy for women is covertly undermined' (pp.50-1) not only by the 'narrator's intrusive generalizations about women' (p.53) -- a by-now familiar charge -- but also by :

. . . a recurrent pattern in Hardy's fiction -- his tendency to 'punish' , either with death or with chastisement, women who reveal somewhat masculine urges and a need to rebel against a purely feminine role, or who have extra-marital sexual experiences. (p.50)

This employment of 'plot-as-punishment' mars even such a sympathetic novel like Tess , and even as early as in Hardy's first published novel, Desperate Remedies , Wittenberg sees 'portents' :

. . . of the manipulative, even faintly sadistic narrative stance that would undermine his most splendid portrayal of a woman in difficulty -- Tess Durbeyfield. Hardy's compassionate recognition and effective dramatization of women's psychological and socio-economic quest for autonomy is subtly contraverted by a covert need, revealed by aspects of his narrative method, to control and, not infrequently, to punish them. (p.54)

Hardy's 'own way of looking' at Tess is 'yet another form of possession' and for Janet Freeman :

By necessity, then, Hardy himself is implicated in the very immorality he has watched and deplored. He cannot escape this fellowship. The grief that overwhelms the end of Tess of

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<sup>50</sup> Patricia Stubbs, Women and Fiction : Feminism and the Novel, 1880 - 1920 (Sussex : Harvester Press, 1979; rpt. London : Methuen, 1981), p.59.

<sup>51</sup> Judith Bryant Wittenberg, 'Thomas Hardy's First Novel : Women and the Quest for Autonomy', Colby Library Quarterly , 18 : 1 (March 1982), p.47. Subsequent page references to this article are incorporated into the text.

the d'Urbervilles . . . is the expression of this guilt, futility, and loss.<sup>52</sup>

Kaja Silverman echoes this sentiment very powerfully when she explores the consequences of the continuous subjection of Tess to what she calls 'a colonizing male gaze'. In the scene of Tess's rape/seduction :

The narrator attempts to establish his own moral distance from what happens to Tess by inveighing against providence . . . . However, since the narrator himself is the only transcendental agency on the horizon when Alec violates Tess, this outcry constitutes a classic disavowal, implicating him in the very action he abominates.<sup>53</sup>

This preoccupation with the 'supremacy of the male gaze' is an issue that George Wotton takes up in his useful chapter on ' The Production of Meaning : "Hardy's Women" and the Eternal Feminine ' :

Trapped and captured by the masculine gaze each of Hardy's women is enmeshed in a conflict of perceptions, a complex of visions of herself. She is constituted as the observed subject whose existence is determined by her reactions to the conflicting acts of sight of the men by whom she is observed. Interpellated as as [sic] subject, subjected to the myth of being the weaker sex, internalizing and recognizing herself in that image, she behaves accordingly. Whatever Hardy's intention, the innumerable acts of sight which constitute the structure of perceptions put the ideological construction of woman into contradiction by showing that the perception of her 'essential nature' is always conditional upon who is doing the seeing.<sup>54</sup>

Wotton's awareness of the contradictions in Hardy's writing is more representative of recent Hardy criticism and perhaps a more mature response than the earlier partisan labelling of Hardy as 'feminist' or

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<sup>52</sup> Janet Freeman, 'Ways of Looking at Tess', *Studies in Philology*, 79 : 3 (Summer 1982), p.323.

<sup>53</sup> Kaja Silverman, 'History, Figuration and Female Subjectivity in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*', *Novel*, 18 : 1 (Fall 1984), p.11. Silverman's article, with a few editorial cuts, is reproduced in Peter Widdowson ed. '*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*': *Contemporary Critical Essays*, New Casebooks, (London : Macmillan, 1993), pp. 129-46.

<sup>54</sup> George Wotton, *Thomas Hardy : Towards a Materialist Criticism* (Totowa, New Jersey : Barnes & Noble, 1985), pp.172-73.

'misogynist'. Thus, Kristin Brady (in the context of Sue's final breakdown) provides the useful reminder that 'Thomas Hardy's most powerful attack on Victorian social conventions is also his most emphatic endorsement of the biological determinism in nineteenth - century gender ideology' <sup>55</sup> ; and Marjorie Garson alerts the reader to the danger that :

While Hardy can be read as especially sympathetic to women and to working people, his sympathy is by no means unambiguous, and to see him simply as politically correct is to miss the anxieties, ambivalences, and ambiguities . . . .<sup>56</sup>

A good example of such complexity is when 'politics of gender' clash with 'politics of class' as in the skimmington-ride episode in The Mayor of Casterbridge where Hardy underplays the 'danger and malice' of the Mixen-Lane gang and obscures Lucetta's 'vulnerability as a pregnant woman' :

By treating the Mixen-Lane machinations as social comedy and by metaphorically displacing the less endearing kinds of criminality from Mixen Lane on to Lucetta, Hardy loads the narrative against her in ways which seem motivated as much by misogyny as by sympathy with the underclass. (p.107)

Although Garson scrupulously highlights the 'author's real sympathy with women' (p.20) in his descriptions of women wasting away under the labour of constant childbirth, the more powerful impression we are left with is of 'Hardy's instinctive terror of the woman who castrates and kills' (p.121) and of the 'misogynistic streak in Hardy's eroticism' (p.24).

On this combination of misogyny/sadism and eroticism/voyeurism, perhaps the most scathing attack on Hardy comes not from the 'critics' but from the creative writers -- two novelists, one male and one female (so the question of gender-bias is irrelevant). In his extremely witty interweaving of fact and fiction in Peeping Tom (1984), Howard Jacobson scores quite a

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<sup>55</sup> Kristin Brady, 'Textual Hysteria : Hardy's Narrator on Women', in Margaret R. Higonnet ed. The Sense of Sex : Feminist Perspectives on Hardy (Urbana and Chicago : Univ. of Illinois Press, 1993), p.99.

<sup>56</sup> Marjorie Garson, Hardy's Fables of Integrity : Woman, Body, Text (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1991), p.3. Subsequent page references to Garson are incorporated into the text.

few telling points although he speaks not in his own narrative persona but makes his fictional characters voice his insights. Camilla, who organizes lectures and seminars for her summer school of Hardy enthusiasts, informs her audience :

'The ordinarily outgoing brute who beats his wife doesn't suppose that he is thereby providing for her needs while he is satisfying his own. Thus the violence done on Hardy's heroines is always essentially vicarious, connived at by the author but inflicted in another's name. The daemon, you see, must be free to watch and feel the pain himself. The seduction of Bathsheba, the rape of Tess, the subjugation of Elfride, are all observed as by an injured third party, jealously. And the more assured the rival's mastery, that's to say the more complete the woman's surrender, then the more exquisite the sense of injury . . . Hardy was using his novels to have the women he loved, real or imaginary -- it comes to the same thing -- violated by proxy.'<sup>57</sup>

The novel's 'hero' Barney Fugleman ( the 'I' of the narrative ) shrewdly opines :

'He [i.e. Hardy] hated them [i.e. women]. In his life and in his art. All his women characters are emanations of either guilt or grievance. He paid them out or he paid them back. The only women he ever cared about were dead ones and you don't need me to tell you that he only cared about them because he was hooked on the pain of missed opportunity.'  
(p.40)

Isolated quotations fail to do justice to the witty pertinency of the sustained attack on Hardy, the exploding of the 'myth' of Hardy as a humane lover of women. But perhaps one more 'Camilla' outburst against Hardy will not be out of place :

'The assumption of an advanced moral tone towards female impurity -- that's not my word -- when it's as clear as daylight that he's simply tossed, like a boat without ballast, between

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<sup>57</sup> Howard Jacobson, *Peeping Tom* (London : Chatto & Windus, 1984 ; rpt. Penguin Books, 1993), pp.76-77. Subsequent page references ( Penguin paperback edn.) are incorporated into the text.



fascination and abhorrence. All that crap about natural Purity! He hasn't got the nerve to admit that Tess is interesting to him *because* of her experience, not *in spite* of it. If he'd been honest he would have given Tess to Alec on every page.' (p.217 ; Jacobson's italics)

In her sombre re-telling of the story of Tess (1993), Emma Tennant takes off from the bitter protest that Hardy's Tess expresses to Angel's suggestion that she take up a study of history. What is the use, Tess passionately asks, of learning that she is not the first woman in human history, and neither will she be the last, to know the meaning of suffering? The Tesses of this world, Tennant argues, in whatever country or century they live, have always been exploited and will continue to be exploited by patriarchal society. Her attack on Hardy, as a representative of patriarchal society, lacks the humour that tempers Jacobson's thrusts, and breathes more of bitter feminist polemic :

For all Hardy's apparent compassion for Tess -- and his description of her on the title page of the book that became him, overcame him and stayed more in the imagination of the world than anything else of him -- as a 'Pure Woman', he was as guilty as the next man. His compassion was an exquisite cruelty. Hardy used the execution of Tess for the crime of murdering her first and hateful lover as a final, tender way of killing the woman he loves; he shaped her, through all the ages of history that woman has toiled, died in the agony of labour, stood at the stake, fallen gagging on black water in the duckponds of witch persecution -- through all the centuries of slavery and non-belonging, without even a name or a woman priest to turn to in the hours of worst desolation, Hardy led Tess to the last, inevitable punishment, the price she must pay as daughter of Eve. For her prime disobedience to man, her ruler, her father, her seducer, Tess must swing.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Emma Tennant, Tess (London : HarperCollins, 1993; rpt. Flamingo paperback, 1994), p.82. Subsequent page references (Flamingo pbk. edn.) are incorporated into the text.

On Hardy the individual, Tennant is no less damning. Exposing Hardy's 'incestuous obsession with his own creation', she comments : ' . . . when Thomas Hardy falls in love, he falls in love with his own creation. His is the male controlling imagination that devours women in its lair : Monster eats the Muse' (p.123). The unnaturalness of it all is aggravated when this 'Monster' discards his fictional women and seeks flesh and blood ones to satisfy his hunger :

For, by now, the Minotaur wants his victims to be real. No more webs to be spun, no more invented heroines, who become tiring to play with, as they trace and retrace the thread of his ideas in a labyrinth of his own making. Gertrude, the real, actual Gertrude who so resembles her beautiful mother, will be the next Tess.<sup>59</sup> (p.126)

This is perhaps too extreme a note on which to end, and objective critical assessment must shed personal animus and recover a sense of balance. Thomas Hardy is neither monster nor messiah. A re-evaluation of his creative and critical writings, his correspondence, and his real life relations with women may reveal what his attitudes really were. Meanwhile, it is important to keep Peter Widdowson's judicious warning in mind :

There may be every possibility . . . for a modern critic to strategically reproduce a 'feminist Hardy', but it would be historically suspect, if nothing else, to hypothesize a male author in the second half of the nineteenth century as having a conscious and coherent feminist philosophy in view.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Gertrude Bugler, a young and very beautiful amateur actress, played the roles of Marty South and Eustacia Vye in the dramatizations of Hardy's novels performed by the local 'Dorchester Debating and Dramatic Society' ( later known as 'The Hardy Players' ). But her most spectacular success was when she played Tess, and the octogenarian Hardy developed an infatuation for this flesh and blood incarnation of his beloved Tess. Gertrude was the daughter of a local dairymaid, Augusta Way, who is supposed to be ( one of ) the original inspiration behind the conception of Tess. See Millgate, *Thomas Hardy : A Biography* , p.293.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Widdowson, *Hardy in History* , p.216.

## Chapter II

### The Hand of Ethelberta

In The Hand of Ethelberta (1876) Hardy abandoned the vein of pastoral comedy that he had so successfully exploited in Under the Greenwood Tree and Far From the Madding Crowd, and he returned to the satiric mode of his first (unpublished) novel of high society -- 'The Poor man and the Lady'.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this seemingly abrupt change of novelistic direction lay probably in Hardy's desire to escape being typecast as the writer of rural love comedies; also, there was the urgent need to establish a distinctive voice of his own in order to put an end to those seemingly endless (and often unfavourable) comparisons with George Eliot's fiction. However, The Hand of Ethelberta does not represent a totally radical discontinuity in Hardy's fiction : in having a secret 'past' (or a past 'secret') which potentially threatens to blight her future marital happiness, Ethelberta has affinities with Fancy and Elfride before her and Eustacia, Viviette, Lucetta and Tess after her.

Ethelberta is the first of Hardy's eponymous protagonists (anticipating Tess and Jude) and she is unique among the Hardy sisterhood in the sense that she is apparently in total control of her own destiny. Far from passively allowing her hand to be sought in marriage, she deftly plays her 'hand' in the game of social manoeuvring. The progress of her career from Berta Chickerel to Lady Mountclere is the result of her ruthless exploitation not so much of her looks as of her 'Mephistophelian

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<sup>1</sup> On the advice of Meredith, who was then reader for Chapman and Hall, Hardy refrained from attempting to publish this 'socialistic, not to say revolutionary' novel (as he would later describe it in his disguised autobiography) whose title read : 'The Poor Man and the Lady ; By the Poor Man'. The rural scenes of this novel were incorporated into Under the Greenwood Tree and the satiric scenes of London society probably found their way into The Hand of Ethelberta. What was left of the cannibalized novel was published in a modified and toned down version as An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress, in 1878. The 'poor man and the lady' remained a recurrent motif in both Hardy's life and his prose fiction.

endowment, brains'.<sup>2</sup> In her social climbing she learns to 'repress' the emotional side of her nature and her social triumph at the end represents the triumph of reason over passion. Indeed, Ethelberta and her foil -- her blushing and swooning younger sister Picotee -- can almost be seen as a study in contrast of 'Sense' and 'Sensibility'.

Ethelberta shares with her creator her humble social origins, her individual talent which helps her to transcend her class, her consequent isolation, alienation and perhaps sense of guilt, and her literary aspirations which are threatened by financial insecurity. Like Hardy, Ethelberta is a poet by nature but, unlike him, she begins her career as a writer by publishing her volume of poems entitled Metres by E.<sup>3</sup> Like Hardy again, financial considerations force her hand and she reluctantly abandons poetry for prose narratives. She becomes a successful romancer, a public story-teller, and at the end of the novel we hear that she is engaged in composing an epic poem after having married a man forty years her senior. Her literary career closely parallels that of Hardy who began as a poet (although an unsuccessful and unpublished one), went on to become a major novelist and later reverted to his first love -- poetry. Marrying, for

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hardy, The Hand of Ethelberta, New Wessex Edition, (London : Macmillan, 1976), Ch.31, p.242. All future references to the novel are to this 1976 (hardback) edition as some of the volumes of the New Wessex Edition incorporate revisions/corrections that Hardy made to the 'Wessex Edition' of 1912 which he himself considered as being the 'definitive' edition of his works. Page numbers have been parenthetically incorporated into the text and, for the convenience of the reader consulting any other edition, chapter numbers have also been provided.

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps this was a case of wish-fulfilment on Hardy's part because the title of Ethelberta's volume of poems, in the serial version, was a more naive Metres by Me. Among Hardy's earliest poems dating back to this period are the 'She, to Him' love poems where Hardy adopts the woman's point of view. Only four of these 1866 sonnets survived from a much larger sequence and they were eventually published in Wessex Poems, almost thirty years later, in 1898.

Interestingly enough, all the creative writers in Hardy's fiction are women. Apart from Ethelberta, there is the poetess Ella Marchmill in the short story 'An Imaginative Woman' and Elfride Swancourt, in A Pair of Blue Eyes, who writes an Arthurian Romance. Egbert Mayne, in An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress, is also a writer but his line seems to be more critical writing than creative.

the second time, a woman almost forty years his junior, Hardy would end his career by composing the epic drama The Dynasts.<sup>4</sup>

At first sight, The Hand of Ethelberta seems to be almost a feminist novel since Hardy allows Ethelberta to voice a trenchant critique of patriarchal society. Women, in such a restrictive and censorious society, are forced to have recourse to subterfuge, to adopt hypocrisy and not honesty as their policy for survival, to 'deny feeling in a society where no woman says what she means or does what she says' (Ch.7, p.76). Ethelberta chafes at the constraints placed on her freedom of action as a woman in such a convention-bound patriarchal society. In the battle for survival the rules have already been laid down by men and Ethelberta rebelliously tells her sister: 'don't you go believing in sayings, Picotee: they are all made by men, for their own advantages' (Ch.20, p.153).<sup>5</sup> Men, by virtue of their sex, enjoy certain privileges denied to women and Ethelberta feels this all too keenly when her London audiences gradually thin away and Picotee suggests that she might take her story-telling performances to the provinces:

'A man in my position might perhaps do it with impunity; but I could not without losing ground in other domains . . . when it comes to starring in the provinces she establishes herself as a woman of a different breed and habit. I wish I were a man!' (Ch.24, p.178)

What is unalterable in the world of reality can easily be altered in a world of make-believe. When Ethelberta authors her own fictional world, her heroine tries to gain a new freedom by cross-dressing. This desire to be

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<sup>4</sup> For an elaborate discussion of the autobiographical implications and parallels in The Hand of Ethelberta see Robert Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy (London: Heinemann Educational, 1975), pp.204-11. Much the same ground is also covered in Robert Gittings's 'Introduction' to the New Wessex Edition (1976) of The Hand of Ethelberta, pp.24-7. See also Patrick Roberts, 'Ethelberta: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: Love and Ambition', The Thomas Hardy Journal, 10 : 1 (1994), pp.87-94.

<sup>5</sup> That men have appropriated even language is a sore point with Bathsheba too. In Far From the Madding Crowd, when Boldwood presses her to define the nature of her feelings for him, she indignantly protests that it is 'difficult for a woman to define her feelings in language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs' (Chap. 51).

a man, to arrogate the male privileges, makes Ethelberta herself almost 'masculine'.<sup>6</sup> The traditional equation of reason with masculinity and emotion with femininity is specially pertinent in Ethelberta's case as she tries to suppress all emotion and rationally and dispassionately plan her future. There are quite a few instances of gender reversal<sup>7</sup> in this novel as, for example, when Ethelberta, 'immeasurably the stronger', presents a cool hand to her lover Christopher Julian whose hand is 'trembling with unmanageable excess of feeling' (Ch.17, p.132). Also, as Mrs Petherwin, Ethelberta takes upon herself the paternal role of provider for her large Chickerel family and later, as Lady Mountclere, she becomes 'my lord and my lady both', controlling Lord Mountclere with an iron hand :

' . . . 'tis a strange reverse for him. It is said that when he's asked out to dine, or to anything in the way of a jaunt, his eye flies across to hers afore he answers : and if her eye says yes, he says yes : and if her eye says no, he says no. 'Tis a sad condition for one who ruled womankind as he, that a woman should lead him in a string whether he will or no.' ('Sequel', p.388)

For an aristocrat who once kept a (series of) resident mistress on the premises, this is indeed a comedown. But Lord Mountclere's extreme dotage had already been prognosticated when he had ordered his fine elms ( which he himself had planted as a boy ) to be felled merely because Ethelberta had whimsically suggested that they blocked a potentially breathtaking sea-view. Ethelberta's power over Lord Mountclere had also been demonstrated in Rouen when she had marched haughtily up the 200-odd stairs of the tower with her old suitor slavishly following at her heels,

<sup>6</sup> Albert J. Guerard in *Thomas Hardy : The Novels and Stories* (London: Geoffrey Cumberlege & OUP, 1949), p.109, calls attention to 'the masculinity of Ethelberta'. Richard Carpenter in *Thomas Hardy* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1964), p.54, too speaks of Ethelberta's 'masculine command'. Richard H. Taylor also sees Ethelberta as 'a symbol of purposive masculinity' in his book *The Neglected Hardy : Thomas Hardy's Lesser Novels* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.65.

<sup>7</sup> For an interesting discussion of how 'Hardy erodes such gender boundaries by reversing the expected gender roles', see Sarah Davies, *The Hand of Ethelberta : de-mythologising "woman"*, *Critical Survey*, 5 : 2 (1993), pp. 123-130.

despite his stiff joints and breathlessness. The complete reversal of roles in the Mountclere marriage is nowhere better symbolically anticipated than in the description of the Imperial Association's archaeological expedition to Corvsgate Castle. After the lecture on the history of the ruined castle, most of the party disperse and

Lord Mountclere offered Ethelberta his arm on the ground of assisting her down the burnished grass slope. Ethelberta, having pity upon him, took it; but the assistance was all on her side; she stood like a statue amid his slips and totterings, some of which taxed her strength heavily, and her ingenuity more, to appear as the supported and not the supporter. (Ch.31, p.245)

What is Hardy's attitude to such an '*unwomanly*' woman ? Does he approve of her assumption of male roles and her jettisoning of the traditional feminine virtues ? 'Despite his apparent ambivalence as an impassive narrator', says Richard Taylor, 'perhaps Hardy too was appalled by the possibilities latent in his creation.'<sup>8</sup> Finely balanced between identification and detachment, Hardy's ambivalence towards Ethelberta is perhaps best summed up by John Bayley :

Hardy is too dispassionate about her, and in a curious way too much in practical earnest about what she might represent for him. . . . [Ethelberta] is turned at the end into an enigmatic image of a woman who has become unknowable through her triumph. He has been too close to Ethelberta for her to be a proper heroine, but after her marriage to Lord Mountclere she is too far away to be imagined either by him or by us. Hardy seems to be wryly envisaging the possible effects on himself of his own social and literary success.<sup>9</sup>

Within the novel, the only indirect clue we have regarding Hardy's response to Ethelberta is the brief narrative comment : ' . . . to have an unsexed judgment is as precious as to be an unsexed being is deplorable'

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<sup>8</sup> Taylor, *Neglected Hardy* , p.66.

<sup>9</sup> John Bayley, *An Essay on Hardy* ( Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978), p.151.

(Ch.8, p.84). Authorial judgement may also be obliquely reflected through a character such as Sol who (with his brother Dan) represents the native dignity of the honest workman. Hardy does not make Sol a butt of satiric ridicule, despite his inverted snobbery, as he probably secretly sympathizes with Sol's socialistic ideas. When Sol meets Ethelberta, after her hasty and secret marriage to Lord Mountclere, he is brutally outspoken :

'Berta, you have worked to false lines. A creeping up among the useless lumber of our nation that'll be the first to burn if there comes a flare. I never see such a deserter of your own lot as you be ! . . . I am ashamed of 'ee. More than that, a good woman never marries twice.' (Ch.46, p.366)

And in the final chapter, when Christopher (a partial self-portrait of Hardy) catches a fleeting glimpse of Ethelberta in her Mountclere carriage, he stands 'a long time thinking; but he did not wish her his' ('Sequel', p.389). Is this a case of grapes being sour or does it imply, at a deeper level, authorial censure and rejection of what Ethelberta has chosen to become ? The question is pertinent because Hardy characterized himself as one who 'constitutionally shrank from the business of social advancement, caring for life as an emotion rather than for life as a science of climbing. . . .'<sup>10</sup>

The Ethelberta who secretly visits Neigh's estate at Farnfield coldly to estimate his material worth as her suitor, or the Ethelberta who takes one look at Enckworth Court and dispassionately decides 'How lovely ! . . . His staircase alone is worth my hand !' (Ch.38, p.293)<sup>11</sup> is admittedly not a

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Michael Millgate (London : Macmillan, 1984 ; rpt. 1989), p.54. It is now generally accepted among Hardy scholars that Florence Hardy's two-volume biography, *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840 - 1891* (London : Macmillan, 1928) and *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892 - 1928* (London : Macmillan, 1930), was almost wholly written by Hardy himself. Millgate's one-vol. edn of 1984 represents the text as Hardy wrote it, without Florence Hardy's editorial revisions.

<sup>11</sup> Sir Walter Scott's implied censure of Elizabeth Bennet for falling in love with Darcy the moment she visits his impressive Pemberley estates would perhaps be more appropriate to Ethelberta whose decision to marry Lord Mountclere springs from purely materialistic considerations, untouched by any genuine feeling. Scott's comment appeared in an unsigned review of *Emma* in the *Quarterly Review*, 14 (Oct 1815); the review is collected in B.C. Southam ed. *Jane Austen : The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), p.65.



very endearing specimen of womanhood. Her callous treatment of her suitors almost justifies D.H. Lawrence's comment that, in the end, 'she has nipped off the bud of her heart'.<sup>12</sup> But a careful reading of the text reveals that this is precisely what Ethelberta has been unable to do; and this is what ultimately saves her from being a Becky Sharp type of cold adventuress.<sup>13</sup> The success of her schemes for her family's improvement depends on possessing a 'cold heart' (Ch.28, p.217) but, much to her own surprise, she discovers that 'instead of being wholly machine [she] is half heart' (Ch.38, p.295). This is something that Christopher too realizes as he has known her long enough to penetrate her mask of assumed indifference. When his sister Faith is critical of Ethelberta's public display of herself (as story-teller), Christopher defends her warmly : 'She has a heart, and the heart is a troublesome encumbrance when great things have to be done' (Ch.16, p.130). Perhaps Christopher, as a lover, is a prejudiced and unreliable commentator but Ethelberta's own actions speak louder than words. Although Christopher's gift of the musical score of 'Cancelled Words' (he has set one of her poems to music) is still capable of reducing her to sentimental tears, her 'jealous motherly guard' (Ch.22, p.169) over Picotee prompts her to extract a promise from Lord Mountclere (as a pre-condition of agreeing to be his wife) that he will do all in his power to bring about a

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<sup>12</sup> D.H. Lawrence's 'Study of Thomas Hardy' was actually written in 1914 but published posthumously in Edward D. McDonald ed. *Phoenix : The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence* (New York : Viking Press, 1936). A modern edition is the 'Cambridge Edition of the Letters and Works of D.H. Lawrence', *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays* ed. Bruce Steele ( Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 7-128; Ch.3, p.23. A substantial portion of Lawrence's essay is also reprinted in Graham Clarke ed. *Thomas Hardy : Critical Assessments* (East Sussex : Helm Information, 1993), Vol. III, pp.241-84.

<sup>13</sup> In Richard Carpenter's view '... old Lord Mountclere plays a kind of Lord Steyne to Ethelberta's Becky Sharp' ( *Thomas Hardy* , 1964, p.56). However, for the anonymous reviewer in the *British Quarterly Review* , 73 (1881), pp.342-60, Ethelberta's 'complete unselfishness' saves her from being 'an adventuress of the Becky Sharpe type'. This review is collected in R.G. Cox ed. *Thomas Hardy : The Critical Heritage* (New York : Barnes & Noble, 1970), pp.78-94.

union between Picotee and Christopher.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the most touching revelation of Ethelberta's failure to cut out her heart is the episode where she sits up at night hemming anew her sister Myrtle's damaged frock, after cutting out an inch all round at the bottom, because she has promised her young sister that the burn in the hem of her frock would disappear if only she would stop crying and go to bed. Buying a new dress would be an easy option; but not having the spare money for it, Ethelberta nevertheless has the tenderness of sisterly affection to sit up and patiently repair the damaged frock.

Is such a girl emotionally fulfilled in either of her two marriages -- to a young boy and an old man -- which frame her life story ? Her marriage to young Petherwin is too cryptically narrated for us to form any clear opinion. Her love for him and his premature death do not seem to have left much of an impression on her. Her words of expostulation to her mother-in-law are admittedly quite cold :

'Dear Lady Petherwin -- don't be so unreasonable as to blame a live person for living ! No woman's head is so small as to be filled for life by a memory of a few months. Over three years have passed since I last saw my boy-husband. We were mere children . . . Two years will exhaust the regrets of widows who have long been faithful wives; and ought I not to show a little new life when my husband died in the honeymoon ?' (Ch.10, p.98)

There is also a certain air of ambiguity about her relationship with Christopher. Indications are that a romantic understanding between them predated her runaway marriage with young Petherwin. What caused the rupture between Ethelberta and Christopher is left deliberately vague and unexplained. Did Ethelberta shrewdly realize that Christopher, as a man

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<sup>14</sup> On one occasion when Christopher solemnly kisses Ethelberta by way of farewell, she gently draws Picotee forward and tells Christopher very simply : 'Kiss her, too. She is my sister . . .' (Ch.24, p.181). This scene perhaps anticipates that more famous one in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* where, after her marriage, Tess generously tells Angel to kiss Marian, Izz and Retty in 'charity'.

lacking ambition and drive, was steadily going down the socio-economic incline and that the only son and heir of a 'just knighted' gentleman was a better social prospect ? We are left guessing about Ethelberta's motives here, as elsewhere throughout the novel, because, as Millgate points out :

. . . her 'true' personality proves finally elusive -- perhaps even to Hardy himself, though the deliberate indirection of the final view of her seems not so much an evasion of difficulty as a conscious choice of ambiguity, a decision to rest with the enigma.<sup>15</sup>

But there can be no ambiguity regarding the character of Lord Mountclere. A dissipated old aristocrat, with unnamed sexual secrets, he is repeatedly and insistently associated with the epithet 'sly'. Ethelberta's impression of him is that he 'appeared to be about sixty-five, and the dignified aspect which he wore to a gazer at a distance became depreciated to jocund slyness upon nearer view . . .' (Ch.31, p.240). Later, at the railway station, Ethelberta's earlier impression is confirmed as she notices 'an old yet sly' (Ch.33, p.258) Englishman attended by his valet. When Lord Mountclere meets with a slight accident due to the over-turning of his carriage, Christopher is at hand to help him. Christopher too characterizes the unknown gentleman as 'a sly old dog apparently' (Ch.37, p.290) and his words are reported to Ethelberta by Picotee. The narrator, describing Lord Mountclere's face, says that it presented a 'combination of slyness and jocundity' (Ch.40, p.316) and when he silently follows Ethelberta through the streets of Melchester, he is said to creep 'as stealthily as a worm into a skull' (Ch.39, p.307).<sup>16</sup> The unnaturalness of his pursuit and his ultimate

<sup>15</sup> Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy : His Career as a Novelist* ( London: Bodley Head, 1971; rpt. Macmillan, 1994), p.112.

<sup>16</sup> Millgate speaks of 'the hints of fundamental evil in the make-up of Lord Mountclere' (*Thomas Hardy : His Career as a Novelist*, p.112). John H. Schwarz calls Lord Mountclere 'a lifelong rascal' and a 'sharp-eyed satyr' in his article 'Misrepresentations, Mistakes, and Uncertainties in *The Hand of Ethelberta*', *The Thomas Hardy Journal*, 1 : 2 (1985), pp.53-62. Robert Gittings, in his 'Introduction' to the New Wessex Edition of the novel (p.20), calls him a 'roué' and a 'miserly hypocrite'.

For a favourable and sympathetic discussion of Lord Mountclere which calls attention to his 'physical gallantry', 'nobility of conduct', his 'strain of goodness' and 'Bacchanalian

marriage with Ethelberta is obliquely commented upon by the hostler in his rebuke to the milkman at the very beginning of the novel :

‘Michael, a old man like you ought to think about other things, and not be looking two ways at your time of life. Pouncing upon young flesh like a carrion crow -- ‘tis a vile thing in a old man.’ (Ch.1, p.34)

The image evoked by the last line strongly reminds us of Volpone’s pursuit of Celia ( *Volpone* , III : vii ) but while Jonson leaves us in no doubt about the identities of the predator and the victim, Hardy is more ambivalent. In a remarkably proleptic image in the opening chapter of the novel, we first see Ethelberta forgetting her queenly bearing and running impulsively across the heath to watch the final outcome of a life - and - death struggle between a duck and a duck-hawk.<sup>17</sup> The duck finally succeeds in escaping its pursuer by exploiting its skill in diving and staying under the water, and resurfacing at unexpected points of the pond, thus frustrating the duck-hawk. The image of the ‘chase’ is significant in a novel preoccupied with Ethelberta’s ‘man-hunt’. But here the identities are somewhat blurred : to see Ethelberta as the duck/victim and Lord Mountclere as the duck-hawk/predator would be too simplistic and such a one-to-one equation would fail to do justice to a novel that explores the complexities of sex and class relations. As Penny Boumelha shrewdly observes :

. . . it might be tempting to see here some exemplum such as how male strength can be evaded by the quick-wittedness of

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good nature’ etc., see George Wing, ‘“Forbear, Hostler, Forbear !” : Social Satire in *The Hand of Ethelberta*’, *Studies in the Novel* , 4 : 4 (1972), pp.568-79.

<sup>17</sup> Hardy was to exploit successfully such proleptic bird and animal imagery most powerfully in *Tess* : for example, the shaft of the mail-cart which pierces Prince and makes the horse bleed to death (Alec’s murder); the allusion to the legend of the hunting of the White Hart (Tess’s rape/seduction); Tess pityingly wringing the necks of the wounded pheasants to put them out of their misery (Tess’s hanging). In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* too the swallow flying out of the furmity-woman’s tent signifies Susan’s release from Michael Henchard through the ‘wife-sale’, while the death of the caged goldfinch symbolically anticipates Henchard’s lonely death in a miserable hovel. In *The Woodlanders* when two roosting birds suddenly quarrel and singe their wings by falling into the hot ashes below, Marty South rightly sees it as prefiguring ‘the end of what is called love’ ( Chap. 19).

the female. But Ethelberta's active role in her own story forbids us such easy recourse to notions of predation and victimage, and we need in particular to remember that it is Ethelberta rather than her male suitors who displays superior strength.<sup>18</sup>

However, the temptation to see Ethelberta as the duck who fails to escape is very strong. When Ethelberta finally tries to withdraw her promise of marriage to Lord Mountclere (caused by her pique at his -- not unreasonable -- jealousy of Christopher), the terse narrative comment reveals how hopelessly (self?)trapped she is: 'Was ever a thrush so safe in a cherry net before!' (Ch.39, p.305).<sup>19</sup>

Ethelberta's belated attempt to extricate herself from Lord Mountclere's grasp takes the form of a desperate physical flight on the very night of the wedding day. Stung by the discovery that Lord Mountclere has a resident mistress (who is temporarily absent), she requests her brother Sol to wait at night with a carriage to help her to escape under cover of darkness. At the appointed hour, Ethelberta quietly slips out and as the carriage speeds away with her in it, she thinks she has made good her escape. But, by a brilliant counter-move, Lord Mountclere has outwitted her and Ethelberta discovers to her horror and dismay that the dark figure in the carriage, whom she had assumed to be Sol, is none other than her 'sly' husband. Ethelberta knows herself to be checkmated and she accepts her defeat with as good a grace as she can summon under the circumstances. Adept, by now, at playing roles and hiding her real emotions, she quickly recovers her composure and can even congratulate

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<sup>18</sup> Penny Boumelha, "A Complicated Position for a Woman": The Hand of Ethelberta in Margaret R. Higonnet ed. The Sense of Sex: Feminist Perspectives on Hardy (Urbana and Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1993), p.252.

<sup>19</sup> Bird imagery is quite often used to define Ethelberta. For instance, Ethelberta's former lady's-maid, Menlove, after discovering Ethelberta's 'low' parentage, speaks of her as 'a daw in eagle's plumes' (Ch.33, p.257).

Lord Mountclere on his 'masterly' counter-stratagem. But the emotion that she represses is expressed in the unequivocal narrative comment :

Ethelberta might have fallen dead with the shock, so terrible and hideous was it. Yet she did not. She neither shrieked nor fainted; but no poor January fieldfare was ever colder, no ice-house more dank with perspiration, than she was then. (Ch.47, p.381)

When Lord Mountclere then takes over her story-telling role and gleefully narrates how he deftly intercepted her note to Sol (actually Christopher who, unknown to Ethelberta, stands in for the puritanical Sol), how he cunningly changed the time and venue of the appointment and so arranged matters that unwittingly the 'good wife rushed into the arms of her husband', Ethelberta bursts out laughing. But, as the narrator tells us, it is 'laughter which had a wild unnatural sound; it was hysterical. She sank down upon the leaves, and there continued the fearful laugh just as before' (Ch.47, p.383). Does the duck escape the duck-hawk after all ?<sup>20</sup>

Ethelberta herself has no illusions about her marriage to Lord Mountclere. She tries to justify it to herself and sits up at night reading Mill's Utilitarianism in order to rationalize her decision. In her earlier dithering over whether to accept or reject Neigh the question that had haunted her had been : 'Would the advantage that might accrue to her people by her marriage be worth the sacrifice ?' (Ch.28, p.212). That Christopher is the only man for whom she genuinely cares is obvious enough. But to marry a struggling musician, who barely keeps himself and

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<sup>20</sup> In Hardy's first attempt at a short story, 'Destiny and a Blue Cloak' (published 1874) he had used a similar plot device. Agatha, a young orphan and one of the two female protagonists of this story of feminine rivalry in love, waits in vain for her lover Oswald to return from India and marry her. Meanwhile, her poor and rather unfeeling uncle pressurizes her to marry old Farmer Lovill and, on the advice of the parson, she gives Lovill a conditional promise of marriage. On the eve of this marriage, Agatha rebelliously decides to run away and arranges with the miller boy to help her escape in the mill-cart. In the early hours of the morning, Agatha makes good her escape only to later discover (like Ethelberta) that the driver of the cart is none other than her would-be husband, Lovill. Lovill is obviously a forerunner of Lord Mountclere, but the authorial response to the Agatha - Lovill marriage is far less equivocal than to the Ethelberta - Mountclere union.

his sister afloat, is out of the question. 'What she contemplated was not merely to ensnare a husband just to provide incomes for her and her family, but to find some man she might respect . . .' (Ch.28, p.212). Is Lord Mountclere such a man ? Even on the eve of the wedding, Ethelberta herself has serious misgivings and makes a rare confession to Picotee : ' . . . I have had a thought -- why I cannot tell -- that as much as this man brings to me in rank and gifts he may take out of me in tears' (Ch.43, p.340). The reaction of Ethelberta's family and friends to this marriage is hardly encouraging. Her father, her brother Sol, her ex-lover Christopher, all react with horror because they have all heard notorious reports of Lord Mountclere's past aberrations and excesses. 'I always said that pride would lead Berta to marry an unworthy man, and so it has !' (Ch.45, p.356) is Sol's bitter comment when he arrives too late to prevent the marriage from being solemnized. Even more bitter are the words her father utters : 'I would almost sooner have had it that in leaving this church I came from her grave . . .' (Ch.45, p.356).

Despite Hardy's 'fundamental ambivalence in the presentation of his heroine'<sup>21</sup>, it is possible to guess what he really must have felt about this marriage. If we accept that Christopher is a partial self-portrait of Hardy, then Christopher's comment when he first hears of the projected union with Lord Mountclere has the added weight of authorial judgement. Disturbed on hearing news of the impending marriage, Christopher tells his sister Faith : 'I should think her guardian angel must have quitted her when she agreed to a marriage which may tear her heart out like a claw' (Ch.40, p.318). In a novel where Fate, Chance, Providence, or President of the Immortals, are conspicuous by their absence, this reference to a suprahuman force controlling (or failing to safeguard) human life is very significant. But since the novel is a 'comedy', and since

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<sup>21</sup> Millgate, *Thomas Hardy : His Career as a Novelist* , p.110.

Ethelberta does not evoke 'the sympathy which Hardy extends to Bathsheba, Tess and Sue',<sup>22</sup> Christopher's comment lacks the passionate indignation and tragic resonance that a similar reference was to have in a later novel. Emotionally committed to his heroine in Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Tess's violation by Alec would move Hardy to bitterly question: '... where was Tess's guardian angel? where the providence of her simple faith? Perhaps ... he was in a journey, or he was sleeping and not to be awaked.'<sup>23</sup>

If Ethelberta had not been framed by a comic narrative, then the near-tragic potential in her character would have been explored. For instance, there is in Ethelberta a bitter world-weariness that is very surprising in one so young and dynamic. Burdened with the self-imposed responsibility of caring for her large family, she is often weary of the constant struggle; and when 'the Hamlet mood [is] upon her' (Ch.34, p.269) her lack of personal ambition is quite evident. As she confides to her mother:

'If I stood alone, I would go and hide my head in any hole, and care no more about the world and its ways. I wish I was well out of it, and at the bottom of a quiet grave -- anybody might have the world for me then!' (Ch.23, p.175)

Quite often, when her plans go awry, the narrator tells us that:

... when the futility of her great undertaking was more than usually manifest, did Ethelberta long like a tired child for the conclusion of the whole matter; when her work should be over, and the evening come; when she might draw her boat upon the shore, and in some thymy nook await eternal night with a placid mind. (Ch.27, p.210)

Frustration and the fear of failure breed in Ethelberta a defeatism that has a touch of almost Swiftian savagery:

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<sup>22</sup> Taylor, The Neglected Hardy, p.64.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, New Wessex Edition, (London: Macmillan, 1975), p.101.



'Yet I wish I could get a living by some simple humble occupation, and drop the name of Petherwin, and be Berta Chickereel again, and live in a green cottage as we used to do when I was small. I am miserable to a pitiable degree sometimes, and sink into regrets that I ever fell into such a groove as this. . . . I begin to have a fear that mother is right when she implies that I undertook to carry out visions and all. But ten of us are so many to cope with. If God Almighty had only killed off three-quarters of us when we were little, a body might have done something for the rest; but as we are it is hopeless !' (Ch.28, p.217)

In a rare moment of unburdening her soul, she confesses to her father :

'Father, I cannot endure this kind of existence any longer. I sleep at night as if I had committed murder : I start up and see processions of people, audiences, battalions of lovers obtained under false pretences -- all denouncing me with the finger of ridicule. . . . I am sick of ambition. My only longing now is to fly from society altogether, and go to any hovel on earth where I could be at peace.' (Ch.36, p.282)

This concatenation of disturbed sleep, of seeing ghosts with their accusing fingers pointed at her, of a desire to escape from the battlefield of ambition, all remind us of a tragic protagonist who has indeed committed murder : Macbeth.<sup>24</sup> For Ethelberta, as for Macbeth, there is now no turning back, because : 'Returning were as tedious as go o'er ' ( *Macbeth* , III: iv, 137). Although in a light moment Ethelberta cavalierly compares life to a game of chess -- 'there is no seriousness in it ; it may be put an end to at any inconvenient moment by owning yourself beaten, with a careless

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<sup>24</sup> The parallel is not as outrageous as it may initially sound. After Ethelberta has tested her power over Lord Mountclere ( he fells his elms in deference to her whim), Hardy makes Ethelberta quote from *Macbeth* in her musings :

What, seeing the precariousness of her state, was the day's triumph worth after all, unless, before her beauty abated, she could ensure her position against the attacks of chance?

To be thus is nothing;  
But to be safely thus.

-- she said it more than once on her journey that day. (Ch.31, p.248)

"Ha-ha!" ' (Ch.17, p.136) -- in her more sober moments she knows that she has to carry on the fight till the bitter end : 'But, having once put my hand to the plough, how shall I turn back ?' (Ch.24, p.178). Even if she does desire to turn back and give up the struggle on her own account, there are others (like her father) to remind her that 'Having put your hand to the plough, it will be foolish to turn back' (Ch.28, p.217). Thus Ethelberta, like Macbeth, is truly the bear tied to the stake ( Macbeth , V: vii , 1-2). Being a successful illusionist herself, Ethelberta produces the illusion of free choice, of 'the triumph of intellect and will over the forces of impulse within and adverse social circumstances without',<sup>25</sup> but she is as much a victim of the 'plot' that she herself has authored as Tess is the victim of the plot that Hardy has authored.

The Hand of Ethelberta does indeed anticipate Tess of the d'Urbervilles in the triangular relationship between Ethelberta, Christopher and Picotee in the comic novel and that between Tess, Angel and 'Liza-Lu in the tragic novel. Ethelberta's generous championship of Picotee's cause, when she discovers her sister's 'secret', foreshadows the famous Stonehenge scene where Tess urges Angel to marry 'Liza-Lu and begin life afresh. Picotee's feelings are far too complicated because she is pulled in opposite directions between her one-sided (and as yet undeclared) love for Christopher and her affectionate loyalty to her sister.

As the narrator neatly sums up :

What Picotee hoped in the centre of her heart as to the issue of the affair it would be too complex a thing to say. If Christopher became cold towards her sister he would not come to the house; if he continued to come it would really be as Ethelberta's lover -- altogether, a pretty game of perpetual check for Picotee. (Ch.19, p.148)

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<sup>25</sup> Clarice Short, 'In Defense of Ethelberta', Nineteenth-Century Fiction , 13 : 1 (1958), pp.48-57.

On the eve of Ethelberta's marriage to Lord Mountclere, Picotee has qualms of conscience which prompt her to put a crucial question to Ethelberta : 'Berta, I am sometimes uneasy about you even now, and I want to ask you one thing, if I may. Are you doing this for my sake ? Would you have married Mr Julian if it had not been for me ?' (Ch.43, p.340). Although Ethelberta (quite characteristically) returns an evasive and equivocal reply, we have the narrator's assurance quite early in the novel that Ethelberta's 'foremost feeling was less one of hope for her own love than of championship for Picotee's' (Ch.22, p.169). Thus, when Ethelberta and Christopher decide that their ways must part, her words of farewell to him are : 'Care for us both equally !' Unwilling to sever the last link, Ethelberta at once said, in a last futile struggle against letting him go altogether, and with thoughts of her sister's heart : 'I think that Picotee might correspond with Faith; don't you, Mr Julian ?' (Ch.24, p.182)

Here Ethelberta is playing a benevolent Providence for at the end of the novel when Christopher finally proposes to Picotee and is only too gladly accepted, he confesses that it 'has been an instance of loving by means of letters' ('Sequel', p.392). He had read the letters Faith regularly received from Picotee and gradually 'got more interested in the writer than in her news' -- which is perhaps what Ethelberta had hoped all along.

Although Picotee's own marriage will be rather humdrum and low-key, she vicariously enjoys the 'glory' of Ethelberta's grand marriage to a peer. She rhapsodizes over Ethelberta's future 'jewels', 'horses and carriages', 'footmen', and is quite disappointed when Ethelberta tells her that she will live very quietly without the usual dinners, travels and jaunts to the city common to one of her station. 'Will you not be, then, as any other peeress; and shall not I be as any other peeress's sister ?' (Ch.39, p.311) is a fairly disturbing question. Will Picotee, under Ethelberta's influence, develop into a second Ethelberta ? There is an incipient

snobbery in her words to Sol when he comes to visit Ethelberta immediately after her marriage to Lord Mountclere : 'You need not come near the front apartments, if you think we shall be ashamed of you in your working clothes. How came you not to dress up a bit, Sol ?' (Ch.45, p.363).

Picotee's assumption of the plural 'we' here identifies her with Ethelberta's social mobility. But although the gradient of Ethelberta's social climb is undoubtedly a regular upward graph, there is a deliberate ambivalence about her emotional/moral progress. Hardy himself tantalizingly raises the question through his narrator : 'Was the moral incline upward or down ?' (Ch.36, p.286). It is a crucial question but one which Hardy himself refused to answer; he 'deliberately left unresolved the question of whether, for Ethelberta herself, achieved ambition also represents achieved happiness'.<sup>26</sup> In the final chapter of the novel (entitled 'Sequel'), Ethelberta is no longer centre-stage and we hear reports of her married life with Lord Mountclere from an anonymous driver and from Picotee. We are told that Ethelberta has succeeded in taming Lord Mountclere, in gaining control over his estates and finances, in short, of becoming 'my lord and my lady both'. But, surely, marital felicity is not just a question of who wears the trousers in the family or who controls the bank account. Hardy's non-committal attitude to Lady Mountclere almost prompts us to echo Auden's ironic questioning at the end of his poem celebrating 'The Unknown Citizen' :

Was he free ? Was he happy ? The question is absurd :

Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Millgate, *Thomas Hardy : His Career as a Novelist* , p.110.

<sup>27</sup> W. H. Auden, *Collected Shorter Poems : 1927 - 1957* (London: Faber & Faber, 1966; rpt.1977), p.147. Auden also contributed an essay, 'A Literary Transference', to the Hardy Centennial number of *The Southern Review* , vol. 6 (1940), pp.78-86. In it he spoke of his love for, and indebtedness to, Thomas Hardy whom he called his 'poetical father'. The essay is collected in Albert J. Guerard ed. *Hardy : A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp.135-42. The essay is also reprinted in Graham Clarke ed. *Thomas Hardy : Critical Assessments* , Vol. III, pp.285-91.

But something is patently wrong, if only we pick up the right clues. Ethelberta after two years of marriage, Picotee informs Christopher, 'lives mostly in the library. . . . She is writing an epic poem' ('Sequel', p.391). Most critics have seen in this a comforting assurance that Ethelberta's cynical marriage of convenience has not dried up her literary inspiration, and her return to poetry after prose is seen as a welcome resurgence of emotion from the domination of reason. This, hopefully, may be the case; but what is vaguely disturbing is the earlier part of the sentence : 'lives mostly in the library'. That a young wife should find the library the most congenial part of the house and the company of books infinitely more preferable than the company of her viscount-husband insinuates that all is not 'plain sailing' on the marital/emotional front. We are reminded strongly of Jane Austen's Mr Bennet who, similarly, withdraws from life and ( rather selfishly ) makes the library his refuge after being bitterly disillusioned about marriage in general and his inane wife in particular. Does Ethelberta too shut herself up in the library in order to escape the company of Lord Mountclere ? Before the marriage, expatiating on the richness of the Enckworth library, with its quartos and folios and 'literature from Moses down to Scott', Ethelberta had tried to reassure Picotee (and herself ?) that 'with such companions I can do without all other sorts of happiness' (Ch.39, p.311).

Hardy calls The Hand of Ethelberta 'A Comedy in Chapters' and it succeeds in being a comedy only because he persistently refuses to investigate 'the deeper implications of the conclusion'.<sup>28</sup> At one point in the novel, Ethelberta says : 'In a world where the blind only are cheerful we should all do well to put out our eyes' (Ch.43, p.340). In this novel named after her, Hardy is doing precisely this : he is deliberately blinding himself to the near-tragic implications of his plot and protagonist because

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<sup>28</sup> Taylor, The Neglected Hardy , p.74.

he knows that '[a]ll comedy, is tragedy, if you only look deep enough into it'.<sup>29</sup> As he himself later recorded in his disguised autobiography : 'If you look beneath the surface of any farce you see a tragedy ; and, on the contrary, if you blind yourself to the deeper issues of a tragedy you see a farce.'<sup>30</sup> Again, in a letter to J.B. Priestley ( 8 Aug 1926 ), Hardy showed his awareness of 'the tragedy that always underlies Comedy if you only scratch it deeply enough'.<sup>31</sup> In The Hand of Ethelberta Hardy chose to 'blind [himself] to the deeper issues' and he refrained from scratching the surface of the comedy to reveal the tragic substratum. In his next novel, The Return of the Native , despite the temporary physical blindness of his hero, Clym Yeobright, Hardy himself would remain unflinchingly clear-eyed as to the tragic possibilities of love, marriage and social ambition.

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<sup>29</sup> Hardy's letter to John Addington Symonds ( 14 Apr 1889 ) in Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate eds. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 1 : 1840-1892, ( Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p.190.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Hardy, The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy ed. Michael Millgate , p.224.

<sup>31</sup> R. L. Purdy and M. Millgate eds. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 7 : 1926 - 1927, (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1988), p.38.

### Chapter III

#### The Return of the Native

It is one of the ironies of Hardy's life that the phase he himself described as 'their happiest time' and as the 'Sturminster Newton idyll' produced the first great tragic novel of his literary career, The Return of the Native (1878).<sup>1</sup> In this novel Hardy explores, in reverse direction, the problem of deracination. If Ethelberta is 'an uprooted native of Wessex' who seeks to escape from her native origins, Clym is the uprooted native who seeks to return. As a 'thinly veiled autobiography' (Hardy himself repeatedly returned to his native Dorset), The Return of the Native is 'an extension of the confessional impulse discernible in The Hand of Ethelberta'.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the transition from urban comedy in The Hand of Ethelberta to rural tragedy in The Return of the Native is not as abrupt as it may appear. Also, in the heroines of these two novels it is perhaps possible to detect an indirect line of descent. As Guerard shrewdly points out : 'Did Ethelberta's unmoral pursuit of power and wealth suggest, finally, Eustacia's unmoral pursuit of pleasure ?'<sup>3</sup> That Eustacia was originally conceived within a moral framework becomes clear from the plot outline that Hardy himself sent to Arthur Hopkins who illustrated the serial version of the novel in Belgravia :

Perhaps it is well for me to give you the following ideas of the story as a guide -- Thomasin, as you have divined, is the *good* heroine, & she ultimately marries the reddleman, & lives

<sup>1</sup> Looking back on his life, while composing his disguised autobiography, Hardy described the days spent at Sturminster Newton as 'their happiest days'. See Thomas Hardy, The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy ed. Michael Millgate (London : Macmillan, 1984 ; rpt. 1989), pp.115, 122. However, for those who believe that Hardy's marriage to Emma was a disaster from the very beginning, there is no irony ; rather, it is only very natural that Hardy should write a novel focusing on marital disharmony.

<sup>2</sup> Peter J. Casagrande, Unity in Hardy's Novels : 'Repetitive Symmetries' (London : Macmillan, 1982), pp.119, 126.

<sup>3</sup> Albert J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy : The Novels and Stories (London : Geoffrey Cumberlege and OUP, 1949), p.140.

happily. Eustacia is the wayward & erring heroine -- She marries Yeobright, the son of Mrs Yeobright, is unhappy, & dies.<sup>4</sup> (Hardy's italic)

Hardy's polarization of Eustacia and Thomasin ( continued by most subsequent critics ) in terms of such rigid moral absolutes blurs some basic affinities between these two young women which are well worth emphasizing. The critical tradition associates Thomasin, in the words of Rosemarie Morgan, with 'submissiveness not imperiousness, docility not fervour, amiability not anger, demureness not passion'.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, Eustacia is seen as the Promethean and Byronic rebel who, according to Leonard Deen, is 'emblematic of the feeling and infinite desire which rebel against inevitable limitation'.<sup>6</sup> But what has not been recognized and therefore needs to be stressed is that passion and rebelliousness are not unique to Eustacia alone. Initially, at least, Thomasin is equally capable of romantic defiance as when she runs away to marry Wildeve after her aunt has explicitly forbidden the banns by openly standing up in church and making her disapproval public. And, in her own quiet but firm way, Thomasin also rejects her aunt's cherished plan of a marriage between Clym and herself, although she is still living under her aunt's protection and although Wildeve's reluctance to solemnize their marriage has placed her in a severely compromised position.

Again, in the present form of the novel, both Eustacia and Thomasin are orphans.<sup>7</sup> Eustacia lives with her grandfather who seems carelessly unconcerned about her welfare, and Thomasin lives with her

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate eds. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 1 : 1840 - 1892, (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1978), p.53.

<sup>5</sup> Rosemarie Morgan, *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* ( London : Routledge, 1988; rpt. 1991), p.62.

<sup>6</sup> Leonard W. Deen, 'Heroism and Pathos in Hardy's *Return of the Native*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 15 : 3 (1960), p.210.

<sup>7</sup> It is surprising to note how many of Hardy's fictional women are actually orphans : Cytherea Graye, Bathsheba, Fanny Robin, Paula, Viviette, Lucetta, Marty and (virtually) Sue.



aunt whose domineering control is equally damaging. Interestingly enough, in the original conception of the novel, Captain Vye ( originally named Captain Drew ) was to have been Eustacia's father and Mrs Yeobright was to have been Thomasin's mother.<sup>8</sup> By revising his original conception and making Captain Vye Eustacia's grandfather and Mrs Yeobright Thomasin's aunt, Hardy was not only in effect orphaning these two young girls but also, on the more positive side, freeing them from potentially tyrannical parental control. Both Eustacia and Thomasin are thus granted more individual autonomy, greater freedom of choice and, as responsible agents, they can now conduct their own lives without the constricting parental authority.

But, as one early reviewer shrewdly pointed out, Eustacia 'has no feeling . . . that such a thing as responsibility exists'.<sup>9</sup> To Eustacia, the 'mockery of her hopes' seems to be a 'satire of Heaven'<sup>10</sup> and not the logical outcome of her own free choice. Thus when she fails to respond to Mrs Yeobright's knocking , due to a complex mixture of reasons, she refuses to recognize her moral culpability : 'Yet, instead of blaming herself for the issue she laid the fault upon the shoulders of some indistinct, colossal Prince of the World, who had framed her situation and ruled her lot' (Bk.4 : Ch.8, p.304). With her penchant for self-dramatization she can even see herself as a tragic heroine trapped in the toils of a sadistic super-

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<sup>8</sup> John Paterson, *The Making of 'The Return of the Native'* (Berkeley and Los Angeles : Univ. of California Press, 1960 ; rpt. 1963), p.9. See also Simon Gatrell ed. *'The Return of the Native' : A Facsimile of the Manuscript with Related Materials* (New York and London : Garland Publishing, 1986). The facsimile of folio 28 of the MS (p.37) clearly shows 'mother' corrected to 'aunt' and the facsimiles of folios 64-65 (pp.79-80) show 'father' corrected to 'grand-father'.

<sup>9</sup> Unsigned review, *Spectator* , 8 Feb 1879; rpt. in R.G. Cox ed. *Thomas Hardy : The Critical Heritage* (New York : Barnes & Noble, 1970), p.58, and in Graham Clarke ed. *Thomas Hardy : Critical Assessments* (East Sussex : Helm Information, 1993), Vol. I, p.116.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* , New Wessex Edition, (London : Macmillan, 1975), Bk.4 : Ch.3, p.267. Future references are to this 1975 hardback edition and page numbers are parenthetically included in the text. For the convenience of the reader consulting any other edition, Book and Chapter numbers have also been parenthetically provided.

power : 'Eustacia could now, like other people at such a stage, take a standing-point outside herself, observe herself as a disinterested spectator, and think what a sport for Heaven this woman Eustacia was' (Bk.5 : Ch.5, p.343). Her bitter words just prior to her drowning reveal the same frame of mind -- that of a passive victim roused to indignant protest at the injustice latent in the scheme of things :

'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 !'<sup>11</sup> (Bk.5 : Ch.7, p.357)

Eustacia's view of herself as victim of a cruel destiny is also echoed by her lover Wildeve on a couple of occasions. Meeting her accidentally after her life is blasted by Clym's blindness and obstinate refusal to leave Egdon, Wildeve commiserates with her : 'I sincerely sympathize with you in your trouble. Fate has treated you cruelly' (Bk.4 : Ch.3, p.272). Later, when he visits her on the fateful day of Mrs Yeobright's visit, he reiterates his sympathy : 'The fates have not been kind to you, Eustacia Yeobright' (Bk.4 : Ch. 6, p.289). The narrator too seems to endorse this view of Eustacia in what appears to be a thinly veiled expression of authorial sympathy :

The gloomy corner into which accident as much as indiscretion had brought this woman might have led even a moderate partisan to feel that she had cogent reasons for asking the Supreme Power by what right a being of such exquisite finish had been placed in circumstances calculated to make of her charms a curse rather than a blessing. (Bk.4 : Ch.3, pp.267-8)

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<sup>11</sup> Eustacia's speech was originally more defiant and hubristic. 'I do not deserve my lot !' was initially, in the MS version, 'I am too good for my lot !', and her present modest 'I was capable of much' originally read 'I was capable of perfection'. See Paterson, *The Making of 'The Return of the Native'*, p.87 and also the MS facsimile of folio 377, reproduced on p.427 of Gatrell's 1986 edition of the MS of *The Return of the Native*.

But a total surrender of individual volition is inimical to genuine tragic status and Hardy, well versed in classical Greek and Shakespearean tragedy, knew that 'anagnorisis' or (self)recognition was indispensable for a tragic protagonist. Thus he grants Eustacia her rare moments of insight, as when she warns Clym prophetically before their marriage : 'Yet I know we shall not love like this always. Nothing can ensure the continuance of love. It will evaporate like a spirit, and so I feel full of fears' (Bk.3 : Ch.4, p.212). Fearing that she will only 'ruin' Clym, she honestly admits : 'Sometimes I think there is not that in Eustacia Vye which will make a good homespun wife' (Bk.3 : Ch.4, p.214). And later, when Wildeve openly expresses his envy of Clym for his 'one great gift', Eustacia has the grace not to pretend to misunderstand and thus fish for compliments. With admirable directness, she says quietly : 'Well, I am a questionable gift' (Bk.4: Ch.6, p.289). Such moments of honesty bring Eustacia down from the tragic pedestal to which both she and her creator artificially seek to elevate her ; but, paradoxically, they also win for her respect and sympathy as a tortured human being.

Throughout this novel, where Eustacia replaces the nominal hero Clym as the focus of interest<sup>12</sup> (anticipating Sue's displacement of Jude), there is a tension set up between two irreconcilable images of Eustacia -- what Robert Evans calls 'Eustacia Regina' and 'The Other Eustacia'. On the one hand, classical allusions to Titans and goddesses, recurrent use of Promethean fire-imagery, self-consciously inflated rhetoric, all seek to build her up as a tragic 'Queen of Night'. Conversely, stripped of her grand

<sup>12</sup> In his letter to Arthur Hopkins, dt. 8 Feb 1878, (already partly quoted) Hardy lists the characters of the novel :

'The order of importance of the characters is as follows :

1. Clym Yeobright
2. Eustacia
3. Thomasin & the reddleman
4. Wildeve
5. Mrs Yeobright.'

See Purdy and Millgate eds. Collected Letters , Vol. 1, p.53.

pretensions, Eustacia is exposed as an essentially 'selfish and self-deceiving girl', 'an arrogant, willful creature, prey to unhealthy melancholy, self-pity and caprice'.<sup>13</sup> But this 'double perspective', far from being a flaw in conceptualization of character, actually perhaps represents Hardy's 'ambivalent feelings toward all romantic aspiration'. Although 'Hardy was of Eustacia's party', his 'conflicting attitudes toward his heroine' prompt him to 'present her both as the tragic Queen of Night and as the comic and morbid courtly pretender'.<sup>14</sup> Eustacia represents the principle of 'individualism' and although 'something in Hardy approved of her', his 'feelings towards Eustacia were ambivalent, and he could not totally accept or reject her. He was unable, intellectually and emotionally, to commit himself for or against the principle he made Eustacia represent'.<sup>15</sup>

Eustacia, as Hardy originally conceived her, was a less complex character, calling forth a less complex response from her creator. As the demonic 'she devil Avice'<sup>16</sup> in the Ur-novel, Eustacia/Avice was more the antagonist than the tragic protagonist, and her witch-like persecution of the 'good' Thomasin would not have made any great demands on the sympathetic interest of either author or reader. Vestiges of this original character conception survive figuratively in the novel in its final 1912 revised form. When her bonfire summons Wildeve to her side, at the beginning of the novel, Eustacia herself triumphantly compares her feat to 'the Witch of Endor call[ing] up Samuel' (Bk.1 : Ch.6, p.87). The rustic Egdon folk too think of her in such terms, as Timothy Fairway reports : '...

<sup>13</sup> Robert Evans in his landmark essay, 'The Other Eustacia', *Novel*, 1 (1968), pp.251-59, first highlighted this split.

<sup>14</sup> David Eggenschwiler, 'Eustacia Vye, Queen of Night and Courtly Pretender', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 25 : 4 (1971), pp.444-54. This essay is collected in Harold Bloom ed. *Thomas Hardy's 'The Return of the Native'*, 'Modern Critical Interpretations' series, (New York : Chelsea House, 1987), pp.39-48.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Benvenuto, 'Another Look at the Other Eustacia', *Novel*, 4 : 1 (1970), pp.77-79.

<sup>16</sup> Writing to Hardy to offer his impressions of the MS of *The Return of the Native*, John Blackwood characterized the female protagonist as 'that she devil Avice'. An extract from Blackwood's letter containing this phrase is quoted in Gatrell ed. *The Return of the Native* : A Facsimile of the MS, p. xi.

the lonesome dark-eyed creature up there that some say is a witch' (Bk.1 : Ch.5, p.75). Although Susan Nunsuch limits herself to 'she is very strange in her ways . . .' (Bk.1 : Ch.3, p.56), she will not only later prick Eustacia's arm in church but also burn her wax effigy ( at the very moment that Eustacia is rushing to her death ) because this over-anxious and ignorant mother superstitiously believes that Eustacia is bewitching her son Johnny and making him ill. Clym, too, in his frenzied state of guilt and remorse over his mother's death, compares her to 'a devil' (Bk.5 : Ch.3, p.330), and in that fatal scene of quarrel with Eustacia he bitterly laments : 'How bewitched I was ! How could there be any good in a woman that everybody spoke ill of ?' (Bk. 5: Ch.3, p.334). Determined to harden himself against her charms, he taunts her : 'Don't look at me with those eyes as if you would bewitch me again ! Sooner than that I die' (Bk.5 : Ch.3, p.332).

This original Satanic Avic/Eustacia was radically transformed by Hardy's repeated textual revisions into a Promethean rebel whose titanic romantic aspirations drew forth Hardy's grudging sympathy and admiration. Investigating the implications of the several layers of textual revisions, Paterson sums up :

The suppression of the diabolical Eustacia Vye and the emergence of the romantic heroine were clearly not essential to the bowdlerization of the Ur-novel. The modification of Thomasin's predicament could not have required, after all, so total a change in the nature of her antagonist. The truth seems rather to be that in the course of revising the Ur-chapters, Hardy discovered and indulged an unconscious and even reluctant sympathy with the demoniacal creature he had initially conceived. As the spokesman of a province whose roots were deeply imbedded in a traditional past, he was on the side of the Thomasin Yeobrights and Diggory Venns, who accepted the injustice of the cosmic administration without a murmur, but as the man who had gone to London and discovered the century of Shelley and Swinburne, he was also on the side of those who refused, like

Eustacia Vye, to come to terms with it. Her transfiguration from satanic antagonist to romantic protagonist suggests, then, that what began as a bowdlerization developed spontaneously into a free and creative revaluation, the effect of which was to reverse the fundamental values of the novel.<sup>17</sup> (Emphasis added)

Paterson's exhaustive analysis of textual revisions gives us a valuable insight into the very process of creation<sup>18</sup> and the shifts in authorial attitudes and intentions ( although it is no longer considered respectable to speak of 'authorial intention' in academic criticism today ). Paterson's pioneering work has been supplemented by Gatrell's fairly recent edition of the facsimile of the MS of The Return of the Native , a close study of which is quite illuminating. For instance, in the serial version of the novel, Hardy had affixed an epigraph to Chapter 10 of Book 1 which does not appear in subsequent versions of the novel but which is extremely significant as an index to Hardy's attitude to Eustacia in particular and womankind in general :

Woman oft has envy shown :  
Pleased to ruin others' wooing,  
Never happy in their own.<sup>19</sup>

Although Hardy removed this misogynic generalization, the attitude behind the lines survives in the narrative analyses of Eustacia's feelings towards Wildeve and Clym -- the two men with whom she is seriously involved ( for one can discount Charley with his one-sided boyish adoration). That envy and rivalry quicken her desire for Wildeve is something that Eustacia herself is made to recognize :

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<sup>17</sup> Paterson, The Making of 'The Return of the Native' , pp.29-30.

<sup>18</sup> For a much briefer but useful summary of the several textual revisions of the novel, see Otis B. Wheeler, 'Four Versions of The Return of the Native', Nineteenth-Century Fiction , 14 : 1 (1959), pp.27-44.

<sup>19</sup> Gatrell ed. 'The Return of the Native' : A Facsimile of the MS , p. xvii. See also Simon Gatrell, Hardy the Creator : A Textual Biography (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1988), p.38. Here, the last line reads : 'Never happy in her own', which is grammatically more consistent.

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 ! . . . 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. (Bk.1: Ch.11, pp.121-122)

Again, apart from the seductive halo of Paris that surrounds Clym and makes him an object of infinite longing, Eustacia's infatuation for him is fanned by the thought of 'Thomasin, living day after day in inflammable proximity to him' (Bk.2 : Ch.6, p.163). Fears of being upstaged by Thomasin send a 'chill' through Eustacia's heart and make her regret that she had ever come between Thomasin and Wildeve. With Thomasin safely married to (a no longer desired) Wildeve, she would no longer pose a threat to Eustacia's romantic pursuit of Clym. Thus, on the night of the mummers' performance, disguised as the Turkish Knight, Eustacia feels

. . . a wild jealousy of Thomasin on the instant. Though Thomasin might possibly have tender sentiments towards another man as yet, how long could they be expected to last when she was shut up here with this interesting and travelled cousin of hers ? There was no knowing what affection might not soon break out between the two, so constantly in each other's society, and not a distracting object near. Clym's boyish love for her might have languished, but it might easily be revived again. (Bk.2 : Ch.6, p.161)

Here Eustacia is judging Thomasin by the yardstick of her own whimsical nature. In her case, the 'distracting object' Clym had displaced Wildeve in her affections and she fears the same may happen with Thomasin because she cannot simply conceive of fidelity for fidelity's sake. To her, 'Love is the dimmest thing where the lover is quite honest' (Bk.1 :

Ch.9, p.105). In fact, infidelity adds the necessary spice to her feelings for Wildeva in the initial stages :

The man who had begun by being merely her amusement, and would never have been more than her hobby but for his skill in deserting her at the right moments, was now again her desire. Cessation in his love-making had revived her love. Such feeling as Eustacia had idly given to Wildeva was dammed into a flood by Thomasin. (Bk.1 : Ch.10, p.115)

The language of this narrative gloss ('amusement', 'hobby', 'idly') and the manifest irony at Eustacia's expense do not argue for much authorial sympathy. More damaging to Eustacia's status as a tragic heroine, for whom we are meant to experience the appropriate tragic emotions, is a narrative comment which is passed off as being the articulation of Eustacia's consciousness : 'And the discovery that she was the owner of a disposition so purely that of the dog in the manger, had something in it which at first made her ashamed' (Bk.1: Ch.11, p.123).<sup>20</sup> Hardy is not a careless artist and his use of the reductive 'dog in the manger' image is both conscious and deliberate. Equally deliberate is his use of Shakespearean echoes which he was quite confident his readers would pick up. In a conscious parallel with *King Lear*, not only does he provide Mrs Yeobright with a heath, a hovel, a fool (Johnny Nunsuch), but he also puts into her mouth words which recall two famous speeches from the play which also concerns itself with filial relationships. After Mrs Yeobright has been denied access to Clym's house, she turns back disappointed and bitterly muses on her homeward journey : 'Can there be beautiful bodies without hearts inside ? . . . I would not have done it against a neighbour's cat on such a fiery day as this !' (Bk.4 : Ch.6, p.294). Mrs Yeobright's wonder at the complete disjunction between external

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<sup>20</sup> This is a good example of what Derwent May wittily describes as both Clym's and Eustacia's tendency to 'sometimes speak about their complex feelings in such neat summaries that one feels they must have had a glimpse of Hardy's notes on them'. See Derwent May's 'Introduction' to the New Wessex Edition of *The Return of the Native*, p.18.



physical beauty and internal moral/emotional bankruptcy echoes Lear's arraignment of Regan in the mock-trial on the heath. Rejected by both Regan and Goneril, Lear raves : 'Then let them anatomize Regan, see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts ?' ( King Lear , III : vi, 74-76). Cordelia too is shocked that her sisters could turn out their aged father on such a violent night :

Mine enemy's dog  
Though he had bit me, should have stood that night  
Against my fire. ( King Lear , IV : vii, 36-38)

Hardy knew his Shakespeare well and he must have been aware that Mrs Yeobright's bitter words would associate Eustacia negatively in the readers' minds with Lear's 'pelican' daughters -- Regan and Goneril -- but at no stage did he revise this speech to tone down its damaging allusiveness.<sup>21</sup> Earlier in the novel, trying to warn Clym off Eustacia, Mrs Yeobright had offered a brief but incisive glimpse into Eustacia's character : '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' (Bk.3 : Ch.2, p.196). While making allowances for the jealousy of a possessive mother, it is nevertheless true that Mrs Yeobright's verdict is borne out by events in the novel. Eustacia is always isolated and alienated from the heath-people and, almost hating her fellow-creatures, she is never shown as being of any use to anyone. But she constantly uses other people, exploiting their romantic weakness for her, in order to further her narrow personal ends. She uses Johnny Nunsuch to

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<sup>21</sup> Some of the close verbal parallels between the speeches in the play and the novel were pointed out by R.E.C. Houghton in 'Hardy and Shakespeare', Notes and Queries , (Vol.206), New Series 8 : 3 (1961), p.98. The verbal and situational parallels between Lear and Mrs Yeobright wandering on the heath, rejected by their children, cannot be purely accidental because Hardy also added a further detail contributing to Mrs Yeobright's death. In addition to a weak heart, physical exhaustion due to the heat and the long walk, and emotional stress, Mrs Yeobright is stung by an adder and surely this is meant to recall Lear's famous association of filial ingratitude with the venom of the 'serpent's tooth' ( Lear , I : iv, 286-87).

tend her bonfire which is a lover's signal to Wildeve (and not a part of the communal festivities) ; she is not above trading on her physical charms and using Charley to gain a role in the mummers' play in order to catch a glimpse of Clym ; she sees Clym not so much as a human being but as a key to unlock for her the glittering world of Paris ; and although her pride is deeply mortified, she agrees to use Wildeve's services in fleeing from Egdon when her marriage finally breaks down.

However, too severe a censure of Eustacia is disarmed by the fact (often forgotten) that she is only nineteen -- an age when it is not too unnatural to have one's head full of 'romantic nonsense' (as Captain Vye complains). In the famous 'Queen of Night' chapter, the narrator for once abandons his impersonality and betrays his loyalties : 'And so we see our Eustacia -- for at times she was not altogether unlovable . . .' (Bk.1 : Ch.7, p.94). The inclusive 'our' seems to endorse Patricia Stubbs's reading of Hardy's 'essential sympathy for the way Eustacia feels about her cramped, empty life' and his 'compassion for Eustacia in her dilemma'.<sup>22</sup> However, in its present version, this transparent expression of authorial sympathy is but a pale shadow of the original MS reading where, in more positive terms, Hardy had boldly declared : 'And so we see our Eustacia -- for she was lovable after all'. This was corrected to '. . . for she was lovable sometimes' and later, in the first edition (1878), retreating from such an open avowal of commitment, Hardy changed the positive phrasing to a negative one : '. . . for she was not altogether unlovable'. The double negatives do not add up to a resounding positive and it is further diluted by the revision of the 1895 Uniform Edition which reads : '. . . for at times she was not altogether unlovable'.<sup>23</sup> These successive textual revisions

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<sup>22</sup> Patricia Stubbs, *Women and Fiction : Feminism and the Novel, 1880 - 1920* (Sussex : Harvester Press, 1979; rpt. London : Methuen, 1981), pp.72-3.

<sup>23</sup> Paterson, *The Making of 'The Return of the Native'*, p.134.

reveal an author who wishes 'to detach himself from his characters', one who 'sees all and knows all but refuses to commit [him]self'.<sup>24</sup>

Hedged about by qualifications, authorial sympathy for the heroine is almost refined out of existence and, later in the novel, Hardy allows himself only the most indirect expression of sympathy. Thus when physical infirmity and surrender of social ambition on Clym's part lead to a considerable cooling in their marital relations, we are told that :

Eustacia's manner had become of late almost apathetic. There was a forlorn look about her beautiful eyes which, whether she deserved it or not, would have excited pity in the breast of any one who had known her during the full flush of her love for Clym. (Bk.4 : Ch.3, p.266)

Readers of Hardy who are familiar with this indirect narrative strategy realize that 'any one' includes both author and reader in a common humanity. Later, on that fateful night of the storm when Eustacia meets her death, Hardy is not satisfied with just invoking the powerful emotional connotations of 'the agony in Gethsemane'. Drawing Eustacia within the fold of common human sympathy, in the same impersonal manner, his narrator says :

Any one who had stood by now would have pitied her, not so much on account of her exposure to weather, and isolation from all of humanity . . . but for that other form of misery which was denoted by the slightly rocking movement that her feelings imparted to her person. Extreme unhappiness weighed visibly upon her. (Bk.5 : Ch.7, p.357)

Confronted with such extreme misery, our reaction can only be spontaneous sympathy ; but there is a strange reluctance in Hardy to display any emotional commitment to his heroine. 'Hardy's ambivalent attitude towards her rebellion' produces 'the complex feelings of loss and waste, coupled with disapproval, which the reader experiences at her

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* , p.162.

death'.<sup>25</sup> Hardy's ambivalence is reflected in his refusal to be explicit and to clarify two main issues relating to Eustacia : what is the precise nature of her pre-marital relationship with Wildeve and is her death an accident or a conscious suicidal choice ? The prehistory of the Eustacia - Wildeve relationship is deliberately left vague and although, at their first meeting in the novel, Eustacia passionately accuses Wildeve of deserting her, later she acknowledges that he is not the sort of 'man to bear a jilt ill-will' (Bk.4 : Ch.8, p.306). Wildeve as deserter and Eustacia as jilt are impossible to reconcile and we assume that the truth must lie somewhere in between. Again, Eustacia's bitter words to Wildeve during this meeting had been, in the first edition of 1878 : ' . . . and deserted me entirely, as if I had never been yours'. This conveniently vague phrasing was elaborated by Hardy in the 1895 edition to : ' . . . as if I had never been yours body and soul so irretrievably !' But fearing that he had been dangerously explicit, Hardy deleted the offending word 'body' and substituted the innocuous phrase 'life and soul so irretrievably !' in the 1912 edition.<sup>26</sup> Had this bowdlerization been occasioned by editorial pressure, for serial publication in a family magazine, Hardy's caution would be understandable and justified. But in the relatively freer sexual climate of 1912, when his own reputation was already firmly established, why did Hardy change the bolder 1895 reading ? One positive interpretation might be that Hardy deliberately chose to be ambiguous because he did not want his readers (i.e. his contemporary reading public of the early decades of the twentieth century, and not readers of the 1990s ) to take a judgemental stand towards Eustacia. If we know the precise nature of her past relation with Wildeve,

<sup>25</sup> Stubbs, *Women and Fiction* , p.73.

<sup>26</sup> Paterson, *The Making of 'The Return of the Native'* , pp. 113, 123. However, strangely enough, Eustacia's original defiant words to Wildeve -- ' . . . you may tempt me, but I won't encourage you any more' -- were changed to a more compromising ' . . . but I won't give myself to you any more' in the 1895 edition ; and this 1895 version was allowed to remain unaltered in the 1912 edition.

then, in the scene of her bitter quarrel with Mrs Yeobright beside the pool, we can decide whether her attitude of injured innocence and wifely indignation is genuine or just a clever pose. Perhaps Hardy wanted to secure for his heroine the benefit of the doubt.

Similarly, despite the opportunities offered by successive revisions of the text, Hardy refused to clarify the precise nature of Eustacia's death although it has important consequences in the evaluation of her character.<sup>27</sup> Like Tess's violation by Alec (rape or seduction?), Eustacia's death by drowning could be variously interpreted. As a suicide, it can be seen as an act of Promethean defiance or as a guilt-ridden self-annihilation traditionally ascribed to the 'fallen woman'. As a tragic accident, it could signify the sheer futility of individual striving in an impersonal universe which finally triumphs over the non-conformists. Eustacia's death, like Tess's violation, occurs off-stage and Hardy is quite content to move

back and forth between the traditional image of a vulnerable woman who drowns herself in despair and shame and the image of a strong, sexually-aware woman who, discontented with the cultural and moral *status quo* of her time, seeks death as a way out of social and sexual limitations.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Hardy's narrative silence over this issue is later echoed in E.M. Forster's similar refusal to clarify what actually happened to Adela Quested in the 'Cave' episode of *A Passage to India*. Forster's words on the subject can be applied generally to many such instances of narrative absences in Hardy: 'In the cave it is *either* a man, or the supernatural, or an illusion. And even if I know! My writing mind therefore is a blur here -- i.e. I will it to remain a blur, and to be uncertain, as I am of many facts in daily life' (Forster's italics). Forster's comment is quoted in P.N. Furbank, *E.M. Forster: A Life*, Vol. 2 (1914 - 1970), (London: Secker & Warburg, 1978), p.125.

<sup>28</sup> Dixie Lee Larson, 'Eustacia Vye's Drowning: Defiance Versus Convention', *The Thomas Hardy Journal*, 9: 3 (1993), p.62. The ambivalence of Eustacia's death is explored by Bruce K. Martin, 'Whatever Happened to Eustacia Vye?', *Studies in the Novel*, 4: 4 (1972), pp.619-27. Strong advocates for 'suicide' include Ken Zellefrow, 'The Return of the Native: Hardy's Map and Eustacia's Suicide', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 28: 2 (1973), pp.214-20; and Frank R. Giordano, Jr., 'Eustacia Vye's Suicide', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 22: 4 (1980), pp.504-21. For a comparison of Eustacia's death with those of Maggie Tulliver and Anna Karenina, see Katherine Hanley, 'Death as Option: The Heroine in Nineteenth-Century Fiction', *College Language Association Journal*, 25: 2 (1981), pp.197-202. Eustacia's suicidal tendencies and ambiguous death relate her also to Lady Macbeth, and Martin Ray very briefly explores this in 'Hardy's Borrowing from Shakespeare: Eustacia Vye and Lady Macbeth', *The Thomas Hardy Year Book*, 14 (1987), p.64.

Unable, or perhaps unwilling, to decide whether Eustacia ranks with the 'Heloises' or the 'Cleopatras' of this world, the narrator compromises by suggesting that in heaven she will occupy a seat between these two prototypes. This same ambivalence can be seen in the presentation of Mrs Yeobright who is one of 'The Three Women' ( a phrase which serves as the title of Book 1 of the novel ). Her son Clym, obsessed by guilt and remorse after her death, almost canonizes her and nostalgically remembers her as a paragon of virtue :

' . . . what goodness there was in her : it showed in every line of her face ! Most women, even when but slightly annoyed, show a flicker of evil in some curl of the mouth or some corner of the cheek ; but as for her, never in her angriest moments was there anything malicious in her look. She was angered quickly, but she forgave just as readily, and underneath her pride there was the meekness of a child.'  
(Bk.5: Ch.3, p.333)

But the Mrs Yeobright who opposes Thomasin's marriage to both Diggory and Wildeve, and also Clym's marriage to Eustacia, does not exactly correspond to this sentimentalized and idealized portrait. As Paterson has demonstrated, Mrs Yeobright had been made of even sterner stuff in the original version of the novel but repeated revisions succeeded in softening down her unyielding rigidity and lack of charity.<sup>29</sup>

Had Mrs Yeobright not publicly humiliated Wildeve by standing up in church and forbidding the banns, then perhaps Wildeve may not have retaliated by dragging his feet over his eventual marriage with Thomasin. Thomasin might thus have been spared a great deal of shame, misery and public gossip. There is also the suggestion that had she not opposed Diggory's suit ( when he was a dairy-farmer, before taking up the reddle business in disappointment ), Thomasin might have married him in the first place -- as she eventually does -- leaving the two romantic

<sup>29</sup> Paterson, *The Making of 'The Return of the Native'* , pp.70-5.

malcontents, Eustacia and Wildeve, to make a match of it. Thomasin's candid letter to Diggory in which she says ' . . . I like you very much, and I always put you next to my cousin Clym in my mind' (Bk.1: Ch.9, p.102) certainly suggests that a little more persuasion might have easily won her over, if only she did not have her aunt's displeasure to contend with.

Mrs Yeobright's interference thus changes the destiny of five young people who all seem to love at cross-purposes ( in typical Hardyan fashion). Her bitter opposition to Eustacia really hardens Clym in his resolve to marry her despite his mother's dire prognostications. Apprehensive of Eustacia's influence over Clym, Mrs Yeobright warns him : 'But when I consider the usual nature of the drag which causes men of promise to disappoint the world I feel uneasy' (Bk.3: Ch.3, p.204). That these are not just the idle words of a jealously possessive mother is proved by the fact that the same idea was expressed in the narrative gloss which Hardy had prefixed to Chapter 1 of Book 3 in the serial version of the novel. In Belgravia , the prose summary of the action (or 'argument') of Book 3 read :

The man & his scheme are fully described ; & he begins his work. But a rencounter leads to emotions which hamper his plans , & cause a sharp divergence of opinion, ultimately committing him to an irretrievable step which a few months earlier he did not dream of.<sup>30</sup> (Emphasis added)

But Clym, in his refusal to listen to such prophecies of disaster, shuts not only his ears but also his eyes. If Eustacia is 'half in love with a vision' (Bk.2: Ch.3, p.138), then so is Clym. He refuses to see Eustacia as the flesh and blood creature that she really is ; instead he apotheosizes her into a semi-divinity whose dazzling radiance momentarily blinds him.

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<sup>30</sup> See Gatrell ed. 'The Return of the Native' : A Facsimile of the MS , p.221. This misogynic idea of women hampering men's plans and dragging them down will operate as a recurrent verbal motif in Hardy's next tragic novel Two on a Tower (1882) and it will be discussed in the following chapter. The two intervening novels, The Trumpet-Major (1880) and A Laodicean (1881), both have 'happy' endings.

Prefiguring his physical blindness is his figurative blindness, and the clear-eyed Mrs Yeobright bluntly tells him : 'You are blinded, Clym . . . It was a bad day for you when you first set eyes on her' (Bk.3: Ch.3, p.209). Later, she laments to Thomasin : 'Sons must be blind if they will. Why is it that a woman can see from a distance what a man cannot see close ?' (Bk.3: Ch.6, p.228). The narrator too seems to endorse Mrs Yeobright's diagnosis and speaks of 'the first blinding halo kindled about [Clym] by love and beauty ' (Bk.3: Ch.4, p.216).

However, Clym is quite justly irritated and inclined to rebel against the 'oppressive influence' of such a tyrannical matriarch who appears to be 'the chief cause of the tragic mischief of the novel'.<sup>31</sup> But her death predictably reduces him to a state of uncritical adoration and he realizes that 'events had borne out the accuracy of her judgment, and proved the devotedness of her care. He should have heeded her for Eustacia's sake even more than for his own' (Bk.6: Ch.4, p.404). Do we hear in these words of Clym ( whom Casagrande calls 'a devastatingly critical self-portrait'<sup>32</sup> ) the accents of regret of Clym's creator ? For those who hold that Hardy's marriage to Emma was already deteriorating by 1878, these words might be an oblique reflection of Hardy's own regret at having defied his mother Jemima in marrying Emma. This autobiographical speculation is not irrelevant or extraneous to the discussion because Hardy himself reportedly told Sydney Cockerell that Mrs Yeobright was modelled on his own mother, Jemima Hardy.<sup>33</sup>

Also, when Hardy drew a map and published it as the frontispiece to the 1878 edition of the novel, the location of Clym's house (Bloom's End) as marked on the map of fictional Wessex almost exactly corresponded to

<sup>31</sup> Casagrande, *Unity in Hardy's Novels* , pp.132-34.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.127.

<sup>33</sup> See Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy : His Career as a Novelist* ( London : Bodley Head, 1971; rpt. Macmillan, 1994), p.125.



the position of Hardy's own birthplace at Higher Bockhampton.<sup>34</sup> And later, when busy revising all his novels and correcting proofs for the 1912 'Wessex Edition', Hardy is supposed to have commented to a friend: 'I got to like the character of Clym before I had done with him. I think he is the nicest of all my heroes, and *not a bit* like me' (Hardy's italics).<sup>35</sup> The very defensiveness of the comment should alert the reader to recognize how much Hardy invested in Clym -- much more, in fact, than he would have liked to admit. Disavowals in Hardy are usually in inverse proportion to biographical truth and it is therefore perhaps reasonable to assume that in Clym, especially in his mother-obsession,<sup>36</sup> there is much of Hardy himself. Through Clym's love-hate relationship with Mrs Yeobright Hardy may be expressing his own ambivalent feelings towards his own mother: admiration, loyalty and gratitude for her devoted and protective care warring against suppressed resentment at her tendency to assume dictatorial control over her children's lives.

Although Mrs Yeobright's obstinate opposition to all marriage partners for Clym and Thomasin seems rather perverse, her instinctive wisdom -- in realizing Wildeve's unsuitability as Thomasin's husband and in recognizing the essential incompatibility of Clym and Eustacia -- is

<sup>34</sup> See Michael Millgate, Thomas Hardy: A Biography (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982; rev. ed. 1992), p.199.

<sup>35</sup> Florence Emily Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892 - 1928 (London: Macmillan, 1930), p.151. This letter to an unidentified 'friend' does not appear in the corresponding section of Millgate's restored edition (1984) of The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy, and so the canonical status of this passage in the 'autobiography' is perhaps suspect. However, the quoted words do appear in Hardy's letter, dt 22 April 1912, to Florence Dugdale (as the second Mrs Hardy then was); see Purdy and Millgate eds. Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 4, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p.212.

<sup>36</sup> Hardy himself underlined this Oedipal theme in the novel by a revision made in the 1895 edition. When Clym learns from Johnny of Eustacia's role in his mother's rejection and death, the narrator says: '... his mouth had passed into the phase more or less imaginatively rendered in studies of Oedipus' (Bk.5: Ch.2, p.328). Before 1895, the sentence had read: '... imaginatively rendered in studies of Laocoon' (see Paterson, The Making of 'The Return of the Native', p.105).

A link with another mother-obsessed son, Paul Morel in Sons and Lovers, is explored by Ann M. Baribault Benway in 'Oedipus Abroad: Hardy's Clym Yeobright and Lawrence's Paul Morel', The Thomas Hardy Year Book, 13 (1986), pp.51-7.

uncannily prophetic. Her motives may be suspect but her forecasts are accurate. In her Cassandra-like utterances of disaster, she goes unheard till events finally vindicate her. Sympathy for her starts building up after Clym leaves her ; and in her abandoned and lonely existence she might have pleaded ( perhaps with more justification than Eustacia ) that the tragedy of her life is : 'want of an object to live for' (Bk.2: Ch.4, p.145). The centre of her life has always been her only offspring Clym ( she regrets, at one point, that she had not married a second time and had other children to absorb her love ), and after Clym marginalizes her, life ceases to have any meaning. Her movement towards death has a tragic inevitability which is consciously heightened by the parallels with another child-forsaken parent, King Lear. Sympathy for Mrs Yeobright's maimed existence is indirectly expressed through a remarkable piece of 'pathetic fallacy'. In her long journey towards Clym's house, in the hope of being reconciled, Mrs Yeobright sits down to rest for a while in order to gather both her strength and her courage :

The trees beneath which she sat were singularly battered, rude, and wild, and for a few minutes Mrs Yeobright dismissed thoughts of her own storm-broken and exhausted state to contemplate theirs. Not a bough in the nine trees which composed the group but was splintered, lopped, and distorted by the fierce weather that there held them at its mercy whenever it prevailed. Some were blasted and split as if by lightning, black stains as from fire marking their sides, while the ground at their feet was strewn with dead fir-needles and heaps of cones blown down in the gales of past years. . . . On the present heated afternoon, when no perceptible wind was blowing, the trees kept up a perpetual moan which one could hardly believe to be caused by the air. (Bk.4: Ch.5, p.286)

Mrs Yeobright's transcendence of individual suffering in contemplating the blasted trees round her anticipates that more famous scene where Tess forgets her own misery when confronted with the

excruciating physical agony of the wounded pheasants. But within the novel, this scene echoes another powerfully symbolic landscape through which Clym passes when he sets out to find a separate house for himself and his future wife :

Here the trees . . . were now suffering more damage . . . The wet young beeches were undergoing amputations, bruises, crippling, and harsh lacerations, from which the wasting sap would bleed for many a day to come, and which would leave scars visible till the day of their burning. Each stem was wrenched at the root . . . convulsive sounds came from the branches, as if pain were felt. (Bk.3: Ch.6, p.224)

This is not a gratuitous piece of nature description and we are meant to realize that Clym too is 'wrenched at the root'. His close relationship with his mother has been likened to 'the right and the left hands of the same body' (Bk.3: Ch.3, p.205) and, when he tears himself away, this organic dismemberment is reflected in the mutilations in the world of nature. Marjorie Garson in her otherwise exhaustive and useful analysis of the 'somatic imagery' in this novel<sup>37</sup> fails to pick up these two powerful instances of bodily disintegration which are crucial in defining the mother-son bond at the heart of the novel. However, the rhetoric of these two passages is much in excess of the objective facts (a man setting up an independent house, after marriage) and it suggests that in the Clym - Mrs Yeobright relationship Hardy was probably indirectly working out some private guilt over real or imagined filial betrayal.

Both Mrs Yeobright and Eustacia achieve through the heightened descriptions of their deaths a dignity and tragic grandeur that they had hardly attained in life. This transfiguration through death is something that is denied to Thomasin -- the only survivor of 'the three women' at the novel's centre. Our first glimpse of Thomasin is when Diggory Venn and

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<sup>37</sup> Marjorie Garson, *Hardy's Fables of Integrity : Woman, Body, Text* ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 54-79.

Mrs Yeobright enter the reddleman's van and the lantern's rays fall on the face of the tired, sleeping girl. Diggory has been accused of voyeurism<sup>38</sup> but here, at least, Hardy is using Diggory and Mrs Yeobright as convenient camera lenses to focus on Thomasin, instead of using his usual formula of the ubiquitous and impersonal 'observer' who is made to notice and record things on behalf of the omniscient narrator. The light of the lantern reveals a 'fair, sweet, and honest country face . . . between pretty and beautiful' (Bk.1: Ch.4, p.63). Diggory compares her to a frightened 'doe' in her distress after her first failed marriage attempt, and the narrator compares her to birds in her various moods : when she muses she is like a kestrel, when frightened she reminds one of a kingfisher, and in her serene moods she skims as lightly as a swallow (Bk.3: Ch.6, p.226). To Clym 'that sweet voice of hers' (Bk.5: Ch.1, p.316) comes like a soothing draught of fresh air after he recovers from his delirium, and this 'sweet' voice is heard again and again at crisis points in the narrative : urging Mrs Yeobright to forget the bitter quarrel and initiate a reconciliation with Clym and his wife, encouraging Clym to be more generous to Eustacia (her ex-rival) and prompting him to write a letter of forgiveness and apology in order to end their separation.

Even Wildeve, susceptible as ever to Eustacia's attraction, grudgingly concedes that Thomasin is a 'confoundedly good little woman', and he wishes he could be faithful to Eustacia without 'injuring a worthy

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<sup>38</sup> Derwent May, 'Introduction' to the New Wessex Edition (1975) of *The Return of the Native*, p.24. Rosemarie Morgan also accuses Diggory of spying on Eustacia in his 'role of censor'. She sees him as a 'moral watchdog', an 'officious intruder', a 'troublemaker', and 'a power-mongering bully and degrader of voluptuous womankind'. See Morgan's *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, pp.66-75. Diggory has evoked widely contrasting responses from readers. J.O. Bailey sees Diggory as imbued with satanic symbolism in 'Hardy's "Mephistophelian Visitants"', *PMLA*, 61 (1946), pp.1146-84. Conversely, Sandy Cohen sees Diggory as a 'Christ figure' in 'Blind Clym, Unchristian Christian and the Redness of the Reddleman : Character Correspondences in Hardy's *The Return of the Native*', *The Thomas Hardy Year Book*, 11 (1984), pp.49-55.

In this episode, at least, the narrator clearly tells us that Diggory, conscious that Thomasin 'was not made to be looked at thus', 'cast his eyes aside with a delicacy which well became him'.

person', that is, his wife 'Tamsie' (Bk.1: Ch.9, p.105). Caught between two conflicting loyalties, Wildeva decides that it is possible to act generously towards his 'gentle wife' and with 'chivalrous devotion towards another and greater woman' (Bk.5: Ch.9, p.369).<sup>39</sup> The grief of this 'gentle girl', in her widowhood, wakes Clym out of the stupor of apathy into which he had sunk following the deaths of Eustacia and Wildeva. Remembering his mother's cherished hope of a marriage between the cousins, Clym

could not help feeling that it would be a pitiful waste of sweet material if the tender-natured thing should be doomed from this early stage of her life onwards to dribble away her winsome qualities on lonely gorse and fern. (Bk.6: Ch.3, p.392)

And when Tamsin timidly reveals to Clym her love for Diggory, he ( after some initial reservations ) tenderly agrees : 'I am only too glad that you see your way clear to happiness again. My sex owes you every amends for the treatment you received in days gone by' (Bk.6: Ch.3, p.396).

Thomasin is thus obviously the 'good', conventional heroine of Victorian fiction and Lawrence's (rather patronizing) comment about her and Diggory is : 'They are genuine people, and they get the prize within the walls'.<sup>40</sup> Less equivocally, Casagrande sees her as 'the novel's chief symbol of renewal', one in whose 'purity and sweetness of spirit' and 'mature and gentle loveliness' is 'enshrined something like normality'.<sup>41</sup> Thomasin and her innocent self-reflection, the baby Eustacia Clementine, provide the much-needed stability of 'The Inevitable Movement Onward'<sup>42</sup> after the tragic holocaust. For Thomasin the heath holds no terrors ; it has never been a 'gaol' to her and although she leaves both the Yeobright home and

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<sup>39</sup> In the earlier versions, Wildeva decides 'to act honestly toward his gentle wife, and chivalrously toward another woman'. The qualifying words 'and greater', with their consequent privileging of Eustacia over Thomasin, were a later 1895 afterthought. See Otis B. Wheeler, 'Four Versions of *The Return of the Native*', pp.37-8.

<sup>40</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays* ed. Bruce Steele ( Cambridge : Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), p.24.

<sup>41</sup> Casagrande, *Unity in Hardy's Novels* , pp.133-42.

<sup>42</sup> This is the title that Hardy gave to Chapter 1 of Book 6 of the novel.

Egdon after her marriage to Diggory, she is true to her roots and stoutly declares : 'I am not fit for town life -- so very rural and silly as I always have been' (Bk.6: Ch.3, p.394). Raised to prosperity by Wildeve's inheritance and Diggory's new-found wealth (as a respectable dairy-farmer), she shows no superior condescension towards the heath-folk and is moved to tears when they gather to wave her goodbye. Her popularity among the Egdon folk is attested by the fact that they actually gather together to make a mattress as a wedding present for her second marriage. Even on the occasion of her first marriage (to Wildeve), as a gesture of goodwill, the heath-folk march up to Wildeve's inn to sing a few ballads to congratulate the newly-wed pair. Of course they do not know that Wildeve has actually bungled the marriage licence, and their friendly serenading is motivated not just by the hope of partaking of some good 'old mead' at the inn, but by the honest desire of 'pleas[ing] the young wife' (Bk.1: Ch.3, p.54). As Timothy tells Wildeve, ' . . . the woman you've got is a dimant' (Bk.1: Ch.5, p.72); and we realize that such community approval and congratulations are significantly absent in the narrative of the Clym - Eustacia marriage.

What is Hardy's attitude to this 'Agnes' figure in the novel -- one who is almost his namesake ? Millgate suggests that Hardy probably had his sister Mary in mind when creating the patient, unprotesting Thomasin, whose very name echoes Hardy's own and who in the manuscript was once cast as Clym's sister rather than his cousin.<sup>43</sup>

Insofar as it is possible to recover the Ur-novel hidden under layers of revisions and afterthoughts, Thomasin probably was a more complex character and even perhaps the central figure in the novel. In her role as the 'ruined maid' ( in the Ur-novel she was to have lived with Wildeve for a week before discovering that their 'marriage' was legally invalid ),

<sup>43</sup> Millgate, *Thomas Hardy : A Biography* , p.200.

Thomasin obviously recalls Fanny Robin in Far From the Madding Crowd and she is also possibly a prototype for Tess Durbeyfield. Paterson speculates that

Some ten years, then, before the appearance of Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Hardy may well have conceived in Thomasin Yeobright the figure of the pure woman caught in the toils of social law and convention and in her story the grounds for a direct attack upon the institution of marriage.<sup>44</sup>

But, being forced to drastically bowdlerize his original conception, he 'may have conceived Thomasin as the central figure of a drama of seduction and later replaced her domestic tragedy with Eustacia's cosmic tragedy'.<sup>45</sup>

Although Gatrell disagrees significantly with Paterson's interpretations of textual revisions, especially in attributing 'diabolism' and 'satanism' to the Ur-Eustacia, his reconstruction of Thomasin's original role is quite similar :

If, however, it can be imagined that Hardy once thought of Thomasin living for a week with Toogood [as Wildeve was originally ironically named] under the impression that she is married to him, and then through the strength of her personality, her truth to herself, refusing to marry a man whom she no longer loves when he is driven to make amends, it would reinforce the still perceptible relationship between Thomasin and Tess Durbeyfield. It would then be possible to consider this version of Thomasin in some ways a precursor of Tess. It might also indicate that one strand of Tess of the d'Urbervilles is a working out of an idea that he felt unable to pursue in The Return of the Native. Proceeding further into the realms of speculation, the comparison gives rise to the likelihood that Thomasin's child would, had her refusal to marry survived, have been illegitimate and thus akin to Tess's baby Sorrow. The relative insignificance of Thomasin in the surviving version -- once she is safely married -- may have been the direct result of

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<sup>44</sup> Paterson, The Making of 'The Return of the Native', pp.15-6.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47.

Hardy recognizing that he could not examine her in the role that he had originally conceived for her, and thus losing interest in what had become a more commonplace personality.<sup>46</sup>

Traces of the complex role once envisaged for Thomasin linger in her indignant protest at the anomalous position in which she is left by Wildeve's 'stupid mistake' over the marriage licence. Aware of wagging tongues round her, and hurt and incited by her aunt's strictures, Thomasin replies with spirit :

'I am a warning to others, just as thieves and drunkards and gamblers are . . . What a class to belong to ! Do I really belong to them ? 'Tis absurd ! Yet why, aunt, does everybody keep on making me think that I do, by the way they behave towards me ? Why don't people judge me by my acts ? Now, look at me as I kneel here, picking up these apples -- do I look like a lost woman ? . . . I wish all good women were as good as I !'  
(Bk.2: Ch.2, p.132)

But with her marriage and motherhood, Thomasin is rescued from her ignominious peripheral position and brought within the folds of the community. Ultimately, she comes to represent almost the yardstick of the norm unlike Eustacia whose marriage with a 'native' fails really to integrate her to the Egdon community.

Although Hardy added a tantalizing note in the 1912 edition of the novel explaining that the Thomasin - Diggory marriage was not part of his original conception of the novel and that his hand was forced by the public demand for a 'happy ending', the marriage has its own comic appropriateness and inevitability. Although the additional 'Book Sixth' destroys the self-conscious five-act structure of the novel's action and 'the year and a day' unity of time of the narrative, nevertheless it is entirely fitting that the novel which opened with Thomasin's misery at her failed attempt at marriage should end with the joyous celebrations of an

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<sup>46</sup> Gatrell, *Hardy the Creator*, pp.36-7.



achieved happy union. Her marriage acts as a necessary counterpoise to the lonely spectacle of a wasted Clym preaching his superfluous sermons to a congregation that merely tolerates and pities him. Without the suggestions of renewal and progress implicit in Thomasin's marriage, the ending of the novel would have been too bleak and negative, too much like the total nihilism and blankness of despair which makes Jude the Obscure such a painful and disturbing experience for many readers. At this stage, Hardy probably realized that after the Eustacias, Lucettas and Tesses have played out their tempestuous lives, it is the Thomasins, Elizabeth-Janes and 'Liza-Lus who survive to carry on the process of living undramatically and unheroically. If Hardy the romantic idealist admired the passionate and uncompromising Eustacia Vyes, then Hardy the stern realist also recognizes that the world needs its Thomasin Yeobrights -- those who quietly accept the tragic inevitability of things with wisdom, courage and dignity.

#### Chapter IV

##### Two on a Tower

Two on a Tower (1882) richly deserves more critical attention than it has received so far. Appearing almost midway in Hardy's career as a novelist, it encapsulates most of the earlier familiar Hardyan motifs and holds in embryonic form the thematic concerns of the great tragic novels to follow. In this rather underrated novel, we have : humanity pitted against the vast, impersonal and indifferent universe ; an agonizing struggle between the life of passion and the life of intellect ; human love and happiness thwarted by the 'impishness of circumstance'<sup>1</sup> ; a re-working of the almost obsessive 'poor man and the lady' motif ; a rustic chorus that mediates the tragedy and puts it into perspective ; overheard conversations, mistimed letters, accidental discoveries -- in fact, all the typical paraphernalia of a 'Hardy' plot.

What is perhaps remarkable about Two on a Tower is the economy of its dramatis personae. Unlike the typical Hardy novel where the female protagonist vacillates/is offered a choice between two or more possible suitors, Lady Constantine is constant in her preference for the young astronomer, Swithin St Cleeve, although she is later forced to contract a marriage of expediency with Bishop Helmsdale in order to provide legitimacy to her unborn child by Swithin. This deception on her part roused the ire of contemporary reviewers who were indignant at what they considered an insult to the Church. The anonymous reviewer in Saturday Review found Lady Constantine's marriage to Bishop Helmsdale

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<sup>1</sup> Hardy uses this phrase himself in Two on a Tower. See the New Wessex Edition of the novel, introd. F.B. Pinion (London : Macmillan, 1976), Ch. 9, p.88. All subsequent references are to the hardback (1976) New Wessex Edition, and page numbers have been parenthetically included within the text. For the convenience of the reader consulting any other edition, chapter numbers have also been parenthetically included.

'repellent',<sup>2</sup> while the Spectator reviewer characterized her passion for Swithin as 'very near to the repulsive'.<sup>3</sup> But, undaunted, Hardy defended his heroine in his 1895 Preface to the novel where he unequivocally stated his sympathy for 'the pathos, misery, long-suffering, and divine tenderness which in real life frequently accompany the passion of such a woman as Viviette for a lover several years her junior' (p.29). However, within the novel itself, there is a sustained tug-of-war between sympathy and censure, between tender, impassioned defence and cynical, almost misogynous, commentary.

Throughout the novel an interesting dialectic is set up within the narrative voice : on the one hand, Viviette's tenderness, sincerity, noble sacrifice are highlighted and on the other hand, her corrupting influence is repeatedly emphasized. Our introduction to Viviette Constantine is hardly auspicious. Like a typical lady of leisure, she is described as being in 'a mood to welcome anything that would in some measure disperse an almost killing *ennui*' (Ch.1, p.32). The italicized word in the text (Hardy's) is the danger signal. A reader familiar with the entire corpus of Hardy's novels immediately recalls Eustacia Vye and Felice Charmond -- two women who cause havoc in the lives of men and women around them and who are ultimately self-destroyed. A further reference to the 'Romance blood' in Viviette's veins prepares us for a tragic story of tempestuous passions, and when the first chapter ends with a reference to the innocent Swithin 'living on in a primitive Eden of unconsciousness' (Ch.1, p.39), it is easy to predict who will play the Eve in the 'Fall' of Swithin /Adam from this prelapsarian devotion to science to the postlapsarian deception of clandestine love affair.

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<sup>2</sup> Unsigned review, Saturday Review, 18 Nov 1882, in R.G. Cox ed. Thomas Hardy : The Critical Heritage (New York : Barnes & Noble, 1970), p.100; also rpt. in Graham Clarke ed. Thomas Hardy : Critical Assessments, Vol. I, (East Sussex : Helm Information, 1993), p.135.

<sup>3</sup> Harold Quilter, Spectator, 3 Feb 1883, in Cox, p.102 and in Clarke, Vol. I, p.136.

Allusions to the 'Fall' are subtly strewn throughout the text in a manner that squarely points the finger of responsibility at Viviette. As her interest in the young astronomer grows, she one day invites him over to her house and gives him the free run of her rather well-stocked library. Immersed in the world of books, Swithin forgets all about physical nourishment till a footman brings him his lunch. When he has finished, Lady Constantine leads him to an adjoining room for dessert and the fruit that Swithin eats in her presence is, significantly, an apple (Ch.7). More explicit is Viviette's own rueful admission -- 'but that which is called the Eve in us will out sometimes' (Ch.14, p.116) -- when she is slightly mortified by Swithin's lack of gallantry in not protesting that her ten-year seniority in age is really of little consequence. Later, when Viviette, despite her anomalous social/moral position, nobly resolves to set Swithin free by refusing to legalize their earlier (technically illegal) marriage, the narrator in his turn also equates Viviette and Eve : 'Women the most delicate get used to strange moral situations. Eve probably regained her normal sweet composure about a week after the Fall' (Ch.35, p.234).

The 'Eve' identification is adumbrated in that early scene where Lady Constantine goes to Swithin's tower and finds her 'Astronomer Royal' sleeping after the exhaustion of sitting up all night recording astronomical data. As Lady Constantine stands contemplating the beautiful sleeping youth, fearful of disturbing his rest, Hardy launches into one of his characteristic narrative asides :

He [i.e.Swithin] had never, since becoming a man, looked even so low as to the level of a Lady Constantine. His heaven at present was truly in the skies, and not in that only other place where they say it can be found, in the eyes of some daughter of Eve . Would any Circe or Calypso -- and if so, what one ? -- ever check this pale-haired scientist's nocturnal sailings into the interminable spaces overhead, and hurl all his mighty calculations on cosmic force and stellar fire into

Limbo ? O the pity of it, if such should be the case ! (Ch.5, p.65; emphases added)

The narrator's sympathy here is clearly with Swithin, who is a 'guileless philosopher', and Viviette is obviously the eternal 'femme fatale' -- of Christian myth and classical legend. She is the woman who distracts, who is an impediment, who opposes sensual delight to intellectual pursuit, who traps the innocent man in the web of her female enchantment. The apparently rhetorical question -- 'Would any Circe or Calypso -- and if so, what one ?' -- is answered in the next paragraph but one. Viviette, moved by some strange impulse, takes the scissors and cuts off one of Swithin's fair curls for a keepsake and then precipitately leaves the tower, half-ashamed of her own action. Hardy does not frame this telling episode within the context of myth and classical allusion which run throughout the text. But the reader is strongly reminded of the story of Samson and Delilah<sup>4</sup> and the suggestion is that by this rape of his lock, Swithin has somehow been betrayed, emasculated, castrated and that it is Viviette who ( in a reversal of gender roles ) has taken unfair advantage of him.

As Swithin slowly wakes up to the truth of their relationship (helped, of course, by overhearing the shrewd comments of the rustic chorus ) he is transfigured from being a youth whose eyes shone with 'speculative purity' under the 'ennobling influence of scientific pursuits' (Ch.5, p.65), to being quite an old hand at amorous intrigue. As the narrator points out repeatedly, with an insistence that almost verges on misogyny :

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<sup>4</sup> Apart from the picture of Samson and Delilah that hangs symbolically on the wall of the inn Jude and Arabella visit during their first courting, both Jude and Henchard (towards the end of their careers) are directly referred to as 'shorn' Samson. Elaine Showalter, in 'The Unmanning of the Mayor of Casterbridge', sees Henchard's gradual emasculation in positive terms. Showalter's essay appeared in Dale Kramer ed. Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy (London : Macmillan, 1979), pp.99-115. Marjorie Garson, in Hardy's Fables of Integrity : Woman, Body, Text ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1991), pp.159-60, however explores the more sinister implications of Arabella as a 'castrating woman'.

St Cleeve's sudden sense of new relations with that sweet patroness had taken away in one half-hour his natural ingenuousness. Henceforth he could act a part. (Ch.13, pp.110-11)

The master-passion had already supplanted St Cleeve's natural ingenuousness by subtlety. (Ch.14, p.117)

Scientifically he had become but a dim vapour of himself; the lover had come into him like an armed man, and cast out the student . . . . (Ch.15, p.119)

'Is Lady Constantine at home?' asked Swithin, with a disingenuousness now habitual, yet unknown to him six months before. (Ch.20, p.151)

. . . Swithin's nature was so fresh and ingenuous, notwithstanding that recent affairs had somewhat denaturalized him . . . . (Ch.29, p.196)

This almost overnight passage from 'innocence' to 'experience' is summed up in a most damning narrative comment which makes one wonder where the authorial sympathy really lies :

The alchemy which thus transmuted an abstracted astronomer into an eager lover -- and, must it be said? spoilt a promising young physicist to produce a common-place innamorato -- may be almost described as working its change in one short night. (Ch.14, p.112)

And yet, just a couple of paragraphs earlier, the narrator had, without any apparent trace of irony, spoken sympathetically of Viviette as being 'fervid', 'cordial', 'spontaneous' and 'tender' (Ch.14, p.112).

The misogyny implicit in the narrator is made explicit through a character who does not enter the novel but who significantly affects the lives of the two on the tower. Swithin's estranged uncle -- Jocelyn St Cleeve -- leaves Swithin a handsome legacy on the condition that he does not marry before he is twenty-five (he is then barely twenty) because

rumours of Swithin's involvement with '*a woman*' have already reached his ears. In the remarkably candid letter that he (posthumously) leaves for his nephew, he expresses both his contempt for women in general and his distrust of the particular woman in question. His general advice is :

. . . Swithin St Cleeve, don't make a fool of yourself, as your father did. If your studies are to be worth anything, believe me, they must be carried on without the help of a woman. Avoid her, and every one of the sex, if you mean to achieve any worthy thing. Eschew all of that sort for many a year yet. . . . Women's brains are not formed for assisting at any profound science : they lack the power to see things except in the concrete. She'll blab your most secret plans and theories to every one of her acquaintance<sup>5</sup>. . . . If you attempt to study with a woman, you'll be ruled by her to entertain fancies instead of theories, air-castles instead of intentions, qualms instead of opinions, sickly prepossessions instead of reasoned conclusions. Your wide heaven of study, young man, will soon reduce itself to the miserable narrow expanse of her face, and your myriad of stars to her two trumpery eyes. . . . the woman sits down before each [man] as his destiny, and too frequently enervates his purpose, till he abandons the most promising course ever conceived ! (Ch.18, pp.138-39)

All this is no more than the familiar diatribe against women in literature written by men. But it is all so patently unfair, especially, when we recall that it is Lady Constantine's generous gifts -- of an object-glass for his telescope, of the even more expensive equatorial, and the lease of the tower itself -- which contribute to make Swithin the competent astronomer he finally becomes.

The coercive effect of this collusion between the 'hardened misogynist of seventy-two' (Ch.18, p.140) -- Jocelyn St Cleeve -- and the

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<sup>5</sup> Strangely enough, Viviette too echoes the language of this negative gender stereotyping. When Swithin attempts to explain to Viviette his 'amazing discovery' in connection with 'variable stars', she responds with self-deprecating irony : ' I shall not understand your explanation, and I would rather not know it. I shall reveal it if it is very grand. Women, you know, are not safe depositaries of such valuable secrets ' (Ch.9, pp.85-6).

narrator is that Viviette becomes trapped in their language and she soon begins to see herself as these (unsympathetic) male viewers see her. Narrative commentary, Christian myth, classical allusion all powerfully combine to erect a moral strait-jacket which imprisons Viviette and imposes on her a terrible burden of guilt. Had such a software been available, it would be tempting to feed the entire text of *Two on a Tower* into a computer and filter out all the negative words used to describe and characterize the Viviette - Swithin relationship. But even a random sampling of such pejoratives will, hopefully, establish my point. Jocelyn St Cleeve's letter had been quite explicit :

She is old enough to know that a *liaison* [Hardy's italic] with her may, and almost certainly would, be your *ruin*<sup>6</sup> . . . A woman of honourable feeling, nephew, would be careful to do nothing to *hinder* you in your career. . . . An experienced woman waking a young man's passion just at a moment when he is endeavouring to shine intellectually, is doing little else than committing a *crime*. (Ch.18, p.139)

Swithin, on his part, though far too loyal at this stage directly to point an accusing finger at Viviette, is quite revealing in the argument he uses to persuade Viviette to marry him. Marriage, he says, will put an end to the danger and unease of their clandestine lovers' meetings : 'All this *ruinous idleness* and *distraction* is caused by the misery of our not being able to meet with freedom' (Ch.15, p.120). When Viviette wisely counsels 'Wait till you are famous', she is stumped by the circularity of his logic : 'But I cannot be famous unless I strive, and this *distracting condition* prevents all striving!' (Ch.15, p.121). That there is some justice in Swithin's complaint is recognized by Viviette herself when she tearfully

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<sup>6</sup> The word 'ruin' rings like a solemn refrain throughout the novel. Apart from the instances cited in the main text, other examples are Viviette's tearful cry : 'O Swithin! Swithin! . . . I have *ruined* you ! yes, I have *ruined* you !' (Ch.34, p.225) and Swithin's realization that Viviette faces the cruel choice of 'repairing her own situation as a wife by *ruining* his as a legatee' (Ch.36, p.235). In the next few pages of the main text, for the sake of added emphasis, all such negative words have been printed in italics.



acknowledges to Swithin : 'I am *injuring* you ; who knows that I am not *ruining* your future . . . I am only *wasting* your time. Why have I drawn you off from a grand celestial study to study poor lonely me ?' (Ch.14, p.115).

Viviette's acute sense of self-reproach alternates with moments of rebellion when she is tempted to snatch happiness at whatever cost. This is finely presented by the narrator :

At some instants she felt exultant at the idea of announcing her marriage and defying general opinion. At another her heart misgave her, and she was tormented by a fear lest Swithin should some day accuse her of having *hampered* his deliberately-shaped plan of life by her *intrusive* romanticism. (Ch.32, p.212)

At one end of the pendulum swing of her moods, she feels she would 'perhaps be a nobler woman in not allowing him to *encumber* his bright future by a union with me at all' (Ch.33, p.219). But '[t]aking brighter views, she hoped that upon the whole this *yoking* of the young fellow with her, a portionless woman and his senior, would not greatly *endanger* his career' (Ch.33, p.219). However, Viviette is too intelligent to live in a fool's paradise for long , and the negatives pile up in this (perhaps) most concentrated expression of her self-reproach :

'O, what a *wrong* I am doing you ! I did not dream that it could be as bad as this. I knew I was *wasting* your time by letting you have me, and *hampering* your projects ; but I thought there were compensating advantages. This *wrecking* of your future at my hands I did not contemplate.' (Ch.34, p.226)

The narrator, closely reflecting and recording Viviette's consciousness, tells of her regret at having '*blocked* his attempted career' (Ch.34, p.226); her realization that '*bondage*' with an older woman 'would operate in the future as a *wet blanket* upon his social ambitions' (Ch.35, p.231); her fear that marriage with her would only be '*depriving* him of

the help his uncle had offered' (Ch.35, p.231). The narrator neatly sums up the situation thus :

That she had *wronged* St Cleeve by marrying him -- that she would *wrong* him infinitely more by completing the marriage -- there was, in her opinion, no doubt. She in her experience had sought out him in his inexperience, and had led him like a child. . . . Without her, he had all the world before him, six hundred a year, and leave to cut as straight a road to fame as he should choose : with her, this story was *negatived* . (Ch.35, pp.230-31)

Although a youth of twenty is hardly a 'child', it is surprising to note how often Swithin is conceived of as a 'child'. In fact, the turning point in Viviette's struggle to rise above the possessive nature of her love for Swithin comes when she fondly watches him in church during the ceremony of the 'confirmation'. The scene is best described in the narrator's own words :

How fervidly she watched the Bishop place his hand on her beloved youth's head; how she saw the great episcopal ring glistening in the sun among Swithin's brown curls; how she waited to hear if Dr Helmsdale uttered the form 'this thy child' which he used for the younger ones, or 'this thy servant' which he used for those older; and how, when he said 'this thy *child* ' [Hardy's italic] , she felt a prick of conscience, like a person who had *entrapped* an innocent youth into marriage for her own gratification . . . . (Ch.24, pp.168-69)

Realizing that the future will not exonerate her from having '*deluded* his raw immaturity' (Ch.35, p.233), Viviette self-effacingly releases Swithin : 'I cannot *ruin* you. . . . Take the bequest, and go. You are too young -- to be *fettered* . . . . I have vowed a vow not to further *obstruct* the course you had decided on before you knew me and my *puling* ways . . .' (Ch.36, p.239). Swithin takes her words at face-value and leaves, and Viviette is released from her 'besetting fear' that her 'actions [are] likely to *distract* and *weight* him'. She is, in a way, relieved that she 'no longer

stood in the way of his advancement' (Ch.37, p.241). It is this sentiment that comes through in the final letter that she sends to Swithin, explaining why she is forced to marry the Bishop of Melchester :

The long desire of my heart has been not to *impoverish* you or *mar* your career. The new desire was to save myself and, still more, another yet unborn. . . . I have done a desperate thing . . . . The one bright spot is that it saves you and your endowment . . . I no longer *lie like a log across your path* , which is now as open as on the day before you saw me. . . . (Ch.40, pp.261-2)

Moralists might argue that Viviette's noble self-sacrifice is tainted by her cold inhumanity in duping the 'innocent' Bishop into marriage and passing off Swithin's child as his. But as Hardy was to argue very powerfully and persuasively in Tess , it is not the purity of action but the purity of intention that is most important. Viviette's unselfish wish not to 'lime Swithin's young wings' (Ch.33, p.219) mitigates somewhat our censure of her deception of the Bishop. And the image, looking forward to the 'trapped animal' images in Tess<sup>7</sup> and Jude , anticipates Hardy's critical examination of the marriage bond in his later novels beginning with The Woodlanders . Had Viviette not released Swithin to pursue his scientific career, he might well have exclaimed with Jude (after the disillusion of his first marriage with Arabella) : 'He was inclined to inquire what he had done, or she lost, for that matter, that he deserved to be *caught in a gin* which would *cripple* him, if not her also, for the rest of a lifetime ?' <sup>8</sup>

Hardy probably realized that it was at this crucial point in the narrative that he ran the risk of losing the reader's sympathy for his heroine. By the light of conventional morality, or even inter-personal

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<sup>7</sup> See Philip Mahone Griffith, 'The Image of the Trapped Animal in Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles', Tulane Studies in English , 13 (1963), pp.85-94.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure , New Wessex Edition, introd. Terry Eagleton ( London : Macmillan, 1975), Part I : Ch.9, p.85 ( *my italics* ).

honesty,<sup>9</sup> Viviette's action would be hard to defend. So Hardy the artist has recourse to a deft sleight-of-hand. Like Tess's rape/seduction, her hanging, Alec's murder, Eustacia's drowning (suicide?), the triple hangings of the children in *Jude* -- and one could keep expanding this list -- Viviette's marriage to the Bishop occurs off-stage and is brought home to Swithin's consciousness by a newspaper report. Perhaps this is one useful lesson that Hardy learnt from his private study of Greek tragedy : that anything unpleasant must occur off-stage and only be reported by a messenger. In the meanwhile, the 'whirligig of time' really races very fast and nearly five years in the narrative -- covering Viviette's marriage, the birth of her son, and her husband's death -- are slurred over in just four or five pages. The narrative telescope (figuratively speaking) which had swung away from England and faced the southern hemisphere with Swithin's departure for the Cape, now swings back to focus on England with Swithin's return to his native village.

Hardy now makes every attempt to recover the lost ground of the reader's sympathy for Viviette. He chooses the local parson, Mr Torkingham, to be Viviette's indirect advocate. Torkingham enlightens both Swithin and the reader about the brief conjugal life of Viviette and the Bishop :

' His poor wife, I fear, had not a great deal more happiness with him than with her first husband. But one might almost have foreseen it. . . . But the Bishop's widow is not the Lady Constantine of former days. No; put it as you will, she is not the same. There seems to be a nameless something on her mind -- a trouble -- a rooted melancholy, which no man's ministry can reach. '<sup>10</sup> (Ch.41, p.268)

<sup>9</sup> In Nov 1906, Hardy was to write to Millicent Fawcett of his belief that 'the father of a woman's child' is not 'anybody's business but the woman's own'. See Purdy and Millgate eds. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 3 : 1902 - 1908, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1982), p.238. But whether Hardy held such radical views as early as 1882 is not known.

<sup>10</sup> This is just one of the many self-conscious Shakespearean echoes scattered throughout Hardy's novels. We are of course meant to recall the famous words of Macbeth to the doctor, regarding Lady Macbeth's somnambulism -- 'Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd, /

This is by no means the first time that Hardy has used a marginal character to throw light on Lady Constantine's plight as a wife. Side by side with the narrative commentary that sets up Lady Constantine as the Eve/Circe/Calypso figure of the novel, there runs a parallel discourse of the woman as deserted wife, as poor victim of a brutal husband, as a creature trapped by matrimony in an unfeeling patriarchal society and an equally inhumane and rigid Mosaic code. There is a very significant moment when Lady Constantine enters the local church and her incipient love for Swithin wrestles with her sense of guilt as a married woman :

The rays from the organist's candle illuminated but one small fragment of the chancel outside the precincts of the instrument, and that was the portion of the eastern wall whereon the ten commandments were inscribed. The gilt letters shone sternly into Lady Constantine's eyes; and she, being as impressionable as a turtle-dove, watched a certain one of those commandments on the second table, till its thunder broke her spirit with blank contrition.<sup>11</sup>

She knelt down, and did her utmost to eradicate those impulses towards St Cleeve which were inconsistent with her position as the wife of an absent man, though not unnatural in her as his victim . (Ch.11, p.97; emphasis added)

Sir Blount Constantine -- 'a notoriously unkind husband' (Ch.33, p.218) -- never features directly in the novel but we hear enough about him and his cruel treatment of his wife to blot out any sympathy that we may be prompted to feel for him. Viviette's near fainting fit when she suddenly beholds Swithin draped in Sir Blount's fur great-coat (Swithin

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Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow ?' ( Macbeth , V : iii, 40-41) -- as the 'Notes' to the New Wessex Edition rightly point out (p.291).

<sup>11</sup> This episode reminds us powerfully of Tess and her encounter with the itinerant Biblical sign-painter ( and his half-painted seventh commandment on the wall ), when she is 'maiden no more'. And again, ironically, it is while Jude and Sue are actually working on the relettering of the Ten Commandments that wagging tongues hound them out of home and employment. In an article 'Candour in English Fiction' that Hardy contributed to New Review in Jan 1890, he stated that the 'crash of broken commandments is as necessary an accompaniment to the catastrophe of a tragedy as the noise of drum and cymbals to a triumphal march'. The article can be found in Harold Orel ed. Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings : Prefaces, Literary Opinions, Reminiscences (London : Macmillan, 1967), p.129.

had unthinkingly adopted this disguise to escape unnoticed from Welland Hall after one of their clandestine nocturnal meetings ), speaks volumes for the abject terror with which Viviette regarded her first husband, Sir Blount. Also, giving the lie to the general (male) conception that it is women's gossip that tears a woman's reputation to shreds, the young Tabitha Lark and the aged Mrs Martin discuss Lady Constantine quite sympathetically at the beginning of the novel. Tabitha, who goes to read aloud to Viviette and keep her company, describes the unhappy deserted Lady Constantine thus : 'Eaten out with listlessness. She's neither sick nor sorry, but how dull and dreary she is, only herself can tell ' (Ch.2, p.43). Mrs Martin -- Swithin's grandmother -- responds with : 'Ah, poor soul ! . . . No doubt she says in the morning , "Would God it were evening", and in the evening , "Would God it were morning" . . .' (p.43). Sammy Blore, a member of the rustic choir, too concedes that 'the woman's heart-strings is tried in many aggravating ways' (p.43), and Mrs Martin again condoles : 'Ah, poor woman ! . . . The state she finds herself in -- neither maid, wife, nor widow -- is not the primest form of life for keeping in good spirits ' (p.43).

In the course of the narrative we learn that Sir Blount has wrested from Lady Constantine a promise, prior to his departure for African lion-hunting , that she will not go out in society but shut herself up like a nun in her house. But his jealousy and doubt of his wife does not prevent him from knowingly committing bigamy by marrying a native princess in Africa.<sup>12</sup> This is perhaps an early suggestion of Hardy's protest against the

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<sup>12</sup> By contrast, Viviette unwittingly commits bigamy when she runs away and secretly marries Swithin in church, at Bath. Viviette had been earlier informed by the local parson of the news of Sir Blount's death in Africa. Sir Blount's debts had been paid off, his Welland estate swallowed up in annuities to distant relatives, and the greatly impoverished Viviette had sincerely believed herself to be a widow. Much later, it is discovered that although Sir Blount is really dead, his death actually occurred not in the previous October ( according to the first misleading report ), but only in December, so that he was alive for six weeks after Viviette's runaway marriage with Swithin. This technical

double standards of sexual morality which he was to explore more fully and polemically in *Tess*. Meanwhile, Lady Constantine has not heard from her husband for over two years and when he ultimately dies, he leaves her in severe financial straits. Sympathy for her financial and emotional impoverishment is voiced through yet another (male) member of the rustic chorus :

‘ ‘Tis all swallowed up’, observed Hezzy Biles. ‘His goings-on made her miserable till ‘a died, and if I were the woman I’d have my randys now. He ought to have bequeathed to her our young gent, Mr St Cleeve, as some sort of amends. I’d up and marry en, if I were she; since her downfall has brought ‘em quite near together, and made him as good as she in rank, as he was afore in bone and breeding.’ (Ch.13, p.107)

Thus, subterranean sympathy for Viviette the ill-used, deserted wife runs parallel to the more overt narrative censure of Viviette the seductive mistress. In the final, short-lived reunion between Viviette and Swithin at the end of the novel, narrative compassion bursts to the surface and there can surely be no doubt as to where authorial sympathy lies. Swithin meets Viviette at the top of the tower and to all appearances it looks as if he and the widowed Viviette can carry on their romance from the point where they had left off -- as Bathsheba and Gabriel or Cytherea and Edward had been able to do before them. But in the world of Hardy’s tragic novels, the man for loving and the moment for loving do not synchronize. Swithin is so shocked by what he sees -- Time’s ravages on Viviette’s beauty -- that he involuntarily recoils in horror.

This scene has a powerful tragic resonance that may best be explained by a complex welter of poignant memory, remorse, yearning and guilt on the part of the author himself. Despite Hardy’s strenuous denials of elements of autobiography in his novels, and his irritation with

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invalidation of their marriage is yet another instance of ‘life’s little ironies’ in Hardy’s stories.

contemporary critics and thesis-writers who sought to read his life into his works, this meeting between the faded Viviette and the still youthful Swithin may probably owe something to Hardy's subsequent meeting with Julia Augusta Martin -- the local lady of the manor who taught 'Tommy' his alphabets and for whom the young Hardy long retained a boy's romantic infatuation.<sup>13</sup> She was probably the original inspiration behind his recurrent 'poor man and the lady' plot pattern,<sup>14</sup> and Hardy's meeting with Mrs Martin, years later in London, is best described by Hardy himself in his disguised autobiography :

During the first few months of Hardy's life in London he had not forgotten to pay a call on the lady of his earliest passion as a child, who had been so tender towards him in those days, and had used to take him in her arms. She and her husband were now living in Bruton Street. The butler who opened the door . . . looked little altered. But the lady of his dreams -- alas! To her, too, the meeting must have been no less painful than pleasant : she was plainly embarrassed at having in her presence a young man of over twenty-one, who was very much of a handful in comparison with the rosy-cheeked, innocent little boy she had almost expected 'Tommy' to remain. One interview was not quite sufficient to wear off the stiffness resulting from such changed conditions, though, warming up, she asked him to come again. But getting immersed in London life he did not respond to her

<sup>13</sup> Quite a few Hardy scholars have drawn attention to this real-life situation as reflected in the novel. See Evelyn Hardy, *Thomas Hardy : A Critical Biography* (London : Hogarth Press, 1954), pp.188-89 ; Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy : A Biography* (Oxford : Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), pp.47-48 ; Richard H. Taylor, *The Neglected Hardy : Thomas Hardy's Lesser Novels* (London : Macmillan, 1982), pp.140-41 ; John Bayley, 'The Love Story in *Two on a Tower*', in Norman Page ed. *Thomas Hardy Annual* , No. 1, (London : Macmillan, 1982), pp.67-68 ; F.B. Pinion in his 'Introduction' to the New Wessex Edition of *Two on a Tower* , p.20.

<sup>14</sup> In a purely literary ( as opposed to autobiographical ) context, Joan Grundy has argued persuasively that *Two on a Tower* may owe something to Hardy's reading of Webster ; see her 'Two on a Tower' and *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The Thomas Hardy Journal* , 5 : 2 (1989), pp.55-60. In the opposite direction, J.R. Ebbatson in 'Thomas Hardy and Lady Chatterley', *Ariel* , 8 : 2 (1977), pp.85-95, speculates that Hardy's Lady Constantine could well be the inspiration behind Lawrence's Lady Constance Chatterley.



invitation, showing that the fickleness was his alone. But they occasionally corresponded, as will be seen.<sup>15</sup>

As in his novels, so also in real life, Hardy could not resist focusing on missed opportunities, and speculating on 'what - might - have - been' :

Among the curious consequences of the popularity of Far from the Madding Crowd was a letter from the lady he had so admired as a child, when she was the grand dame of the parish in which he was born. He had seen her only once since -- at her town-house in Bruton Street as aforesaid. But it should be stated in justice to her that her writing was not merely a rekindled interest on account of his book's popularity, for she had written to him in his obscurity, before he had published a line, asking him to come and see her, and addressing him as her dear Tommy, as when he was a small boy, apologizing for doing so on the ground that she could not help it. She was now quite an elderly lady, but by signing her letter 'Julia Augusta' she revived throbs of tender feeling in him, and brought back to his memory the thrilling 'frou - frou' of her four grey silk flounces when she had used to bend over him, and when they brushed against the font as she entered church on Sundays. He replied, but, as it appears, did not go to see her. Thus though their eyes never met again after his call on her in London, nor their lips from the time when she had held him in her arms, who can say that both occurrences might not have been in the order of things, if he had developed their acquaintance earlier, now that she was in her widowhood, with nothing to hinder her mind from rolling back upon her past.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Hardy, The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy, ed. Michael Millgate (London : Macmillan, 1984 ; rpt. 1989), p.43. Millgate's edition restores the passages excised from the text, as Hardy originally wrote it, by the 'Grundyism' of his second wife, Florence Emily Hardy, over whose name the book was first published by Macmillan ( as a widow's biography ), in two volumes, in 1928 and 1930.

<sup>16</sup> Millgate ed. Life and Work of Thomas Hardy, pp.104-5 ; see also F.E. Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy : 1840 - 1891 (London : Macmillan, 1928), p.134. A comparison of Millgate's and F.E. Hardy's versions of this paragraph ( see also Millgate's section on the 'Selected Post-Hardy Revisions', p.507) shows that Florence Hardy deleted the long last sentence in the paragraph quoted ( beginning ' Thus though their eyes never met again . . . ' and ending ' . . . her mind from rolling back upon her past.' ). Florence Hardy probably felt that Hardy was being too indiscreet, but it is just such candid confessions that open up a whole new world of meaning and significance to the modern reader.

In the world of the novels, Swithin's rejection of Viviette, though less deliberate, is just as cruel as Knight's rejection of Elfride or Angel's rejection of Tess. Stripped of its erotic content, it can also be compared to Elizabeth-Jane's rejection of Henchard ( when he returns with his wedding gift of a caged goldfinch ) because all these rejections reveal an essential lack of 'loving-kindness' -- the highest Hardyian virtue. Having initially turned his back on Viviette, Swithin is immediately remorseful as he realizes that :

. . . all her conduct had been dictated by the purest benevolence to him, by that charity which 'seeketh not her own'. Hence he did not flinch from a wish to deal with loving-kindness towards her -- a sentiment perhaps in the long-run more to be prized than lover's love.<sup>17</sup> (Ch.41, p.274)

This is not Hardy's belated attempt to whitewash the character of his heroine, by drawing attention to her unselfish transcendence of self-interest. Throughout the narrative, the sincerity of Viviette's love -- that strange compound of 'maternal', 'sisterly' and 'amorous' feeling (Ch.7, p.73) -- is never questioned. When Viviette ultimately takes the brave decision to separate from Swithin, the narrator unequivocally explains her motives :

Nothing can express what it cost Lady Constantine to marshal her arguments ; but she did it, and vanquished self-comfort by a sense of the general expediency. It may unhesitatingly be affirmed that the only ignoble reason which might have dictated such a step was non-existent ; that is to say, a serious decline in her affection. Tenderly she had loved the youth at first, and tenderly she loved him now, as time and her after-conduct proved.<sup>18</sup> (Ch.35, p.234)

<sup>17</sup> We are reminded of the narrator's suggestion, in the final paragraph of the penultimate chapter of *Far From the Madding Crowd*, that 'good-fellowship' or '*camaraderie*' is more permanent as a basis for love than mere 'evanescent' sexual passion.

<sup>18</sup> A similar 'poor man and the lady' motif runs through the first half of 'The Spectre of the Real', a short story that Hardy co-authored with Mrs Florence Henniker. In this story, Rosalys and Jim make a secret runaway marriage but they soon tire of each other and, embittered, they decide on a mutual separation. The narrator makes it quite clear that their love had been based largely on sexual attraction so that when the novelty of 'sensuous'

Thus when Swithin, after his initial involuntary revulsion from her, turns back to claim her as his wife, Viviette utters 'a shriek of amazed joy', falls into his arms and dies : 'Sudden joy after despair had touched an over-strained heart too smartly' (Ch.41, p.275). Surely it is unnecessary to enter a debate on the medical plausibility of such a death ; what is more important here is the literary/poetic context that lends it both inevitability and credibility. In a novel that has called attention to its Shakespearean echoes,<sup>19</sup> the description of Viviette's death surely recalls Edgar's description of the death of Gloucester in *King Lear* :

. . . but his flaw'd heart,  
Alack, too weak the conflict to support !  
'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,  
Burst smilingly. (V : iii, 195-98)

And Lear's heart too bursts with sudden joy, after grief, when he mistakenly believes that life still stirs in the dead Cordelia.<sup>20</sup> He dies with the words :

Do you see this ? Look on her, look, her lips,  
Look there, look there ! (V : iii, 309-10)

Not surprisingly, Viviette's sudden death has disconcerted quite a few readers. Richard Taylor, for instance, sees it as a 'final melodramatic *coup de theatre*', and for him 'Viviette's death is poetical but too unexpected and too unnatural to be genuinely moving . . .'.<sup>21</sup> Pearl

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charms wears off, there is nothing left to hold the pair together. This is emphatically not the case in the Viviette - Swithin relationship.

'The Spectre of the Real' is now available in Pamela Dalziel's edition of Thomas Hardy's *The Excluded and Collaborative Stories* ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> For example, the narrator's words ' . . . Time had at last brought about his revenges' (Ch.41, p.273) are an echo of *Twelfth Night*, V : i, 386 , as Pinion points out in the 'Notes' to the New Wessex Edition (p.292). See also footnote 10 of chapter IV of the present thesis.

<sup>20</sup> This interpretation ( Bradley's ) is, of course, just one among the many plausible conjectures on the cause of Lear's death.

<sup>21</sup> Richard H. Taylor, *The Neglected Hardy* , p.136.

Hochstadt accuses Hardy of flagrantly 'rigging his plot',<sup>22</sup> while Mary Childers insidiously suggests that the ending :

. . . may seem grotesquely contrived and motivated only by the need for a climactic ending that resolves the fate of the characters. But its representation of Swithin's guilt and provision for his freedom through the death of Viviette is significantly typical of Hardy's work.<sup>23</sup>

The narrator's reaction to Viviette's death is extremely ambivalent. The final words of the novel read : 'Viviette was dead. The Bishop was avenged' (Ch.41, p.275). How are we to interpret these words ? On the ironic level, they probably anticipate the narrator's sarcastic fling at 'Justice' and 'the President of the Immortals' in the more famous ending of Tess . On the more literal level, it reflects a narrator ( and author ?) trapped within a conventional patriarchal morality where for women at least the 'wages of sin' is, inevitably, death (Ruth, Hetty and Tess all ultimately die). For, in a sense, Viviette is a 'fallen' woman because, despite Hardy's claim in his (1895) Preface that 'there is hardly a single caress in the book outside legal matrimony' (p.29), Viviette's child is conceived when she is fully aware that her marriage with Swithin is legally invalid. This is something that Hardy went out of his way to emphasize in subsequent editions of the novel so that there is no scope for awarding Viviette the benefit of the doubt. Thus, within the narrow code of retributive justice, Viviette's death is a well deserved punishment for her 'fall' and also her deliberate deception of the Bishop because, as Hochstadt claims, 'the book's concluding sentence manages to suggest that the early death of that

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<sup>22</sup> Pearl R. Hochstadt, 'Hardy's Romantic Diptych : A Reading of A Laodicean and Two on a Tower', English Literature in Transition, 1880 - 1920 , 26 : 1 (1983), p.30. Subsequent page references to Hochstadt are incorporated into the text.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Margaret Childers, The Habit of Misogyny (Ph.D. thesis : State Univ. of New York at Buffalo, 1981), p.137. Subsequent page references to Childers are incorporated into the text.

deluded worthy [i.e. the Bishop] is not unrelated to his distress at being presented with a seven-months child' (p.29).<sup>24</sup>

While there is not much textual evidence to support this reading, there is no escaping the multiple ambiguities of the novel's ending. On the one hand, we have the unmistakable sympathy of the narrative gloss ( on Swithin's initial revulsion from Viviette ) : ' "O Woman," might a prophet have said to her, "great is thy faith if thou believest a junior lover's love will last five years !" ' (Ch.41, p.274). Anyone familiar with the various disguises adopted by the Hardy narrator ( the 'an - observer - might - have - seen' or 'a - passerby - may - have - noticed' formula ) will immediately recognize that in this expression of compassion for Viviette, the author/ narrator/ prophet is one composite and unitary being. Thus, in Rosemary Sumner's opinion, the 'impressiveness of her [i.e. Viviette's] struggle is partly due to the success and sympathy with which Hardy has created her as a passionately emotional woman'.<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, Mary Childers finds an 'atmosphere of sexual panic' (p.120) pervading this novel which, like The Mayor of Casterbridge , The Return of the Native and Jude the Obscure , seems to illustrate the theme of the 'ruin of good men by bad wives' (p.117). The novel reveals 'the desire to protect a man from a woman' (p.124) and its 'events express a wish for the liberation of the young man' (p.128). As the unsuspecting Bishop Helmsdale says of Swithin : 'It would be a matter of regret . . . if he should follow his father in forming an attachment that would be a hindrance to him in any honourable career . . . ' (Ch.25, p.174). Fear of women and the narratorial animus against 'the sex' also clearly surface in

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<sup>24</sup> Bishop Helmsdale's death may or may not be causally related to the untimely birth of Viviette's child and his doubts about its paternity. But in 'The Spectre of the Real', Lord Parkhurst's suicide is in all probability caused by his discovery of his wife Rosalys's past history. The narrative 'silence' leaves the reader conjecturing whether Rosalys impulsively did a 'Tess'-act of wedding-night confession.

<sup>25</sup> Rosemary Sumner, 'The Experimental and the Absurd in Two on a Tower', in Norman Page ed. Thomas Hardy Annual , No. 1, (1982), p.80.

that totally gratuitous gibe at Tabitha's expense at the end of the novel. Tabitha has blossomed into womanhood and has become a successful musician, playing at concerts and oratorios. She has, the narrator mockingly says, 'in short, joined the phalanx of Wonderful Women who had resolved to eclipse the masculine genius altogether, and humiliate the brutal sex to the dust' (Ch.41, p.270).

Tabitha, 'the single bright spot' in the horizon, is the 'more natural mate' for the young Swithin and the novel ends with a hint of a future union between Tabitha and Swithin which foreshadows Hardy's use of the sop ending in *Tess* by hinting at a possible Angel - 'Liza-Lu union'.<sup>26</sup> In a letter that Hardy wrote to Florence Henniker in 1920, he tantalizingly suggested :

History does not record whether Swithin married Tabitha or not. Perhaps when Lady C. [sic] was dead he grew passionately attached to her again, as people often do. I suppose the bishop did find out the secret. Or perhaps he did not.<sup>27</sup>

Hardy, who canonized his first wife Emma after her death through his poetical outpourings of grief and guilt, certainly knew all about how death renders a woman doubly well-beloved -- because irretrievably lost.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See Taylor, *Neglected Hardy* , pp.144-45.

<sup>27</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 6 : 1920 - 1925, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1987), pp.44-5.

<sup>28</sup> However, this is not an experience unique to men as quite a few Hardy women similarly sublimate their dead lovers who had either remained inaccessible or been rejected in life. Thus Marty South in *The Woodlanders* canonizes Giles Winterborne through her weekly floral offerings at his grave ; and Milly in 'The Marchioness of Stonehenge' succumbs to the temptation of becoming 'a corpse's bride', thus 'secur[ing] in death him whom in life she had vainly idolized'. In 'Barbara of the House of Grebe', Barbara literally worships the statue of her dead first husband in her secret nightly rituals of 'silent ecstasy' and 'reserved beatification'. Again, in 'The First Countess of Wessex', the Mrs Dornell who had plotted to outwit and thwart her husband's plans makes a strange volte-face after his death when she suddenly discovers his 'many virtues' and makes 'a creed of his merest whim'.

## Chapter V

### The Woodlanders

The Woodlanders (1887) is the quintessential Hardy story with its typical country - city conflict in the patterning of the characters and their inter-relationships. With the neat symmetry that critics have come to associate with Hardy's stone-mason's geometry, Marty South is seen as representing rural innocence, Felice Charmond the lure of the city, while Grace Melbury is precariously poised between her native rural moorings and the veneer of acquired urban sophistication. But this traditional interpretation needs to be re-examined for the simple reason that the categorization is too neat to go unchallenged.

One of the most haunting impressions left by a first reading of this novel is the poignant portrait of that lonely and devoted woodland girl, Marty South. No reader can be left untouched by the description of her patient endurance, her dogged faithfulness, and her silent love that literally persists beyond the grave. Appropriately enough, the chorus of praise sung in her honour, by both contemporary and modern critics, is rather deafening. The anonymous reviewer in Athenaeum hailed Marty as 'the really heroic woman, in her way the sweetest figure that Mr Hardy has ever drawn. . . .'<sup>1</sup> Duffin echoes this when he debates whether Marty has not the stronger claim to being called the 'heroine' of the book because, in her 'plain, unpolished steadfastness', she is 'a figure of far greater beauty and interest' (than Grace) and it is 'a great loss to literature that Hardy did not make her the subject of a full-length study'.<sup>2</sup> In his elaborate chart classifying Hardy's female characters, Guerard places Marty alongside Tess

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<sup>1</sup> Unsigned review, Athenaeum, 26 March 1887, rpt. in R.G. Cox ed. Thomas Hardy : The Critical Heritage (New York : Barnes & Noble, 1970), p.142, and also in Graham Clarke ed. Thomas Hardy : Critical Assessments, Vol. I, (East Sussex : Helm Information, 1993), p.151.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Charles Duffin, Thomas Hardy : A Study of the Wessex Novels, The Poems, and The Dynasts (Manchester : the University Press, 1916; 3rd rev. ed. 1937), pp.232-33.

as the 'Two Pure Women' in Hardy's fiction and he regrets that the 'solid worth and fidelity' of this 'unselfish child of the soil' goes largely unappreciated.<sup>3</sup> More recently, Michael Millgate likens Marty to Elizabeth-Jane and sees Marty as 'a kind of moral touchstone of her world';<sup>4</sup> David Lodge apotheosizes her as 'the personification of selfless, unostentatious heroism';<sup>5</sup> Patricia Stubbs sees in her a symbolic figure of 'the eternally faithful maiden who stands always by the tomb of the dead knight';<sup>6</sup> Douglas Brown sentimentally calls her 'the most moving' of Hardy's characters, one 'who incarnates the finest part of country attitudes'.<sup>7</sup> But a critical re-reading of the text makes it quite obvious that there are certain embarrassed silences, certain unanswered questions which gloss over those aspects of her personality which will not bear close scrutiny. Hardy tries his utmost to build her up as an asexual, almost disembodied creature, with no human desires or frailties, but the text simply does not bear out such an interpretation.

We first meet Marty in the second chapter of the novel where, in order to support a long ailing parent, she has to stay up all night and finish her tedious work despite weary eyes and blistered fingers. At this moment of unrelieved poverty, the Mephistophelean intruder -- the barber Percomb -- tempts her with a very lucrative offer if only she will part with some of her luxuriant curls. But Marty stubbornly refuses to comply because she shrewdly guesses that her transplanted locks will go to

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<sup>3</sup> Albert J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy : The Novels and Stories ( London : Geoffrey Cumberlege and OUP, 1949), p.142.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Millgate, Thomas Hardy : His Career as a Novelist (London : The Bodley Head, 1971), p.256.

<sup>5</sup> David Lodge, 'Introduction' to Thomas Hardy's The Woodlanders, New Wessex Edition (London : Macmillan, 1975), p.17. All subsequent references to the novel are to this 1975 (hardback) edition, and page and chapter numbers have been parenthetically included in the text.

<sup>6</sup> Patricia Stubbs, Women and Fiction : Feminism and the Novel, 1880 - 1920 (Sussex : Harvester Press, 1979; rpt. London : Methuen, 1981), p.86.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas Brown, 'Transience Intimated in Dramatic Forms', in R.P. Draper ed. Thomas Hardy : Three Pastoral Novels. A Casebook (London : Macmillan, 1987), p.158.



enhance the charms of Mrs Charmond, whose reputation as a trifler has already reached even a 'sequestered spot' like Little Hintock. 'I value my looks too much to spoil 'em', she declares with justifiable pride and the barber has to return empty-handed, but not before his triumphant rejoinder -- '*you've got a lover yourself* , and that's why you won't let it go!' -- leaves her blushing (Ch. 2, p.46 ; Hardy's italics).

In the next chapter, while transporting her bundle of finished spars from her cottage to her employer's shed, in the small hours of the night, she unwittingly overhears a conversation between Mr Melbury and his second wife regarding the marital prospects of his only daughter, Grace. Being an over-fond and anxious parent, Melbury is worried about Giles Winterborne's poverty but his wife reassures him with the homely wisdom that 'Love will make up for his want of money. He adores the very ground she walks on' (Ch.3, p.50). At this point, there is a very interesting parenthetical insertion by Hardy : '(Marty South started, and could not tear herself away.)'. What is important to note here is that Marty is not taken aback when she hears of this projected alliance between Giles and Grace, but the news that Giles 'adores' Grace hits her like a thunderbolt. Finally, she withdraws to her cottage retreat with words of pained resignation : 'That, then, is the secret of it all . . . I had half thought so. And Giles Winterborne is not for me !' (Ch.3, p.52). This is immediately followed by her 'mercilessly cutting off the long locks of her hair' and the motivation is surely too transparent to require any comment.

Successive re-readings of the novel raise certain awkward questions regarding Marty's role in the Giles - Grace relationship, questions which Hardy not only does not care to answer, but questions which he does not even dare to raise lest the sweet idyllic portrait should be cruelly shattered. For instance, what really prompts Marty to write those cruelly prophetic words :

'O Giles, you've lost your dwelling-place,

And therefore, Giles, you'll lose your Grace.' (Ch.15, p.135)

on the wall of Giles's humble dwelling at a time when the sudden reversal of fortune has made the social gap between Giles and Grace suddenly seem all the more unbridgeable ? Although Grace timidly changes the word 'lose' to 'keep', the significance is lost on Giles for the simple reason that -- in keeping with the predominant role assigned to missed chances in most Hardy novels -- Giles never happens to cast a second glance and notice the favourably altered version. Weighed down by the sad truth of that crude couplet, Giles sits down to write a formal letter to Mr Melbury withdrawing his claim on Grace and cancelling the tacit engagement between them.

This is quite blatantly an instance of Hardy sacrificing character to the requirements of the plot. The plot requires a misunderstanding between Giles and Grace, followed by estrangement, and Hardy assigns to Marty the villain's role. Marty has just buried her only parent barely a couple of weeks ago and, as a struggling orphan, she surely has enough worries about keeping body and soul together,<sup>8</sup> to intrude uninvited into the emotional tangles of other people. Or is it that she has not given up hope altogether and is angling for Giles herself ? It appears as if she is prompted by petty female jealousy against a more powerful and favoured rival and thinks that everything is fair in the war of love. Marty apparently knows Giles's weak point -- his delicate sense of honour -- and through the warning she scratches on the wall she is probably trying to open Giles's

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<sup>8</sup> Apart from being forced to sell her hair, does Marty also sell her father's body to Fitzpiers for his anatomical investigations ? Fitzpiers tempts Grammer Oliver to enter into a contract to sell her brain and probably he uses his seductive arts on Marty too because in Chapter 18 Fitzpiers shows Grace a 'fragment of old John South's brain' (p.156) under the microscope lens. Grace's 'wonder as to how it should have got there' is shared by the reader because this remains an unexplained mystery in the novel. Surprisingly, this incident has attracted little critical attention ; and unless we are to add grave-digging to Fitzpiers's many other crimes, the only plausible explanation is that he pressurized Marty into selling John South's brain.

eyes to the fact of the social disparity between him and Grace. Giles is far too honourable to persist in his wooing of his childhood sweetheart once he realizes that their marriage will drag her down socially and financially. He would rather willingly sacrifice his long-cherished dreams of marital happiness with Grace than bring censure down on her beloved head by any selfish act on his part. And Marty probably hopes that although she may not gain Giles's love of his own free choice, she might yet win him over by default.

Hardy does not ever state all this directly ; indeed, he is strangely reluctant to subject Marty's motives to close critical scrutiny. This may partly be explained by the suggestion made by one of his biographers that Marty ( like Elizabeth-Jane ) was probably modelled on Hardy's much-loved sister, Mary.<sup>9</sup> Possibly, too, Marty's dumb devotion to Giles draws on Mary Hardy's silent, life-long devotion to the memory of Horace Moule -- the friend and mentor whose tragic death (suicide) left a deep impression on Thomas Hardy. But the reader, lacking such personal and emotional reasons, is more sceptical. At the end of the chapter, when Giles taxes her about her motive in writing those words, Marty tersely replies : 'Because it was the truth' (Ch.15, p.136). But who has appointed her the sole custodian of Truth in affairs that are surely not her concern ?

If this appears to be an act of unwarranted cruelty -- in ruthlessly demolishing the romanticized picture of loyal and suffering womanhood -- then one has only to go farther into the text and take up an episode in the latter half of the novel where she again plays a questionable role vis-a-vis the Giles - Grace relationship. With Fitzpiers increasingly playing truant from his lawful wife, Grace, and defecting to Mrs Charmond with her superior allurements, Marty -- like most of the other Hintock folk -- is

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Gittings, *The Older Hardy* (London : Heinemann Educational, 1978), pp.45 & 155-56.

apprehensive about the final outcome. There is the distinct possibility that Fitzpiers's callous neglect of his wife will wean Grace's heart away from him and relight the as yet unextinguished embers of her first childhood love for Giles. To forestall this possible re-attachment between Grace and Giles, Marty again acts as the self-appointed custodian of morality by handing a letter to Fitzpiers to the effect that Mrs Charmond is no better than a crow decked out in borrowed plumes. That this letter is of crucial importance in the mechanism of the plot is obvious from the fact that it has far-reaching consequences : it occasions a serious rupture between Fitzpiers and Mrs Charmond, leads to Fitzpiers's repentant return to English shores and his wife, and culminates in Giles's heroic self-sacrifice which of course paves the way for a patched-up reunion between Grace and Fitzpiers.

What really prompts Marty to write this momentous letter ? Is it pure disinterested Christian / sisterly love which makes her attempt to repair Grace's ruined home and heart ? Or is this yet another instance of Marty's 'playful malice' (Ch.5, p.66) ? In the words of the narrator, although she is 'so young and inexperienced', she sees the 'danger to two hearts, naturally honest, in Grace being thrown back into Winterborne's society by the neglect of her husband' (Ch.33, pp.253-4). But the experienced woman of the world, Mrs Charmond, ( and the cynical reader ) suspects otherwise. Helped by Marty's blushes and stammer, Mrs Charmond shrewdly divines that her idle amour with Grace's husband is indirectly 'involving the wreck of poor Marty's hopes' (Ch.33, p.254). That she is not far from the truth is implied by the narrator in an earlier episode where Marty, rather unwillingly, has to act as a go-between during the superstitious midnight rites on Midsummer Eve. Much against her personal inclinations, but at the request of Grammer Oliver, the onus of contriving an accidental meeting between Grace and Giles rests on her. The narrator's comment on

her predicament is very revealing : 'Poor Marty, always doomed to sacrifice desire to obligation . . .' (Ch.20, p.170).

Similarly, the narrator's comments on Marty's motives for writing that letter to Fitzpiers hint at something that is never fully explored. That letter was 'poor Marty's only card, and she played it' (Ch.33, p.261), (incidentally, 'poor' is the epithet that the narrator invariably uses when speaking of Marty ) ; and the writing of the letter is not an impulsive gesture, but 'her long contemplated apple of discord' (Ch.34, p.264). This is not to suggest, even for a moment, that Marty is consciously playing the hypocrite ; rather, both Marty and her creator are strangely reluctant to probe beneath the surface motives and light up the shadowy world of subconscious desires. Later, when Fitzpiers personally thanks her for that letter which facilitated his release from Mrs Charmond, the narrator says : 'Marty was shy, indeed, of speaking about the letter and her motives in writing it' (Ch.44, p.343). Perhaps the darker springs of her motivation are really hidden from her ; but, as critical readers, we cannot afford to be so innocent and so naively blind.

That an unacknowledged rivalry in love accounts for many of Marty's actions is made clear in that encounter where Grace and Marty stand facing each other at the foot of the bed on which the long-suffering Giles has just breathed his last. In the distraction of grief, Grace murmurs : 'He died for me !' Being emotionally disturbed herself, Marty fails to comprehend the true import of these words. Not realizing the sense of guilt that prompted Grace's remark, Marty replies with a touch of bitterness :

'He belongs to neither of us now, and your beauty is no more powerful with him than my plainness. I have come to help you, ma'am. He never cared for me, and he cared much for you ; but he cares for us both alike now.' (Ch.43, pp.333-4)

Then both women kneel beside the bed and pray for his soul and later they form a mutual pact about going to his grave together, to lay flowers in his memory, as they had 'both loved him'. A sadder but wiser Grace generously remarks to Marty : 'He ought to have married *you* , Marty, and nobody else in the world !' ( Ch.44, p.341; Hardy's italic ). This idea has just been mooted by Hardy himself in an authorial commentary :

Marty South alone, of all the women in Hintock and the world, had approximated to Winterborne's level of intelligent intercourse with Nature. In that respect she had formed his true complement in the other sex, had lived as his counterpart, had subjoined her thoughts to his as a corollary. (Ch.44, p.340)

For eight months after Giles's death, both Grace and Marty religiously keep up the practice of laying flowers at his grave every week. When finally Grace is won over by Fitzpiers -- through the brilliant but sensational device of the man-trap -- Marty waits for her in vain and finally goes alone to the churchyard to fulfil her sacred duty to the dead. The words she whispers while tending the grave are unconsciously self-revelatory :

'Now, my own, own love , . . . you are mine, and only mine ;  
for she has forgot 'ee at last, although for her you died ! . . .  
But no, no, my love, I never can forget 'ee . . . ' (Ch.48, p.375)

The accents here are unmistakable as, probably for the first time, Marty addresses the departed Giles openly as her 'love'. Giles had never given her a moment's thought when alive, at least not as a possible sweetheart ; but now that he lies cold in his grave, and his Grace has returned to the lawful embrace of Fitzpiers, Marty feels that she can claim him as her very own, without any social or moral impropriety. In death, Giles has become hers as he never was when alive.

Most critics have eulogized this final elegy with which the novel comes to an impressive close. There has hardly been a major dissenting

voice<sup>10</sup> because, admittedly, this lyric lament is very touching. We are moved by Marty's obvious sincerity and her tragic isolation. But even while recognizing and acknowledging the beauty of this requiem for the dead, we cannot be totally deaf to the undertones of possessiveness and rivalry in love in the 'If - ever - I - forget - your - name' formula.<sup>11</sup> Hardy (deliberately?) glosses over this aspect by presenting an almost etherealized picture of Marty as a creature quite removed from earthly desires :

As this solitary and silent girl stood there in the moonlight, a straight slim figure, clothed in a plaitless gown, the contours of womanhood so undeveloped as to be scarcely perceptible in her, the marks of poverty and toil effaced by the misty hour, she touched sublimity at points, and looked almost like a being who had rejected with indifference the attribute of sex for the loftier quality of abstract humanism. (Ch.48, p.375; emphases added)

This is not the first time that the narrator has spoken thus. Earlier, in the scene where Giles accosts Marty for scribbling those cruel words on his wall, the narrator describes her as 'a slim figure in meagre black, almost without womanly contours as yet' (Ch.15, p.136). But what about womanly jealousies ? A couple of pages earlier, while describing Marty reposing in dignity beside the body of her father (awaiting burial), the narrator tenderly calls her 'a guileless soul that had nothing more left on earth to lose, except a life which she did not over-value' (Ch.15, p.133). But surely a guileless

<sup>10</sup> Daniel R. Schwarz represents a minority voice when he says : 'The scene where Marty stands over Giles's grave has perverse, even necrophiliac overtones. There is a touch of fanatical madness in the final words of this "solitary and silent girl". . . . She finds her fulfilment in the death of her beloved when she can apotheosise him as her patron saint and finally possess him.' See Schwarz's essay 'Beginnings and Endings in Hardy's Major Fiction', in Dale Kramer ed. Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy (London : Macmillan, 1979), p.29.

<sup>11</sup> In this novel with its typically Hardyan plot ( where Marty loves Giles - who loves Grace - who loves Fitzpiers - who loves Felice ), the text itself highlights and emphasizes the parallels implicit in the shifting choreography of lovers' alliances. Thus Marty's graveside 'If - ever - I - forget - your - name' lament echoes, in a way, the narrative summing up of Giles's bitter regret at the loss of Grace. Isolated by her marriage to Fitzpiers, Grace looks down from the 'Earl of Wessex' hotel window to see Giles toiling in the yard, and Giles's feelings at this poignant meeting are expressed by the narrator through a quotation of Edmund Gosse's poem with its haunting 'If I forget' refrain (Ch.25, pp.199-200).

soul, under such recent bereavement, would not have stooped to the gratuitous heartlessness of etching that couplet on the wall ! Thus, despite Hardy's intention of refining her into a creature of pure air and fire, she comes alive as a normal human being of flesh and blood, with all the natural hopes, desires and weaknesses that flesh is heir to. The problem with judging the character of Marty is that she is a half-drawn sketch and although, with our post-Freudian hindsight, we can easily divine her possible motives, Hardy declines his omniscient authorial privilege of delving deeper into her consciousness. The problem is aggravated by a sense of sadness, tinged with a sense of betrayal, at having to dethrone a universally beloved character.

In traditional analyses of this novel, Marty and Mrs Charmond fit very neatly into the Lily - Rose dichotomy so dear to Victorian novelists. No major critic has a kind word to spare for the unfortunate Felice. Commenting on the 'essential falsity' of her relationship with Fitzpiers, Merryn Williams says : 'Her interests are as futile as her emotions, and these are both artificial and shortlived.'<sup>12</sup> David Lodge dismisses her as a 'slightly shop-soiled visitant from the *beau-monde*.'<sup>13</sup> Patricia Stubbs, though finally recognizing Felice's 'victim' status, begins by calling her an 'emotional vampire'.<sup>14</sup> Mary Jacobus rather surprisingly describes Felice as being 'at once Fitzpiers's "loadstar" and the "fiery sepulchre" which consumes the moth.'<sup>15</sup> This is quite the reverse of the truth because it is ultimately Felice who is self-destroyed, while Fitzpiers is the survivor who regains an estranged wife and a promising professional practice. Thus, to treat Marty as the unsullied Lily and Felice Charmond as the fatally

<sup>12</sup> Merryn Williams, 'A Post-Darwinian Viewpoint of Nature', in R.P. Draper ed. Thomas Hardy : Three Pastoral Novels , p.173.

<sup>13</sup> David Lodge, 'Introduction' to The Woodlanders , New Wessex Edition, p.16.

<sup>14</sup> Patricia Stubbs, Women and Fiction , p.76.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Jacobus, 'Tree and Machine : The Woodlanders', in Dale Kramer ed. Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy , pp.125-6.



seductive Rose would be an over-simplification. Although Felice is responsible for much of the tragedy in this novel where 'hearts are ill affin'd',<sup>16</sup> she is not a creature as dark as hell, any more than Marty is as white as the driven snow. Through very subtle touches, the character of Mrs Charmond is humanized till she becomes more a victim caught in the toils of her own passionate nature, than the conventional seductress without either conscience or compassion.

We first hear of Mrs Charmond, and her coquettish ways, when the barber comes to Little Hintock to persuade Marty to sell locks of her luxuriant hair. With an arrogance born of wealth and social position, Mrs Charmond thinks that she can buy all the good and valuable things of life. No longer in her prime, she is vain enough to want to heighten her attractions with the help of borrowed glory. She wears her false hair deliberately to ensnare the hearts of susceptible young men ( like Dr Fitzpiers ) in a way that makes her not much superior to the coarse Arabella who uses the same artifice to entrap the young Jude. Mrs Charmond, with her languid idleness, her frustration at the uneventful tedium of rural life, and her frantic desire to escape to the excitement of the Continent, reminds us strongly of Eustacia Vye and we are apprehensive that this volatile woman will ultimately destroy both herself and those who come into contact with her.

Apart from being a heartless charmer (the narrator broadly hints that she had married the late Mr Charmond more for money than for love), she is also a heartless ( and rootless ) landowner, often wantonly reducing her tenants to homeless destitutes. Already inflamed against Giles because of his uncompromising behaviour during that Oedipus-like

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<sup>16</sup> This is the second line of the quatrain which serves as epigraph to The Woodlanders. Hardy wrote to Florence Henniker : 'I have been looking for a motto for the title page of the "Woodlrs" [sic] & not being able to find one, composed it' (letter dated 12 August, 1895). See Purdy and Millgate eds. Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 2, (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1980), p.85.

encounter of vehicles, she takes her revenge by refusing to renew his leases on the houses held on the system of 'lifehold'. As a result, when John South dies, Giles is forced to leave the house that has been his family's for generations and ultimately all these cottages are callously pulled down. Such an introduction to the character of Mrs Charmond is hardly calculated to win the reader's sympathy, but the scales begin to turn about half-way through the novel.

The scene where Mrs Charmond and Fitzpiers encounter each other for the first time in the novel -- ostensibly as patient and doctor -- is richly ambivalent. Mrs Charmond has just suffered a minor accident and she summons the young doctor to attend her. The vision that greets Fitzpiers's eyes is described by the narrator with a fine touch of satire :

... by the light of the shaded lamp he saw a woman of elegant figure reclining upon a couch in such a position as not to disturb a pile of magnificent hair on the crown of her head. A deep purple dressing-gown formed an admirable foil to the peculiarly rich brown of her hair-plaits ; her left arm, which was naked nearly up to the shoulder, was thrown upwards, and between the fingers of her right hand she held a cigarette, while she idly breathed from her delicately curled lips a thin stream of smoke towards the ceiling. (Ch.26, pp.207-8)

Surely this is no patient, but a practised courtesan, a seductress, a vamp -- call her what you will -- complete to the last detail : a cigarette in hand. Every word, every gesture is rehearsed and every look calculated to entice. We are left cold by all this scheming and artifice but, mid-way through the interview, a note of sincerity creeps in as Mrs Charmond nostalgically recalls their first youthful encounter.

That this first meeting has left a deep imprint on Mrs Charmond's romantic imagination is obvious from the fact that she has recognized in Dr Fitzpiers the young impecunious student to whom she had once lost her girlish heart. Fitzpiers's memory is not so fresh and needs to be goaded;

neither is his regret at this early missed opportunity as keen and lasting as hers appears to be. He dismisses the experience as 'the merest bud . . . a colossal passion in embryo. It never matured' (Ch.26, p.210). We are left speculating as to the probable course of events had this bud been left to flower in peace. Had this early romantic attachment not been frustrated, perhaps Felice Charmond would have grown to be a very different person altogether. Surely it is not fair to human nature to argue backwards ( from our knowledge of her present character ) and say that even in those innocent girlhood days she had not been in love with Fitzpiers, but in love with the concept of being in love.

As her renewed intimacy with Fitzpiers proceeds, it gradually turns out to be more than the idle recreation that it was probably initially meant to be. She even comes to regret having refused Giles a renewal of his house-leases because this has indirectly 'foredoomed [her] revived girlhood's romance' (Ch.27, p.219). As she sinks uncontrollably into this abyss of infatuation, her better self struggles to assert itself. She is not completely without conscience and does not wantonly seek to destroy Grace's home and happiness by stealing her husband. This is proved by her hasty flight to Middleton -- on the pretext of visiting an invalid relative -- because she has no confidence in her ability to resist Fitzpiers if she stays on at Hintock. When she weakly confesses this to Fitzpiers later, the only emotion he experiences is the triumph of conquest, the thrill of knowing that ' the heart which others bled for, bleed[s] for me' (Ch.29, p.233). The relationship had begun with Mrs Charmond toying with Fitzpiers ; now, by a complete tragic reversal, it is Fitzpiers who has mastered the proud beauty of yester-year. She, who had once 'smiled where she has not loved, and loved where she has not married' ( Giles's comment in Ch.31, p.246), is now completely enslaved to the whims of this thoughtless philanderer.

This truth is recognized even by Grace, the wronged wife. In that memorable encounter in the woods, where the two women confront each other, lose their bearings in the maze of trees, cling to each other for moral and emotional support, and finally part with an almost conciliatory kiss,<sup>17</sup> Grace sizes up the real situation :

‘I thought till now that you had only been cruelly flirting with my husband to amuse your idle moments -- a rich lady with a poor professional gentleman whom in her heart she despised . . . But I guess from your manner that you love him desperately ; and I don’t hate you as I did before . . . since it is not sport in your case at all but *real* -- O, I do pity you, more than I despise you ! For *you* will suffer most !’ (Ch.33, p.255 ; Hardy’s italics)

Mrs Charmond’s pride prevents her from acknowledging the truth of this comment and she loudly protests her indifference. But Grace is not to be deceived by assumed appearances and she goes on :

‘. . . I have called him a foolish man -- the plaything of a finished coquette. I thought that what was getting to be a tragedy to me was a comedy to you. But now I see that tragedy lies on your side of the situation no less than on mine, and more ; that if I have felt trouble at my position you have felt anguish at yours ; that if I have had disappointments you have had despairs. Philosophy may fortify *me* -- God help *you* !’ (Ch.33, p.256 ; Hardy’s italics)

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<sup>17</sup> It is quite unnecessary to see in this scene ‘a muted echo of the extraordinary “lesbian” episode in *Desperate Remedies*’ ( Millgate, *Hardy : His Career as a Novelist* , p.249). Rather, this scene -- as also the ‘ “French” farce’ of the ‘Wives all’ scene -- can be taken as a positive instance of ‘spontaneous physical supportiveness’ ( Penny Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women : Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form* , Sussex : Harvester Press, 1982, p.109). Patricia Stubbs too sees in this sympathetic ‘alliance’ between Felice and Grace ‘. . . a challenge to the social gulf between “good” and “bad” women, “innocent” and “guilty” which had divided women from each other for so long’ ( *Women and Fiction* , p.78). Despite ‘some sexual ambiguity’, Judith Bryant Wittenberg also sees in all such ‘examples of friendship between women’ (e.g. Miss Aldclyffe and Cytherea Graye; Paula Power and Charlotte de Stancy; Felice Charmond and Grace Melbury) ‘an instance of supportive female bonding’ (‘Thomas Hardy’s First Novel : Women and the Quest for Autonomy’, *Colby Library Quarterly* , 18 : 1 , 1982, pp.49-50).

Interestingly enough, the conciliatory kiss does not feature in the original MS of the novel and it was a later addition on the printer’s copy for the 1912 Wessex Edition. See Dale Kramer ed. *The Woodlanders* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1981), p.229n.

That Felice experiences moments of self-reproach is evident from that brief encounter with Marty which immediately precedes this crucial interview with Grace. Marty's uneasiness and embarrassment at the mention of Giles Winterborne's name tell her the hidden story that Marty is too tongue-tied to utter. Mrs Charmond is appalled : 'the picture thus exhibited to her of lives drifting awry, involving the wreck of poor Marty's hopes, prompted her yet further in those generous resolves which Melbury's remonstrances had stimulated' (Ch.33, p.254). The reference here is to an earlier interview between Mrs Charmond and Mr Melbury, in which the anxious father had called on the lady of the manor, and 'appeal[ed] to her in the name of [their] common womanhood' (Ch.30, p.239), in a desperate bid to salvage his daughter's marriage.<sup>18</sup> In fighting for his daughter's marital happiness, Mr Melbury does not mince matters and Mrs Charmond is understandably indignant at first. To be lectured, on such a delicate matter, by a man so much her social inferior, cannot have been a pleasant experience. Predictably, she tries to assume the accents of injured innocence but her consciousness of guilt soon reduces her to bitter tears. In this change of heart, what is significant is that 'the allusion to Grace's former love for her seemed to touch her more than all Melbury's other arguments' (Ch.32, p.250). Thus, she is certainly not the heartless

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<sup>18</sup> Hardy's novels offer a rich source of intertextuality. This interview between Mr Melbury and Mrs Charmond, for instance, recalls the interview between Diggory Venn and Eustacia Vye, on a similar issue, in *The Return of the Native*. Both men, in their well-meaning but crude and blundering fashion, are determined to fight for the domestic happiness of their loved ones whose husbands are being led astray by these two socially superior ladies. Both men arrive too early, in their eagerness for the interview, while the ladies are still idling in bed ; both are forced to wait for a considerable time before the ladies condescend to put in an appearance, and both men use their bluntness to good purpose. Although Mr Melbury dogs Fitzpiers's steps almost as fanatically as Diggory stalks Wildeve, once even making an unauthorized entry into Hintock House, Mr Melbury has been spared the charge of 'voyeurism' levelled by modern critics against Diggory Venn. Among recent critics, Marjorie Garson grudgingly concedes : 'Venn is placed in a paternal relation to Thomasin, in so far as he continues to try to do what a father would certainly have tried to do had he been alive : compel Wildeve to marry her and then protect her from the consequences of her husband's adulterous affair' ( *Hardy's Fables of Integrity : Woman, Body, Text* , Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1991, p.58).

seductress that most critics have taken her to be. In fact, her helplessness is suggested by the narrator's comment :

A fascination had led her on ; it was as if she had been seized by a hand of velvet ; and this was where she found herself -- overshadowed with sudden night, as if a tornado had passed. (Ch.32, p.251)

Mrs Charmond does try 'her best to escape her passionate bondage' to Fitzpiers but finds that the 'struggle was too wearying, too hopeless, while she remained' (Ch.36, pp.278-79). Conscientiously struggling against her 'infatuation', she makes two determined bids to escape Hintock and thus allow physical distance to cool her ardour. On the pretext of a relative's illness, she goes away to Middleton Abbey but her attempt is foiled because Fitzpiers repeatedly pursues her even there. Later, moved by Melbury's remonstrances, she again determines to escape to the Continent because her mind is genuinely troubled by all the unhappiness that her liaison is generating for Grace, Marty and Giles. As an anonymous woodlander puts it :

'She's been all as if her mind were low for some days past -- with a sort of fret in her face, as if she chid her own soul. She's the wrong sort of woman for Hintock . . . But I don't care who the man is, she's been a very kind friend to me.' (Ch. 34, p.263)

In the original MS this speech, overheard by Fitzpiers, was radically different. In the MS, the unknown speaker reports that Mrs Charmond's decision to go to the Continent is the result of a threat from her anonymous South Carolinian lover ( now in the suicidal, rather than the homicidal, stage of his infatuation ) to blow out his own brains if she fails to accompany him abroad.<sup>19</sup> By drastically revising this speech, Hardy changed Mrs Charmond's purely external motivation to an agonizingly

<sup>19</sup> Folio 333 of the MS of *The Woodlanders* which is preserved as a bound volume in the 'Thomas Hardy Memorial Collection' at the Dorset County Museum, Dorchester. I am grateful to the Curator of the Dorset County Museum, Mr Richard de Peyer, for granting me access to the MS.

internal one. The words 'as if she chid her own soul' suggest a tortured self-reproach that should go a long way in demolishing the image of Felice Charmond as a mere heartless coquette.

In fact, Mrs Charmond is in the very act of packing some of her personal belongings, for her proposed Continental trip, when her pious resolution of severing all links with Grace's husband fades as a blood-soaked Fitzpiers, crawling on all fours for over a mile, taps on her window at midnight because it is the only sanctuary that he knows. (The drunken Fitzpiers has just been felled from horseback by his indignant father-in-law and so a return to the Melbury roof is out of the question). With eyes blinded by tears, Felice does all she can to ease his pain and she ministers to all his needs with 'passionate solicitude'. She supports him up a narrow staircase, hides him in the lumber room, hauls out a bed for him to rest, fetches food and water for his nourishment and finally washes the blood from his face and hands. All this selfless service wins from the narrator the tribute : 'While he ate her eyes lingered anxiously on his face, following its every movement with such lovingkindness as only a fond woman can show' (Ch.36, p.281). No serious reader of Hardy can be unaware of the emotional value that Hardy attached to this Biblical word : 'lovingkindness'. To Hardy, it is the highest human virtue and it is very significant that he uses it in this scene of extra-marital love. What makes this loaded word doubly significant is that in the MS, the sentence had originally read : ' . . . with such solicitude as only a woman can show'.<sup>20</sup> 'Solicitude' lacks the Biblical overtones of 'lovingkindness', and the revision (along with the addition of the word 'fond') helps to lift Felice's passion for Fitzpiers from mere sexual appetite to something infinitely nobler.

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<sup>20</sup> Folio 357 of the MS of The Woodlanders , now in the Dorset County Museum.

Interestingly enough, in the scene which is an obverse mirror image of this one -- i.e. Grace ministering to the dying Giles in One-Chimney Hut -- the situational parallel is strengthened by a verbal echo that readers would fail to pick up from the printed text as it exists today. When Grace bathes Giles's hot head, moistens his feverish lips, sponges his heated body, the narrator says : 'All that a tender nurse could do Grace did ; and the power to express her *solicitude* in action, unconscious though the sufferer was, brought her mournful satisfaction' (Ch.42, p.325 ; my italic). Here, the word 'solicitude' which connects Grace with Felice ( in the MS ) remains unchanged, and Grace's tending of Giles is not described as an act of 'lovingkindness'. That the revising hand was ultimately sympathetic to Felice Charmond can perhaps be inferred from another textual revision in the MS. At Hintock House, when finally an exhausted Felice sponges the blood-stained railing with a trembling hand, the narrator rhapsodizes : 'What will not women do on such devoted occasions ?' (Ch.36, p.282). In the MS, this sentence had originally read : 'What will not women do on such desperate occasions ?'<sup>21</sup> On second thoughts, Hardy struck out 'desperate' and replaced it by 'devoted'. The substitution of just this single adjective radically transforms the tone of the rhetorical question, and the transferred epithet 'devoted' signals, quite unequivocally, Hardy's final judgement on the character of Felice. The reader too is invited to take a generous view of Felice Charmond, a woman in whom 'there beat[s] a heart capable of quick, extempore warmth' (Ch.5, p.70), who is 'not bad by calculation' (Ch.30, p.240) as even Mr Melbury readily concedes, and one in whose 'life' and 'love' -- the narrator solemnly assures us -- 'there was nothing . . . to be ashamed of, and many things of which she might have been proud . . .' (Ch.27, p.215).

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, folio 359.



At the end of the novel, when Fitzpiers picks up a quarrel with Mrs Charmond, over a trifle ( her false locks of hair ) and abandons her, our sympathy for this 'devoted' woman is stirred even though she is not the deserted wife ( like Grace ) but only the discarded mistress. When we are told that she met her death while travelling in search of Fitzpiers, in the vain hope of effecting a reconciliation, the tide of compassion for her sweeps aside moral fences regarding the legality ( or otherwise ) of the relationship. Our pity for her is reinforced by the delicate hint -- Victorian prudery did not allow Hardy to be more explicit -- that Felice Charmond was pregnant at the time when Fitzpiers so callously abandoned her. In this novel where Hardy takes an honest and unflinching look at the Marriage Question, he does not fall into the conventional trap of glibly equating 'virtue' with 'wife' and 'vice' with 'mistress' (as Penny Boumelha has rightly recognized ).<sup>22</sup>

Hardy's concern to show how genuine emotion can transcend socially and morally accepted boundaries is illustrated also in the peripheral character of Suke Damson. On Fitzpiers's side, she is just a country girl of vitality who adds the necessary touch of spice to his jaded appetite. But for Suke, the initial tumble in the hay has led to a deeper involvement which is quite evident from her tearful reaction to the news of Fitzpiers's accident. The wildly exaggerated rumours about Fitzpiers's fall from his horse impel both Suke and Felice ( who even forgets the discretion necessary to her social station ) to rush to Grace's house to ascertain the nature and extent of the danger. Despite her initial sarcasm -- 'Wives all, let's enter together !'<sup>23</sup> -- Grace does not allow her wifely jealousy to blind her to the genuine emotion of these two women and a

<sup>22</sup> Penny Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women* , p.108.

<sup>23</sup> This cutting phrase does not appear either in the original MS or in the English three-volume first edition of March 1887. It makes its appearance in the Osgood McIlvaine edition of 1896. See Dale Kramer ed. *The Woodlanders* (1981), p.242n.

'tenderness spread[s] over Grace like a dew' (Ch.35, p.275). The narrator's comment on the piquant situation is very candid :

In their [ i.e. Felice and Suke's ] gestures and faces there were anxieties, affection, agony of heart -- all for a man who had wronged them -- had never really behaved towards either of them anyhow but selfishly. Neither one but would have well-nigh sacrificed half her life to him, even now. The tears which his possible critical situation could not bring to her [i.e. Grace's] eyes surged over at the contemplation of these fellow-women whose relations with him were as close as her own without its conventionality. (Ch.35, p.275)

Although Hardy initially thought of naming this novel 'Fitzpiers at Hintock',<sup>24</sup> and although the first 'woodlander' of any importance to whom we are introduced is Marty South, the pivot of this story where 'hearts are ill affin'd' is neither the male intruder nor the female native. Fitzpiers's disruptive value is too great to be ignored and undeniably the book really begins and ends with the solitary figure of Marty South. Nevertheless, it is Grace Melbury -- the quintessential returned native like Fancy Day ( Under the Greenwood Tree ) and Clym Yeobright ( The Return of the Native ) before her -- who is at the still centre of this storm of mismatched and tragic loves. As David Lodge astutely recognizes :

Grace Melbury is, of course, the catalyst in the situation. Without her, we may speculate, Fitzpiers might have married his old flame Felice Charmond, and Marty's love for Giles might have been requited.<sup>25</sup>

The tragedy in Grace's life is that she attracts, and dithers between, two men -- Giles Winterborne and Edred Fitzpiers -- who represent the two antipodal social hemispheres that come into conflict within her own personality. This conflict is nowhere better expressed than in the scene

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<sup>24</sup> For the English serial version, Hardy offered Macmillan two alternative titles : 'Fitzpiers at Hintock' and 'The Woodlanders'. Both Frederick Macmillan and his editor, Mowbray Morris, found 'The Woodlanders' more attractive as a title. See Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders ed. Dale Kramer (1981), p.7.

<sup>25</sup> David Lodge, 'Introduction' to The Woodlanders , New Wessex Edition, pp. 17-18.

describing the homely entertainment to which Giles has invited the Melbury family and some of his neighbours. Intended to bring the young couple together, this ill-starred Christmas party, with its sequence of domestic mishaps, ironically widens the social gulf between Grace and Giles. Grace is uneasily conscious of the crude homeliness of it all and when the bandsmen strike up the old favourite melodies, the narrator says: 'Grace had been away from home so long, and was so drilled in new dances, that she had forgotten the old figures, and hence did not join in the movement' (Ch.10, p.104). This is only to be expected of a born woodland girl whose city breeding has rendered her incapable of distinguishing between 'bitter-sweet' and 'John-apple' trees.

Apart from that one episode where Grace shows an independent will and timidly changes 'lose' to 'keep' in the couplet inscribed on the wall by Marty, there seems to be an element of passivity in Grace. She acquiesces in her father's ambition for a socially advantageous marriage and does not even try to actively counter the strange fascination that Fitzpiers casts over her. She blows hot and cold towards Giles with a perversity which cynics would describe as being typically feminine. When Giles is relatively prosperous, she is not sensitive enough to hide her feeling of social superiority ; conversely, when Giles is reduced to poverty, the narrator describes her sentiments thus :

And yet at that very moment the impracticability to which poor Winterborne's suit had been reduced was touching Grace's heart to a warmer sentiment in his behalf than she had felt for years concerning him. (Ch.15, p.131)

Such are the strangely unpredictable and perverse ways of the feminine heart, misogynists might exclaim !

Yet, to do her justice, the docile Grace's emotional confusion is worse confounded by her father who keeps alternating between his dream

of a socially creditable marriage<sup>26</sup> and his long-cherished pious resolution of joining Grace and Giles in matrimony, as a reparation for the wrong he had done to Giles's father in stealing his beloved. This makes him encourage Giles and Fitzpiers by turns although he very shrewdly guesses that : ' . . . somewhere in the bottom of her heart there pulsed an old simple indigenous feeling favourable to Giles, though it had become overlaid with implanted tastes ' (Ch.11, p.109 ; emphases added ). Later, troubled by her husband's obvious infidelity, Grace too passionately regrets her fancy education which has left her neither crow nor peacock :

' . . . I wish I worked in the woods like Marty South ! I hate genteel life . . . . Because cultivation has only brought me inconveniences and troubles . . . . If I had stayed at home I should have married -- ' (Ch.30, p.240)

The tearful, broken sentence speaks volumes, especially since Grace has just made an 'appalling' discovery. She has courageously 'looked into her heart, and found that her early interest in Giles Winterborne had become revitalized . . . ' (Ch.30, p.238).

While acknowledging that he liked The Woodlanders best as a story, Hardy expressed his misgivings about Grace. If we can credit the testimony of Rebekah Owen, Hardy is supposed to have conveyed to her that :

Grace never interested him much ; he was provoked with her all along. If she would have done a really self-abandoned, impassioned thing ( gone off with Giles ), he could have

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<sup>26</sup> Grace is as much a victim of her father's social ambition as Tess is a victim of her father's dream of recovering the family's lost aristocratic glory. Grace is made 'uneasy at being the social hope of the family' (Ch.12, p.114) and she 'wishes that she was not his [i.e. Mr Melbury's] worldly hope' (Ch.12, p.116) just as Tess has misgivings about her family's ambition that she marry a 'gentleman'. Also, Grace's bitter awareness that among the rich autumnal fruit harvest 'some kernels were unsound as her own situation, and she wondered if there were one world in the universe where the fruit has no worm' (Ch.28, p.224) anticipates Tess's more famous cynical equation of the world with 'blighted' apples.

If Grace foreshadows Tess, she also recalls Ethelberta in being suspended 'in mid-air between two storeys of society' (Ch.30, p.235). Mr Melbury's assurance to Grace that she can drive past him without acknowledging their kinship, once she has risen socially through marriage, recalls several similar speeches by Sol and Dan, Ethelberta's two proud and independent workmen brothers, who insist on meeting as strangers in public in order to spare Ethelberta possible social disgrace. Also, when Ethelberta dines at Doncastle's house she is forced to pretend that the butler (her father) is a complete stranger to her.

made a fine tragic ending to the book, but she was too commonplace and straitlaced, and he could not make her.<sup>27</sup>

While we certainly appreciate Hardy's respect for the autonomy of character,<sup>28</sup> we doubt if Grace could have seized the initiative, given the moral strait-jacket which society imposes on her. She certainly gives all the encouragement necessary to motivate an average lover and cannot be held responsible for the fact that Giles is a laggard in love. On Midsummer Eve, for example, Giles -- with his characteristic apathy and defeatism -- disdains to reach out a restraining hand when Fitzpiers boldly steps forward and snatches Grace from under his very nose. After this symbolic usurpation, it is only a matter of time before Fitzpiers and Grace are declared man and wife.

Placing Grace in the tradition of 'Hardy' women, an early reviewer astutely remarked : 'There is a little of Bathsheba Everdene in Grace Melbury -- enough to make her marry the man of her fancy and not of her heart.'<sup>29</sup> But while Bathsheba had a providential escape from both Troy and Boldwood, and could finally settle down with Gabriel Oak, Grace is left with no other option but to return to a seemingly repentant Fitzpiers after Giles ( rather selfishly? ) courts death. Perceiving in Grace a rudimentary conflict between 'flesh' and 'spirit', Ian Gregor comments that 'she

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted by Carl J. Weber, 'Hardy and *The Woodlanders*', *The Review of English Studies*, 15 : 59 (1939), p.332. See also Carl J. Weber, *Hardy and the Lady from Madison Square* (Waterville, Maine : Colby College Press, 1952), pp.89-90.

<sup>28</sup> Grace's recalcitrance and Hardy's acknowledgement of his failure to manipulate her are echoed in John Fowles's novel with its abundance of Hardy epigraphs. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (London : Jonathan Cape, 1969; rpt.1970), Fowles wittily confesses his helplessness through a self-conscious authorial intrusion :

It is only when our characters and events begin to disobey us that they begin to live. When Charles left Sarah on her cliff-edge, I ordered him to walk straight back to Lyme Regis. But he did not ; he gratuitously turned and went down to the Dairy.

... I can only report -- and I am the most reliable witness -- that the idea seemed to me to come clearly from Charles, not myself. It is not only that he has begun to gain an autonomy ; I must respect it, and disrespect all my quasi-divine plans for him, if I wish him to be real. (Ch.13, p.98)

<sup>29</sup> William Wallace, *Academy*, 9 April 1887. Quoted in R.G. Cox ed. *Thomas Hardy : The Critical Heritage*, p.154, and also in Graham Clarke ed. *Thomas Hardy : Critical Assessments*, Vol. I, p.163.

provides Hardy with an opportunity to do a first sketch for Sue Bridehead.<sup>30</sup> Apart from the very obvious fact that both Sue and Grace -- like most Hardy women -- vacillate between two contrasted male figures, other similarities are not hard to discover. Impelled by her 'Daphnean instinct' (Ch.40, p.310), Grace may not have quite jumped out of her bedroom window like Sue, but her departure at the news of Fitzpiers's arrival ( as the repentant husband ) is no less precipitate. Grace's prudish concern for social propriety which pushes the ailing Giles to his martyrdom is later recalled in the minor episode where Sue tantalizingly keeps the young Oxford student at arm's length, thus indirectly contributing to his death. Also, Grace's tame return to Fitzpiers is tragically echoed in Sue's humiliating final surrender to Phillotson. But the parallel cannot be pressed any further because, intrinsically, these two women belong to two opposite ends of the spectrum. There is a gulf of difference between Sue's morbid shrinking from physical contact and that part of Grace's nature which successive revisions of the text could only obliquely hint at.<sup>31</sup>

The narrator describes Grace as 'a woman who, herself, had more of Artemis than of Aphrodite in her constitution' (Ch.42, p.325). This is a truly baffling comment because under her seemingly docile surface, wild passions are smouldering. Although they belong to opposite sides of the marital fence, Grace is really more kin to Felice than is commonly realized. This is brilliantly suggested in that encounter in the woods where Grace, on accidentally confronting Mrs Charmond, 'stood like a wild animal on

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<sup>30</sup> Ian Gregor, *The Great Web : The Form of Hardy's Major Fiction* ( London : Faber and Faber, 1974), p.156.

<sup>31</sup> Dale Kramer's excellent critical edition of *The Woodlanders* (1981) offers an elaborate discussion of the revisions that Hardy constantly made for the serial, volume, English and American versions of the novel. According to Kramer, these revisions 'suggest Hardy's continuing concern that Grace be recognized as a sexual being. . .' (p.45). 'Grace's sexual interest in Fitzpiers is projected in all versions of the novel' and her 'reason for reaccepting Fitzpiers [is] sexual desire' (p.46).

first confronting a mirror . . .' (Ch.33, p.254).<sup>32</sup> Mirrors are essentially self-reflecting, and this interview represents 'like meeting like' -- Mr Melbury's shrewd comment on an earlier Grace-Felice meeting (Ch.12, p.115). Both these women are susceptible to the 'fascination' of the 'coercive, irresistible Fitzpiers'. In their first meeting, Grace experiences an 'indescribable thrill' (Ch.18, p.151) when her eyes first meet Fitzpiers's, as reflected in the mirror, and later Grace is powerless to 'terminate the interview' because of 'the compelling power of Fitzpiers's atmosphere' (Ch.18, p.155). The narrator's assessment of the Fitzpiers-Grace relationship is quite revealing : ' . . . Fitzpiers acted upon her like a dram, exciting her' (Ch.22, p.181) ; he exercised a 'strange influence . . . upon her whenever he came near her', but it was 'an excitement which was not love' ( Ch.23, p.184 ) ; the 'intoxication' that he produced lasted only during the brief period of physical proximity. This is as explicit as Hardy dared to be, without having the reviewers reaching for his throat. But what the Grundyites prevented Hardy from saying is rather crudely and openly stated by the uninhibited Mr Melbury. When his daughter returns to her truant husband, Melbury accepts it with a shrug : 'Well -- he's her husband . . . and let her take him back to her bed if she will !' (Ch.48, p.372).

Even in her relationship with Giles, it is her 'agonizing seductiveness' (Ch.39, p.303) that prompts Giles's first -- and last -- passionate embrace and kiss. 'Then why don't you do what you want to ?' (p.303) Grace archly asks, and Giles is just human enough not to be able to resist this open invitation. Earlier, it is her 'abandonment to the seductive hour' and the 'passionate desire for primitive life' as reflected in her face (Ch.28, p.226) that lead to Giles absent-mindedly caressing the flower that

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<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of Hardy's recurrent use of 'windows' and 'mirrors' as framing and distorting devices in the narrative, see William B. Thesing, ' "The Question of Matrimonial Divergence" : Distorting Mirrors and Windows in Hardy's The Woodlanders, The Thomas Hardy Year Book , no.14 (1987), pp.44-52.

she wears in her bosom. Even in the early days of their 'childhood' affection, 'her mouth was somewhat more ready to receive a kiss from his than was his to bestow one' (Ch.25, p.197). Towards the end, when she realizes the enormity of Giles's sacrifice, she repeatedly calls out to him to enter the hut. There is something more than common humanity or Christian charity in her final italicized appeal : '*Come to me, dearest ! I don't mind what they say or what they think of us any more*' (Ch.41, p.321).<sup>33</sup> This impression is strengthened by the wild, remorseful kisses that she bestows on the dying Giles and the 'thrill of pride' with which she triumphantly tells her husband that he may draw 'the extremest inference' from their living together in the hut (Ch.43, p.332).

That the Felice-Fitzpiers and the Grace-Giles relationships are basically not very different is suggested by the question Fitzpiers puts to Grace on the death of Giles : 'Would it startle you to hear . . . that she who was to me what he was to you is dead also ?' (Ch.43, p.332). That these two relationships run parallel is dimly recognized by Giles too. Much earlier, when Grace had reacted rather sharply to his absent-mindedly stroking the flower on her dress, he had lamely muttered his defence : 'It would not have occurred to me if I had not seen something like it done elsewhere -- at Middleton lately' (Ch.28, p.226). This strange parallelism is nowhere more powerfully suggested than in the scene where Grace nurses the dying Giles. The scene is almost a mirror image of the previous one where Felice had devotedly nursed the injured Fitzpiers and no alert reader can miss the resemblance. Just in case (s)he does, Hardy is anxious to drive home the point through the consciousness of Fitzpiers. On entering the hut, Fitzpiers is :

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<sup>33</sup> Grace's explicit '*Come to me, dearest !*' was added as late as 1912. For variant readings of Grace's appeal, in successive stages of the novel from MS to the 1912 Wessex Edition, see Dale Kramer ed. *The Woodlanders* (1981), p.287n.



. . . arrested by the spectacle, not so much in its intrinsic character . . . but in its character as the counterpart of one that had had its run many months before, in which he had figured as the patient, and the woman had been Felice Charmond. (Ch.43, p.330)

A few pages earlier, in an authorial intrusion, Hardy had significantly commented :

Six months before this date a scene, almost similar in its mechanical parts, had been enacted at Hintock House. . . . Outwardly like as it had been, it was yet infinite in spiritual difference ; though a woman's devotion had been common to both. (Ch.42, p.325 ; emphasis added)

No further explanation of the 'spiritual difference' follows and the sentence remains quite ambiguous. If Hardy (who was certainly not a prude ) is here trying to claim that the Grace - Giles relationship is on a higher plane because it is untouched by the physicality of the Felice - Fitzpiers relationship, then we have to find a satisfactory answer to a crucial question. Why does Hardy refrain from using the key word 'lovingkindness' in describing Grace's ministration to Giles, when he uses this value-loaded word to describe a relationship which should -- by conventional standards of morality -- remain beyond the pale of the reader's sympathy ? But that is just the point. Conventional judgements of 'good' and 'bad', conventional stereotypes of 'virtuous wife' and 'false mistress' are simply irrelevant. Hardy's portrayal of women is very complex and ambivalent : the women themselves are a bundle of contradictions and conflicting impulses, inviting both our sympathy and our censure, and Hardy's attitude to his women is sometimes confused and shifting.

## Chapter VI

### The Short Stories of the 1890s

The short stories of Hardy really constitute the 'neglected'<sup>1</sup> area of his protean literary oeuvre. Although marginalized by readers and critics alike, some of these stories are significant in representing ideas in embryo, in tentative rehearsing of themes to be fully explored in the later novels. Thus, 'The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid' (1883), with its comic denouement, is an anticipation of Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891) where 'Hardy looks unconditionally at the worst contingencies' because 'Tess is Margery carried to a frighteningly right conclusion'.<sup>2</sup> The writing of Tess seems to have sensitized Hardy to the pain and pathos of a woman's position in a patriarchal society where it is always the woman who is forced to 'pay'. Despite modern critical readings of unconscious betrayals of voyeurism in Hardy's treatment of Tess,<sup>3</sup> it is surely transparent to the average ( and less sophisticated ) reader that Hardy's emotional investment in Tess is both sincere and unalloyed. Hardy confessed to George Douglas : 'I am so truly glad that Tess the Woman has won your affections. I too lost my heart to her as I went on with her history',<sup>4</sup> and to Thomas Macquoid he lamented : 'I am glad you like Tess -- though I have

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<sup>1</sup> Richard H. Taylor's The Neglected Hardy : Thomas Hardy's Lesser Novels (London : Macmillan, 1982) concentrates on the seven so-called 'minor' novels which fall outside Hardy's category of 'Novels of Character and Environment'. There is no chapter on the short stories, and the only book length study of Hardy's stories remains Kristin Brady's The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy (London : Macmillan, 1982). Roger Ebbatson's Hardy : The Margin of the Unexpressed ( Sheffield : Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), contains a useful chapter on 'Three Short Stories (1891-93)'.

<sup>2</sup> George Wing, 'Tess and the Romantic Milkmaid', A Review of English Literature , 3 : 1 (1962), pp.22, 30.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, Penny Boumelha, Thomas Hardy and Women : Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form ( Sussex : Harvester Press, 1982 ) ; Janet Freeman, 'Ways of Looking at Tess', Studies in Philology , 79 : 3 (1982), pp.311-323 ; Kaja Silverman, 'History, Figuration and Female Subjectivity in Tess of the d'Urbervilles', Novel , 18 : 1 (1984), pp.5-28 ; John Goode, Thomas Hardy : The Offensive Truth ( Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1988 ) ; T.R. Wright, Hardy and the Erotic ( London : Macmillan, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 1, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1978), p.249.

not been able to put on paper all that she is, or was, to me'.<sup>5</sup> This is not merely the expression of a common artistic regret of execution failing to match the original brilliance of conception ; it reveals a personal commitment to Tess who becomes for Hardy not just an imaginative fictional construct but an intimate flesh and blood acquaintance.

The experience of writing *Tess* , more than any other novel, helped Hardy emotionally to transcend gender boundaries and in the wake of its (partial) composition,<sup>6</sup> he seems to have been left with a powerful, residual, intuitive sympathy for women which spilled over into the six short stories that he wrote for the *Graphic* . These six stories ( 'Barbara of the House of Grebe', 'The Marchioness of Stonehenge', 'Lady Mottisfont', 'The Lady Icenway', 'Squire Petrick's Lady' and 'Anna, Lady Baxby' ), along with four other previously published stories, were later gathered together as *A Group of Noble Dames* (1891). Although the ostensible narrators of these vignettes of the aristocratic past are the male members of the Wessex Field and Antiquarian Club,<sup>7</sup> a powerful feminine point of view does emerge from these women-centred stories. This is hardly surprising in the context of a remarkable statement made by Hardy in his letter of 21 October 1891 to W.E. Henley, in response to the latter's editorial request for a story : 'Now -- would you not rather wait till some time (late) next year ? I am *pregnant* of several Noble Dames ( this is an *unnatural reversal* I know,

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.245.

<sup>6</sup> By Sept 1889 Hardy had completed half of *Tess* ( then called 'Too Late Beloved' ) and sent the MS to Tillotson & Son. The first fifteen chapters were already set in type before Tillotson's realized the controversial nature of the story and they returned both proofs and MS to Hardy. Hardy then offered the unfinished novel first to *Murray's Magazine* and subsequently to *Macmillan's Magazine* and was rejected by both. Despite this, he continued to work on the novel till Dec 1889 and then laid it aside to compose the 'Noble Dames' stories ( Jan - May 1890 ) after which he resumed work on completing and bowdlerizing *Tess* . By the end of Oct 1890 the entire MS of *Tess* was sent to the *Graphic* for serial publication which began in July 1891. See Juliet Grindle and Simon Gatrell eds. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1983), pp.4-12.

<sup>7</sup> Probably modelled on the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club of which Hardy was a member. In fact, Hardy himself had read a paper at the Dorchester meeting of this club, on 13 May 1884, entitled 'Some Romano-British Relics Found at Max Gate, Dorchester'.

but my constitution is getting *mixed* ) -- I mean I have thought of several more sketches of that sort . . . ' (my italics).<sup>8</sup> For a male author to use the metaphor of 'mothering' a text is very unusual indeed because, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have pointed out, 'all-pervasive in Western literary civilization' is 'the patriarchal notion that the writer "fathers" his text just as God fathered the world', 'through the use of the phallic pen on the "pure space" of the virgin page'.<sup>9</sup>

In a majority of the stories of A Group of Noble Dames and Life's Little Ironies (1894) Hardy's major preoccupation is with the theme of marital incompatibility and the consequent loneliness and frustration of women trapped in emotionally sterile marriages. Having no other avenue of self-fulfilment, marriage becomes the be-all and end-all of a woman's existence. Sometimes, as in the case of Betty Dornell ('The First Countess of Wessex'), she is pushed into marriage by her ambitious and scheming mother at the tender age of thirteen when she is too ignorant of its full implications. Even with the relatively maturer heroines, marriage seems to be a pressing economic necessity that does not take into account individual predilections. Revealing the naked economic compulsion beneath the decorous surface of love and romance ( in a spirit that recalls Jane Austen ) the narrator in 'An Imaginative Woman' tries to analyze Ella Marchmill's unthinking mismating. The dreamy poetic Ella has married the unsentimental 'gunmaker' , William Marchmill, because :

. . . the necessity of getting life-leased at all cost, a cardinal virtue which all good mothers teach, kept her from thinking of it at all till she had closed with William, had passed the honeymoon, and reached the reflecting stage. Then, like a person who has stumbled upon some object in the dark, she

<sup>8</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 7, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1988), pp.117-18, under the section 'Additional Letters'.

<sup>9</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic ( New Haven and London : Yale University Press, 1979; rpt. 1984), pp. 4, 6.

wondered what she had got . . . a clog or a pedestal,  
everything to her or nothing.<sup>10</sup>

This is a recurrent motif and Edith Harnham, in 'On the Western Circuit', is kin to Ella in being pushed into a marriage by well-meaning but insensitive parents whose limited visions can envisage no broader horizons for their daughters. As the narrator explains :

Edith Harnham led a lonely life. Influenced by the belief of the British parent that a bad marriage with its aversions is better than free womanhood with its interests, dignity, and leisure, she had consented to marry the elderly wine-merchant . . . ( LLI , p.97)

The obvious narratorial animus against such loveless life-bondages is a reflection of Hardy's own sentiments in the 1890s. Perhaps Hardy's personal disillusionment in marriage contributed not insignificantly to this state of mind but even without entering biographical speculation it is easy to gauge Hardy's sentiments from his contribution to a symposium in The New Review in 1894. Answering a question on what he thought young girls should be taught before entering matrimony ( a debate on sex education probably prompted by Tess ) Hardy wrote :

As your problems are given on the old lines so I take them, without entering into the general question *whether marriage, as we at present understand it, is such a desirable goal for all women as it is assumed to be* ; or whether civilisation can escape the humiliating indictment that, while it has been able to cover itself with glory in the arts, the literatures, in religions, and in the sciences, it has never succeeded in creating that homely thing, a satisfactory scheme for the conjunction of the sexes.<sup>11</sup> (My italics)

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Hardy, 'Life's Little Ironies' and 'A Changed man' , The New Wessex Edition, ed. F.B. Pinion ( London : Macmillan, 1977), p.12. Subsequent references to the stories in Life's Little Ironies ( abbreviated as LLI ) are to this (hardback) New Wessex Edition, and page numbers are parenthetically included in the text.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Hardy, 'The Tree of Knowledge', in The New Review , Vol. X, no. 61, June 1894, p.681.

Hardy's questioning of the institution of marriage is fictionally reflected in Jude and Sue's hesitation and mistrust regarding marriage, and more than twenty years later ( in 1918 ) Hardy was to declare categorically to Florence Henniker : 'If I were a woman I should think twice before entering into matrimony in these days of emancipation, when everything is open to the sex.'<sup>12</sup> But this is precisely where the tragedy lies. Hardy's fictional women live out their frustrated lives in an age and society where opportunities for women were very limited and marriage was considered the only respectable maturation of self-hood. Hence for these lonely ladies, whether aristocratic or plebeian, marriage becomes a prison from which there is no escape since 'what's done can't be undone'. Hardy had used this phrase powerfully in Tess ( Joan Durbeyfield's response to the news of Tess's desertion by Angel, because of her confession ) and it echoes hauntingly through the stories of A Group of Noble Dames and Life's Little Ironies . After Barbara marries the penniless and socially inferior Edmond Willowes, her parents Sir John and Lady Grebe reconcile themselves to this misalliance because they realize that 'what was done could not be undone' ( 'Barbara of the House of Grebe' ).<sup>13</sup> Later, when her 'Adonis'-like husband returns from his Continental educational tour badly mutilated by fire, Barbara shrinks from him in ill-concealed horror and, despite her subsequent remorse next morning, she realizes that 'to undo the scene of last night was impossible' (GND , p.264). Similarly, when Lord Quantock reacts with pained disapproval on learning of his daughter's runaway marriage, her husband coolly replies : 'The deed is done, and can't be undone by talking here' ( 'The Honourable Laura', GND , p.358).

<sup>12</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 5, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1985), p.283.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Hardy, 'Wessex Tales' and 'A Group of Noble Dames' , The New Wessex Edition, ed. F.B. Pinion ( London : Macmillan, 1977), p.253. Subsequent references to the stories in A Group of Noble Dames ( abbreviated as GND ) are to this (hardback) New Wessex Edition, and page numbers are parenthetically included in the text.

Unlike the world of Jude where divorce is a practical possibility, the earlier novels and stories reflect a world where there is no prospect of possible release, save through death. Thus Mrs Dornell tries to argue the *de facto* nature of their daughter's marriage in pleading with her husband, Squire Dornell, to desist from sowing the seeds of rebellion in young Betty: 'Lord, don't you see, dear, that what is done cannot be undone, and how all this foolery jeopardizes her happiness with her husband ?' ('The First Countess of Wessex', GND , p.221). This irrefutable logic carries its weight with the hot-headed Squire and, when he later meets his son-in-law, he tries to suppress his paternal disapproval and grudgingly concedes : 'Well, what's done can't be undone . . . though it was mighty early, and was no doing of mine. She's your wife ; and there's an end on't' (GND , p.230). The tragic irreversibility of a course of action is brought home more achingly to Edith Harnham whose initial charitable gesture of ghost-writing a love-letter on behalf of her illiterate maid,<sup>14</sup> Anna, boomerangs ironically on herself. Caught in a web of deception and vicarious romantic wish-fulfilment, Mrs Harnham cannot extricate herself from the position of Anna's 'amanuensis' to which she has so thoughtlessly committed herself. Despite her clear-eyed recognition of the emotional danger to which she is exposing herself, Edith Harnham realizes that 'what was done could not be undone, and it behoved her now, as Anna's only protector, to help her as much as she could' ('On the Western Circuit', LLI , p.96).

Woman as victim of her own (frustrated) sexuality is a reiterative motif in these two volumes of Hardy's short stories. Mrs Harnham's growing 'infatuation' for the 'sensuous' Charles Bradford Raye ( her maid

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<sup>14</sup> Hardy had himself written such proxy love-letters on behalf of the local illiterate maidens, as he candidly acknowledges in his disguised autobiography. See The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy ed. Michael Millgate ( London : Macmillan, 1984 ; rev. ed. 1989), p.287. Raymond Blathwayt, in 'A Chat With the Author of "Tess" ', Black and White , Vol. 4, 27 Aug 1892, p.239, records Hardy as saying : 'Girls resembling the three dairymaids in "Tess" used to get me to write their love-letters for them when I was a little boy.'

Anna's lover) makes her passionately exclaim to herself on learning of Anna's pregnancy : 'I wish his child was mine -- I wish it was !' ( LLI , p.98). Charles Raye's idle caress of Edith's palm at the fair ( mistaking it to be Anna's, in the press of the crowd ) has awakened a latent sexuality in a woman whose marriage 'contract had left her still a woman whose deeper nature had never been stirred' (p.97). Unlike the 'unfledged' Anna whose innocent simplicity as a 'child of nature' makes her vulnerable to Raye, the maturer ( thirty year old ) Edith self-consciously 'indulge[s]' herself in the 'luxury' of her infatuation. In a startlingly frank analysis of female sexuality that must have shocked Mrs Grundy, the narrator says that Edith's passion for Charles is fanned by the fact that 'he had been able to seduce another woman in two days [which] was his crowning though unrecognized fascination for her as the she-animal' (p.97).<sup>15</sup> But it would be grossly unfair to the 'lonely, impressionable' Edith to suggest that animality is her sole ruling passion. Behind her desire that Charles had impregnated her, and not Anna, is surely her frustrated maternity because the narrator clearly suggests that her taking up of Anna and her attempts to educate the country girl are the result of her 'being without children' (p.88). Edith, in her own way, is staunch to Anna in her trouble and despite her private misgivings about 'ruining' the young barrister Charles,<sup>16</sup> she completes the business that she had so thoughtlessly begun by accompanying Anna ( as witness ) to the registry-office in London.

<sup>15</sup> This sentence was later added in 1894 for the volume edition of LLI and it does not appear either in the manuscript or the serial version of the story as originally published in The English Illustrated Magazine in Dec 1891. In the magazine version, Edith is a widow and Anna's pregnancy is bowdlerized. Also, the sentence about marriage leaving Edith's 'deeper nature' unstirred was absent in the serial version. See Norman Page, 'Hardy's Short Stories: A Reconsideration', Studies in Short Fiction , Vol. 11 (1974), p.82 ; revised and incorporated into Norman Page's book Thomas Hardy (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), pp.128-9.

<sup>16</sup> The word 'ruin' reverberates throughout this story just as it does in Two on a Tower ( see Chapter IV of the present thesis ). Edith is distressed at having indirectly pushed Charles into a 'marriage which meant his ruin' (p.101) ; after discovering Anna's illiteracy when he is already irrevocably married to her, Charles accuses Edith : 'You have deceived me -- ruined me !' (p.104). And, in her epistolary impersonation as Anna, Edith hopes that she is 'no weight upon him in his career, no clog upon him in his high activities' (p.98; my italics).



When she returns to Melchester and her sterile marriage, and her husband enters her apartment, all the agony of her situation is revealed by her broken whisper : 'Ah -- my husband ! -- I forgot I had a husband !' (p.106).

Edith's compeer, Ella Marchmill, indulging her 'tender' and 'passionate' feelings for the poet Robert Trewe,<sup>17</sup> similarly has to remind herself of 'how wicked she was, a woman *having a husband* and three children, to let her mind stray to a stranger in this unconscionable manner' ('An Imaginative Woman', LLI , p.21 ; my italics). And later, in her death-bed confession to her husband, Ella admits : 'I can't tell what possessed me -- how I could forget you so, my husband !' (p.32). Both Edith and Ella 'forget' they have husbands because the emotional sterility of their marriages force their 'living ardours' into fresher channels. Ella's final self-justification -- 'I wanted a fuller appreciator, perhaps, rather than another lover' (p.32) -- belies the highly erotic content of the earlier scene where Ella secretly contemplates the photograph of Robert Trewe with passionate tears and kisses.<sup>18</sup> Like Edith Harnham, Ella Marchmill corresponds with her unmet 'God of Love' under her poetic pseudonym 'John Ivy' and she even sends him her votary's offering of some of her best poems. When Trewe (unknowingly) turns away from her very gates, Ella is prostrated by grief and disappointment and she 'trie[s] to let off her

<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the only male creative writer in all Hardy's fiction, the absent Robert Trewe is, in a sense, a self-portrait. Trewe's extreme sensitiveness to critical 'misrepresentation', his life-long pursuit of the 'unattainable' 'imaginary woman', the 'undiscoverable, elusive one' ( like Pierston in *The Well-Beloved* ), his shyness of strangers, are well-recorded aspects of Hardy's own personality. Describing Trewe, the narrator says that 'he was a pessimist in so far as that character applies to a man who looks at the worst contingencies as well as the best in the human condition' (p.15). This is surely Hardy of 'In Tenebris II' ( dated '1895-96' by Hardy ) where the poetic self is one 'Who holds that if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst'.

<sup>18</sup> In his successive textual revisions of this story, contrary to his usual (reverse) practice in other novels and stories, Hardy tones down 'any words or scenes which might have indicated some kind of sexual or passionate basis to Ella's obsession with Trewe'. See Martin Ray, ' "An Imaginative Woman" : From Manuscript to Wessex Edition', *The Thomas Hardy Journal* , 9 : 3 (1993), pp.76-83.

emotion by unnecessarily kissing the children, till she had a sudden sense of disgust at being reminded how plain-looking they were, like their father' (p.27). Later, when she is expecting her fourth child, she must have often wished ( like Edith ) -- when she gazed at the poet's picture -- that the coming child was the 'handsome' Trewe's rather than the 'plain-looking' Marchmill's. Her unconscious desire ironically triumphs at the end when by 'a known but inexplicable trick of Nature', the 'dreamy and peculiar expression of the poet's face' ( and the colour of his hair ) is reflected in the face of her little boy, like a 'transmitted idea' (p.32).<sup>19</sup>

A physical copy of their lovers, which Edith and Ella fail to biologically achieve, is attained by another 'possessed' woman, Car'line in 'The Fiddler of the Reels'. This story is perhaps Hardy's most powerful exploration of a common theme -- the 'irrationality of desire', the 'infatuation with the exotic and unknown'.<sup>20</sup> Car'line's almost epileptic reaction to the 'heart-stealing melodies' played by 'Mop' Ollamoor suggests that this 'weird and wizardly' fiddler robs her of her own volition, leaving her completely enslaved to his will.<sup>21</sup> Even after her marriage to the

<sup>19</sup> When Hardy transferred 'An Imaginative Woman' from *Wessex Tales* to *Life's Little Ironies*, he added a justification in the 1912 'Prefatory Note' claiming that the story turned upon 'a trick of Nature, so to speak, a physical possibility that may attach to a wife of vivid imaginings, as is well known to medical practitioners and other observers of such manifestations' (LLI, p.10). But instead of appealing to the (pseudo)science of his day, Hardy might well have invoked the authority of a more ancient text. In *Genesis* XXX, 31-43, is the story of Jacob's manipulative and selective cattle-breeding. When it is agreed that all the striped and spotted among his uncle Laban's sheep would fall to Jacob's share, Jacob peels white streaks in rods of poplar and almond and places them near the watering troughs and 'since they bred when they came to drink, the flocks bred in front of the rods and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted'. Shakespeare's Shylock, trying to justify his taking of interest, refers to this Biblical story and approvingly relates how Jacob peeled certain wands and

... stuck them up before the fulsome ewes,  
Who then conceiving, did in eaning time  
Fall parti-colour'd lambs, and those were Jacob's.

(*The Merchant of Venice*, I: iii, 81-83)

<sup>20</sup> T.R. Wright, *Hardy and the Erotic*, pp.89, 90. Wright has an interesting chapter (pp.89-105) on the entire range of Hardy's short stories which he sees as illustrations of the perversity and unpredictability of desire.

<sup>21</sup> Hardy had earlier used music as a metaphor for compulsive sexual attraction, in *Desperate Remedies* (1871), in the scene where Cytherea Graye is 'fascinated' and 'compelled' to sit 'spell-bound' in an atmosphere of 'unearthly weirdness' while Aeneas

patient Ned Hipcroft ( who accepts both her and her daughter by 'Mop' ), Car'line is just as hopelessly vulnerable to the 'acoustic magnetism' of Mop's fiddle. The narrator's repeated use of words and phrases like 'hysteric', 'convulsively', 'paroxysm of desperation', 'excruciating spasms' suggest that when she dances 'slavishly and abjectly' during their final encounter, it is not just the gin-and-beer that she has drunk which is responsible for her complete surrender of 'independent will'. Like Margery in 'The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid' before her, Car'line seems to be trapped by an intoxication that has an element of 'witchery' about it. Mop and Baron von Xanten both carry a strong suggestion of the supernatural and they seem to be, if not quite 'Mephistophelian' intruders, at least the type of demon-lover common to folk-lore and ballads.<sup>22</sup> Their power over Car'line and Margery, who are like putty in their hands, cannot be solely explained in terms of sexual fascination, the allure of the exotic, the strange power of music, or a young girl's 'Cinderella' fantasies. But, surprisingly, the narrative sympathy that is so transparent in the case of Edith and Ella is more ambivalent in the case of Car'line, and the reader's sympathy at the end of the story is directed more towards the husband Ned than to Car'line. After Mop abducts his daughter 'Carry', it is the step-father Ned who spends sleepless nights in his anxiety that the 'rascal's torturing her to maintain him!' (LLI , p.138). His love for a child not physically his own -- 'But she *is* mine, all the same ! Ha'n't I nussed

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Manston plays the organ accompanied by Nature's orchestra of thunder, lightning, and rain (Chap.8).

<sup>22</sup> Frank R. Giordano, Jr., in 'Characterization and Conflict in Hardy's "The Fiddler of the Reels" ', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* , 17 (1975-76), pp.617-633, argues for a more positive reading of 'Mop'. Giordano sees Mop not as a Satanic figure but as an embodiment of 'Apollonian' and 'Dionysian' elements in a story which contrasts 'ancient Greek paganism' with 'modern British Hebraism'. He attributes to Car'line a greater degree of individual 'responsibility' and sees her more as 'witch' than as 'innocent victim'.

Michael Benazon in 'Dark and Fair : Character Contrast in Hardy's Fiddler of the Reels', *Ariel* , 9 : 2 (1978), pp.75-82, too takes a sympathetic view of Mop, seeing him as the 'romantic, instinctive man' who, like Henchard, represents the 'old, natural world', as against the Farfrae-like Ned who stands for 'what is new, urban, and industrial'.

her ? Ha'n't I fed her and teached her ? Ha'n't I played wi' her' ( p.137 ; Hardy's italic) -- is contrasted with Car'line's strange unconcern : 'Don't 'ee raft yourself so, Ned ! You prevent my getting a bit o' rest !' (p.138). In her unnaturalness as a mother, Car'line forfeits the sympathy<sup>23</sup> that she deserves as a woman victimized in a sexual power - relationship by a man who consciously exploits his uncanny hold over her.

In fact, motherhood enters Hardy's short stories in a way unprecedented in the novels -- despite Fanny Robin's and Tess's illegitimate babies, Lady Constantine's technically illegitimate son, and the shadowy presence of Jude and Sue's children. Moreover, in these stories of the 1890s Hardy is very much ahead of his times and he seems to be advocating quite revolutionary ( not to say, startling ) ideas based on eugenic principles. For instance, the wife in 'Squire Petrick's Lady' suffers from a romantic 'hallucination' ( like her mother and grandmother before her -- so it seems to be an inherited nervous trait ) and just before she dies after giving birth to a son, she makes a melodramatic death-bed confession. She enlightens her husband, Timothy Petrick, that their newborn son ( the long hoped-for heir ) is not really his. Timothy Petrick's natural initial reaction as a widower is to sink into 'a hatred and mistrust of womankind' (GND , p.317) and he sadly neglects the child Rupert. But gradually, through a perverse pride in his son's supposedly 'aristocratic blood' (the father is conjectured to be the young Marquis of Christminster), Petrick comes not only to dote on the allegedly illegitimate boy but also to completely reverse his earlier judgemental stand on his wife Annetta. Being a man 'of good old beliefs in the divinity of kings', his 'poor wife's conduct in improving the blood and breed of the Petrick family win[s] his

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<sup>23</sup> From Hardy's subsequent textual revisions, a 'harsher and more critical portrait of Car'line progressively emerges', stressing her peevishness and her 'increasingly selfish' self-absorption. See Martin Ray, ' " The Fiddler of the Reels" : A Textual Study', The Thomas Hardy Journal , 9 : 2 (1993), pp.55-60.

heart' (p.319). Completely ignoring what Hardy was to call, in *Jude*, the 'beggarly question of parentage',<sup>24</sup> Petrick's volte-face makes him admire and approve of 'his good wife' who 'like a skilful gardener' had 'given attention to the art of grafting' (p.319) and improved the family stock. Petrick's reaction anticipates that of the nonchalant husband in Hardy's poem 'The Husband's View' ( *Time's Laughingstocks*, 1909). In order to hide her 'sin', the girl in this poem hastily marries the first man who offers himself and when the 'untimely fruit' is discovered by the husband, instead of deserting or upbraiding her, he calmly approves of her action because the nation needs sturdy sons for 'soldiering'.

These radical impulses of the 1890s ( perhaps influenced by Shavian ideas <sup>25</sup>) hardened into convictions and in 1906 Hardy was to write to Millicent Fawcett of his belief that the 'father of a woman's child' is entirely her own business.<sup>26</sup> And looking at it from the man's point of view, Hardy was to defend his poem and unequivocally explain his stance to Agnes Grove in a letter of 1909 :

In 'The Husband's View' to which you also allude, the husband's state of mind is preeminently a sane one, if you

<sup>24</sup> Jude matures from his initial regret at 'the wilfulness of Nature in not allowing issue from one parent alone' to a fine scorn for biological parenthood :

The beggarly question of parentage -- what was it after all ? What does it matter, when you come to think of it, whether a child is yours by blood or not ? All the little ones of our time are collectively the children of us adults of the time, and entitled to our general care. That excessive regard of parents for their own children, and dislike of other people's is, like class-feeling, patriotism, save-your-own-soulism, and other virtues, a mean exclusiveness at bottom. ( *Jude*, New Wessex Edition, 1975, pp. 195, 288).

Thus although Sue is distressed by the Arabella-'half' in Little Father Time, she tries magnanimously to rise above her instinctive sexual jealousy and to adopt Jude's son when he makes his dramatic appearance in their household.

<sup>25</sup> Evidences of Hardy's reading of Shaw can be gathered from the extracts from Shaw's works that Hardy copied ( or pasted, in the case of newspaper cuttings ) into his 'Literary Notes' scrapbooks. For instance, see items no.2082 ( from Preface to Shaw's *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* ), no.2456 ( from Shaw's *Translations and Tomfooleries* ), & no.2485 ( from Preface to *Major Barbara* ), in Lennart A. Bjork ed. *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 2, ( London : Macmillan, 1985). Hardy also recorded that in May 1905 he saw Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island* and *Man and Superman* ; see *Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* ed. Millgate, p.349.

<sup>26</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 3, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1982), p.238. See footnote 9 of Chapter IV of the present thesis.

reflect on it. In fact he is the man of the future, though it did not strike me that he was till now. If our endeavours shd [sic] be directed to the good of humanity at large, & eugenic principles shd [sic] prevail, the husband of a century hence will say to his wife, 'Pray don't consider my feelings, if you shd [sic] meet with a healthier or more intellectual man than I am. The race is the thing.'<sup>27</sup>

This is a tall order for most average husbands and certainly one which William Marchmill fails to live up to in 'An Imaginative Woman'. This story and 'Squire Petrick's Lady' form a diptych, a study in contrast which is quite interesting. Timothy Petrick ironically rejects his biological son when young Rupert's 'broad nostril' and 'bull-lip' finally convince him ( along with a conversation with Annetta's family doctor ) that the child is not really descended from the illustrious house of the Duke of Southwesterland. Conversely, William Marchmill no less ironically rejects his biological son because the child's physical resemblance to the portrait of the poet, Robert Trewe, misleads Marchmill into a conviction that his wife has played him false with her (unmet) poet-lover.<sup>28</sup> That wives are often thus sorely tempted, especially when taunted with their failure to produce a son and heir, is illustrated in 'The Lady Icenway'. When Lord Icenway bitterly reproves his wife Maria that 'you could oblige your first husband, and couldn't oblige me' ( *GND* , p.314), Lady Icenway regrets that she had not 'sooner' thought of using her returned ( and bigamously married ) first husband to produce the much-desired 'lineal successor to the barony'. This first husband, the foreigner Anderling, is forced to live incognito ( on his return to England after a long period of self-exile ) because his love for his son makes him extremely servile to the imperious Maria's whims. As soon as Maria, now Lady Icenway, conceives

<sup>27</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 4, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1984), p.67.

<sup>28</sup> Pertinent here is Launcelot Gobbo's witty comment : 'it is a wise father that knows his own child' ( *The Merchant of Venice* , II : ii, 73-4).

of her plan of using Anderling, she goes to his cottage and unabashedly tells him ' You must get well -- you must ! *There's a reason* ' ( p.313 ; Hardy's italics ) and she blushingly whispers her 'reason' into his ears. The dying man's sad response ( recalling Tess's when Angel comes to reclaim her at Sandbourne ) is : 'Too late, my darling, too late !' The fact that Anderling has been employed as Lady Icenway's *gardener* is surely no coincidence and when she goes to her 'gardener' for eugenic assistance, it recalls Petrick's praise of his dead wife as a 'skilful gardener' who had understood 'the art of grafting' to improve the family line.

Narrative sympathy for Maria as the unsuspecting victim of a deception ( i.e. bigamy ) is heavily undercut by the revelation of her arrogant social superiority and by her lukewarm maternal feeling which makes Anderling's strong paternal interest in their boy appear ridiculously excessive to her. Her 'haughty severity' and the emotional coldness that her name suggests, make Lady Icenway one of the less amiable ladies in Hardy's gallery of 'Noble Dames'. Another not-so-amiable lady is Joanna Phippard of 'To Please His Wife' ( LLI ). This story is a ruthless exposition of internecine female jealousy,<sup>29</sup> and in Joanna we have almost a medieval personification of Envy and Covetousness. Joanna has no qualms about weaning the sailor Jolliffe away from her friend Emily Hanning to whom Jolliffe is nearly as good as engaged. But Joanna's 'green envy' is not assuaged even when she succeeds in becoming Mrs Jolliffe. In a spirit of competition, she resents that Emily, now married to the wealthy

<sup>29</sup> Hardy's first short story, 'Destiny and a Blue Cloak' ( published in 1874 ) had similarly dealt with the theme of female rivalry in love. Here, Frances Lovill heartlessly manipulates people and events in order to thwart and revenge herself upon her rival Agatha Pollin. A fresh dimension to such a conflict -- wife versus erstwhile mistress -- is provided in 'The Withered Arm' ( published in 1888 ) where Rhoda Brook's intensity of hatred for her supplanter, the wife Gertrude, translates itself through some supernatural / telepathic means into actual physical injury to Gertrude's arm. Apart from Boldwood's crazed shooting of Troy, in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardyan examples of such deliberate and treacherous *male* rivalry in love do not easily come to mind, to match the deadly enmity of such women as Joanna, Frances and Rhoda. Of course, as a counterbalance, there is the unselfish solidarity of Tess's dairymaid friends, Marian, Izz, and Retty.

and 'worthy' merchant Lester, can afford to send her two sons to 'College' while Joanna's two sons are 'obliged to go to the Parish School !' (LLI , p.114). Her constant nagging drives Jolliffe to seek his fortune afresh and even when he returns from his first sea expedition with a bag literally bursting with gold 'sovereigns and guineas', it fails to satisfy Joanna whose peevish response is : '*we* count by hundreds ; *they* count by thousands' (p.117; Hardy's italics). Joanna's social pride cannot stomach the fact that her 'boys will have to live by steering the ships that the Lesters own ; and I was once above her !' (p.117). In fact, Joanna's envy colours even the narrative voice and we are told that '[t]races of patronage had been visible in Emily's manner of late' (p.114) and that 'Emily's silks rustled arrogantly' (p.119) when she entered Joanna's small grocery shop. That this is just a reflected expression of Joanna's jaundiced vision is made quite unequivocal when the narrator chooses to dissociate and distance himself from Joanna's all-consuming envy and state : 'To do Emily Lester justice, her assumption of superiority was mainly a figment of Joanna's brain' (p.119).

'To please His Wife' reads almost like a prose rendering of a Morality play with its pattern of Virtue (Emily) rewarded and Vice (Joanna) punished. The character contrast of these two women could not have been more stark, and the unexpectedness of the ending lies in the fact that it is so very inevitable. There is no final ironic twist that one comes to expect of a short story in general, and Hardy's short stories -- dealing with 'life's little ironies' -- in particular. Unlike Newson in The Mayor of Casterbridge , the sailor Jolliffe does not return to be reunited with his family and the ship ( appropriately named *Joanna* -- as a symbol of Joanna's inordinate 'ambition' which even stifles her genuine maternal instincts ) presumably goes down with Jolliffe and their two young sons on board. Joanna ends up, half-crazed through remorse, grief, and long-



deferred hope, virtually a pensioner in the generous household of Emily, 'the woman whose place she had usurped out of pure covetousness' (p.113). The satiric portraiture of Joanna, however, mellows down in the final paragraphs of the story where the 'wretched woman', moved by 'baseless expectations', hastens hopefully to the shop door every time that a fancied sound of footsteps in the street deludes her into thinking that her husband and sons have at last returned. It is easy to take a final judgemental stand on Joanna and say that she deserved her suffering, that her mental torture is indeed 'her purgation for the sin of making them [i.e. her husband and two sons] the slaves of her ambition' (p.120). But narrative / authorial sympathy for this (self)-demented woman is expressed, indirectly, through the figure of the young man who, aware of her sad story, answers as 'kindly' as possible Joanna's eager question, 'Has anybody come ?' (p.122). This young man perhaps embodies that 'lovingkindness' in human relationships which Hardy felt made even the worst tragedies endurable. Joanna's tragedy -- reflected in the emptiness of the final words of the story 'No; nobody has come.' -- is largely self-invited; but this does not deprive her of authorial sympathy for her 'grief-stricken soul'.

Joanna's appropriation of Jolliffe had not been inspired by love ; she had 'usurped' Emily's place 'out of pure covetousness'. Her 'dog - in - the - manger' attitude is reflected time and again in Hardy's fiction. In The Return of the Native , for example, Eustacia's alternating attraction towards Wildeve and Clym is goaded by thoughts of Thomasin's real or imaginary rivalry. Eustacia's 'interest in Wildeve' is 'entirely the result of antagonism' and her desire for him cools as soon as she learns that 'he was no longer coveted by her rival'. Again, Eustacia's infatuation for Clym is fuelled by the thought of 'Thomasin, living day after day in inflammable

proximity to him'.<sup>30</sup> In *The Woodlanders*, similarly, Grace's interest in her wayward husband Fitzpiers is rekindled when she sees how selflessly and passionately two other women ( Felice Charmond and Suke Damson ) love him. When these two distraught women rush to Grace's house on hearing of Fitzpiers's equestrian accident, Grace's reaction is : 'How these unhappy women must have admired Edred ! . . . How attractive he must be to everybody ; and indeed, he is attractive.' And the narrator's comment is : 'The possibility is that, *piqued by rivalry*, these ideas might have been transmuted into their corresponding emotions by a show of the least reciprocity in Fitzpiers. There was, in truth, a lovebird yearning to fly from her heart ; and it wanted a lodging badly' (my italics).<sup>31</sup> That a wife can be 'piqued' into renewed love and admiration for her husband, by learning how desirable he is to another woman, is illustrated in 'Anna, Lady Baxby'. Set against the background of the Civil War, the story domesticizes the conflict between Royalist and Parliamentary forces. Lady Baxby, responding to an emotionally charged appeal from her brother, is about to desert her Royalist husband and join the Parliamentary forces when she surprises an 'intriguing damsel' obviously awaiting a secret 'assignation' with Lord Baxby. But, instead of being repelled by her 'wicked' husband's 'faithlessness' and 'sly manoeuvrings', Lady Baxby's reaction is : ' " How the wench loves him ! " . . . She changed from the home-hating truant to the strategic wife in a moment' ( *GND* , p.328).

In the short stories quite often female desire seems to be inextricably linked with envy and covetousness rather than simple affection. Thus, in 'The Marchioness of Stonehenge', Lady Caroline, surfeited with the

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, New Wessex Edition, 1975, pp.121-22, 163. See also Chapter III of the present thesis for a discussion of Eustacia's 'dog in the manger' attitude to her lovers.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, New Wessex Edition, 1975, p.277. See also Chapter V of the present thesis for a discussion of Grace's reaction to her two rivals.

attention and flattery of young noblemen, chooses to bestow her hand on 'quite a plain-looking young man of humble birth . . . and guileless heart . . . the parish-clerk's son' ( GND , p.277).<sup>32</sup> Just as we are about to applaud her for her commendable lack of social pride and her mature perceptiveness of innate human worth, there appears the deflating narrative qualification : 'It should be said that perhaps the Lady Caroline (as she was called) was a little stimulated in this passion by the discovery that a young girl of the village already loved the young man fondly, and that he had paid some attentions to her' (p.277). Later, Lady Caroline exploits the tender devotion of this simple village girl, Milly, by palming off her baby on her and thus removing all evidence of the 'mismatched' clandestine marriage of which she is very soon heartily 'ashamed'. Continuing the same pattern of coveting what belongs to others, Lady Caroline's ( now the Marchioness of Stonehenge ) 'motherly emotions' are stirred years later when she sees what a fine young man and successful soldier her hitherto neglected son has become. In her determination to declare her true identity as his mother and reclaim him, she is -- as ever -- driven by a jealousy of Milly. Foolishly confident that her son 'would only too gladly exchange a cottage-mother for one who was a peeress of the realm', she resolves to tear him 'away from that woman whom she began to hate with the fierceness of a deserted heart for having taken her place as the mother of her only child' (p.287). At this point, the Marchioness conveniently forgets that *she* had initially used the threat of dire consequences in forcing Milly to assume the role of the parish-clerk's son's 'widow'. The Marchioness, like Joanna, meets her nemesis when her son

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<sup>32</sup> This is yet another instance of the 'poor man and the Lady' motif recurrent throughout Hardy's fiction. Compare Hardy's An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress ( which is the bowdlerized survival of his original, unpublished novel 'The Poor Man and the Lady' ), Two on a Tower , the short stories 'Barbara of the House of Grebe' ( GND ) and 'The Waiting Supper' ( subsequently collected in A Changed Man and Other Tales , 1913), and also 'The Spectre of the Real' which Hardy co-authored with Florence Henniker.

chooses the 'dear devoted soul [ pointing to Milly ]' who 'tended me from my birth, watched over me, nursed me when I was ill, and deprived herself of many a little comfort to push me on' ( p.288 ; Hardy's parenthesis). Subsequently, the Marchioness dies of '[t]hat anguish that is sharper than a serpent's tooth' (p.289). The obvious allusion to Shakespeare's King Lear is ironically double-edged because while the son appears to be ungrateful to his biological mother ( who had callously abandoned him ), he remains unflinchingly faithful to his adoptive and nominal mother who cared for him when he was 'weak and helpless'.

In the final paragraph of this story, which quite obviously serves as the framing device to link the rural Dean's narrative to the following story which also deals with two women's rivalry over the possession of a child, the 'sentimental member' among the Club's audience voices what is perhaps an authorial sentiment when he says : 'She probably deserved some pity' (p.289). This line sums up the impulse behind many of the stories of the 1890s because they seem to suggest that woman, despite all her alleged waywardness, selfishness and occasional perversity, deserves pity and not censure. As the 'sentimental member' puts it, in his narrative gloss while relating the story of the 'Lady Mottisfont', '[w]hen all is said and done, and the truth told, men seldom show much self-sacrifice in their conduct as lords and masters to helpless women bound to them for life' (GND , p.296). Hardy's accents are clearly audible behind this exercise in ventriloquism for, as Hardy was to acknowledge to J.W. Mackail, 'How much less regardful of self women are than men'.<sup>33</sup> Male selfishness is ruthlessly exposed, for instance, in 'For Conscience' Sake' where Millborne re-enacts the 'old story' of promising a young girl marriage, seducing her, and then 'coolly' abandoning her because it would be 'beneath my position to marry her' (LLI , p.49). Twenty years later, his conscience belatedly

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<sup>33</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 5, p.196.

awakens and prompts him to 'rectify the past' by 'putting wrong right' (p.50). In his reparative plan, Millborne seems to be impelled more by a desire to regain his own 'sense of self-respect' rather than to 'make amends to 'the poor victim herself, [who] encumbered with a child, . . . had really to pay the penalty' (p.49). This 'poor victim' Leonora, is a Tess<sup>34</sup> who has come through triumphant because by her own determined efforts she has succeeded in establishing herself as a respected teacher of music and as a useful member of society.

When Millborne belatedly offers her marriage, Leonora ( who has passed herself as a 'widow', Mrs Frankland ) replies with admirable spirit and dignity : 'My position in this town is a respected one ; I have built it up by my own hard labours, and, in short, I don't wish to alter it' (p.53). Behind this speech lie twenty years of hard struggle as a single parent and Hardy's admiration for such a woman comes out clearly from an anecdote that he incorporated into his third person autobiography :

In December Hardy was told a story by a Mrs Cross, a very old country-woman he met, of a girl she had known who had been betrayed and deserted by a lover. She kept her child by her own exertions, and lived bravely and throve. After a time the man returned poorer than she, and wanted to marry her ; but she refused. He ultimately went into the Union workhouse. The young woman's conduct in not caring to be 'made respectable' won the novelist-poet's admiration, and he wished to know her name ; but the old narrator said, 'Oh, never mind their names : they be dead and rotted by now.'

The eminently modern idea embodied in this example -- of a woman's not becoming necessarily the chattel and slave of her seducer -- impressed Hardy as being one of the first glimmers of woman's enfranchisement ; and he made use of it in succeeding years in more than one case in his fiction and verse.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> The use of the words 'victim' and 'pay' verbally link Leonora to Tess who 'once victim' is 'always victim' and who is 'The Woman [who] Pays'.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Millgate ed. *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* , pp.162-63.

One instantly thinks of Tess who proudly refuses to pretend to love Alec ( after her rape/seduction ) although she knows that 'a lie on this thing would do the most good to me now ; but I have honour enough left, little as 'tis, not to tell that lie'.<sup>36</sup> But consideration for her fatherless siblings finally forces Tess to submit to Alec and become his 'creature' again in the final 'phase' of the novel just as Leonora (Mrs Frankland) reluctantly accepts Millborne's offer of marriage in the hope that the consequent 'social lift' will smoothen the path for the marriage of her daughter Frances with the fastidious curate. Familial loyalties compel both Tess and Leonora to compromise their personal integrity and independent spirit, and Tess's bitter indictment of Alec -- 'And you had used your cruel persuasion upon me. . . . O, you have torn my life all to pieces' (*Tess* , p.403) -- is echoed in Leonora's accusation of Millborne after their marriage ironically widens the breach between Frances and her lover : 'Why did you come and disturb my life a second time ? . . . Why did you pester me with your conscience, till I was driven to accept you to get rid of your importunity ?' (*LLI* , p.58). If Alec keeps reappearing at Tess's side like the veritable 'Satan', Millborne returns 'as the spectre to their [ i.e. Frances and Leonora's ] intended feast of Hymen', turning 'its promise to ghastly failure' (p.59). Ultimately, Millborne performs the only truly honourable act of his life -- he disappears and leaves mother and daughter in peace to pick up the interrupted threads of their lives. In his letter of explanation for his self-exile ( he lives in Brussels ) he reiterates the 'what's - done - can't - be - undone' motif of these stories when he admits that 'there are some derelictions of duty which cannot be blotted out by tardy accomplishment' (p.61).

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* , New Wessex Edition, p.107. Subsequent page references are to this 1975 (hardback) edition and are incorporated into the text.

Millborne is man enough to give the two women the deliverance they desire. Not so young Randolph in 'The Son's Veto'. Acutely conscious of his (precarious) social position, Randolph takes upon himself the male prerogative of ordering his widowed mother's life. He embodies the repressive codes of patriarchal society which stifle natural female aspirations. Poor Sophy, 'a child of nature', had stood too much in awe of her 'reverend and august' husband and after his death, their son Randolph arrogates to himself his father's authoritarian role. The sheer emptiness of Sophy's life is symptomatized by the elaborate braiding of her hair which is intricately coiled up every morning only to be 'demolished regularly at bedtime' (LLL, p.33). This daily doing up and undoing of the cleverly woven braids<sup>37</sup> is an index not of her vanity but of the emotional vacuum in her life because her son 'seems to belong so little to me personally, so entirely to his dead father' (p.43). Even after over fourteen years of marriage, Sophy is still a misfit in the social atmosphere to which she (the ex-parlour maid) has been raised by her marriage with a vicar. This is rendered painfully obvious when her son impatiently corrects her grammatical lapses, and also by her total sense of non-belonging at the grand event of the public schools' cricket-match where there is a parade of 'white collars' and 'great coaches'. Sophy's chance encounter with her teenage sweetheart, the market-gardener Sam, seems to offer her a new lease of life but this hope proves illusory because her 'fastidious' son will not countenance a re-marriage that will socially 'degrade [him] in the eyes of all the gentlemen of England!' (p.45).

Sophy had been introduced as a wheel-chair bound 'young invalid lady' and, as the story progresses, it becomes quite obvious that the nature

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<sup>37</sup> This seems to be a parodic version of Penelope's weaving of Odysseus's father's shroud by day and the unravelling of it every night, as a ploy to keep her suitors at bay till Odysseus returns. Hardy (whose familiarity with Homer dated back to his mid-teens) might have had this classical story in mind, and Telemachus's heroic defence against his mother's (unwelcome) suitors is parodied in Randolph's stubborn refusal to countenance Sam's suit.

of her lameness is psychosomatic in origin. When Sam reappears in her life and she goes down excitedly to meet him, she can perform this difficult task by 'sidling downstairs by the aid of the handrail, in a way she could adopt on an emergency' (p.42). Sam is 'something to live for' (p.42) and after her meetings with him she begins to 'revive' and is even 'able to leave her chair and walk about occasionally' (p.44). But after Randolph tyrannically makes her promise, before an improvised altar, that she will not wed Sam without her son's consent, she 'seem[s] to be pining her heart away' and '[h]er lameness became more confirmed as time went on' (pp.45-46). Her lameness thus becomes almost a metaphor for her enforced emotional crippling, and her wheel-chair bound existence speaks of her entrapment in a widowhood which denies her personal mobility and freedom of action. Narrative sympathy for Sophy is very transparent and authorial indignation on behalf of her wasted and stultified life comes through in the satire of Randolph who becomes a 'priest' whose 'education had . . . sufficiently ousted his humanity' (p.45) -- a portrait that is reminiscent of the uncharitable and narrowly dogmatic brothers of Angel Clare.

Hardy himself is supposed to have considered 'The Son's Veto' as his best short story<sup>38</sup> and it is certainly one where his sympathy for a woman's position is expressed very unequivocally. Another story which speaks powerfully against man's inhumanity to woman is 'Barbara of the House of Grebe'. This story has achieved a certain amount of notoriety because T.S. Eliot castigated it as introducing the reader to 'a world of pure Evil'. In Eliot's opinion, it is a story 'written solely to provide a satisfaction for some morbid emotion'.<sup>39</sup> Despite Hardy's life-long interest in

<sup>38</sup> Hardy is supposed to have told his American admirer, Rebekah Owen, in 1896 that he thought 'The Son's Veto' was his 'best' short story. See Carl J. Weber, *Hardy of Wessex: His Life and Literary Career* (New York : Columbia University Press ; London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1940 ; rev. ed. 1965), p.300.

<sup>39</sup> T.S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods* (London : Faber & Faber, 1933), p.58.



(admittedly) morbid details of hangings and the like, this is a misreading of the story and Rosemary Sumner offers an alternative reading of the story as an 'experiment in aversion therapy' and as Hardy's intuitive anticipation of 'the use of conditioning as a therapeutic process' which began scientifically only in the 1930s.<sup>40</sup> This story, with its Browningsque exploration of abnormal states of mind, concerns Barbara's infatuation with the life-size marble statue of her dead first husband Willowes and the 'cure' improvised by her second husband, Lord Uplandtowers, who ( like the Duke of Ferrara ) 'determines that all smiles shall stop together'.<sup>41</sup>

Lord Uplandtowers's voyeuristic cruelty in forcing Barbara to repeatedly view the realistically mutilated features of the statue of her 'Phoebus-Apollo' husband is an elaboration of the earlier 'hints at sadistic practices in the bedroom'<sup>42</sup> in 'The Duchess of Hamptonshire' ( 1878 ; later collected in GND ). Far from unconsciously betraying Hardy's covert indulgence in the sadistic delights of this 'perverse and cruel man' (p.275), this story actually illustrates Hardy's continuing concern for the 'spiritual and mental suffering, for the most part undeservedly inflicted'<sup>43</sup> on vulnerable women by husbands / lovers / fathers / sons. The detailed narration of Lord Uplandtowers's 'brutality' does not necessarily imply that Hardy either vicariously participates in it or condones it. As Rosemary Sumner very rightly states, '[i]t is quite clear which side Hardy is on in the argument'.<sup>44</sup> Although Barbara's love for Willowes is culpable because it is a love engendered in the eyes only ( a love based on external beauty which

<sup>40</sup> Rosemary Sumner, 'Hardy Ahead of His Time : "Barbara of the House of Grebe" ', Notes and Queries , Vol. 225 ( June 1980), pp.230-231. Rosemary Sumner elaborates this argument in her book Thomas Hardy : Psychological Novelist ( London : Macmillan, 1981 ; rpt. 1986), pp.23-28.

<sup>41</sup> George Wing, 'A Group of Noble Dames : "Statuesque Dynasties of Delightful Wessex" ', in Norman Page ed. Thomas Hardy Annual , No. 5, (London : Macmillan, 1987), pp.75-101. This essay is also reprinted in The Thomas Hardy Journal , 7 : 2 (May 1991), pp.24-45 ; p.35. Subsequent page references to Wing's article are to The Thomas Hardy Journal reprint.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>44</sup> Rosemary Sumner, 'Hardy Ahead of His Time : "Barbara of the House of Grebe" ', p.231.

dies when that perfect manhood is disfigured and is again brought alive when the statue reincarnates Willowes's bodily perfection ), she does not deserve the psychological 'wife-battering' to which Uplandtowers subjects her. Authorial sympathy for Barbara unmistakably filters through the words that Hardy puts into the mouth of the old Surgeon -- the ostensible narrator of this tale. When Uplandtowers conceives his plan of 'fiendish disfigurement' of the immaculate statue in order to 'cure' his wife's infatuation, the narrator wonders at the obtuseness of a 'subtle man' who 'never thought of the simple stratagem of constant tenderness' (p.270). That the pliant Barbara could be won over by love never occurs to Uplandtowers because he is simply incapable of such patient and nourishing love.

Randolph and Uplandtowers thus represent two faces of male repressiveness -- the son's and the husband's -- and authorial sympathy is quite evidently with the helpless victims of their unjust oppression. Thus many of the stories in A Group of Noble Dames and Life's Little Ironies hark back to Tess in their spotlight on the victimization of woman and in their poignant 'what's-done-cannot-be-undone' refrain. These stories of mismatched loves bear the typical Hardy signature in their plotting as they voice Hardy's indictment of a flawed universe, inimical to human happiness, where 'the call seldom produces the comer, the man to love rarely coincides with the hour for loving' ( Tess , p.67). They also anticipate some of the central concerns of Jude , especially the interrogation of marriage as an institution and the revelation of the crushing weight of societal pressures to conform which constrict and ultimately deny individual volition. Hardy's main themes in these stories of the 1890's, which bridge Tess and Jude , seem to be woman's vulnerable position in patriarchal society, the frustration and isolation born of marital incompatibility, the coercive and irrevocable nature of the marriage bond

itself, and the emotional sterility of lives denied the personal space in which to achieve self-maturation. Hardy's feminist sympathies -- not to mention his radical ideas on eugenics -- emerge obliquely, but quite unmistakably, through these woman-centred stories<sup>45</sup> which often read (e.g. 'Barbara of the House of Grebe' ) like powerful pleas against 'man's inhumanity to [wo]man'.<sup>46</sup>

But it would be wrong to conclude that Hardy saw woman always as the 'exploited' and man invariably as the 'exploiter'. In *Anderling* ('The Lady Icenway'), for instance, we have a reverse situation where *Anderling* -- despite his original deception of a bigamous marriage -- ends up being a victim of Lady Icenway's selfish manipulateness. Similarly, despite his initial idle seduction of Anna, there is some narrative sympathy for Charles Raye ('On the Western Circuit') who is duped into a disadvantageous marriage by the collusion of two women. When Charles Raye, at the end of the story, drearily resigns himself to a 'galley' where he is 'chained to work for the remainder of his life, with her [i.e. Anna], the unlettered peasant, chained to his side' (LLI, p.105), it is not merely a case of self-dramatization or self-pity. It is a recognition of the inescapability from marital incompatibility -- the barrister Raye and the illiterate Anna cannot even converse on the same intellectual wavelength -- that will later prompt Jude ( after his marriage with Arabella ) to enquire of the powers-that-be what he had done to deserve to be caught in a 'gin' that would cripple him for life.

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<sup>45</sup> Interestingly enough, the original proposed titles for 'On the Western Circuit' had been 'The Amanuensis' and 'The Writer of the Letters', both of which focus the tragic spotlight on Edith Harnham. See R.L. Purdy, *Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study* ( London : Geoffrey Cumberlege and Oxford Univ. Press, 1954), p.84.

<sup>46</sup> In a conversation with William Archer, in Feb 1901, Hardy stated : 'What are my books but one plea against "man's inhumanity to man" -- to woman -- and to the lower animals ?' See Archer, *Real Conversations* ( London : William Heinemann, 1904), pp.46-7.

## Chapter VII

### Jude the Obscure

Hardy's novels sometimes had a long gestation period and the embryo of Jude the Obscure (1895) is often traced to a note Hardy jotted down in April 1888 : 'A short story of a young man -- "who could not go to Oxford" -- His struggles and ultimate failure. Suicide. [Probably the germ of *Jude the Obscure*.]'.<sup>1</sup> But before working out this idea fully in a novel-length study, Hardy rehearsed it in a short story 'A Tragedy of Two Ambitions' (1888).<sup>2</sup> In this neglected short story Hardy portrays the struggles and frustrations of two brothers, Joshua and Cornelius, whose academic aspirations are thwarted by a combination of meagre financial resources, class prejudice and family circumstances in the shape of a feckless and drunken father. While Hardy's sympathies evidently went out to the two brothers in their 'untutored reading of Greek and Latin', he was quite alive to the possibility that even the noblest intellectual aspiration could be both corrupt and corrupting.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the story strikes a balance between being an eloquent plea on behalf of deserving but deprived students who fail to make it to the University, and offering an unsentimental critique of the selfish pursuit of academic ambition.

When Hardy came to rework this theme of academic aspiration in Jude the Obscure it was further complicated by the addition of the theme of marital mismatings. But what the reviewers of Jude took to be its central

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hardy, The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy ed. Michael Millgate ( London : Macmillan, 1984; rpt. 1989), p.216.

<sup>2</sup> The story was published serially in The Universal Review in Dec 1888 and it was later collected in the volume Life's Little Ironies (1894). See R. L. Purdy, Thomas Hardy : A Bibliographical Study ( London : OUP, 1954), p.81.

<sup>3</sup> Joshua's motives, especially, appear suspect as he seems to be impelled more by 'pride of place' than by the pure desire for knowledge as an end in itself. Towards the end of the story, both brothers become so warped by their desire for upward social mobility that they become almost guilty of parricide as they fail to respond in time to the cries for help of their drowning father -- a sin of omission that recalls Gwendolen's frozen immobility when her husband Grandcourt is drowning, in George Eliot's Daniel Deronda (1876).

concern -- the 'Marriage Question' -- was to Hardy only incidental and of secondary importance. In a letter of 10 November 1895 Hardy clearly spelt out his thematic priorities to Edmund Gosse :

It is curious that some of the papers should look upon the novel as a manifesto on "the marriage question" ( although of course, it involves it ) -- seeing that it is concerned first with the labours of a poor student to get a University degree, & secondly with the tragic issues of two bad marriages, owing in the main to a doom or curse of hereditary temperament peculiar to the family of the parties. The only remarks which can be said to bear on the *general* marriage question occur in dialogue, & comprise no more than half a dozen pages in a book of five hundred.<sup>4</sup> ( Hardy's italic )

But a novel often outgrows its authorial formulation and, as Hardy himself recognized in his 1912 'Postscript' to *Jude*, 'there can be more in a book than the author consciously puts there'.<sup>5</sup> Thus, for most readers, the emotional histories of the criss-crossing lives of Jude, Sue, Arabella and Phillotson tend to upstage Jude's Christminster obsession and the novel is a good example of an afterthought/sub-plot swamping the original impulse/main plot. Analyzing the evolution of *Jude* through its MS revisions, John Paterson demonstrates how 'the novel's center of gravity shifted away from the university theme' and 'moved in the direction of the marriage question' as the

theme with which Hardy started -- the "struggles and ultimate failure" of a young man to make a place for himself in the academic world -- was forced by the dynamics of the author's imagination to give way to another and more dangerous theme, to an attack on the stringency of the

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<sup>4</sup> R. L. Purdy and M. Millgate eds. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 2 : 1893 - 1901, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1980), p.93. This letter to Gosse ( along with two others ) is included in F. E. Hardy's 'biography' *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy 1892 - 1928* (London: Macmillan, 1930), pp. 40-41. However, these letters are absent in the corresponding section of Millgate's restored edition of Hardy's autobiography.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* introd. Terry Eagleton, New Wessex Edition, ( London : Macmillan, 1975), p.30. Subsequent references to the novel are to this 1975 (hardback) edition and both 'Part' and Chapter references as well as page numbers are parenthetically included in the main text.

marriage laws and on the narrow Christianity responsible for their stringency.<sup>6</sup>

However, Paterson's reading of the novel's change of direction is challenged by Patricia Ingham who persuasively argues that 'the manuscript evidence does not show such a change, but rather that the story starts off already concerned with the relationship between Sue and Jude and with their possible marriage', and that 'from the earliest identifiable stage . . . the story is concerned with marriage as well as academic aspirations'.<sup>7</sup> Although Paterson and Ingham radically disagree on this issue, both stress that in the original version of the story, Sue played a more prominent role in what was later designated as 'Part First' of the novel. 'Sue is the focus of Jude's longing for Christminster', as 'the schoolmaster Phillotson evidently did not exist when the first eighty-four pages of the manuscript were written'.<sup>8</sup> It is Sue, adopted by the Provost of a Christminster college, to whom Jude appeals for books and it is Sue who provides the erotic touch to Jude's yearning for the 'city of light' :

[Jude] parted his lips as he faced the north-east, & drew in the wind as if it were a sweet liquor.

'You' he said, addressing the breeze caressingly 'were in Christminster city between one & two hours ago : floating along the streets, pulling round the weather-cocks, touching Sue's face, being breathed in by her; & now you be here, breathed in by me; you, the very same.'<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John Paterson, 'The Genesis of *Jude the Obscure*', *Studies in Philology*, 57 : 1 (1960), pp.87-98; p.98.

<sup>7</sup> Patricia Ingham's two-part article on 'The Evolution of *Jude the Obscure*' appeared in *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 27 (1976) no. 105, pp.27-37 and no. 106, pp.159-169; pp. 159, 162.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.162, 161. With Phillotson absent from the original conception of the novel, the character inter-relationships in *Jude* resolve themselves into the familiar triangular pattern with an important gender reversal as Jude relates to Arabella and Sue in the same way that Tess relates to Alec and Angel. Thus, D. H. Lawrence's comment, in 'Study of Thomas Hardy' (written in 1914, but published in 1936), that 'Jude is only Tess turned round about' is quite valid. See Lawrence's *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays* ed. Bruce Steele (Cambridge : Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), p.101.

<sup>9</sup> Original version of this passage in *Jude*, as quoted by Patricia Ingham in her article 'The Evolution of *Jude the Obscure*', *RES* (1976), p.166.

When Hardy erased Sue's presence from the opening section of the novel and systematically replaced her by Phillotson, this passage -- with its transparent eroticism -- is made to appear slightly ridiculous because of the discrepancy between the object of desire ( Phillotson in Christminster ) and the intensity of emotion inspired in the boy Jude.

Hardy not only erased Sue from the first part of the novel, but also effectively from the title he ultimately chose for it. It is interesting to consider Hardy's original titles for this novel while it was being serialized in Harper's New Monthly Magazine from December 1894 to November 1895. In the first instalment, the title read The Simpletons and in the second it was changed by Hardy ( presumably because of its resemblance to Charles Reade's novel, A Simpleton ) to Hearts Insurgent . Dissatisfied still, Hardy wrote to the publishers in November 1894 and requested them to change the title to 'The Recalcitrants', although since the instalment had already gone to press, this title was never really used.<sup>10</sup> Rather surprisingly, what has generally gone unnoticed is that these three early titles all employ the plural form suggesting that Hardy initially conceived of the novel as having a binary focus. In finally choosing the title Jude the Obscure for the first book edition,<sup>11</sup> Hardy privileges Jude over Sue and he erases Sue's primary status as (joint) protagonist of this novel. But strangely enough, when in 1897 Hardy made schemes for dramatizing Jude the titles he provisionally selected were 'The New Woman' and 'A

<sup>10</sup> See Purdy, Thomas Hardy : A Bibliographical Study , p.87. Rosemary Sumner in her book Thomas Hardy : Psychological Novelist ( London : Macmillan, 1981; rpt. 1986), twice mentions ( on p.147 & p.166) another early title for Jude : 'The Malcontents'. Unfortunately, Sumner does not cite her source and I have not been able to trace this reference anywhere.

The comic and tragic implications of the titles 'The Simpletons' and 'Hearts Insurgent' are explored by R. P. Draper in 'Hardy's Comic Tragedy : Jude the Obscure', collected in the revised edition of Thomas Hardy : The Tragic Novels. A Casebook ed. R. P. Draper (London: Macmillan, 1975; rev ed. 1989); p.234. Draper's article was written originally for Critical Essays on Thomas Hardy : The Novels eds. Dale Kramer and Nancy Marck (Boston, Massachusetts : G. K. Hall, 1990), pp. 243-254.

<sup>11</sup> Hardy, of course, typically complicates the issue by stating in his 1895 'Preface' to Jude that the 'present and final title, deemed on the whole the best, was one of the earliest thought of' (p.27).

Woman with Ideas'.<sup>12</sup> Also, despite the close parallels between Jude's boyhood and his creator's,<sup>13</sup> and despite the narrator's identification with Jude's point of view within the novel, Hardy confessed in a letter to Florence Henniker (August 1895): 'Curiously enough I am more interested in this *Sue story* than in any I have written' (my italics).<sup>14</sup> In referring to *Jude* as the 'Sue story' Hardy seems to be anticipating the impression of successive generations of readers who feel, like Robert Heilman, that 'Sue takes the book away from the title character, because she is stronger, more complex, and more significant . . .'.<sup>15</sup>

Hardy's wavering and uncertainty about Sue's status in the novel is reflected yet again in the confusion with regard to Sue's prehistory. At one point we are told that when Sue's parents separated, her mother 'went away to London with her little maid' (Pt. I, Ch.11, pp.93-94). Later, Jude's great-aunt Drusilla reports that Sue was 'brought up by her father to hate her mother's family' (Pt. II, Ch.6, p.132). Hardy was an inveterate reviser and he usually took advantage of every new edition to improve his text, but this inconsistency regarding whether Sue was reared by her mother or her father remains even in the text of the 1912 Wessex Edition. All this suggests that despite Hardy's acknowledgement to George Douglas that he 'liked' Sue, his emotional investment in her was not as all-consuming as it was in the case of Tess.<sup>16</sup> A reader coming straight from *Tess* to *Jude* will at once be struck by the difference in the mode of presentation of Tess and

<sup>12</sup> See Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist* (London: Bodley Head, 1971; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1994), p.312.

<sup>13</sup> For a useful summing up of the autobiographical elements in *Jude* see Cedric Watts, *Thomas Hardy: 'Jude the Obscure'*, 'Penguin Critical Studies' series, (London: Penguin Books, 1992), pp.20-21.

<sup>14</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 2, p.84.

<sup>15</sup> Robert B. Heilman, 'Hardy's Sue Bridehead', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 20: 4 (1966), pp.307-323; p.307.

<sup>16</sup> On 20 Nov 1895, Hardy wrote to Sir George Douglas: 'I am glad you like Sue. So do I -- depressed as I am at the feebleness of my drawing of her.' See Purdy and Millgate eds. *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 2, p.98. For Hardy's more enthusiastic response to Tess, expressed in letters to George Douglas and Thomas Macquoid, see Chapter VI of the present thesis.



Sue. In marked contrast to Tess's interiority, her transparent lucidity, we are confronted with the otherness of Sue, with what Penny Boumelha calls her 'resistant opacity'.<sup>17</sup> Except on the rare occasion of her adventure in buying the pagan deities, Sue is hardly ever presented to us directly but always mediated through the consciousness of either Jude, Phillotson, or the (male) narrator -- or even Arabella, Aunt Drusilla, and widow Edlin. Sue thus remains a 'riddle' and a 'conundrum' to Jude; to Phillotson she is 'puzzling' and 'unstateable'; and the narrator too is baffled by 'the state of that mystery, her heart'. Extremely articulate, we do learn a great deal about Sue from Sue -- through her endless self-analyses and her inadvertently revealing self-contradictions. But although we hear her, we never *overhear* her : we hear her public voice but never that intimate inner voice that we can listen to in the case of Tess and even Jude. Thus we have monologues galore but no true soliloquies.

Within the novel, there is a persistent demand that 'Sue must be available to understanding',<sup>18</sup> and Hardy attempts to do precisely this in his letter of 20 November 1895 to Edmund Gosse. Defending Sue, Hardy clarifies that 'there is nothing perverted or depraved in Sue's nature. The abnormalism consists in disproportion : not in inversion, her sexual instinct being healthy so far as it goes, but unusually weak & fastidious'.<sup>19</sup> This statement is extremely significant because Hardy was probably aware that by 'the end of the century, sexologists were redefining the rebellious New Woman as an "invert" or lesbian'.<sup>20</sup> While taking care to protect Sue from the charge of lesbianism, Hardy however seems to be indirectly

<sup>17</sup> Penny Boumelha, Thomas Hardy and Women : Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form (Sussex : Harvester Press, 1982), p.132.

<sup>18</sup> John Goode, 'Sue Bridehead and the New Woman', in Mary Jacobus ed. Women Writing and Writing About Women (London : Croom Helm, 1979), p.103.

<sup>19</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 2, p.99.

<sup>20</sup> Elaine Showalter, The Female Malady : Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830 - 1980 (New York : Pantheon Books, 1985; rpt. London : Virago Press, 1987), p.273.

accusing her of playing a sexual power-game because in the same letter to Gosse he further explains :

One point illustrating this I cd [sic] not dwell upon : that, though she has children, her intimacies with Jude have never been more than occasional, even while they were living together ( I mention that they occupy separate rooms, except towards the end ), & one of her reasons for fearing the marriage ceremony is that she fears it wd [sic] 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. This has tended to keep his passion as hot at the end as at the beginning, & helps to break his heart. He has never really possessed her as freely as he desired.<sup>21</sup>

In adopting the strategy of being unavailable, Sue thus reveals an 'impulse for power' as 'she wants to be sexually attractive and powerful but to remain sexually unavailable'.<sup>22</sup> Likening her to La Belle Dame Sans Merci, Robert Heilman says that she not merely leaves her men 'palely loitering', but '[s]ymbolically, she comes fairly close to husband-murder'.<sup>23</sup> In less sensational but no less negative terms, Terry Eagleton sums up the case against Sue and finds it remarkable that 'Hardy retains some of our sympathy for Sue against all the odds. For there isn't, when one comes down to it, much to be said in her defence'.<sup>24</sup> Value-loaded words like 'hysterical', 'neurotic', 'sado-masochistic', 'narcissistic', 'frigid', 'morbid', 'perverted', 'abnormal', 'flirt', 'inconsistent', 'selfish' repeatedly crop up in critical analyses of Sue ; and even Jude, in his less tender moments, accuses her of being 'incapable of real love' (Pt. IV, Ch.5, p.255), of having 'flirted outrageously' with Phillotson (p.256), of having a 'dog-in-the-manger' attitude to Arabella (p.258), and of ultimately being guilty of a mean save-

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<sup>21</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 2, p.99.

<sup>22</sup> Robert B. Heilman, 'Hardy's Sue Bridehead', *NCF*, pp. 311, 313.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.318.

<sup>24</sup> Terry Eagleton, 'Introduction' to *Jude the Obscure*, New Wessex Edition (1975), p.19.

your-own-soul-ism (Pt. VI, Ch.3, p.361 & Pt. VI, Ch.6, p.381). However, revealing an interesting gender bias, Mary Jacobus and Elizabeth Langland are more sympathetic to Sue. Rejecting D. H. Lawrence's thesis that Sue was born with the female 'atrophied' in her, Jacobus argues that it is 'precisely Sue's femaleness which breaks her', her 'experience as a woman' which 'brings her from clarity to compromise, from compromise to collapse' because the 'burden has been too heavy, the bearer too frail'.<sup>25</sup> Deploring both the narrator's and Jude's tendency to 'evaluate Sue's behavior in terms of sex rather than in terms of individual character', Langland sees in Sue the expression of 'the passionate resistance of a cohesive personality to the self-suppression and loss of identity traditional love dictates'.<sup>26</sup> Defending Sue against the charge of frigidity, Rosemarie Morgan maintains that it is not Sue who is sexually unresponsive but rather Jude whose 'fantasies about the sexless "ennobled" Sue' imprison her latent passionate self, and Jude who ultimately disempowers Sue by 'denying her a sexual reality'.<sup>27</sup>

The complete lack of critical consensus about Sue lends point to Anne Simpson's claim that Sue 'occupies the site of unknowability in a text that challenges assumptions about the transparency and coherence of the feminine'.<sup>28</sup> It is certainly to Hardy's credit that he presents us a vivid, volatile and unpredictable human being rather than a clinical case which can be objectively analysed, neatly labelled, and conveniently filed away in a medical journal. Thus, Sue's 'inconsistency', 'contradictoriness', and 'elusiveness' are indirectly the greatest tributes to her living quality, her

<sup>25</sup> Mary Jacobus, 'Sue the Obscure', *Essays in Criticism*, 25 : 3 (1975), pp. 304-328 ; pp.320-321.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Langland, 'A Perspective of One's Own : Thomas Hardy and the Elusive Sue Bridehead', *Studies in the Novel*, 12 : 1 (1980), pp.12-28 ; pp.19, 22.

<sup>27</sup> Rosemarie Morgan, *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* ( London : Routledge, 1988 ; rpt. 1991), pp. 138, 154.

<sup>28</sup> Anne B. Simpson, 'Sue Bridehead Revisited', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 19 (1991), pp.55-66 ; p.55.

resistance to being reduced to a mere type. Hardy gives us a compelling sense of Sue's uniqueness and Sue herself contributes to this view of her specialness. For example, after her marriage to Phillotson, when experience teaches her what marriage actually means, she confesses to Jude: 'I am certain one ought to be allowed to undo what one has done so ignorantly!<sup>29</sup> I daresay it happens to lots of women ; only they submit, and I kick' (Pt. IV, Ch.2, p.232). The 'they - I' opposition posits Sue as a Promethean rebel, distinct from the rest of her submissive sex. But, surprisingly enough, within the novel a high proportion of women do 'kick' against the bonds of matrimony. Arabella, after her sexual appetite is presumably satiated, runs away first from Jude and later from her (bigamously married) second husband Cartlett. In the careful geometric plotting of the novel,<sup>30</sup> Arabella's desertions of Jude and Cartlett neatly parallel Sue's desertion of first Phillotson and later Jude. Although they may 'kick' for entirely different reasons, what is important is that both Sue and Arabella 'bolt' from their husbands. Though Sue blinds herself to this similarity with a woman whom she repeatedly calls 'low-passioned', 'too low, too coarse' (Pt. V, Ch.2, pp.278, 280), Arabella's shrewd comment is not lost on the reader. When Sue visits Arabella ( as a penance for restraining Jude from going out to help her the previous night ), Arabella bluntly tells Sue : 'you are a oneyer too, like myself . . . Bolted from your first, didn't you, like me ?' (Pt. V, Ch.2, p.283). Sue, of course, reacts with stiff dignity and refuses to acknowledge any such kinship but Arabella's words are important because they remind the reader that Sue's aversion to marriage/ Phillotson is not unique/pathological but is in fact shared by quite a few women in the novel. Sue is truly her mother's daughter because, according

<sup>29</sup> This is a variant of the 'what's-done-can't-be-undone' motif that runs through *Tess* and Hardy's short stories of the 1890's ( see Chapter VI of the present thesis).

<sup>30</sup> In his letter of 10 Nov 1895, Hardy complimented Gosse saying : 'It required an artist to see that the plot is almost geometrically constructed.' See *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 2, p.93.

to aunt Drusilla, Sue's mother too could not 'stomach' her husband : 'Her husband offended her, and she so disliked living with him afterwards that she went away to London with her little maid' (Pt. I, Ch.11, pp.93-94). From the prehistory of the novel, we hear of another such woman who was a common ancestress of both Jude and Sue. Her grim story is recounted by widow Edlin on the eve of Jude and Sue's attempt to solemnize their union at the registry office : 'She ran away from him, with their child, to her friends ; and while she was there the child died. He wanted the body, to bury it where his people lay, but she wouldn't give it up' (Pt. V, Ch.4, p.295). In a book of 400-odd pages, it is quite easy to forget such brief references which, nevertheless, are important in placing Sue's rebellion within a tradition of women who 'kick' and 'bolt'.

In fact, Sue's ultimate breakdown too can be somewhat explained in the light of this singularly mistimed narration, for Mrs Edlin continues :

'Her husband then came in the night with a cart, and broke into the house to steal the coffin away ; but he was caught, and being obstinate, wouldn't tell what he broke in for. They brought it in burglary, and that's why he was hanged and gibbeted on Brown House Hill. His wife went mad after he was dead.' (p.295)

Of course, the story is not an exact parallel of Sue's emotional history but the links are significant enough, although generally overlooked. Sue does not go 'mad', but her complete abdication of reason -- which had hitherto made her intellect glow like a 'star' -- is triggered off by the deaths of her children and her consequent feeling of guilt. This is not to suggest that Sue is a study in hereditary disposition, although heredity does play an important role in this novel and Sue herself is sensitively aware of the 'tragic doom [which] overhung our family' (Pt. V, Ch.4, p.296). Hardy too drew attention to the 'doom or curse of hereditary temperament peculiar to the family of the parties', in his letter of 10 November 1895 to Edmund

Gosse.<sup>31</sup> Writing on the same day to Florence Henniker, Hardy reiterated that the story 'is really one about two persons who, by a hereditary curse of temperament, peculiar to their family, are rendered unfit for marriage, or think they are'.<sup>32</sup> But such hints have largely gone unheeded and critics who react with incredulity to Little Father Time's suicide tend to forget that the young boy is the child of a suicidally-inclined father and the grandchild of a suicidal grandmother. Quite early in the novel, when Arabella's taunt provokes Jude into investigating his dead parents' history, his great-aunt Drusilla informs him :

'Your father and mother couldn't get on together, and they parted. It was coming home from Alfredston market, when you were a baby . . . that they had their last difference, and took leave of one another for the last time. Your mother soon afterwards died -- *she drowned herself*, in short, and your father went away with you to South Wessex . . . .' (Pt. I, Ch.11, p.93 ; my italics)

Significantly enough, Jude's mother -- i.e. Sue's aunt -- is one more of the peripheral women in the novel (ignored by critics like John Lucas) who don't meekly 'submit' but actually 'kick' and 'bolt'.<sup>33</sup> Like mother, like son, seems to be the suggestion of the narrative at this point because on the very next page Jude attempts to repeat his mother's act of desperation -- i.e. to drown himself. Since this episode seems to have become a victim of collective readerly amnesia, it is perhaps worth quoting at length :

In the dusk of that evening Jude walked away from his old aunt's as if to go home. But as soon as he reached the open down he struck out upon it till he came to a large round pond. The frost continued, though it was not particularly

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.93. A longer extract from this letter has already been quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.94.

<sup>33</sup> John Lucas is surely forgetting all these marginal women in the novel when he asserts that 'we would need more in the way of women than the novel actually gives us' before we can decide whether Sue is a 'representative woman' or simply a 'pathological case'. See John Lucas's chapter on 'Hardy's Women' in *The Literature of Change : Studies in the Nineteenth Century Provincial Novel* (New Jersey : Barnes & Noble; Sussex : Harvester Press, 1977 ; rev. ed. 1980), pp.189-190.

sharp, and the larger stars overhead came out slow and flickering. Jude put one foot on the edge of the ice, and then the other : it cracked under his weight; but this did not deter him. He ploughed his way inward to the centre, the ice making sharp noises as he went. When just about the middle he looked around him and gave a jump. The cracking repeated itself; but he did not go down. He jumped again, but the cracking had ceased. Jude went back to the edge, and stepped upon the ground.

It was curious, he thought. What was he reserved for ? He supposed he was not a sufficiently dignified person for suicide. Peaceful death abhorred him as a subject, and would not take him. (Pt. I, Ch.11, p.94)

Unable to literally drown himself, Jude drowns his sorrow in drink and it is important to remember that Jude's suicidal bid occurs (as in his mother's case) just after his final quarrel with his spouse. Earlier, the boy Jude, finding that 'Nature's logic was too horrid for him' and disillusioned because 'events did not rhyme', had desired to 'prevent himself growing up' (Pt. I, Ch.2, p.42). Jude's son -- who unfortunately inherits his 'despondency' and not Arabella's resilience -- becomes the embodiment of 'the coming universal wish not to live' (Pt. VI, Ch.2, p.346) whose embryonic form is latent in Jude's desire 'that he had never been born' (Pt. I, Ch.4, p.55).<sup>34</sup> Finally, when Jude does die, his death is self-willed and a direct consequence of his deliberately suicidal trip to Marygreen to visit

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<sup>34</sup> In both these 'straw hat' passages (pp.42 & 55), the boy Jude is lying down with his face covered by the hat and the sun's rays peering at him through the 'interstices' of the straw plaiting. Despite Hardy's persistent and vigorous denials of any autobiographical element in *Jude*, the situational and verbal parallels with a passage in his disguised autobiography are striking :

He was lying on his back in the sun, thinking how useless he was, and covered his face with his straw hat. The sun's rays streamed through the interstices of the straw, the lining having disappeared. Reflecting on his experiences of the world so far as he had got he came to the conclusion that he did not wish to grow up.

Hardy was then about eight years old. See *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Michael Millgate, p.20.

Sue for the last time. The exchange between Jude and Arabella (his wife now, for the second time) clearly brings out the suicidal theme<sup>35</sup> :

'You've done for yourself by this, young man,' said she. 'I don't know whether you know it.'

'Of course I do. I meant to do for myself.'

'What -- to commit suicide ?'

'Certainly.'

'Well, I'm blest ! Kill yourself for a woman.'

(Pt. VI, Ch.9, p.397)

As if he has not already stated his intentions clearly enough, Jude goes on to elaborate : ' . . . a fellow who had only two wishes left in the world, to see a particular woman, and then to die, could neatly accomplish those two wishes at one stroke by taking this journey in the rain' (p.397). In the face of such textual evidence, it is rather surprising to find Terry Eagleton claiming : 'The factor of heredity certainly crops up from time to time, but in the end little is made of it, and it isn't an element in the final tragic catastrophe. It remains as an awkwardly unintegrated dimension in the novel, generating "atmosphere" but not much else . . . .'<sup>36</sup>

Although in 1911 Hardy classified his 'major' novels under the heading 'Novels of Character and Environment', as 'a young man [who] had been among the earliest acclaimers of The Origin of Species', he was surely not unaware of the role of heredity in determining character and action.<sup>37</sup> However, this is not to suggest that Sue's career is solely determined by her heredity any more than it is solely determined by her sex. Thus the vexed question of why Hardy allows Sue to break down remains. The narrator and Jude try to grope their way to an understanding

<sup>35</sup> In August 1893, when the composition of Jude had begun in earnest, Hardy records that he and a lady friend 'talked of suicide, pessimism, whether life was worth living, and kindred dismal subjects, till we were quite miserable'. See Life and Work of Thomas Hardy, ed. Millgate, p.275. In this context, it is also important to keep in mind the fact that the suicide of Horace Moule -- Hardy's early friend and mentor -- had left a deep impression on Hardy.

<sup>36</sup> Terry Eagleton, 'Introduction' to Jude (New Wessex Edition, 1975), p.23.

<sup>37</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy, ed. Millgate, p.158. Hardy also records that in the latter part of 1890, after having finished adapting Tess for the serial issue, among the many books that he read was Weismann's Essays on Heredity ; see Life and Work, p.240.



of her tragedy by invoking an essentialist view of women. 'Strange difference of sex, that time and circumstance, which enlarge the views of most men, narrow the views of women almost invariably', Jude reflects (Pt. VI, Ch.10, p.405). While this may sound crudely sexist, there is an element of truth in it because women cannot deny their bodies and the tragedy of a child's death will usually be more traumatic for the mother than for the father because of the undeniable fact of biology. Thus, Penny Boumelha very rightly points out :

Sue's 'breakdown' is not the sign of some gender-determined constitutional weakness of mind or will, but a result of the fact that certain social forces press harder on women in sexual and marital relationships, largely by virtue of the implication of their sexuality in child-bearing.<sup>38</sup>

The death of their children hits both Jude and Sue, but it hits Sue harder because, as Hardy reasoned, 'it was not so much the force of the blow that counted, as the nature of the material that received the blow'.<sup>39</sup> The 'nature' of Sue also accounts for the fact that Sue and Arabella react so differently to the tragedy. This cannot be explained away by arguing prosaically that Sue has lost three children while Arabella has lost only one, because the difference is not one of degree but one of kind. While the 'fragile', 'fine-nerved' and 'sensitive' Sue is completely undone, Arabella -- as a 'woman of rank passions' -- probably considers herself well rid of an encumbrance in her future marital adventures.

The 'deadly war waged between flesh and spirit', to which Hardy himself drew attention in his 1895 Preface to *Jude* (p.27), has been a conveniently available paradigm in which to cast Arabella and Sue. Edmund Gosse, in one of the earliest reviews of *Jude* (in November 1895), was quick to pick up this polarity and state : 'As Arabella was all body, so

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<sup>38</sup> Penny Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women* (1982), p.153.

<sup>39</sup> *Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Millgate, p.448. Hardy's comment was, however, made in a different context : to explain his oversensitivity to adverse press criticism.

Sue is all soul.<sup>40</sup> Subsequent critics have continued in this tradition and thus Kate Millett sees in Arabella ('utter carnality') and Sue ('pure spirit') the familiar 'Rose - Lily' opposition which is so mutually exclusive that Sue almost becomes a 'victim of a cultural literary convention . . . that in granting her a mind insists on withholding a body from her'.<sup>41</sup> At the fulcrum of these two opposing forces, stands Jude -- a representative 'Everyman' figure -- flanked, in 'Morality' fashion, by his 'Good Angel' and 'Bad Angel'. Sue and Arabella become almost allegorical externalizations of Jude's inner conflict as he aspires to soar into pure realms of knowledge and is repeatedly ( and rudely ) brought down to earth by his bodily sensations.<sup>42</sup> Jude is humanity placed precariously between the angels above and the animals below and this dualism is reflected in the vocabulary of the novel where one set of terms -- e.g. 'ethereal', 'refined', 'uncarnate', referring to Sue -- are privileged over another set of terms e.g. 'low', 'coarse', 'gross', which all refer to Arabella.<sup>43</sup>

By the time Hardy came to use this form of the triangular love relationship, it had already established itself as a novelistic cliché and one has only to look before and after to discover striking similarities in novels as diverse as Tom Jones, Adam Bede, Jude the Obscure, and Sons and Lovers. Nothing can be more far removed from Fielding's blithely comic narrative than Hardy's bleak and pessimistic story; and yet Tom and Jude's courses run parallel, up to a certain point, in their amatory history. Tom is seduced by the game-keeper's daughter Molly just as Jude is seduced by the

<sup>40</sup> Edmund Gosse, 'Mr Hardy's New Novel', St James's Gazette, 8 Nov 1895, p.4.

<sup>41</sup> Kate Millett, Sexual Politics ( New York : Doubleday, 1970; London : Rupert Hart-Davis, 1971), pp.130, 133.

<sup>42</sup> Jude himself conceptualizes life as a 'constant internal warfare between flesh and spirit' (Pt. III, Ch.10, p.210); and at one point he actually calls Sue his 'good angel' (Pt. III, Ch.9, p.204); later he appeals to Sue, his 'guardian-angel', not to desert him (Pt.VI, Ch.3, p.361).

<sup>43</sup> This point is well established in Phillip Mallett's article 'Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form in Jude the Obscure', English, 38 : 162 (1989), pp.211-224. See also Phillip Mallett's essay 'Jude the Obscure : A Farewell to Wessex' in The Thomas Hardy Journal, 11 : 3 (1995), pp.48-59.

pig-breeder's daughter Arabella. Both Tom and Jude find their ideal spiritual mates in Sophia and Sue (respectively), to whom they remain faithful in spirit despite their occasional backsliding in being ensnared into sleeping with 'coarse' women. The important difference, of course, is that while wedding bells finally peal out joyously for Tom, the Christminster Remembrance Day organ notes and hurrahs cruelly mock the dying Jude as he lies alone deserted by both Sue and Arabella. The comparison may seem somewhat arbitrary till one realizes that Hardy himself obliquely hinted at Arabella's literary pedigree in his 20 November 1895 letter to Edmund Gosse :

As to the "coarse" scenes with Arabella, the battle in the school room, &c., the newspaper critics might, I thought, have sneered at them for their Fielding-ism rather than for their Zolaism. But your everyday critic knows nothing of Fielding. I am read in Zola very little, but have felt akin locally to Fielding, so many of his scenes having been laid down this way, & his home near.<sup>44</sup>

Surprisingly, not many critics have taken up this clue and in invoking Chaucer's proverbial 'Wife of Bath' as Arabella's progenitor they have overlooked a source much closer in both time and place. As Cedric Watts very rightly points out, 'Arabella has an ancestor in the lusty Molly Seagrim'.<sup>45</sup>

Therefore, through Hardy's comments on Fielding's Molly it is perhaps possible to guess what was his attitude to Arabella whom the narrator describes as 'a complete and substantial female animal -- no more, no less' (Pt. I, Ch.6, p.62). Declining an invitation to write an 'Introduction' to a proposed Library Edition of Fielding's novels, Hardy wrote in June 1898 to Archibald Constable & Co. : '[Fielding's] aristocratic, even feudal, attitude towards the peasantry ( e.g. his view of Molly as a "slut" to be

<sup>44</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 2, p.99. Portions of this letter have been quoted earlier in this chapter.

<sup>45</sup> Cedric Watts, Thomas Hardy : 'Jude the Obscure' , 'Penguin Critical Studies', p.51.

ridiculed, not as a simple girl, as worthy a creation of Nature as the lovely Sophia ) should be exhibited strongly'.<sup>46</sup> A few months later, in September 1898, Hardy reiterated his stand in a letter to Edmund Gosse which deserves lengthy quotation :

You just allude to F.'s [sic] "aristocratic temper". This temper of his always strikes me forcibly -- more than it does most people I imagine : especially in his attitude towards Molly. His date has, no doubt, something to do with it : but I can never forgive him ( as a youth, even, I never could ) for regarding her as a grotesque creature, a slut, &c. -- & my impression is that the shadowy original ( or originals ) of Molly were town girls with whom F. [sic] came into sensual contact, dressed up in peasant clothes ; & no cottager. It would be too long to say why I have come to this conclusion ; but I feel certain that F. [sic] never knew thoroughly the seduced rustic girl ; or that, if he did, the "aristocratic temper" you mention & the prejudices of his time, absolutely blinded him to her true character.

It is curious that such a woman of the people as George Eliot shd [sic] have carried on the prejudice to some extent in her treatment of Hetty, whom she wd [sic] not have us regard as possessing equal rights with Donnithorne.<sup>47</sup>

Hardy's passionate defence of Molly and Hetty would seem to suggest that his sympathies lay with Arabella too. Thus, going counter to the long established critical tradition which holds that Arabella is probably

<sup>46</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 2, p.195 ; Hardy's parenthesis.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.200 ; Hardy's parentheses. Although it would require a great deal of critical ingenuity to make Molly or Arabella into a seduced and betrayed rustic girl like Tess, Hardy's point about Hetty is valid. Hardy is here more concerned with class inequality rather than with gender injustice ; but Hetty -- as the woman who pays -- is the locus where the politics of class and the politics of gender intersect. Despite living an unconventional life herself, George Eliot seems to have accepted the most sexist of the literary conventions of the day : the 'fallen woman' *must* die and thus expiate her guilt. Thus, at the end of *Adam Bede*, while Arthur is charitably reinstated within the community, Hetty conveniently dies while sailing back to England. Ironically enough, the charge that Hardy formulated against Fielding and George Eliot in this regard was levelled against Hardy too by a later novelist. There is a lot of truth in D.H. Lawrence's comment that Arabella's 'coarseness seems to me exaggerated to make the moralist's case good against her'. See Lawrence's *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays* ed. Bruce Steele, p.106.

the only woman towards whom Hardy shows any animosity, McDowell confidently asserts :

Although he was not blind to her limitations and her destructiveness, Hardy enjoyed Arabella with his mind and with his sympathies. Hardy's own animal nature was undoubtedly strong enough for him to see Arabella humorously and tolerantly even if the requirements of his art . . . sometimes distorted his view of her as a person. If he had detested her, it is not likely that he would have been able to view her with gusto and detachment.<sup>48</sup>

In less personal terms, Cedric Watts too sees in Arabella 'an affirmation of vitality' as she 'resourcefully snatch[es] at life's few pleasures'. Thus, in her 'resilient selfishness [which] has a degree of gusto and fighting spirit', she comes to acquire 'an almost Falstaffian positive value'.<sup>49</sup> This is persuasive rhetoric, but the feeling persists that Arabella can embody a positive value only in a world where all other (normal) positives have been eroded or thrown overboard. The case against Arabella is not that she successfully exploits her sexuality ( after all, any weapon is fair in the grim battle for survival as 'Poor folks must live' ) but that she flouts, without regret, every norm of common human decency. Her treatment of her son and of the dying Jude are equally callous and shows that, more than Ethelberta, it is Arabella who has succeeded in completely cutting out her heart. She allows Little Father Time to be handed round like a piece of unwanted baggage, and the total atrophy of the maternal instinct in her is revealed in her visit to Jude and Sue after the children's deaths when she 'talk[s] with placid bluntness about "her" boy, for whom, though in his lifetime she had shown no care at all, she now exhibited a ceremonial mournfulness that was apparently sustaining to the conscience' (Pt. VI, Ch.3, p.356). The strongest indictment of Arabella

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<sup>48</sup> Frederick P.W. McDowell, 'In Defense of Arabella : A Note on Jude the Obscure', English Language Notes, 1 : 4 (1964), pp.274-280 ; p.277.

<sup>49</sup> Cedric Watts, Jude the Obscure, 'Penguin Critical Studies', p.84.

comes, however, not from Hardy's narrator but from Little Father Time in his question to Sue : ' "Is it you who's my *real* mother at last ?" ' (Pt. V, Ch.3, p.292; Hardy's italic). In this piteous query is summed up the poignant history of the boy's emotional starvation, his quest for a mother's love and security, his bewilderment at being passed from one substitute mother-figure to another, his bitterness over the real mother who played him false, his childish despair of ever reaching the end of his journey in search of a mother/permanent home. It is no wonder that this intensely lonely, unloved and unwanted child commits suicide, and yet his death seems to leave Arabella with no perceptible signs of guilt or remorse. Arabella's lukewarm 'I had often wished I had [ my child ] with me . . . Perhaps 'twouldn't have happened then ! But of course I didn't wish to take him away from your wife' (Pt. VI, Ch.3, p.356) contrasts very strongly and tellingly with Sue's complete prostration after her children's deaths.

In this late novel Hardy does not allow his narrator to indulge in those moralizing generalizations so characteristic of his early novels and therefore we have no authorial perspective on Arabella. But what the narrator refrains from expressing is often put into the mouth of other characters, and behind at least one of Jude's reproaches to Arabella it is surely not too fanciful to hear the voice of Hardy protesting against the indissolubility of marriage. When Jude finally discovers Arabella's ruse of pretended pregnancy which has trapped him into marriage with her, and when she defends herself by saying that 'Every woman has a right to do such as that. The risk is hers', Jude ( without the hindsight of divorce ) responds sadly :

'I quite deny it, Bella. She might if no life-long penalty attached to it for the man, or, in his default, for herself ; if the weakness of the moment could end with the moment, or even with the year. But when effects stretch so far she should not go and do that which entraps a man if he is honest, or herself if he is otherwise.' (Pt. I, Ch.10, p.90)

Jude here states the case fairly, recognizing that marriage could become a 'life-long penalty' for *both* the man and the woman, and this is the burden of Hardy's protest against marriage as an institution : 'the fundamental error of . . . bas[ing] a permanent contract on a temporary feeling . . .' (Pt. I, Ch.11, p.93). But, fortunately enough, in the world of Jude divorce seems to be quite readily available<sup>50</sup> and thus the 'penalty' need not be necessarily 'life-long'. Although in September 1926, while negotiating with St John Ervine for a possible dramatization of Jude, Hardy speculated whether Arabella were not 'the villain of the piece',<sup>51</sup> it would be quite unfair to saddle Arabella with the sole responsibility for blasting Jude's life. Rather, Jude is destroyed by the collusion of two women who, as Marjorie Garson points out, 'antipathetic to one another though they are, are at some level working together to destroy the protagonist'.<sup>52</sup> Thus the 'novel blames the various female figures who fail to fulfil [Jude's] impossible desires', mainly 'Sue and Arabella, both of whom go through the motions of nurturing him but who really kill him'.<sup>53</sup> The barely concealed misogamy of the novel shades off into implied misogyny in showing a 'gentle but pliable hero [who] is destroyed by two stereotypes of female sexuality -- the scheming seductress and the fascinating, tantalizing prude'.<sup>54</sup> Caught between what Patricia Stubbs calls 'rapacious sensuality' (Arabella) and 'obsessive virginity' (Sue), Jude will become a prototype for D. H. Lawrence's Paul Morel who is torn between

<sup>50</sup> That the two divorces are obtained under false pretences is something that is explored, in all its legal implications, by William A. Davis, Jr., in 'Hardy, Sir Francis Jeune and Divorce by "False Pretences" in Jude the Obscure', The Thomas Hardy Journal, 9 : 1 (1993), pp.62-74.

<sup>51</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 7 : 1926 - 1927, (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1988), p.41. Interestingly enough, Sue does *not* feature in the list of possible 'villains', the other two alternatives offered being 'Jude's personal constitution' and 'blind Chance'.

<sup>52</sup> Marjorie Garson, Hardy's Fables of Integrity : Woman, Body, Text (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1991), pp.161-162.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.170, 172.

<sup>54</sup> Patricia Stubbs, Women and Fiction : Feminism and the Novel 1880 - 1920 (Sussex : Harvester Press, 1979; rpt. London : Methuen, 1981), p.81.

the virginal Miriam and the sensual Clara. The unstated but clearly implied thesis of both Jude the Obscure and Sons and Lovers seems to be that Jude and Paul make a sorry mess of their lives not because they are inherently weak or culpable but because their women lamentably fail them. Thus, in presenting a 'lovable male protagonist [who] is destroyed between a sensual and a spiritual woman . . . Hardy explicitly blames women for their contribution to [Jude's] ruin, as he never blames men collectively for that of Tess'.<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, despite Hardy's sarcastic reference in his 1912 'Postscript' to Jude to 'the screaming of a poor lady in Blackwood . . .' (p.30), Mrs Oliphant was not very far off the mark when she shrewdly observed that '[i]t is the women who are the active agents in all this unsavoury imbroglio' and the men are merely their 'passive' 'victims'.<sup>56</sup> Jude certainly sees his life's tragedy in these terms, as he reflects :

Strange that his first aspiration -- towards academical proficiency -- had been checked by a woman, and that his second aspiration -- towards apostleship -- had also been checked by a woman. 'Is it,' he said, 'that the women are to blame ; or is it the artificial system of things, under which the normal sex-impulses are turned into devilish domestic gins and springs to noose and hold back those who want to progress ?' (Pt. IV, Ch.3, p.234)

Jude's equation of Arabella and Sue is quite valid up to a point because both are responsible for the destruction of, at least, his books. Arabella physically manhandles Jude's books, deliberately smearing them with her greasy fingers and angrily flinging them to the floor. Sue's effect is more subtle and indirect but no less invidious as she destroys the very spirit

<sup>55</sup> Katharine Rogers, 'Women in Thomas Hardy', The Centennial Review, 19 : 4 (1975), pp.249-258; p.251.

<sup>56</sup> Mrs Oliphant, 'The Anti-Marriage League', Blackwood's Magazine, Jan 1896, collected in R.G. Cox ed. Thomas Hardy : The Critical Heritage ( New York : Barnes & Noble, 1970), pp.256-262; p.260. The article can also be found in Graham Clarke ed. Thomas Hardy : Critical Assessments, Vol. I, ( East Sussex : Helm Information Ltd., 1993), pp.248-252. For a longer quotation from Mrs Oliphant's article see Chapter I of the present thesis.



enshrined in Jude's books. Her unremitting withering scorn of institutionalized religion ultimately leads Jude ( along with his guilt over his 'unlicensed' love for 'Mrs Phillotson' ) to make a huge bonfire of all his precious 'theological and ethical works' (p.234). To a bibliophile and autodidact, nothing can be more tragic than such wanton destruction of books.

That women, generically speaking, *are* destructive is a discourse that runs throughout the novel as the negative vocabulary -- 'checked', 'noose', 'hold back' -- colours the language of the narrator, Jude, and even Sue in her guilt-ridden moments. The obvious symbolism of the 'Samson and Delilah' painting, which hangs on the wall of the inn that Jude and Arabella visit during their courtship, is underpinned by the reiterative use of negative terms in a pattern quite familiar to a reader of Two on a Tower.<sup>57</sup> When Arabella deceives Jude into marriage by falsely hinting that she is pregnant, Jude candidly tells her : 'It is a complete *smashing up* of my plans . . . . Dreams about books, and degrees, and impossible fellowships . . .' (Pt. I, Ch.9, p.80; my italics). This is merely a re-formulation of the earlier narratorial comment, after Arabella's phallic missile has woken Jude out of his academic dreams, that the 'intentions as to reading, working, and learning, which [Jude] had so precisely formulated only a few minutes earlier, were suffering a curious collapse into a corner, he knew not how' (Pt. I, Ch.6, p.65). When Jude later passes by the milestone on which he had carved his initials, he remembers that the act 'embodying his aspirations' had 'been done in the first week of his apprenticeship, before he had been *diverted* from his purposes by an *unsuitable* woman' (Pt. I, Ch.11, pp.96-97; my italics). Jude's three-year 'coarse conjugal life' with Arabella is a 'disruption', and when he makes his way to Christminster,

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<sup>57</sup> See Chapter IV of the present thesis for an extended discussion of Hardy's use of such pejorative terms in Two on a Tower .

the narrator sees it as 'making a new start -- the start to which, barring the *interruption* involved in his intimacy and married experience with Arabella, he had been looking forward for about ten years' (Pt. II, Ch.1, p.101; my italic). Jude is 'encumbered' by marriage and 'enchained' to a manifestly unworthy specimen of womanhood. And finally when Jude is drunkenly 'recapture[d]' into marrying Arabella for the second time, he is explicitly referred to as 'her shorn Samson' (Pt. VI, Ch.7, p.384). But such negative language is not restricted to Arabella ; Sue too unconsciously picks up this misogynic register and when she leaves Phillotson to join Jude in the train for Aldbrickham, she laments : 'I fear I am doing you a lot of *harm* . *Ruining* your prospects of the Church ; *ruining* your progress in your trade ; everything ! . . . O I seem so bad -- *upsetting* men's courses like this!' (Pt. IV, Ch.5, p.253; my italics). The use of the plural -- 'men's courses' -- extends the implication of this speech to include Phillotson too who is made to suffer, for his generosity in granting Sue her freedom, by being publicly humiliated and forcibly dismissed from his school job.

The novel repeatedly raises questions about the nature of women. After Sue is cowed into social conformity by the deaths of her children, Jude is totally at a loss to understand her '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 ?' (Pt. VI, Ch.3, p.359). Much earlier, when Sue had requested Jude to give her away in church, during her first marriage to Phillotson, Jude had responded to her 'cruelty' by wondering : 'Women were different from men in such matters. Was it that they were, instead of more sensitive, as reputed, more callous, and less romantic ; or were they more heroic ?' (Pt. III, Ch.7, p.193). Jude may flounder in uncertainty regarding women's essential nature, but the narrator is more confident in his generalizations on the sex whose 'every face bear[s] the legend "The Weaker" upon it' (Pt.

III, Ch.3, p.160). Although in this very late novel the incidence of reductive generalizations about women is much less than before, Hardy has not yet completely outgrown his early habit. For instance, when Jude sinks to his lowest depths in drunkenly reciting the Creed in a tavern, his subsequent bitter remorse is described by the narrator in these terms : 'If he had been a woman he must have screamed under the nervous tension which he was now undergoing' (Pt. II, Ch.7, p.145). Jude, of course, ultimately does something better than scream like a woman ; he commits suicide like a man. In a later episode, when Sue is understandably piqued by Jude's belated confession about his marriage to Arabella, Jude is at a loss to comprehend her behaviour which seems to him to be '*essentially large-minded and generous on reflection, despite a previous exercise of those narrow womanly humours* on impulse that were necessary to give her sex' (Pt. III, Ch.6, p.186 ; my italics).

However, despite the general negative tenor of such reductive generalizations about women that pepper the text throughout -- ( which is why critical discussions of Hardy's misogyny tend to concentrate on Jude ) -- it is in this novel that Hardy voices his strongest pro-feminist position through Sue. Sue's indignation at the inferior status accorded to women comes out powerfully in her biting satire of the marriage service :

'I have been looking at the marriage service in the Prayer-book, and it seems to me very humiliating that a giver-away should be required at all. According to the ceremony as there printed, my bridegroom chooses me of his own will and pleasure ; but I don't choose him. Somebody *gives* me to him, like a she-ass or she-goat, or any other domestic animal. Bless your exalted views of woman, O Churchman !'  
(Pt. III, Ch.7, p.189 ; Hardy's italic)

The sexual inequality, the complete reduction of woman to the status of a commodity to be handed over from one owner to another, the absolute proprietorial rights of the husband over his wife -- over both her wealth

and her body -- were a social reality in an age when a woman even 'surrendered her legal existence on marriage'.<sup>58</sup> Also implicit in Sue's speech is her rebellion against a society which conditions women into accepting the passive role of being the 'chosen', instead of granting her the (equal) autonomy of becoming the active chooser. If women overstep their traditional passive roles, social anarchy will surely result : this seems to be the paranoia of those critics who were hostile to the New Woman's bid for independence. Fear of the New Woman's disruptive potential and ridicule of what was considered her inordinate demands, were widespread and it surfaces briefly in even such a source as Stoker's immensely popular Dracula (1897) :

Some of the 'New Women' writers will some day start an idea that men and women should be allowed to see each other asleep before proposing or accepting. But I suppose the New Woman won't condescend in future to accept ; she will do the proposing herself. And a nice job she will make of it, too !<sup>59</sup>

In 1906 Hardy was to write to Millicent Fawcett that the father of a woman's child was entirely her own business,<sup>60</sup> and Sue anticipates Hardy by a decade when she declares to Jude that 'in a proper state of society, the father of a woman's child will be as much a private matter of hers as the cut of her under-linen, on whom nobody will have any right to question her' (Pt. IV, Ch.5, p.255). A more radically subversive statement comes, surprisingly enough, from Phillotson when he is trying to justify his decision to grant Sue her freedom. Phillotson completely floors his friend

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<sup>58</sup> See Phillip Mallett, 'Woman and Marriage in Victorian Society', in Elizabeth M. Craik ed. Marriage and Property (Aberdeen : Aberdeen Univ. Press, 1984), pp.159-189 ; p.162.

<sup>59</sup> Bram Stoker, Dracula, Everyman Paperbacks, (London : J. M. Dent, 1993; rpt. 1995), Chap. 8, p.88. Interestingly enough, in Far From the Madding Crowd when Bathsheba finally goes to Gabriel's house it almost seems as if she has 'come courting' him ; while in A Laodicean Paula literally runs after George Somerset across almost half the Continent and, meeting him by his sick-bed, she comes as near to a direct proposal as any of Hardy's women. Neither Bathsheba nor Paula are self-consciously 'New Women' and their directness does not seem to render them, in any way, less charming or endearing.

<sup>60</sup> See footnote 9 of Chapter IV and also Chapter VI (footnote 25) of the present thesis.

Gillingham (and surely Hardy's 1896 readership) by proposing 'Matriarchy': 'I don't see why the woman and the children should not be the unit without the man' (Pt. IV, Ch.4, p.247). For all her 'advanced' views, Sue does not go this far ; but she gives authentic voice to the protest that conventional society imposes an identity on a married woman with which she often cannot emotionally relate : 'I am called Mrs Richard Phillotson, living a calm wedded life with my counterpart of that name. But I am not really Mrs Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone . . .' (Pt. IV, Ch.1, p.223). That 'wifedom' can at times be totally annihilating is also acknowledged by Jude, indirectly, as he tries to convince Sue : 'No, you are not Mrs Phillotson . . . You are dear, free Sue Bridehead . . . Wifedom has not yet squashed up and digested you in its vast maw as an atom which has no further individuality' (Pt. III, Ch.9, p.206). Further, wifedom can imply inferior domestic status and this is brought out in Arabella's ironic advice to Phillotson on how to tame a 'kicking' wife. Though Arabella herself negotiates her different identities -- from Miss Donn to Mrs Fawley, to Mrs Cartlett, and back again to Mrs Fawley ( and possibly Mrs Vilbert next ) -- with blithe unconcern, even she is allowed to voice a valid criticism of social organization right from Biblical times. As far back as the days of Moses, the sexual double standard had flourished : ' "Then shall the man be guiltless ; but the woman shall bear her iniquity." Damn rough on us women ; but we must grin and put up wi' it !' (Pt. V, Ch.8, pp.328-29).

Jude, however, tries to argue that men are equally victims and he scores a valid point when he insists :

'Still, Sue, it is no worse for the woman than for the man. That's what some women fail to see, and instead of protesting against the conditions they protest against the man, the other victim; just as a woman in a crowd will abuse the man who crushes against her, when he is only the helpless transmitter of the pressure put upon him.' (Pt. V, Ch.4, pp.299-300)

If these are Hardy's views put into the mouth of his 'poor puppet',<sup>61</sup> then it certainly justifies the comment that 'Sue is at once Hardy's major contribution to feminism and the expression of his doubts about it'.<sup>62</sup> Ultimately, of course, Jude is forced to concede that the 'woman mostly gets the worst of it in the long run !' (Pt. VI, Ch.3, p.362). What this 'worst' is has already been spelt out by the narrator in that notorious 'The Weaker'-sex passage : it is 'the storms and strains of after-years, with their *injustice* , loneliness, child-bearing, and bereavement . . .' (Pt. III, Ch.3, p.161 ; my italic). Seen in a positive light, as an oblique protest against the 'injustice' of a woman's lot, this passage along with other statements put into the mouths of Sue, Phillotson, Arabella and Jude, can construct a truly feminist Hardy. But the case founders somewhat on the crucial issue of Sue's breakdown and volte-face. Hardy himself highlighted the issue, in his 1912 'Postscript' to *Jude* , by referring to a German reviewer who regretted that the portrait of Sue 'had been left to be drawn by a man, and was not done by one of her own sex, who would never have allowed her to break down at the end' (p.30).

Why *does* Hardy allow Sue to break down ? Perhaps Hardy was merely reflecting a social reality which his artistic integrity refused to sugar-coat. As Elaine Showalter has demonstrated :

For many late Victorian female intellectuals, especially those in the first generation to attend college, nervous illness marked the transition from domestic to professional roles. . . . From the pioneering doctor Sophia Jex-Blake to the social worker Beatrice Webb, New Women and nervous illness seemed to go together.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> In his 10 Nov 1895 letter to Gosse, Hardy calls Jude 'my poor puppet'. See Hardy's *Collected Letters* eds. Purdy and Millgate, Vol. 2, p.93.

<sup>62</sup> Katharine Rogers, 'Women in Thomas Hardy', *Centennial Review* , p.254.

<sup>63</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady* (1985), p.137.

Sue certainly seems to be a 'first generation' college girl,<sup>64</sup> and studies of other 'New Women' novels of the 1880's and 1890's have shown that it was a common feature for these 'theoretically emancipated' women to make 'an initially successful bid for freedom and then collapse into crushing conformity . . . . Almost all New Woman heroines break down at the end, most go through some period of nervous prostration if not madness . . . .'<sup>65</sup> Thus the German reviewer ( if he is not totally Hardy's fictional construct ) was certainly wrong because most of the heroines of even female writers like Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird, 'George Egerton' (Mary Chavelita Dunne) and Sarah Grand suffer breakdowns, and Hardy was only sharing a 'common ambivalence in literature of the time' in his 'ambivalence of the treatment of Sue's revolt -- a revolt which, though sympathetically depicted, is also shown to meet its nemesis . . . .'<sup>66</sup>

But the more serious charge against Hardy is not that he allowed Sue to break down but that he subordinated her so that 'she is made the instrument of Jude's tragedy, rather than the subject of her own'.<sup>67</sup> The novel never prompts us to 'ask what is happening to Sue ; because it is rather a question of Sue happening to Jude'.<sup>68</sup> It is difficult to defend Hardy

<sup>64</sup> Sue passes the examination for a Queen's Scholarship and gains admission to the teachers' Training College at Melchester. After two years' training (the normal duration of the course), she hopes to obtain her teacher's Certificate which will enable her to secure a teaching post in a girls' school. Hardy's own sisters, Mary and Kate, had successfully qualified from Salisbury Training College -- which, according to Hardy's autobiography, is faithfully depicted as the Melchester Training College in *Jude*. Hardy's cousin, Tryphena Sparks, had qualified as a teacher from Stockwell Training College and Hardy visited Stockwell Training College and Whitelands Training College in 1891, possibly as part of his preparation for writing *Jude*.

<sup>65</sup> Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (New York : Harper & Row ; London : Macmillan, 1978), p.106. Penny Boumelha too discusses such 'collapse from within' in her useful chapter on 'Women and the New Fiction 1880 - 1900', in *Thomas Hardy and Women* (1982), pp.63-97. See also A. R. Cunningham, 'The "New Woman Fiction" of the 1890's', *Victorian Studies*, 17 : 2 (1973), pp.177-186.

<sup>66</sup> Cedric Watts, 'Hardy's Sue Bridehead and the "New Woman"', *Critical Survey*, 5 : 2 (1993), pp.152-156 ; p.155. Cedric Watts points out the irony that while female writers allowed their heroines to break down, it was the 'male playwrights' -- Ibsen and Shaw -- who showed 'revolts successfully carried out' (p.155).

<sup>67</sup> Penny Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, p.148.

<sup>68</sup> John Goode, 'Sue Bridehead and the New Woman', in Mary Jacobus ed. *Women Writing and Writing About Women* (1979), p.104.

against this charge especially since in his next novel, The Well-Beloved (1897),<sup>69</sup> the narrative further reduces women to object status. The three Avices -- mother, daughter, and granddaughter -- are even denied a personalizing name and their emotional histories are relevant only inasmuch as they impinge on Pierston's consciousness. The rest of their life story is expunged from the text and their individual differences ignored and erased by the protagonist who tries to impose on them the uniform identity of the 'Well-Beloved' because ( to rephrase John Goode ) it is a question of the three Avices 'happening' to Pierston.

What, therefore, is Hardy's ultimate attitude to Sue and Arabella ? The answer to this question can perhaps be found in Hardy's successive textual revisions of Jude . Apart from the obvious restoration in the 1895 (post-dated 1896) book edition of passages bowdlerized in the serial version, Jude underwent two textual revisions: in 1903 after Macmillan had taken over (in 1902) as Hardy's English publishers, and again in 1912 for the definitive 'Wessex Edition' of Hardy's works. Through the 'cumulative effect' of these successive revisions, Hardy tried to soften his original 'somewhat harsh' and 'too rigid' portrait of Sue by giving her 'more human sympathy' -- e.g. she is made less evasive about her feelings for Jude and when she finally surrenders to his physical desire, the 1912 version has the significant additional words : 'I do love you' (Pt. V, Ch.2, p.280).<sup>70</sup> Jude, too, is made to withdraw his 1903 accusation that Sue is

<sup>69</sup> This novel, under the title The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved , was published serially in Oct - Dec 1892. For the book version, it underwent a thorough re-writing, with significant changes in the title, the protagonist's name, characterization, plotting of narrative episodes, and conclusion. The differences between the 1892 and 1897 versions of the text are so substantial that some critics accord 'equal status' to both texts, treating the work not as one story with 'alternative endings' but as 'alternative texts' with an 'either/or structure'. See, e.g., Patricia Ingham, Thomas Hardy : Feminist Readings (New York and London : Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), pp.96-97.

<sup>70</sup> Robert C. Slack, 'The Text of Hardy's Jude the Obscure', Nineteenth-Century Fiction , 11 : 4 (1957), pp.261-275 ; p.272. In his fairly detailed discussion of textual revisions which make Sue a more sympathetic figure, Slack provides a useful juxtaposition of the 1903 and 1912 texts.



'cold', and he tones down his original harsh condemnation -- '. . . you are *never* so nice in your real presence as you are in your letters' -- to a more moderate 'you are *often* not so nice [etc] . . .' (Pt. III, Ch.6, p.184 ; my italics). In the case of Arabella, however, Hardy's sympathy is much less in evidence as is demonstrated in one very crucial textual revision. The 1895 (post-dated 1896) Osgood McIlvaine edition had described Arabella -- when Jude first notices her, on being struck by her novel love-missile -- as 'a complete and substantial female human -- no more, no less'.<sup>71</sup> In the 1903 Macmillan 'New Edition' ( and in all subsequent editions ), just *one* word is changed, but it radically transforms the tone of the entire description as Arabella now becomes 'a complete and substantial female *animal* . . .' (Pt. I, Ch.6, p.62 ; my italic). In sliding down the evolutionary ladder -- from 'human' to 'animal' -- we suspect that Arabella forfeits some of her creator's imaginative sympathy, despite Hardy's genuine and repeatedly expressed concern for cruelly trapped rabbits and inhumanely slaughtered pigs.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, The Wessex Novels, Vol. VIII, ( London : Osgood, McIlvaine & Co., 1896), p.42. See also Robert C. Slack's article (above footnote), p.265.

<sup>72</sup> For Hardy's hatred of blood-sport or any form of cruelty to animals / birds, his strong advocacy of slaughterhouse reform, his qualified support for anti-vivisection, see *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 2, p.148 ; Vol. 3, p.74 ; Vol. 4, pp.168, 170, 174, 330-1 ; Vol. 5, pp.20, 30, 321, 340 ; Vol. 6, pp.144, 223 ; Vol. 7, p.149.

## Chapter VIII

### Hardy, his Wives, and his Literary Protégées

From the 1890s onwards book-length critical studies of Thomas Hardy began to appear and when these books found their way into the Max Gate library -- presented either by the author or the publisher -- it was invariably their biographical sections that irritated Hardy. The worst offender seems to have been Ernest Brennecke's The Life of Thomas Hardy (1925) which is littered with Hardy's marginal comments : 'false', 'incorrect', 'untrue', 'conjectural', 'exaggerated', 'garbled', 'imaginary', 'impertinent invention'.<sup>1</sup> In a 1922 letter to Agnes Grove, Hardy had already stated his position unequivocally, in refusing to entertain a female thesis-writer whom she had recommended :

I am sorry I am unable to be interviewed by the young woman. I have many such applications to obtain personal details, which are quite unnecessary for writing a "thesis", that should be based on published works alone of course. So that I am depriving her of nothing of value in the least.<sup>2</sup>

Given such a clear warning that trespassers on his private life are unwelcome, it may seem a case of fools rushing in where saner critics have wisely refrained. However, to explore fully Hardy's attitudes to women it is necessary to take into account at least his relationships with his two wives -- both of whom had literary

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<sup>1</sup> Hardy's copy of Brennecke's book is now in the Dorset County Museum and I am grateful to the Curator, Mr Richard de Peyer, for allowing me to consult it. Hardy's dismissive marginal comments are to be found, e.g., on pp. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 21, 40, 43, 61, 69, 78, 81, 82, 84, 89, 98, 100, 101, 102, 105, 106, 124, 135, in just the first half of the book. See Hardy's letters to the publisher C.B.M. Childs (1 Apr 1925) and to Frederick Macmillan (4 Apr 1925) regarding Brennecke's book, in Purdy and Millgate eds. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 6, (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 317 & 318-9. See also Florence Hardy's letter of 8 Apr 1925 to the American collector Paul Lemperly, complaining of the inaccuracies in Brennecke's book, in Michael Millgate ed. Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1996), p.222. Also, Hardy's strong objection to the biographical part of Frank Hedgcock's book Thomas Hardy, penseur et artiste (1911) effectively smothered the proposed scheme to publish an English translation of Hedgcock's book by Vere Collins.

<sup>2</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 6, p.151.

ambitions -- and with his literary ladies whom he protectively took under his wing, revising their work, urging reluctant publishers on their behalf, and even painstakingly correcting their proofs.

In her Hardy-baiting novel, Emma Tennant states provocatively : 'Yes, Thomas Hardy made of his wife that well-known Victorian phenomenon, the madwoman in the attic. His neglect and cold indifference alienated her, she became "scatty" and the housekeeping got beyond her capabilities.'<sup>3</sup> Behind the gross exaggeration in Emma Tennant's accusation of Hardy there is perhaps a kernel of truth because when Emma Hardy retired to the attic of Max Gate she was deeply frustrated and disillusioned at both personal and literary levels. Witnessing Hardy's extreme susceptibility to younger, beautiful, (often aristocratic) women with literary aspirations -- Rosamund Tomson, Florence Henniker, Agnes Grove, Florence Dugdale -- it must have pained Emma to realize her husband's insensitive disregard of her own literary aspirations. When Emma and Hardy first met in 1870 it was perhaps her literary ambition that had drawn her to the unimpressive looking architect who knocked on the rectory door. As she later recorded in Some Recollections ( written in 1911 ), one of the first things she noticed about his appearance was 'a blue paper sticking out of his pocket' -- the MS of a poem.<sup>4</sup>

Even biographers not very sympathetic to Emma Hardy concede grudgingly that her emotional and moral support was crucial to Hardy at a time when he was wavering between architecture and literature. Had she desired mere financial security she would have urged Hardy to stick to architecture, but her intuitive recognition of Hardy's literary potential made her supportive of his

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<sup>3</sup> Emma Tennant, Tess ( London : HarperCollins, 1993 ; rpt. Flamingo pbk., 1994), p.127.

<sup>4</sup> Emma Hardy, Some Recollections eds. Evelyn Hardy and Robert Gittings ( London : Oxford Univ. Press, 1961), p.55. Subsequent page references are to this edition, unless otherwise specified.

tentative efforts in that direction and 'many years later, talking to Eden Phillpotts he mentioned his everlasting gratitude to her for this'.<sup>5</sup> Recalling those early years of indecision and struggle, in his disguised autobiography, Hardy paid Emma ( then Miss Gifford ) a warm tribute which deserves to be quoted at length if only to counterbalance the standard image of Emma Hardy, built up by biographers and critics, as that of an eccentric, ego-centric, mentally deficient wife who was a social embarrassment to the long-suffering and uncomplaining Hardy :

However, deeming their reply [i.e. Macmillan's] on the question of publishing the tale [i.e. Under the Greenwood Tree ] to be ambiguous at least, he got it back, threw the MS. into a box with his old poems, being quite sick of all such, and began to think of other ways and means. He consulted Miss Gifford by letter, declaring that he had banished novel-writing for ever, and was going on with architecture henceforward. But she, with no great opportunity of reasoning on the matter, yet, as Hardy used to think and say -- truly or not -- with that rapid instinct which serves women in such good stead, and may almost be called preternatural vision, wrote back instantly her desire that he should adhere to authorship, which she felt sure would be his true vocation. From the very fact that she wished thus, and *set herself aside altogether* -- architecture being obviously the quick way to an income for marrying on -- he was impelled to consider her interests more than his own.<sup>6</sup> (My italics)

Emma's assistance took a very practical shape ; she later recalled : ' . . . I copied a good deal of manuscript which went to-and-fro by post, and I was very proud and happy doing this . . . ' <sup>7</sup> This was the MS of Desperate Remedies which, unfortunately, has not survived. In fact, Emma's service as Hardy's amanuensis continued right up to the early 1890s and the painstakingly hand-

<sup>5</sup> James Gibson, Thomas Hardy : A Literary Life ( London : Macmillan, 1996), p.62.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Millgate ed. The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy ( London : Macmillan, 1984 ; rpt. 1989), p.89.

<sup>7</sup> Some Recollections , p.60. This is confirmed by Hardy's autobiography ; see Millgate ed. The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.85.

written fair copies could only have been a labour of love. The full extent of her contribution is now a matter of debate and speculation as much of the evidence was destroyed, often by Hardy himself, and it is only the reconstructive efforts of a few Hardy scholars that give us an idea of her erased work. For instance, when Hardy was composing A Laodicean he was totally confined to bed with an internal haemorrhage and the publisher's deadline could only be met by his dictating a substantial part of the novel to Emma. In his disguised autobiography, the normally reticent Hardy pays Emma a brief tribute : 'Accordingly from November onwards he began dictating it to her from the awkward position he occupied . . . She worked bravely both at writing and nursing, till at the beginning of the following May a rough draft was finished by one shift and another.'<sup>8</sup> But what happened to this MS in Emma's handwriting ? When Hardy distributed his MSS to the various libraries, through Sydney Cockerell in 1911, the MS of A Laodicean was significantly missing -- Hardy had himself burned it much earlier.<sup>9</sup>

A similar fate met those pages written by Emma in the MSS of the other novels too. For example, the 108 scattered leaves missing from the MS of The Mayor of Casterbridge and the 39 leaves missing from the MS of Tess of the d'Urbervilles were probably in Emma's hand, as Alan Manford has quite convincingly argued. Often the bottom line(s) of a page is torn/cut away and the subsequent pages missing, or the top of a page is torn/cut away and the previous few leaves missing, which all seem to suggest that 'there was a deliberate and systematic attempt to suppress the fact of Emma Hardy's part in [the]

<sup>8</sup> Millgate ed. The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.150.

<sup>9</sup> See Richard Little Purdy, Thomas Hardy : A Bibliographical Study ( London : Geoffrey Cumberlege and OUP, 1954), p.38. See also Michael Millgate, Thomas Hardy : A Biography (Oxford : OUP, 1982 ; rev. ed. Clarendon pbk., 1992), p.395n.

manuscript'.<sup>10</sup> Simon Gatrell had reached the same conclusion when he wrote : 'There is much circumstantial evidence to suggest that over a hundred leaves of the manuscript of The Mayor of Casterbridge were removed by Hardy, when he presented it to the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society in 1911, because they were all or part in Emma's hand.'<sup>11</sup> Earlier, in his 'Introduction' to the Facsimile edition of Tess, Gatrell had written :

Thirty-nine leaves of the manuscript are missing, and recent research on other defective manuscripts, notably The Mayor of Casterbridge, has suggested that Hardy probably removed them before allowing the manuscript to be presented to the British Museum because they were wholly or in part written in the hand of his wife, Emma.<sup>12</sup>

Emma Hardy's hand, however, does survive in the MS of The Woodlanders : while Purdy identified 106 sheets as being either wholly or partly in Emma's hand ( out of 498 sheets ), Manford makes a claim for 128 sheets -- i.e. nearly a fifth of the MS. This MS thus represents the largest number of leaves in Emma's hand that is extant and this fact, along with the nature of some of Emma's errors of transcription which suggest dictation ( e.g. misspelling a character's name as 'Bocock' instead of 'Beaucock' ), imply that by 1887 at least the Hardy marriage had not irretrievably broken down. Given the systematic removal of Emma's scribal contributions to Hardy's other MSS, the substantial number of pages in her hand in The Woodlanders MS which have survived seems somewhat of a puzzle. It is significant to remember that The Woodlanders

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<sup>10</sup> Alan Manford, 'Who Wrote Thomas Hardy's Novels ? ( A Survey of Emma Hardy's Contribution to the Manuscripts of Her Husband's Novels)', The Thomas Hardy Journal, 6 : 2 (1990), p.92. See also Alan Manford, 'Emma Hardy's Helping Hand', in Dale Kramer and Nancy Marck eds. Critical Essays on Thomas Hardy : The Novels ( Boston, Massachusetts : G.K. Hall & Co., 1990), pp.100-121.

<sup>11</sup> Simon Gatrell, Hardy the Creator : A Textual Biography ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1988), p.48.

<sup>12</sup> Simon Gatrell ed. 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles' : A Facsimile of the Manuscript with Related Materials, 2 vols, ( New York and London : Garland Publishing, 1986), vol. 1, p.xi.

MS (perhaps for obvious reasons) was not among the list of MSS that Sydney Cockerell undertook to distribute to various public libraries in 1911, and Hardy seems to have lost control over the MS towards the end of his life as it was purchased by Howard Bliss, one of the earliest private collectors of Hardy's books and papers. A letter from the second Mrs Hardy to Howard Bliss in 1924 sheds some light on the issue. Bliss had pointed out that there were some pages in Emma's writing in the MS and Florence Hardy conveyed Hardy's reaction to this information :

I have been talking to T.H [sic] about 'The Woodlanders' MS. & he is appalled to think so many pages were not his. At first he suggested that they could be taken out, & he would write in the passages . . . but that seems unfair to the one who copied in so many pages with no thought save that of being helpful.

If this defect -- for I know it is a defect -- in the MS is disappointing do please -- as an act of real friendship -- let us have it back & the cheque would be returned . . . And then, later, some other MS. might be found for you.<sup>13</sup>

Earlier, in 1921, when Howard Bliss had reported the interesting find of a page of MS in the first Mrs Hardy's writing, Florence Hardy had replied : 'She did indeed frequently copy for him any pages that had many alterations. She liked doing it. There are some pages of her handwriting in the MS. of several of the novels.'<sup>14</sup> Apart from making fair copies of the heavily revised pages of the MSS of the novels, Emma Hardy also worked steadily on the relatively unglamorous job of copying out notes for Hardy in his 'Literary Notes' notebook. More than 200 entries ( i.e. no. 21 to no. 249 ) are in Emma's hand<sup>15</sup> and this

<sup>13</sup> Millgate ed. *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, p.217. This letter represents one of the rare positive references to her predecessor by the second Mrs Hardy. Perhaps after ten years of being married to genius, Florence Hardy was beginning to recover some of her original sympathy for the first Mrs Hardy. After Hardy's death, the MS of *The Woodlanders* was eventually repurchased by Florence Hardy and it is now in the Dorset County Museum.

<sup>14</sup> *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, pp.175-6.

<sup>15</sup> Lennart A. Bjork, *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy* ( London : Macmillan, 1985), Vol. 1, p.xxxviii.

speaks volumes for her desire to be a willing 'helpmeet', especially since ( unlike her successor ) she did not have typing skills to lighten the labour.

Why Hardy removed evidences of Emma's contribution will remain a matter for speculation. Perhaps he felt that an 'adulterated' MS would not have authoritative value when donated to libraries ; perhaps he was irritated by Emma's supposed claims that it was she who had really written Thomas Hardy's novels. Again, this wild exaggeration contains a tiny grain of truth. In Some Recollections Emma had written about their courtship days : 'The rarity of the visits [i.e. Hardy's] made them highly delightful to both ; we talked much of plots, possible scenes, tales, and poetry and of his own work.'<sup>16</sup> That this is not an idle boast, that Emma did have bright suggestions which Hardy readily incorporated into his work is proved by an episode as late as the 1890s. In Tess of the d'Urbervilles , when Tess confesses her past to Angel, the scene is lent an ominous quality by the firelight playing on Tess's jewels. In the third person account of his life, Hardy wrote :

Hardy spent a good deal of time in August and the autumn correcting Tess of the d'Urbervilles for its volume form, which process consisted in restoring to their places the passages and chapters of the original MS. that had been omitted from the serial publication. That Tess should put on the jewels was Mrs Hardy's suggestion.<sup>17</sup>

Characteristically enough, this crucial last line is missing from Florence Hardy's version of the text<sup>18</sup> but as Millgate restores this line it now enjoys canonical status as the candid acknowledgement on the part of the author of Tess . Confirmation is also provided by Raymond Blathwayt in his 1892 article where he quotes Hardy as saying (pointing to a sketch) : 'That is Woolbridge Manor

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<sup>16</sup> Some Recollections , p.60.

<sup>17</sup> Millgate ed. Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.250.

<sup>18</sup> Florence Emily Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy , 1840 - 1891 ( London : Macmillan, 1928) , p.313.



house . . . In that house and on that same night, if you remember, she tried on the jewels that Clare gave her. I think I must tell you that that was an idea of Mrs Hardy's.<sup>19</sup> But several other unacknowledged graftings too occurred -- e.g. snatches from Emma's courtship letters appear in Elfride's speeches ( A Pair of Blue Eyes ),<sup>20</sup> the vivid phrases from Emma's honeymoon diary recording their Continental trip surface in the description of Rouen in The Hand of Ethelberta ,<sup>21</sup> and many passages from Emma's Some Recollections later inspired some of the memorable poems of 1912 - 13. The edition by Evelyn Hardy and Robert Gittings makes the connections clear by juxtaposing Emma's prose passages with Hardy's companion poetic pieces although Hardy himself rather disingenuously claimed that while composing 'A Man was Drawing Near to Me', 'he had either not read her reminiscence of the evening as printed above, or had forgotten it'.<sup>22</sup>

It was the fate of Emma's writing, whether merely scribal or more ambitiously creative, to be forgotten, suppressed, erased. Her voice was silenced, her achievement negated. In those years of mutual estrangement Emma is supposed to have written the infamous 'Black Diaries' about which Howard Jacobson acidly comments ( through his fictional character, Camilla ) :

<sup>19</sup> Raymond Blathwayt, 'A Chat with the Author of "Tess"', Black and White, Vol. IV, 27 Aug 1892, p.239.

<sup>20</sup> See Robert Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy ( London : Heinemann Educational, 1975), pp.165-6. As Gittings points out (despite a slight misquotation), Elfride's words to Knight -- 'I suppose I must take you as I do the Bible -- find out and understand all I can ; and on the strength of that, swallow the rest in a lump, by simple faith' (Chap. 19) -- clearly echo Emma's words to Hardy : 'I take him (the reserved man) as I do the Bible ; find out what I can, compare one text with another, & believe the rest in a lump of simple faith.' These lines from Emma Gifford's Oct 1870 letter were copied by Hardy into his 'Memoranda I' notebook ; see Richard H. Taylor ed. The Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy ( London : Macmillan, 1978), p.6.

<sup>21</sup> See Robert Gittings, 'Introduction' to The Hand of Ethelberta, New Wessex Edition, ( London : Macmillan, 1976), pp.19-20. Emma Hardy's four travel diaries, with their interesting sketches, have been published as Emma Hardy Diaries ed. Richard H. Taylor ( Northumberland : Mid Northumberland Arts Group, & Manchester : Carcanet New Press, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy, p.72. The experience of reading Emma's prose recollections and Hardy's nostalgic poems inspired by them is not unlike the experience of reading Dorothy Wordsworth's beautiful prose description of the daffodils in her 'Grasmere' journal and comparing it with her famous brother's much-anthologized piece 'I wandered lonely as a cloud'.

'After Emma's death Thomas Hardy found amongst her papers a mass of diary entries gathered together under the title, "What I think of my Husband". You won't be surprised to learn that he destroyed them. His remorse for his wife is famous, but it wasn't strong enough to allow her to have her say.'<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps of all the papers that fed the periodic bonfires in the Max Gate garden, these 'black diaries' ( ominously entitled 'What I Think of My Husband' ) deserved to perish. They were probably just the safety outlet for Emma's bottled-up feelings of resentment and, if death had not forestalled her, Emma perhaps would have burnt them herself. While the suppression of these diaries is entirely understandable, what is puzzling is a different case of editorial suppression in relation to the more sunny and romantic Some Recollections . Hardy was sufficiently impressed by the literary quality of this diary and he incorporated a fairly long extract from it in his own disguised autobiography. Allowing the pages of Emma's diary to take up the narrative of their courtship, he quotes Emma :

I have never liked the Cornish working-orders as I do Devonshire folk ; their so-called admirable independence of character was most disagreeable to live with, and usually amounted to absence of kindly interest in others, though it was unnoticeable by casual acquaintance. . . . Nevertheless their nature had a glamour about it -- that of an old-world romantic expression ; and then sometimes there came to one's cognizance in the hamlets a dear heart-whole person. ( Hardy's ellipsis )<sup>24</sup>

What has been carefully edited out from this paragraph by the silent ellipsis -- and in this instance the editorial scissors seem to be firmly in Hardy's hand -- is the following revealing sentence by Emma :

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<sup>23</sup> Howard Jacobson, Peeping Tom ( London : Chatto and Windus, 1984 ; rpt. Penguin Books, 1993), p.180.

<sup>24</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.74.

One stands out [saliently] amongst them with worth of character and deep devotion though rather dumb of expression, a man gentle of nature, musical, christlike in guilelessness, handsome of face and figure, David-like farming his own land : he never married, and told after I had left of his disappointment, and [of his] attraction on first seeing me on the stairs.<sup>25</sup>

Even if this was mere romantic fantasizing on Emma's part, with no basis in facts whatsoever, there was surely no harm in letting it stand. After all, Hardy's own literary output -- in both prose and poetry -- is replete with the tragedy of missed chances, with backward glances of yearning, and quite a few of his poems vocalize his regret for a 'lost prize' : e.g. 'The Opportunity (For H.P.)' (Helen Paterson), 'Thoughts of Phena' (Tryphena Sparks), 'To Lizbie Browne' (Elizabeth Bishop), 'To Louisa in the Lane' (Louisa Harding), 'Concerning Agnes' (Agnes Grove), 'Wessex Heights' (Florence Henniker, among many others), 'An Old Likeness (Recalling R.T.)' (Rosamund Tomson). Unconsciously betraying the same double standards -- against which Tess was so powerful a plea -- Hardy here applies a double censorship : as the male editor, he silences this intransigent female voice and as the husband, he discreetly draws the veil over his wife's verbal indiscretion.

A more insidious instance of the suppression of Emma's work relates to her other creative medium -- her sketches. Emma's diaries are filled with lively pencil drawings and probably after one of their visits to Tintagel Castle she did a painting of it in water-colour. Years after her death, the Dorchester 'Hardy Players' produced Hardy's The Queen of Cornwall (in November 1923) and the programme for the performance contained a photograph of Tintagel Castle.

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<sup>25</sup> Some Recollections, p.59. The MS of Some Recollections, now in the Dorset County Museum, bears ample evidence of revisions in Hardy's hand. The sentence in question ( 'One stands out . . . me on the stairs') was obviously an afterthought because it was written on the blank verso of the previous page and keyed into the text at this point by a symbol. The final words -- 'and told me after I had left . . . me on the stairs' -- have been deleted in ink ; but whether it was Emma's hand or Hardy's that struck out these words is difficult to tell at this date.

Actually, it was a photograph of the water-colour of the castle by Emma Gifford (as she then was) but it simply bore the caption 'From a Water Colour Drawing in the possession of the Author'.<sup>26</sup> Emma's authorship of the painting is suppressed and her creative effort rendered anonymous.

Of Emma's purely literary efforts, her 'The Maid on the Shore' surely deserved a private printing/ limited edition. Although the narrative line is somewhat slack and there is some confusion about names and relationships, the story does possess a certain charm. There are powerful evocations of the Cornish seascape which are not unworthy of the hand of Hardy himself and the story is certainly richer in human interest than, say, 'Blue Jimmy : The Horse Stealer'. If, as Pamela Dalziel has demonstrated, Hardy had a greater hand in the composition of 'Blue Jimmy' ( than just slight editorial corrections on proof sheets ),<sup>27</sup> then one can only conclude that it was one of Hardy's off days. 'Blue Jimmy', ostensibly by Florence Dugdale ( later, the second Mrs Hardy ), is the flattest and dullest narrative to which Hardy ever applied his pen. 'The Maid on the Shore', by contrast, is full of surprises which nevertheless have an air of inevitability and the exploration of the psychology of love among the quartet of lovers is interesting. Hardy presumably was sufficiently impressed by it because he preserved the typescript and even made corrections ( typographical and stylistic ) in ink in his hand.<sup>28</sup> But while he was busy improving the compositions

<sup>26</sup> See Purdy, *Thomas Hardy : A Bibliographical Study* , p.230n. See also Purdy and Millgate eds. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 6, p.281n.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Excluded and Collaborative Stories* ed. Pamela Dalziel ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1992), pp.332-347. While Dalziel obviously sees it as a 'collaborative' work, Purdy includes 'Blue Jimmy' among Hardy's 'Uncollected Contributions' ; see his *Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study* , p.314.

<sup>28</sup> The typescript, prepared by Florence Dugdale, is now in the Dorset County Museum and I am grateful to Mr de Peyer for granting me access to it. Examples of Hardy's revisions include : correction of the punctuation on p.50 ; correction of an obvious typographical error and correction of grammar ( 'were' changed to 'was' ) on p.85 ; 'motive' revised to 'motto', again on p.85 ; correction of 'great nephew' and 'Uncle' to 'grandson' and 'Grandfather' respectively, on p.76 and elsewhere, to make the at times confused relationships between the characters more consistent.

of Florence Henniker, Agnes Grove and Florence Dugdale, he apparently did not give a thought to touching up Emma's story for publication.

Emma Hardy, however, did achieve publication. Her attempts at poetry were marginally more successful and one of her sonnets, called 'Spring Song', was published in the Sphere on 14 April 1900. Another, 'The Gardener's Ruse'<sup>29</sup>, appeared in The Academy on 27 April 1901, while three more short pieces appeared locally in the Dorset County Chronicle in 1905, 1907 and 1910. In December 1911 a slim volume of her verse entitled Alleys was privately printed and this was followed in April 1912 by the private printing of her religious prose entitled Spaces. A couple of poems in Alleys, e.g. 'The Trumpet Call' and 'Dancing Maidens', are engaging in their simplicity and directness of appeal but by no stretch of even the most sympathetic imagination was she a good poet (and it is more difficult to be enthusiastic about Spaces).<sup>30</sup> Earlier, drawing on the experiences of her impulsive journey across the Channel, she had written an article 'In Praise of Calais' and it was published in the Dorset County Chronicle on 31 December 1908. Passionately opposed to any sort of cruelty to 'living creatures, even of the insect kind', she again wrote to the Editor of the Dorset County Chronicle and her letter was published on 14 July 1910. Despite a literary misquotation, this short piece is remarkable for its sensitive statement: 'It must be remembered that minuteness of organism does not prevent agony, that size is of no account in the scheme of creation.'<sup>31</sup> The other passionate commitment in Emma Hardy's life was the women's suffrage movement and she actually joined

<sup>29</sup> Michael Millgate shrewdly reads this poem as 'an ironic fable of Emma's perception of her relationship with her husband' ( Thomas Hardy: A Biography, p.405n). I feel that this poem could well be Emma Hardy's reply to Hardy's own poem 'The Ivy-Wife' ( Wessex Poems, 1898) which Emma seems to have taken personally.

<sup>30</sup> Both Alleys and Spaces have been conveniently reprinted together as 'Poems and Religious Effusions by Emma Lavinia Hardy', Toucan Press Monograph, No. 29, 1966, and collected in J. Stevens Cox ed. Thomas Hardy: Materials for a Study of His Life, Times and Works, Vol. I, (St Peter Port, Guernsey: Toucan Press, 1968).

<sup>31</sup> Millgate ed. Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy, p.50.

the three thousand odd Suffragettes in their 1907 London march in such inclement weather that it came to be dubbed as the 'Mud March'. Next year, she again joined the London demonstrations but this time, perhaps inhibited by her recurring lameness, she contented herself with riding in an open carriage at the head of the procession.<sup>32</sup> She had contributed, in March 1907, to a symposium on women's suffrage (along with Millicent Fawcett) published in The Woman at Home, and in May 1908 she wrote a spirited but balanced letter to the Editor which was published in The Nation under the title 'Women and the Suffrage'. In it she makes a remarkable statement : 'The truth of the matter is that a man who has something of the feminine nature in him is a more perfectly *rational* being than one who is without it, though men who are not possessed of this supreme quality pour contempt on such rare ones as have it.'<sup>33</sup> This same penetrating insight is occasionally revealed in her personal correspondence too (very little of which, unfortunately, has survived). For instance, in 1894, she is writing to Mary Haweis and her comment on the move to clear London streets of prostitutes is extremely shrewd : 'I am interested in Mrs Ormiston Chant, her proceedings & her faith in the possibility of purifying London -- if only she would organize a crusade to clear the young men from the streets -- to attack them rather than the women -- how she would do it !'<sup>34</sup> All this suggests that Emma Hardy was not as scatter-brained as she is generally made out to be and if Hardy had only given her the same tutelage that he lavished on Agnes Grove, perhaps Emma Hardy may have made at least a modest journalistic career for herself.

<sup>32</sup> See Denys Kay-Robinson, The First Mrs Thomas Hardy (London : Macmillan, 1979), pp.202-3 & 205-6.

<sup>33</sup> Millgate ed. Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy, p.40 (Emma Hardy's italic) ; see also p.38. Here Emma Hardy seems to be almost anticipating the central argument of Elaine Showalter's essay on 'The Unmanning of the Mayor of Casterbridge', in Dale Kramer ed. Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy (London : Macmillan, 1979).

<sup>34</sup> Millgate ed. Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy, p.6.

One of the ironies of Emma's literary aspirations is that she wrote a short story called 'The Inspirer', about a wife who serves as her husband's Muse. The story is no longer extant but from Florence Dugdale's letters to Emma<sup>35</sup> ( she was then typing it for the first Mrs Hardy ) it is obvious that both Emma and Florence considered it her best work. Although this story itself does not survive, its creator does in a way survive as indeed 'The Inspirer' : for through her death, Emma inspired those poignant poems of 1912-13 with their haunting sense of loss, regret and remorse. Another irony surrounding one of Emma's works -- 'The Acceptors' -- is that when Florence Dugdale was trying to place it with a publisher, she wrote to Emma (August 1910) saying that she had not disclosed Mrs Hardy's name as the author of the piece because she 'thought that it would be wiser to get a perfectly unbiassed opinion'<sup>36</sup> from the publisher so that the story could be published (presumably) on its own merit. As the publication of Hardy's letters in seven volumes now abundantly makes clear, Florence Dugdale's own literary attempts did not always achieve publication on their own steam. Hardy was solidly behind her, putting in a good word, egging on a reluctant publisher, and often heavily revising and polishing her drafts. As early as 8 July 1907 (that is, much before her 1910 meeting with Emma Hardy when she could lay no claim to being 'for several years the friend of the first Mrs Hardy' which is how Hardy's autobiography rather disingenuously describes her<sup>37</sup> ), Hardy is trying to launch her on a writing career in order to spare her the 'drudgery of teaching'. Writing to Maurice Macmillan, Hardy is warmly recommending Florence Dugdale as being 'well qualified to be of assistance to

<sup>35</sup> Florence Dugdale's letters to Emma Hardy, dated 30 Sept 1910 and 4 Oct 1910, are now in the Dorset County Museum. These two letters are included in Michael Millgate's selective edition of the *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, pp.62-4.

<sup>36</sup> Letter from Florence Dugdale to Emma Hardy, dated 18 Aug 1910, now in the Dorset County Museum. This letter is included in Millgate ed. *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, pp.61-2.

<sup>37</sup> Millgate ed. *Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, p.392.

your firm in the preparation of school books & supplementary readers' because of her 'strong literary tastes, & a natural gift for writing'.<sup>38</sup> The very next day, Hardy is writing to Archibald Marshall, Editor of the Daily mail, ostensibly in response to his request for another poem, but making no effort whatsoever to mask his true intentions :

My immediate reason for writing is however of another kind -- to bring under the editorial eye of the Daily Mail a young writer -- Miss F. Dugdale, who has done research work for me at the British Museum to my great satisfaction, & whose growing practice in journalism & discriminating judgment in literature would render her, I think, of use in one or other department of the paper. She is a certified school teacher, & might, in my opinion, do good work in reviewing books for the young. She has already written a few things for the Daily Mail, but has not, I think, been sufficiently discovered by the Editors.<sup>39</sup>

A couple of months later, in September 1907, Hardy is writing to thank Reginald Smith for having accepted Florence Dugdale's story 'The Apotheosis of the Minx' which was published in the Cornhill in May 1908.<sup>40</sup> This definitely suggests that Hardy had a hand in placing the story, if not in its actual composition. However, not all editors were so obliging and Herbert Greenhough Smith, acting editor of the Strand Magazine, failed to respond to Hardy's recommendation of a story (in July 1908) by 'a modest young writer' which was 'somewhat lurid & sensational, but . . . well told & striking'.<sup>41</sup> The story, identified tentatively as Dugdale's 'The Scholar's Wife', found no better luck --

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<sup>38</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 3, (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1982), p.261.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.261-2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.274. Hardy's letter contains an interesting postscript -- 'My services to Lady Grove are really too small to be worth naming' -- which suggests that Reginald Smith had shrewdly guessed both the extent of Hardy's hidden contributions to the work of Agnes Grove and Florence Dugdale and also that Florence had replaced Agnes as Hardy's current favourite literary pupil.

<sup>41</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 7, (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1988), p.147, i.e. under 'Additional Letters'.



for once -- with Clement Shorter too, and it was ultimately published in Pall Mall Magazine in January 1909. What means of persuasion Hardy used on this occasion is not known, but at times he was not above resorting to what can only be described as blatant arm-twisting tactics. For instance, on 20 September 1910, Hardy wrote to James Milne :

I am sending you for the Daily Chronicle a little topical sketch that was forwarded to the paper a year ago by the author, for publication on Oct 21. I have just read it, & have come to the conclusion that its rejection on that occasion must have been owing to oversight or press of matter, for it is about the only thing left to say in print concerning Trafalgar Day, & it is, moreover, said well, & with real literary art. If you & the Editor tell me that the Daily Chronicle does not want literature I have, of course, no answer to make.<sup>42</sup>

The article whose claims this covering letter urged was Florence Dugdale's 'Trafalgar ! How Nelson's Death Inspired the Tailor', originally submitted (and rejected) in September 1909, but subsequently duly published in the Daily Chronicle on Trafalgar Day, 21 October 1910. After all, very few editors could fail to respond to such a persuasive letter written by a man who had just been awarded the Order of Merit. In fact, Hardy's contribution in this instance was not just pushing the piece down a timid editor's throat ; he seems to have had a hand in the composition as well, because in an earlier letter to Florence Dugdale (September 1909), he had written : 'The sketch reads remarkably well. If you feel you do not like my supposed improvements, rub them out ; though I *advise* you to recopy the story just as it now stands' (Hardy's italic).<sup>43</sup>

In August 1910, Hardy is again advancing the claims of 'Blue Jimmy' to Reginald Smith :

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<sup>42</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 4, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1984), p.117.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.45.

At last I send the story -- or rather record -- I spoke about : "Blue Jimmy the horse-stealer". It seems interesting to me, & if I may say so, worthy of the Cornhill, even if only from the novelty of its subject. I hope you will think the same. The writer has been at some pains to hunt up the particulars at the British Museum, & I gave her also a few traditional ones. I can guarantee the truth of the story -- if truth has any virtue in such a case.<sup>44</sup>

'Blue Jimmy' was duly published in the Cornhill (in February 1911) but Hardy was not always so successful in promoting Florence's works. Earlier, a similar letter addressed to C. E. S. Chambers (March 1909),<sup>45</sup> accompanying an (unidentified) story of Florence, failed to produce the desired effect in Chambers's Journal.

Hardy's contribution to Florence Dugdale's literary output was sometimes more direct and yet covert. For instance, when Florence was preparing the prose and verse descriptions to accompany the illustrations in The Book of Baby Beasts (1911), Hardy passed off his own poem 'The Calf' under her name. Similarly, in Florence's The Book of Baby Birds (1912), the poem on 'The Yellow-Hammer' is actually Hardy's, and in her The Book of Baby Pets (1913) 'The Lizard' is Hardy's contribution. Purdy even speculates that Hardy probably had a hand in the revision of the other poems in all these three books.<sup>46</sup> That these three poems have subsequently found a place in the 'New Wessex Edition' of Hardy's The Complete Poems (1976) suggests that there is no serious scholarly challenge to ascribing these poems to the Hardy canon.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p.114.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>46</sup> Purdy, Thomas Hardy : A Bibliographical Study, pp.314, 316, 317.

<sup>47</sup> MSS in Hardy's hand for 'The Yellow-Hammer' and 'The Lizard' are now in the Purdy Collection in the Beinecke Library at Yale University. The ascription of 'The Calf' rests upon oral evidence i.e. Purdy's being told by Florence Hardy's sister, Mrs Ethel Richardson, that she was 'sure' Florence had said that Hardy was its author. I am very grateful to Professor Michael Millgate for providing me with the above information.

Hardy's ghost-writing of his own (auto)biography was a brilliant strategy but it was nothing new. It was the natural culmination of a long period of ghost-writing Florence's articles/stories/poems, and when Florence Hardy acquiesced in this literary deception one suspects that wifely loyalty ran hand-in-hand with personal literary ambition. She perhaps saw herself in the tradition of Boswell - Lockhart and, at any rate, her literary conscience did not urge her to reveal the secret as long as she lived. Already such subterfuges had been going on for quite some time, albeit on a minor scale. For instance, in June 1910, Hardy wrote to his friend Edward Clodd :

I do not know if you saw in The Standard a sort of summary of my existence so far, which appeared there on my birthday. It was written by my secretary Miss Dugdale. She does work for that paper, & they asked her to do an interview ; but I would not consent to that, so she wrote the article they printed, with which they were much pleased. The fact was that I knew they would print *something* , & I preferred to fall into her hands to being handled by a stranger, as I can always depend on her good taste.<sup>48</sup> (Hardy's italic)

Was this article, 'Thomas Hardy . Great Writer's 70th Birthday', which appeared on 2 June 1910 in the Standard , really written by Florence Dugdale or did Hardy ghost-write it ? The suspicion is confirmed by later events because in this same letter Hardy goes on to make a proposal and to reassure Clodd :

The Evening Standard ( I think she said ) has now asked her to do a similar sketch of yourself for publication on your 70th birthday, & she wonders if you would mind. It would probably be quite short & general. I have told her that if you agree I will read the MS. before she lets it go, & I would not pass anything that you could possibly object to. (Hardy's parenthesis)

When the article by Florence Dugdale, celebrating Clodd's 70th birthday, duly appeared in the Evening Standard on 30 June 1910, Florence wrote to Clodd

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<sup>48</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 4, p.98.

confiding : 'As for the purple patches, they were *all* his [i.e. Thomas Hardy's], I can assure you.'<sup>49</sup> If Hardy was responsible for the 'purple patches' in Clodd's biographical sketch, then does it strain credulity too much to imagine that he was probably responsible for many passages of his own '70th birthday' article ?

Also, the final volumes of Hardy's Collected Letters contain quite a few letters drafted by Hardy himself ( as the editors' meticulous footnotes point out ) but signed by Florence Hardy and sent out over her name. Hardy had become quite an adept in the third-person style and he seems to have realized his wife's potential as his proxy self. Disclaimers, letters of denial, letters expressing disapproval, are all sent out in Florence Hardy's name. For example, Hardy's lack of enthusiasm over Vere H. Collins's proposal to translate Hedgcock's book, because of the disproportionate space it devotes to his prose ( at the expense of his poetry ) and because of the minor errors in the biographical section, is conveyed in a letter (22 June 1922), ostensibly by Florence Hardy, but probably composed by Hardy himself as even the words 'signed by F.E.H.' are apparently in Hardy's hand.<sup>50</sup> The same distancing strategy is adopted in the subsequent letters to Vere Collins (9 July 1922) and to Frank Hedgcock (12 July 1922).<sup>51</sup>

When Samuel Chew was working on the revisions to his book Thomas Hardy : Poet and Novelist (1921 ; rev. ed. 1928) he received a letter, ostensibly from Florence Hardy (17 September 1922), stating :

I am enclosing herewith the notes for the new edition of your book as promised . . . they are sent on the understanding that they are kept private as to their present shape, & that you do not mention anything about how you came by the details they give, or that you state them on authority . . . .

<sup>49</sup> Letter of 2 July 1910, collected in Millgate ed. Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy, p.60 ; Florence Dugdale's italic.

<sup>50</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 6, pp.138-39.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.144-46.

Mr Hardy has looked them over, & says they are quite correct -- indeed, they are based entirely on his own remarks.<sup>52</sup>

The extreme caution expressed in these lines along with the presence of numerous additions in Hardy's hand in the accompanying typescript imply that although the list of suggested corrections is headed 'Notes on Professor Chew's Book by F.E.H.', the work was probably largely Hardy's own. Certainly this is the inevitable conclusion from the editorial decision to include it in Hardy's Collected Letters .

Perhaps the most revealing case of such ghost-writing is a letter of 24 August 1924 sent to T.H. Tilley regarding a possible dramatic production of Tess. The letter, signed 'F.E. Hardy', states : 'Mr Hardy agrees to their performing the Tess play . . . .' But in the pencil draft, for once the mask slips as the words Hardy had originally written were : 'I agree . . . .'<sup>53</sup> Florence Hardy, on her part, seems to have been passively acquiescent to such Hardyian intrusions into her own work, even her personal correspondence. Thus, in her letter of 4 August 1918 to Sydney Cockerell there is a paragraph, on the 'fashion for obscurity' among contemporary young poets, which was actually dictated by Thomas Hardy and included by Florence as part of her own letter.<sup>54</sup> Writing to Sydney Cockerell again, Florence Hardy comments on Crabbe as one of the 'potent influence[s]' on Hardy's 'realism' ( rather than Zola ) and this entire paragraph, dictated by Hardy, is included (within quotation marks) as part of her letter of 6 February 1919 to Cockerell.<sup>55</sup> Again, on 7 December 1919, as part of her letter to Cockerell, Florence Hardy complains of the 'flagrant' 'trickery' in the Saturday Review

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.153 ; see also pp.154-57.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.269.

<sup>54</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 5, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1985), p.275. This letter is not included in Millgate ed Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy.

<sup>55</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 5, p.294. Florence Hardy's letter -- which begins with the words : ' . . . my husband has dictated this answer -- not however to be quoted as his' -- is included in Millgate ed. Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy , p.155.

criticism of 'my husband's poems' ; but as her subsequent letter (18 December) to Cockerell acknowledges, her comments were actually written at Hardy's dictation.<sup>56</sup>

Although Hardy continued to exploit his wife as a convenient mouthpiece to air indirectly his own opinions, he seems to have frowned upon Florence's independent literary efforts once she became 'Mrs Hardy'. Thus, as early as 20 March 1914, just over a month after her marriage to Hardy, Florence Hardy is lamenting to Rebekah Owen : 'To my great grief I am just obliged to refuse to write, for my publisher, a book about dogs -- to be illustrated by that splendid artist -- Detmold. I have a pile of books, too, to review, but I suppose that it is unfair to my husband to take up so much outside work.'<sup>57</sup> On 22 July 1914, within six months of her marriage, Florence Hardy is expressing her misgivings to Lady Hoare : 'Ought I -- in fairness to my husband -- to give up my scribbling?'<sup>58</sup> That this is not just a chance remark is obvious from her writing again to Lady Hoare only four days later (26 July 1914) :

With regard to my own writing I have a feeling, deep within me, that my husband rather dislikes my being a scribbling woman. Personally I *love* writing, poor though the result be, but I do realize that I can find plenty of domestic work to do, & I can also devote a great deal of time to him.<sup>59</sup> (Florence Hardy's italic)

<sup>56</sup> See Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 5, pp.346-7 & n. Florence Hardy's letters of 7 Dec & 18 Dec 1919 to Cockerell are not included in Millgate ed. Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy.

<sup>57</sup> Millgate ed. Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy, p.95. It is worth remembering that before her marriage, as Florence Dugdale, she had collaborated with the artist Detmold in three books : The Book of Baby Beasts (1911), The Book of Baby Birds (1912), and The Book of Baby Pets (1913). But there seems to be some controversy regarding the date of publication of the third book i.e. Baby Pets. Traditionally, it has been assigned the date 1915, e.g. by Purdy, and this is the date given in the British Museum General Catalogue of Printed Books (1960). Pamela Dalziel, however, has pointed out that 'the Bodleian Library acquisition stamp is dated "14. 5. 1914" and the catalogue gives 1913 as the year of publication'. See Dalziel ed. The Excluded and Collaborative Stories, p.345n. In 1915 of course Florence Dugdale would be Florence Hardy.

<sup>58</sup> Millgate ed. Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy, p.99.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted by Marguerite Roberts, Florence Hardy and The Max Gate Circle, Thomas Hardy Year Book, no. 9, (Guernsey : Toucan Press, 1980), p.36, and also in Pamela Dalziel's edn of Hardy's The Excluded and Collaborative Stories, p.346. This letter is not included in Millgate ed. Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy.

That Florence Hardy did her best to sacrifice her personal literary ambitions and instead devote her energies to Hardy's domestic comfort and poetic productivity is suggested by Hardy's letter of 20 May 1917 to Florence Henniker : 'She still keeps up her reviewing, but will soon drop it ; not having quite sufficient spare time with the household to look after, & the garden also, which she has taken upon herself, much to my relief.'<sup>60</sup> The tone of this letter is dangerously complacent and prescriptive and suggests that, for all his feminist sympathies, Hardy did not take very kindly to a 'scribbling' wife. It is sad to think that a man who proudly wrote to friends on his second marriage that 'my wife is a literary woman' should, only four years later, be writing : 'F. [i.e. Florence Hardy] gets letters asking her to review books ( since she reviewed Mrs Shorter's poems under her own name ), but she does not want to, as the house is enough for her to attend to, she finds.'<sup>61</sup> Although Florence Hardy reviewed (anonymously) half a dozen novels for the *Sphere* in July 1916 and continued with her occasional contributions to newspapers, she would lament to Rebekah Owen on 25 May 1920 : 'All literary work of my own is put a stop to.'<sup>62</sup> The phrase is nicely ambivalent : was the termination self-willed or externally imposed ?

As both the Mrs Hardys learnt to their cost, Hardy was singularly unenthusiastic about a 'scribbling' wife but when the 'dear fellow-scribbler'<sup>63</sup> happened to be a Mrs Henniker (or a Mrs Grove) of course the story was very

<sup>60</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 5, p.215.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13 ( letters to Lady Grove and Lady Hoare both dt. 13.2.1914 ) ; and p.283 ( letter to Florence Henniker dt. 27.10.1918 ; Hardy's parenthesis ).

<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Robert Gittings and Jo Manton, *The Second Mrs Hardy* ( London : Heinemann Educational ; Seattle : Univ. of Washington Press, 1979), p.90. This letter is not included in Millgate ed. *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*. It is only fair to point out, however, that Florence Hardy's article, 'No Superfluous Women', did appear in the *Weekly Dispatch* as late as 17 Sept 1922.

<sup>63</sup> Hardy's letter of 22 Oct 1893 to Florence Henniker. See Purdy and Millgate eds. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 2, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1980), p.38.

different. Poor Emma had good reason to complain of these literary and society ladies : 'They are the poison ; I am the antidote.'<sup>64</sup> Hardy had met Florence Henniker in May 1893 during his visit to Dublin where the Hardys had been the guests of her brother Lord Houghton, then Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland. Whether Hardy's increasing estrangement from Emma made him all the more susceptible to this 'charming, *intuitive* woman'<sup>65</sup> or whether his transparently passionate affair with Mrs Henniker resulted in the aggravation of marital disharmony is a classic 'chicken-and-egg' question. Within a month of this meeting, Hardy is 'keenly conscious' of the 'one-sidedness' of the relationship and he later expresses his wish that Mrs Henniker were more emancipated and 'free from certain retrograde superstitions'.<sup>66</sup> He is offering to conduct her to cathedrals and give oral instruction in architecture ; readily complying with her request to write down the true names of the places in her copy of *Tess* (perhaps the only copy thus annotated) ; suggesting that they exchange copies of Swinburne's poems, annotate the volumes, and then restore each others' copies : in short, seizing on any pretext to keep the correspondence and the connection alive. Mrs Henniker on her part, perhaps not realizing the full intensity of the emotion she has stirred, is sending him her translations of three love poems<sup>67</sup> and later sending him her

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in T.P. O'Connor, 'Personal Traits of Thomas Hardy', Toucan Press Monograph, No. 54, 1969, pp.238-9 ; collected in J. Stevens Cox ed. *Thomas Hardy : More Materials for a Study of His Life, Times and Works*, Vol. II, ( St Peter Port, Guernsey : Toucan Press, 1971).

<sup>65</sup> Millgate ed. *Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, p.270 ; Hardy's italic.

<sup>66</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 2, pp.14 & 26.

<sup>67</sup> These translations from Becquer, Dreves and Gautier, in Florence Henniker's hand, were tipped in to Hardy's 'Literary Notes II' notebook ; see Lennart A. Bjork ed. *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 2, ( London : Macmillan, 1985), pp.57-60. The first poem with its regret -- 'Oh ! had I but wept that day !' -- dated June 1893, could well have inspired Hardy's moving poem 'Had You Wept' ( *Satires of Circumstance*, 1914). This is not at all unlikely given the long gestation period of some of Hardy's poems ( e.g. the image of a horse harrowing clods, seen by Hardy during the 1870 Franco-Prussian War, surfaced in the poem 'In Time of "the Breaking of Nations" ' written during the First World War ). Hardy's poem 'Had You Wept' has been read, perhaps inevitably, as autobiographical and the probable addressees range from Emma Hardy to Florence Hardy to Tryphena Sparks. For an interesting discussion see K.G.



photographs (a familiar pattern that had been enacted before with Rosamund Tomson and that would later be re-enacted with Agnes Grove). But there were limits beyond which she was not prepared to go, as she seems to have made abundantly clear to Hardy in a railway carriage during their 8 August 1893 trip to Winchester. Mrs Henniker had clearly no intention of breaking her marriage vows for Hardy and no wish to see his name feature as co-respondent in divorce court proceedings. However, she had no objection to their names being coupled together in a joint literary venture because although she had already published three novels before she met Hardy, she realized that the Hardy connection would boost both her literary image and the sales.

It was probably Florence Henniker who suggested their collaborating to write a short story and, deprived of the fulfilment of his wild romantic hopes, Hardy ultimately agreed to this second-best literary substitute. The result was the story published in *To-Day* as 'The Spectre of the Real' (November 1894) and this is the *only* openly acknowledged collaborative work undertaken by Hardy. It is interesting to note that the story was originally entitled 'Desire' and referred to by this name in the letters that passed between the collaborators.<sup>68</sup> When Hardy later drastically revised the ending, making this title inappropriate, among the list of alternative titles that he asked Florence Henniker to consider were, significantly enough, 'A passion & after' and 'A shattering of Ideals'.<sup>69</sup> The complicated history of the writing of this story -- with Hardy providing the plot outline, Mrs Henniker fleshing it out into a narrative, Hardy revising it and completely rewriting the conclusion, Mrs Henniker being hurt at her descriptive passages being cut out and Hardy reluctantly reinstating them against his better

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Wilson, 'Thomas Hardy and Florence Henniker : A Probable Source for Hardy's "Had You Wept" ', *The Thomas Hardy Year Book*, No. 6 (1976 ; pub. 1977), pp.62-6.

<sup>68</sup> See *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 2, pp.30, 36, 38.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40 ; Hardy's capitalizations. The two subsequent quotations are from this same letter of 28 Oct 1893 from Hardy to Florence Henniker.

judgement, Hardy having the MS professionally typed and then correcting the proofs himself -- all this has been dealt with in a very elaborate and scholarly manner by Pamela Dalziel and it is pointless going over the same ground. What is important is that Hardy was determined to 'keep it a secret to our two selves which is my work & which yours' and since the MS does not survive it seems to have been a well kept secret. Hardy's presentiment that 'all the wickedness . . . will be laid on my unfortunate head, while all the tender & proper parts will be attributed to you' was borne out by the reviews, one of which cautioned Mrs Henniker against 'the advancing pessimism of a collaborator, however illustrious' and another which lamented 'those deflections from good taste which seem to have become characteristic of Mr Hardy's later art'.<sup>70</sup> Hardy's revisions had tended to emphasize the sexual nature of the heroine Rosalys's attraction towards her first husband Jim and these apparently displeased not only the reviewers but also his co-author because when Mrs Henniker collected the story in her book *In Scarlet and Grey* (1896) it was primarily these revisions that she bowdlerized by toning down the sexually suggestive passages.

Whether or not this collaborative venture cured Hardy's infatuation for Florence Henniker, it certainly decided him against any such literary partnership in the future. Realizing Mrs Henniker's sensitivity to his implied criticisms in revising her draft, and possibly deeply hurt himself by the negative reviews, Hardy wrote to Mrs Henniker in November 1896 advising her -- with a touch of bitterness -- to 'keep better literary company in future'.<sup>71</sup> In the previous year, Hardy had sent Clement Shorter one of Mrs Henniker's stories, recommending it as 'an artistic & tender little tale'.<sup>72</sup> But when Mrs Henniker had suggested that

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<sup>70</sup> These two reviews (and a couple more) are quoted in Pamela Dalziel's edn of Hardy's *The Excluded and Collaborative Stories*, pp.285 & 287.

<sup>71</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 2, p.137.

<sup>72</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 7, p.127, under 'Additional Letters'.

Hardy's name appear as co-author of this story, 'A Page from a Vicar's History', Hardy had written to Clement Shorter (14 March 1895) clearly and emphatically stating his objection :

It is very good of Mrs Henniker to feel as she does about the story. But I should be manifestly wrong to put my name as joint-author, when it bears such clear internal evidence of the sex of the writer . . . my share having been editorial, my actual writing being limited to the rather commonplace incident of the last page or so. Possibly Mrs Henniker might be induced to reconsider her decision, or to write a new ending : otherwise I see no course left but to withdraw the story from publication.<sup>73</sup>

Despite Hardy's gradual disillusionment with Mrs Henniker -- at both romantic and literary levels -- the relationship did *not* sour and this is proved by the long and numerous letters he wrote to her over a thirty year period, i.e. 1893 to 1922.<sup>74</sup> When she died in April 1923, Hardy's notebook entry, later incorporated into his autobiography, reads : 'After a friendship of 30 years !'<sup>75</sup> The depth and genuineness of this friendship is clearly brought out by an incident in 1915 which reveals the human touch that is always so endearing in Hardy's character. During those troubled war years, when even to have a German-sounding name rendered a person suspect in the eyes of the authorities and the common people alike, to be a German was tantamount to being a spy. Knowing that the one friend who would not fail her was Thomas Hardy, Florence Henniker appealed to him to provide a personal testimonial of

<sup>73</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 2, pp.71-2.

<sup>74</sup> Realizing the importance and interest of these letters, Mrs Henniker carefully preserved them (except some very personal ones which she understandably destroyed) and bequeathed them on her death to Florence Hardy. After Hardy's own death in Jan 1928, Florence Hardy corresponded with Daniel Macmillan (Nov 1933 - Jan 1934) on the feasibility of publishing these letters but nothing seems to have come of it ; see Millgate ed. Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy , p.321. The letters were first published as One Rare Fair Woman : Thomas Hardy's Letters to Florence Henniker 1893 - 1922 eds. Evelyn Hardy and F.B. Pinion ( London : Macmillan, 1972).

<sup>75</sup> See Richard H. Taylor ed. The Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy , p.69, and Millgate ed. Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.452.

trustworthiness for her faithful old German maid Anna Hirschmann. Mrs Henniker's trust was not misplaced and Hardy promptly complied with her request thus possibly saving Anna from deportation by the Home Office.<sup>76</sup>

Hardy's friendship for Mrs Henniker expressed itself in various ways in the 1890s. It ranged from his early lover's solicitude about her health ('Don't fag yourself out at that dancing. Promise you won't') to offering advice on which photograph to use as the frontispiece of her collection of stories (Outlines, 1894): 'If you do decide to put the portrait at the beginning of the volume take my advice & have the profile one -- (the first you sent me.).'<sup>77</sup> In two letters of October 1893, almost exclusively concerned with professional advice on how best to deal with her publishers, Hardy attempts to teach her 'the tricks of the trade' and -- perhaps remembering his own problems with Under the Greenwood Tree -- he specifically warns her: 'Don't part with the copyright.'<sup>78</sup> On a more practical level, Hardy appoints A.P. Watt as Mrs Henniker's literary agent and writes to him 'to stir him up' in his negotiations with publishers regarding her short stories.<sup>79</sup> Trying to bring her into critical notice, Hardy writes to Clement Shorter in April 1894 openly reminding him that he has not yet reviewed Mrs Henniker's book (Outlines); a review duly appeared in The Sketch in July 1894. Not satisfied with just this, Hardy himself writes a promotional paragraph about her in which he praises her 'emotional imaginativeness' and recommends her

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<sup>76</sup> The MSS of Mrs Henniker's letter of appeal (23 May 1915) and her letter of thanks (28 May 1915) are now in the Dorset County Museum and I am grateful to Mr de Peyer for allowing me access to them. For Hardy's response (25 May 1915) see Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 5, p.99.

<sup>77</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 2, pp.17 & 40 (Hardy's parenthesis). It was indeed Hardy's recommended 'profile' photograph which served as the frontispiece to Outlines.

<sup>78</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 2, p.39; see also p.41. Early in his career, in July 1872, Hardy had sold the copyright of Under the Greenwood Tree to Tinsley for £30. Less than three years later, in Jan 1875, when Hardy wished to buy back the copyright, Tinsley demanded £300!

<sup>79</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 2, p.37. Pathetically enough, perhaps in a spirit of competition, Emma Hardy also independently appointed A.P. Watt as her literary agent but he does not seem to have had any success in placing her stories.

'note of individuality, her own personal and peculiar way of looking at life' without which no writer 'has any right to take a stand before the public as author'. Hardy's brief survey of her literary career (slightly inaccurate), backed by a mention of her aristocratic credentials, appeared anonymously in The Illustrated London News (18 August 1894).<sup>80</sup>

On the purely literary level, Florence Henniker was the first of Hardy's three protégées. Although she was already a published author, with three novels behind her, Hardy felt free to revise her work when she sent him some of her stories. Hardy must have used his red pencil somewhat liberally because he sounds immensely relieved when he writes to her in September 1893: 'I was very glad . . . that you received my scribbings for amendments on their pages without any of the umbrage you might have felt at the liberty I took in making them.'<sup>81</sup> However, Florence Henniker had an independent spirit and was to prove less tractable than either Agnes Grove or Florence Dugdale who often docilely accepted Hardy's suggestions / corrections. On this occasion Mrs Henniker ignored Hardy's suggestion to rename the collection as 'The Statesman's Love-Lapse, & other stories' (the book was published in 1894 as Outlines) and neither did she take heed of his advice to include the story 'His Excellency' in the collection. Made wiser by his difficulties with the publishers regarding Tess, Hardy again anxiously wrote to Mrs Henniker in October 1893 about her projected collection: 'You must not *waste* the stories for the mere sake of getting them printed quickly. I hope you modified that one of them called "A lost illusion" as I suggested -- & did the other things, as the changes were likely to

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<sup>80</sup> This publicity piece, entitled 'The Hon. Mrs. Henniker', is reprinted as 'Appendix II' in Evelyn Hardy and F.B. Pinion eds. One Rare Fair Woman, pp.209-10. The lines quoted above are taken from this source.

<sup>81</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 2, p.29.

affect a publisher's views' (Hardy's italic).<sup>82</sup> But Hardy seems to have realized very soon that Mrs Henniker was just as thin-skinned as himself as far as criticism was concerned, even when it came from a genuine well-wisher. Thus, only two months later, in December 1893, he is solemnly reassuring her about her story entitled 'Bad and Worthless' :

. . . I packed up the type-written story, & sent it on to Mr Shorter, *without altering a line* . One letter I had altered, & did not remember till it was sealed up : in the spelling of "Gawd" -- which is Kipling's, & should decidedly be avoided. But you can restore it in proof if you care to. My defence of having thought of tampering with the sketch is that you said I was to get £50 for it, which of course you will not get as it stands.<sup>83</sup> (Hardy's italics)

This letter has an interesting postscript which clearly suggests that Hardy was desirous of smoothing ruffled feathers : 'You must overlook the liberty I took in suggesting alteration of the tale. I am vexed with myself for it.'

Nevertheless, Hardy seemed chronically unable to refrain from offering constructive criticism. One point that he repeatedly stressed is that her stories were too brief, too skeletal, and they could well do with a little more fleshing out. Even in the first flush of romantic ardour, he bravely risks telling her (in June 1893) : 'Indeed I fancy you write your MSS. a little too rapidly.'<sup>84</sup> And as late as January 1900 he repeats his point : 'I read your "Lady Gilian" with the greatest interest . . . Like nearly all your stories, it makes one wish there were more of it. The opening scene is beautiful, & tender, & I don't know any woman but yourself who could have written it. It is this which makes me wish the latter part had been worked out at greater length.'<sup>85</sup> The same criticism is again implied

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p.37. When the story was published in *Outlines*, its title was changed to 'A Sustained Illusion', perhaps based on Hardy's suggestion for changing the ending of the story.

<sup>83</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 2, p.44. Mrs Henniker seems to have heeded Hardy's advice to avoid 'Gawd' ; she used 'Gor-d' instead.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.245.

when he refers to 'Past Mending' as her 'little -- too little -- story', and comments on 'A Faithful Failure' that 'as usual, I regretted its shortness'. Hardy of course immediately adds the palliative : 'That suggestive style of writing is one that you have quite made your own.'<sup>86</sup>

Of course by this time Mrs Henniker is no longer his literary 'pupil'. Hardy had already congratulated her in December 1896 on her graduation from a 'novice' to 'an experienced writer', although even as late as July 1898 he is still offering to forward a story of hers, with a letter of recommendation, to the American magazine 'The Independent' -- which he does, telling the editor that the story has a sound moral!<sup>87</sup> But, effectively, the year 1895 had marked a watershed in Hardy's role as literary mentor as is suggested by his letter of 4 August to Mrs Henniker : 'I am overwhelmed with requests from Editors for short stories, but I cannot write them. Why didn't you go on being my pupil, so that I cd [sic] have recommended you as a substitute !'<sup>88</sup> Exactly a month after writing this, Hardy met his next literary pupil on 4 September 1895. Amid a scene of 'extraordinary picturesqueness and poetry', in the heightened atmosphere of music and dancing, under 'thousands of Vauxhall lamps' and 'the mellow radiance of the full moon', Hardy made his acquaintance with 'the beautiful Mrs Grove'.<sup>89</sup> Agnes Grove was the married daughter of the archaeologist General Pitt-Rivers, who had invited the Hardys to visit Rushmore and witness the annual Larmer Tree Sports. Hardy's meeting with this beautiful young aristocrat, with whom he promptly led off the country dances, certainly sent his heart fluttering and the magic of this moment was poignantly recaptured

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.252 & 264.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p.140 ; & pp.197, 205.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p.84.

<sup>89</sup> Phrases from a descriptive account of the Larmer Tree festivities in a 'local newspaper', the cutting of which Hardy seems to have preserved because he later quotes it in his autobiography. See Millgate ed. *Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, p.286.

thirty years later (after Mrs Grove's death in December 1926) in Hardy's poem 'Concerning Agnes' ( Winter Words , 1928). With his artist's vision, Hardy probably had a presentiment of a pattern about to repeat itself because only days after his Rushmore visit he is writing to tell Florence Henniker (11 September 1895) : 'It was a pleasant visit, . . . the most romantic time I have had since I visited you at Dublin.'<sup>90</sup> One wonders what Mrs Henniker thought of this candid confession. Of course, moving in the same social circles, Mrs Henniker and Mrs Grove were already on visiting terms (they apparently first met in July 1895) and later there seemed to develop gradually a genuine friendship between these two Hardy pupils.

Hardy's romantic feeling for Agnes Grove was of far less intensity and much shorter duration than that for Florence Henniker and very soon he seems to have settled down to an avuncular interest in promoting her literary career. As he told Agnes Grove in 1907, while fondly recalling 'that dance on the green at the Larmer Tree by moonlight' : 'I have a strong temptation to grow "romantic" . . . [but] I am not going to, being long past all such sentiments.'<sup>91</sup> Agnes Grove's reaction to that first meeting is recorded in her diary and the entry for 4 September 1895 reads : 'Went to Larmer Tree Sports, met & talked to Thomas Hardy, found him interesting, dined there' (she does not mention the dancing).<sup>92</sup> Subsequent diary entries reveal that Hardy visited her on 25 March 1896 and on 21 May she went to tea with the Hardys while on the following day the Hardys came over to tea. Meetings also took place at the houses of common social

<sup>90</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 2, p.87.

<sup>91</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 3, p.269.

<sup>92</sup> Desmond Hawkins ed. The Grove Diaries : The Rise and Fall of an English Family 1809 - 1925 (Wimborne : The Dovecote Press ; New Jersey : The University of Delaware Press, 1995), p.310. For other diary entries relating to Hardy, see also pp.313, 314, 323, 336. Two other valuable sources of information on Agnes Grove's life and her relationship with Thomas Hardy are Desmond Hawkins's article 'Concerning Agnes' in Encounter , 48 : 2 (1977), pp.45-49, and Desmond Hawkins's book Concerning Agnes : Thomas Hardy's 'Good little Pupil' (Gloucester : Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1982).



acquaintances, e.g. at the Asquiths' party and at Dorothy Stanley's wedding. In 1900 Mrs Grove visited Max Gate twice, in February and in March, and on the latter visit (when she stayed the night at Max Gate) Emma Hardy made the friendly gesture of meeting her at the Dorchester railway station. During 1906 and 1907 when the Hardys were in London for the 'season', Mrs Grove was a regular visitor at the tea-parties in their rented London flat, although the painter Jacques-Emile Blanche (who did a portrait of Hardy in 1906) presents a rather unfavourable picture of suppressed tensions, jealousies and resentments -- with Agnes Grove usurping the role of hostess and Emma Hardy sitting fuming on the sidelines. There is probably some exaggeration in this account because as late as 1910 Hardy is warmly inviting Agnes Grove to visit Max Gate ( which he could not have done if Emma was hostile to her ) : 'Why don't you motor over to see us on Monday (Bank Holiday)? . . . if you drop in here in the afternoon you will be a godsend.'<sup>93</sup> And after Emma's death in 1912, replying to Agnes Grove's letter of sympathy, Hardy gives her a fairly detailed account of Emma's last illness saying that he has written of these 'painful details' because 'I gather from your letter that you cared enough for her to be interested in them'.<sup>94</sup>

Certainly there is every suggestion of an amicable relationship in the letter that Emma Hardy wrote to Agnes Grove in January 1906. Agnes Grove's young son Terence had tragically fallen into the garden pool and been drowned and, like many a writer, his grieving mother had tried to find release from the pain through the cathartic act of writing. When the childless Emma Hardy read Agnes Grove's privately printed allegory on Terence's death, she was moved to write : 'I have read your lovely little dirge-tale with my woman's heart, twice over. Perhaps, never having had a babe I do not quite comprehend the grief, yet I

<sup>93</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 4, p.111.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p.246.

believe I do too . . . . I feel I know & love your boy, & his sweet ways . . . .'<sup>95</sup> In December 1907, Emma Hardy again wrote to Agnes Grove ( in a letter of mixed congratulations, criticism and commentary ) : 'I have been much entertained with your book "The Social Fetich" having observed many of the errors myself which you mention so felicitously & with such gentle consideration. And I have enjoyed the anecdotes . . . .'<sup>96</sup> Emma then goes on to mention what she considers certain inaccuracies and infelicities in the book which she hopes Agnes will correct in a new edition. Mrs Hardy could not have been unaware of the fact that her husband had actually read and corrected the proofs of The Social Fetich ( the book was openly dedicated to Hardy by Mrs Grove ) and her criticism may thus be read as an implied criticism of Hardy himself. It is in certain passages in this letter that one can sense Emma's underlying sense of hurt, jealousy and resentment at Hardy's complete neglect of her own literary aspirations. If Agnes Grove's success as a writer had made Emma envious, what must have rankled even more was the knowledge of just how much Hardy had contributed to that success.

When Hardy had first met her, Mrs Grove (unlike Mrs Henniker) does not seem to have been successful in publishing any of her writing. But within two months of their meeting, Hardy had clearly adopted her as his pupil and was frankly advising her to rewrite an article she had written in reply to a Bishop who had expressed his views on 'Why Women Do Not Want the Ballot' in the North American Review . Hardy told Mrs Grove that her 'Reply' was 'a spirited & sincerely written' piece but that it bore 'evidence of inexperience' and a 'tendency to redundancy'. This could be corrected by rewriting and Hardy characteristically offered : 'If you like, I will mark the places which I consider

<sup>95</sup> Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy , pp.31-2.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p.36.

faulty, & send it back to you to revise & get recopied. If you then cared to return it to me I could despatch it.'<sup>97</sup> Agnes Grove must have acquiesced promptly because this 3 November 1895 letter is followed only four days later by Hardy returning her article with these explanatory words : 'I have marked it in a perfectly brutal manner ; but I am sure that the person who had intelligence enough to write it will know quite well that, if she goes in for literature -- where competition is so keen & ruthless -- it is truest friendship which points out faults frankly at starting.'<sup>98</sup>

Presumably after making the suggested corrections, Mrs Grove sent the article back to Hardy who read it over again to see if he could improve anything, changed one 'flippant' word in it, and sent it to the Editor of the North American Review with a covering letter (13 November 1895) which anticipates many similar letters to different editors that he would later write for his next pupil, Florence Dugdale. Mentioning Mrs Grove's aristocratic connections, in an obvious attempt to impress the editor, Hardy writes : 'The article herewith sent has come into my hands, & probably you will agree with me in thinking it a spirited reply to the argument of the Bishop in your pages. It is, besides, essentially *feminine* -- typically feminine -- &, as such has a value to students of the question, apart from its representations & reasonings' (Hardy's italic).<sup>99</sup> When the article was rejected, Hardy did his best to reassure her that the 'refusal has obviously nothing to do with the merits or demerits of the article' and advised her to 'shape the article into a general reply to the customary objections ; & then wait for an opening for it when the question again comes to the front'. Hardy then went on to suggest a new essay topic at which, as a mother of young children herself, she might try her hand : 'Some remarks of yours about Sue's talk

<sup>97</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 2, p.91.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p.92.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p.95 ; see also p.96.

with the child in "Jude" suggested to me that an article might be written entitled "What should children be told?" -- working it out under the different headings of "on human nature", "on temptations", "on money", "on physiology", &c. It would probably attract attention.'<sup>100</sup> By suggesting this topic Hardy had at least ensured that the correspondence between them continued to flow.

An interesting sidelight on Hardy's relations with his two literary pupils -- ex- and current -- is provided by the publication of Jude. Florence Henniker had left her mark on the novel by contributing not only her name to the heroine (Susanna Florence Mary Bridehead) but also her essential character trait i.e. seemingly emancipated but ultimately quite conventional; also, in one letter Hardy calls Mrs Henniker 'ethereal' which is exactly the word Jude uses to characterize Sue in his thoughts.<sup>101</sup> But Hardy delayed in presenting a copy of the novel to Mrs Henniker and when he finally did send her a copy, he offered the lame excuse: 'My hesitating to send "Jude" was not because I thought you narrow -- but because I had rather bored you with him during the writing of some of the story, or thought I had.'<sup>102</sup> On the other hand, he had earlier sent Agnes Grove a copy of the novel with the confident words: 'You are, I know, sufficiently broad of view to estimate without bias a tragedy of very unconventional lives.'<sup>103</sup> The opposition between the words 'narrow' and 'broad' in these two letters leaves the reader to draw his or her own conclusion. Far from being a pessimist, Hardy seems to have been -- in this respect at least -- an incurable optimist and he probably hoped that after his disappointments over

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p.101.

<sup>101</sup> Hardy's letter of 18 Dec 1893 in Collected Letters, Vol. 2, p.44; Jude the Obscure, New Wessex Edition (1975), p.204. Florence Henniker also probably left her mark on Hardy's short story 'An Imaginative Woman' which Hardy, according to his autobiography, 'touched up' in Dec 1893. For a persuasive discussion see Martin Ray, 'An Imaginative Woman': From Manuscript to Wessex Edition', The Thomas Hardy Journal, 9: 3 (1993), pp.76-83.

<sup>102</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 2, p.94.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p.91.

Rosamund Tomson and Florence Henniker, he had at last found his 'enfranchised' woman in Agnes Grove.

One immediate consequence of Mrs Grove's reading of Jude was her writing of the article, on Hardy's repeated prompting, about what children should be told. Hardy, well knowing her tendency to err on the side of prolixity (Mrs Henniker had erred in the opposite direction), offers to read her MS and advises her : 'Above all, don't make it long -- quite the contrary, short : then, if it catches on, you can write a second paper on the subject -- which is better than saying everything at once. I would advise that you shorten the section headed "on religion" -- reserving what you cut out for another utterance.'<sup>104</sup> After reading her MS, he compliments her on revealing a 'sustained power of reasoning not usual in women's arguments', but cannot refrain from detailed advice on revisions, pencilling his suggestions and making 'inked corrections of obvious oversights'.<sup>105</sup> Telling her that it would be wise to get the MS typed, Hardy cautions her : 'I have ruthlessly pencilled the MS. as you will see. The fact is, you have grown too diffuse towards the end, with a consequent weakening of your argument. To become a strong writer you must keep a constant curb upon yourself in this respect.'<sup>106</sup> When she had an afterthought and appealed to his judgement, his opinion was that 'this insertion will not improve the essay . . . though true enough, [it] is quite commonplace beside the rest of the article'.<sup>107</sup> Finally, after all the corrections had been made and the re-written article had reached Hardy again, he struck out two 'superfluous' sentences and then sent it to the Editor of the Free Review , reassuring Agnes : 'The trouble has been nothing. You are such a good little pupil that it is a pleasure to offer you

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p.114.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p.115.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p.116.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p.116 ( letter written on the day following the previous one in p.116 ).

suggestions.’<sup>108</sup> The article was accepted and published in two parts in July 1896. Agnes Grove’s pleasure in seeing her work finally appear in print was slightly marred by her pique which comes out in her diary entry : ‘Received Free Review. [My] signature wrong.’<sup>109</sup> The article had appeared under the name ‘Mrs Walter Grove’ while she had obviously wanted the name to read ‘Agnes Grove’. Hardy consoled her : ‘If you go on writing you will become case-hardened to such accidents.’<sup>110</sup>

Agnes Grove’s period of apprenticeship was clearly not yet over because in July 1896 Hardy read another of her articles, suggested changes in pencil, attached a forwarding note to the Editor of the Contemporary Review , and asked her to post it. On this occasion, however, their joint effort did not yield any result. In November 1896 she wrote another essay as a continuation of her earlier series on ‘What Children Should Be Told’ and submitted it on her own to the Free Review but it was not accepted. When she sent the essay to Hardy for his opinion, he advised her to rewrite it as an independent article and try the Humanitarian , adding his usual injunction : ‘be sure you don’t make it lengthy.’ He had marked the essay in pencil and alerted her to the fact that ‘some other sentences than those marked want looking to & shortening. Don’t be afraid of full stops’.<sup>111</sup> The result of all this school-masterly advice was that the revised essay was accepted by the Humanitarian , Hardy read the proofs, and it was eventually published in February 1897. Hardy’s letter of congratulation to Agnes Grove (1 January 1897) reads -- as Desmond Hawkins wittily puts it -- like an ‘end-of-term report’ : ‘I think that upon the whole you may congratulate yourself

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p.117.

<sup>109</sup> Desmond Hawkins ed. *The Grove Diaries* , p.314.

<sup>110</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 2, p.124.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p.137.

upon your advance during the year past : you have obtained a firmer hold upon the pen, & are in a fair way of being well known as a writer.'<sup>112</sup>

When Agnes Grove ventured into fiction and sent Hardy her (unidentified) story, he found it 'distinctly promising' but realizing that nothing was 'so harmful to a young writer as deceiving him or her by uncritical commendation', he frankly told her that her madman was 'rather too melodramatic' and that some incidents, though fine in themselves, needed to be better integrated to make them '*indispensable* to the *ending* of the story' (Hardy's italics). Even after over two years of being Hardy's pupil, Agnes Grove had obviously not yet overcome her besetting fault because Hardy tells her that he had to change 'two or three passages where there is needless circumlocution'.<sup>113</sup> Hardy sent the story to Chapman's Magazine but it was rejected and the story does not appear to have ever achieved publication. Hardy's advice to Agnes Grove on this occasion was to tell her to 'think of another tale about half the length of the present one' since what seemed to matter most to editors was 'a convenient length'.<sup>114</sup> Perhaps disappointed with the total lack of success in her maiden attempt at fiction, Agnes Grove returned to her journalistic work and to the topic closest her heart -- women's suffrage. When her article 'Objections to Woman Suffrage Considered' appeared in the Humanitarian (August 1899), Hardy expressed his agreement with most of her opinions, praised the writing as a 'forcible piece of rhetoric', and added : 'Indeed, I don't know any woman-writer who puts such vigour into her sentences as you do, or who is so dexterous in the conduct of an argument of that kind, & this power of yours makes me feel

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p.142. See Desmond Hawkins's article 'Concerning Agnes', Encounter (1977), p.48.

<sup>113</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 2, pp.189 & 190 (two letters).

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p.196 ( two letters ).

that you should give your attention exclusively to essay writing, & not to fiction, & also makes me proud of you as a pupil.<sup>115</sup>

In February 1900 Hardy is again reading one of her articles, making 'such corrections as I should make were the article mine', and suggesting that she send it to a ladies' magazine because the writing is of a 'delicate sort'.<sup>116</sup> Although this article does not seem to have been published, her series of sketches entitled 'On Fads' appeared in the Cornhill in April 1900. Hardy had read 'On Fads' in proof, with 'real appreciation of the delicacy & humour with which the situations are suggested'<sup>117</sup>, and knowing him to be an inveterate reviser -- even of his own work -- it is difficult to imagine him returning the proofs without pencilling in suggestions / corrections. This speculation seems to be borne out by Hardy's comment in a later letter : 'I thought "On Fads" read much better the second time, when I saw it in the Cornhill , than at first in proof : a good sign.'<sup>118</sup> In 1904 Agnes Grove successfully published quite a few articles and Hardy wrote to congratulate her on having 'passed your apprenticeship'<sup>119</sup> but, as in the case of Mrs Henniker, he simply could not let her go. Thus as late as 1907 -- i.e. more than ten years after their original meeting -- he is still offering to read the proofs of her forthcoming book ( The Social Fetich , 1907) which she plans to dedicate to him :

I will certainly read the proofs with pleasure, if you would like me to. Two pairs of eyes are better than one, & it is extraordinary what things escape the writer -- owing, of course, to his or her prepossession with the real meaning, which has a blinding effect . . . . But if there are any passages I don't like you must not mind my saying so in horrid hard words.

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p.226.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p.247 ( two letters ).

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p.251.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p.253.

<sup>119</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 3, pp.108-9.



I shall feel much honoured by the dedication -- you *know* I shall ;  
& I am sure you will do it nicely -- though you have a quite  
exaggerated opinion on what you owe to me. I shall be much  
envied by younger men.<sup>120</sup> (Hardy's italic)

But, apparently, Agnes Grove needed help even with the precise wording  
of the dedication for in two letters of August 1907 Hardy is advising her on  
whether to use the phrase 'aid & counsel' or 'help & advice', and telling her that :

As it is a question of expression merely (the sentiments expressed  
being entirely your own, I am charmed to think) there is no reason  
why I should not make suggestions about it. It seems to me, then,  
that what comes most nearly to your feeling would be the words  
"and in memory of old and enduring friendship" -- the absence of  
the article before the adjective would also give more finish to the  
phrase in my opinion ; while, on my side, it expresses exactly the  
truth. I have never ceased to bless the day on which we met at  
Rushmore . . . .<sup>121</sup>

When Hardy read the proofs of the book, although he could find no fault with  
the 'Preface', the very first sheet of the text seems to have called forth copious  
comments and, somewhat apologetically, Hardy wrote :

You will be irritated, & no doubt rightly, at the masterfulness of my  
criticisms, but you need not adopt them ; & I can assure you that  
they are such as I should have made on the writing of a person  
whose career was more to me than any other's in the world. ( I have  
not thought it worth while to mark those passages for which I have  
nothing but praise. )<sup>122</sup> [ Hardy's parenthesis ]

That Hardy still looked upon Agnes Grove as a cherished pupil is  
suggested by his letter to her (December 1907) thanking her for sending him a  
copy of The Social Fetich : 'But though I find the book entertaining I am not

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p.266.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p.269 ; see also p.268. The wording of Agnes Grove's dedication seems to have faithfully  
followed Hardy's suggestions.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p.271 ; see also p.272. While correcting the proofs of Agnes Grove's book, Hardy was  
busy making the final revisions to Part III of The Dynasts .

going to agree to your always frittering yourself away on these whimsical subjects. You can do much more solid work, & no doubt will as you get older.'<sup>123</sup> More than two years later, when her selection of essays was published under the title On Fads (1910), Hardy singled out three essays for praise but did not hesitate to tell her bluntly:

When I read the more carelessly written after these I felt quite inclined to give you a scolding for not taking more trouble. But the fact is that your ideas come tumbling out in such a torrent that they make your sentences turgid & involved. You mustn't mind my saying this. The following slips are those I noticed more particularly : some are obviously accidental : some are *blameworthy* . (Hardy's italic)<sup>124</sup>

A list of mistakes and misprints accompanied this letter of April 1910 and in the following month Hardy admitted : 'I rather exaggerate your faults of style in criticizing you, to make you persistently careful, for you are, you know, rather inclined to let your pen run away with you at times !'<sup>125</sup> Agnes Grove had probably requested Hardy's opinion on the sentences in her book which had been singled out for attack by the critics because in this same letter Hardy tells her that a 'sentence may often be strictly correct in grammar, but wretched in style', and then adds rather disarmingly : 'But remember that I am no authority. I have written heaps of ungrammatical sentences I dare say . . . .' Agnes Grove was intelligent enough to realize that behind all Hardy's criticism of her writing lay a genuine and affectionate interest in her career, for she could not have forgotten some remarkable lines that Hardy had written to her in August 1907 : 'By the way, Swinburne told me that he saw in a paper "Swinburne planteth, & Hardy

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<sup>123</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 3, p.284.

<sup>124</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 4, p.82.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p.89.

watereth, & Satan giveth the increase". If you are in any sense the "increase" you will be a remarkable seedling.<sup>126</sup>

One book by Agnes Grove that had won Hardy's unqualified approval was The Human Woman (1908), an inscribed copy of which she had sent him. After reading the book, Hardy wrote warmly :

. . . the whole is really a series of brilliant & able essays, which all who favour woman suffrage should be grateful for. I, of course, who have long held that in justice women should have votes, whatever may be said of the policy of granting them to the sex (from a man's point of view), have not needed convincing, though some of your ingenious arguments had not occurred to me.<sup>127</sup>

As an active member of the National Union of Suffrage Societies, Emma Hardy too must have welcomed this book, whatever be the current state of her feelings for its author. Indeed, a passionate commitment to women's suffrage and an abhorrence of the violent stone-throwing and window-smashing tactics of the militants probably bound Emma Hardy and Agnes Grove together as allies in a common cause. While Agnes Grove felt that the militants were mistakenly encouraging the false idea of sex-antagonism, Emma Hardy expressed her disapproval of the violent 1908 demonstrations by temporarily withdrawing her membership of the London Society for Women's Suffrage.

Another interest that Emma Hardy shared with her two 'rivals' was Anti-Vivisection. Emma's love for animals and indignation at any form of cruelty practised on them led her to 'beard any man ill using an animal & amaze him into a shamefaced desistence'<sup>128</sup> and she even wrote a letter to the Editor protesting against the cruelty of the methods used by animal trainers in circuses

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<sup>126</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 3, p.268.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p.354 ; Hardy's parenthesis.

<sup>128</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 4, p.244. In this letter to Florence Henniker (Dec 1912) Hardy pays a warm tribute to the recently dead Emma : 'her *courage* in the cause of animals was truly admirable, surpassing that of any other woman I have ever known' (Hardy's italic).

and hoping that an Act would be passed 'to prevent the exhibiting of performing animals'.<sup>129</sup> And, as Hardy had informed Florence Henniker in March 1897 : 'We -- or rather Em [i.e. Emma Hardy] -- had an anti-vivisection meeting in our drawing-room last week.'<sup>130</sup> Florence Henniker, an ardent anti-vivisectionist herself, seems to have suggested to Emma Hardy in 1897 that she persuade her husband to use his influence and get Zola to write a book on anti-vivisection.<sup>131</sup> Although this proposal fizzled out, Mrs Henniker's letters to Hardy reveal her concern for the suffering of horses wounded during the World War campaigns, her hope that more humane methods of slaughtering would be adopted, her delight at the passing of the Plumage Bill in America, and her fear that the newly set up physiological Laboratory at Cambridge would result in untold tortures to dumb creatures in private research rooms ( she hoped that some 'mad woman' would burn down the Laboratory ).<sup>132</sup>

Hardy shared many of these concerns regarding animal welfare and perhaps it was their common love of animals ( personified in the numerous Max Gate cats ) that formed the last bond between Hardy and Emma when all other links had snapped, probably under the strain of Hardy's involvements -- romantic, literary, or purely social -- with various other women. These relationships will be examined in the following chapter, on three distinct levels : (i) an exploration of the correspondences between the works of two feminist writers and Hardy's late fiction, which suggests that they may have influenced his fictional portrayal of women in the 1890s ; (ii) a survey of Hardy's literary

<sup>129</sup> Emma Hardy's anonymous protest was published in the *Daily Chronicle* , 4 Sept 1899. See Millgate ed. *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy* , p.17.

<sup>130</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 2, p.157.

<sup>131</sup> See Hardy's letter to Mrs Henniker (19 Feb 1897) in *Collected Letters* , Vol. 2, p.148 ; see also Emma Hardy's letter to Rebekah Owen (19 Feb 1897) in *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy* , p.10.

<sup>132</sup> Florence Henniker's letters dated 21 Nov 1920, 24 Oct 1920, 13 Jan 1914, & 10 June 1914, the MSS of which are now in the Dorset County Museum.

and social interactions with some of his contemporary female writers, ranging from the intensely passionate (e.g. Rosamund Tomson) to the virtually non-existent (e.g. George Eliot) ; (iii) an account of the homage paid to Hardy by the younger generation of women writers, some of whom made their pilgrimage to Max Gate, and Hardy's reciprocal warmth in encouraging and sometimes actively aiding these younger talents.

## Chapter IX

### Hardy and Some Contemporary Female Writers

In 1869 in the office of the publisher Frederick Chapman, an aspiring young writer was introduced to a novelist with an established reputation who gave the novice sober advice regarding the publication of his inflammatory first novel 'The Poor Man and the Lady'. This meeting between two authors, the young Thomas Hardy and the older George Meredith, developed into a forty-year literary and personal friendship culminating in Hardy's affectionate obituary poem 'George Meredith' (dated 'May 1909') and the essay 'G.M. : A Reminiscence' (1928).<sup>1</sup> More than a decade after this memorable meeting, in the early 1880s and again in the office of Frederick Chapman, a beautiful young writer -- flushed with the sensational success of her maiden novel -- was introduced to the journalist and editor Frank Harris. In his Contemporary Portraits, Frank Harris recalls this meeting :

Distinctly pretty with large dark eyes and black hair . . . Her chief desire she explained to me at once. She wanted to know all the writers, especially the novelists. Would I introduce her to Thomas Hardy and George Moore ? I promised to do my best for her. On the same morning she put forward something of the feminist's view . . . she was a suffragette before the name became known.<sup>2</sup>

Judging from contemporary photographs, this young feminist -- Olive Schreiner -- was certainly very beautiful and a meeting with Thomas

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<sup>1</sup> This brief essay, commemorating Meredith's birth centenary, was written by Hardy at the request of Meredith's son who was then the editor of Nineteenth Century and After. The article appeared (posthumously) in this periodical in Feb 1928. It has been collected in Harold Orel ed. Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings : Prefaces, Literary Opinions, Reminiscences (London & Melbourne : Macmillan, 1967), pp.151-55. The memorial poem on Meredith was published in The Times (22 May 1909) and later collected in Time's Laughingstocks (Dec 1909).

<sup>2</sup> Frank Harris's recollection is quoted in one of the early biographies of Olive Schreiner. See Vera Buchanan-Gould, Not Without Honour : The Life and Writings of Olive Schreiner (London : Hutchinson & Co., 1949), p.69.

Hardy might have yielded interesting results, given Hardy's extreme susceptibility to female beauty. If nothing else, a personal meeting would have produced at least a couple of euphoric poems ; but there is nothing to suggest that such a meeting ever took place. The two writers, however, must have surely met through their works. Schreiner's The Story of an African Farm (1883) -- First Edition, with Hardy's autograph on the title page -- does feature in a descriptive catalogue of books from the Hardys' Max Gate Library which were sold off in May 1938 ( after Florence Hardy's death in October 1937 ).<sup>3</sup> However, it is quite difficult to say with any amount of certainty when ( if at all ) Hardy read African Farm . With Schreiner's reading of Hardy we have hard evidence in the form of a letter she wrote to Havelock Ellis on 28 March 1884. Apparently, Schreiner was not too impressed by Hardy's early novels and she tells Ellis :

I have just finished reading your article in the Westminster Review [on 'The Novels of Thomas Hardy'], and I have read A Pair of Blue Eyes . I think your criticism very adequate and just. I shall read Far From the Madding Crowd and then I shall better be able to make up my mind as to whether I like Hardy much or not. Now I hardly know -- there seems to me a certain shallowness and unrealness about his work -- no, that's putting it too strongly ; it seems to me as though he was only fingering his characters with his hands, not pressing them up against him till he felt their hearts beat.<sup>4</sup>

Towards the end of this rather long letter, in which she mentions reading Nora ( the first English translation, in 1882, of Ibsen's A Doll's House ), Schreiner goes on to remark :

<sup>3</sup> See J. Stevens Cox ed. The Library of Thomas Hardy, O.M. , Toucan Press Monographs, no. 52, 1969, p. 201. This monograph is collected in J. Stevens Cox ed. Thomas Hardy : More Materials for a Study of His Life, Times and Works , Vol. II, (St Peter Port, Guernsey : Toucan Press, 1971).

<sup>4</sup> Richard Rive ed. Olive Schreiner Letters , Vol. 1 : 1871-1899, (Oxford : Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), p.35. This letter is also included in one of the earliest collections of her letters edited by her husband ; see S.C. Cronwright-Schreiner ed. The Letters of Olive Schreiner 1876-1920 (London : T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1924 ; rpt. 1976), p.14.

It is very funny that in the book that I am revising now [From Man to Man] there is one character who reminds me somewhat of Knight in his relation to Elfride [A Pair of Blue Eyes]. The likeness is not strong, still it is there. He is a man who, when the woman he loves confesses to him, turns away from her ; but my woman tells him that which he could never have known if she had not told him, and he yet turns away from her.<sup>5</sup>

In the absence of any further reference to Hardy in her letters, one wonders what Schreiner thought of Hardy's later novels, especially Jude the Obscure , since the correspondences between African Farm and Jude are even more striking. Schreiner's fiercely independent heroine, Lyndall, anticipates Hardy's Sue in her frustration at the limited opportunities available to women, in her bitterness at blatant gender-discrimination, and in her refusal to commit herself to the iron contract of marriage. In fact, Lyndall's disillusionment begins quite early. Driven by an insatiable hunger for knowledge, Lyndall leaves her stagnant farm life and enters a boarding school through her own sheer determination. But her experience at the boarding school, instead of opening up wider vistas of knowledge before her, only reveals how hopelessly confined is a woman's lot. As Lyndall bitterly sums up to her cousin Em :

' . . . I have discovered that of all cursed places under the sun, where the hungriest soul can hardly pick up a few grains of knowledge, a girls' boarding-school is the worst. They are called finishing schools, and the name tells accurately what they are. They finish everything but imbecility and weakness, and that they cultivate. They are nicely adapted machines for experimenting on the question, "Into how little space a human soul can be crushed ?" I have seen some souls so compressed that they would have fitted into a small thimble, and found room to move there -- wide room. A woman who

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<sup>5</sup> Cronwright-Schreiner ed. Letters of Olive Schreiner , p.14 ; the parenthetical insertions in the quoted text are those of the editor. This portion of the letter is not included in Richard Rive's edition of Schreiner's letters.



has been for many years at one of those places carries the mark of the beast on her till she dies . . . ' <sup>6</sup>

Lyndall's claustrophobic sense of being physically confined, of being denied the free space in which to develop her being, is echoed powerfully by Sue who is ultimately forced to run away from the rigour of the teachers' Training School. When Jude first visits Sue at the school, '[a]ll her bounding manner was gone ; her curves of motion had become subdued lines' and 'she had altogether the air of a woman *clipped* and *pruned* by severe discipline' (my italics).<sup>7</sup> With 'all the bitterness of a young person to whom restraint was new' (p.152), Sue confesses to Jude how they are 'kept on very short allowances in the College'. That Lyndall and Sue are merely reflecting the experience of many young girls of the time is confirmed by a letter that Hardy's sister, Kate, wrote to Emma Hardy in which she looks back on her Salisbury training college experience and bitterly declares : ' . . . I don't mind if Tom publishes how badly we were used.' <sup>8</sup>

Lyndall's sense that 'to be born a woman [is] to be born branded' (p.154) is powerfully echoed by the narrator in *Jude* in a passage describing the young girls lying asleep in their cubicles :

. . . every face bearing the legend 'The Weaker' upon it, as the penalty of the sex wherein they were moulded, which by no possible exertion of their willing hearts and abilities could be

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<sup>6</sup> Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* ( Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.151-52. Subsequent references to this work are to this 1992 'World's Classics' paperback edition, and page numbers are parenthetically incorporated into the text.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, New Wessex Edition, ( London : Macmillan, 1975), pp.151-52. Subsequent page references, parenthetically included in the text, are to this 1975 (hardback) New Wessex Edition.

In *Jude*, Hardy refers to the Melchester academic institution interchangeably as both 'School' and 'College' ; but since most of the students are aged between nineteen and twenty-one, and some even older, in modern terms it seems more a college than a school.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Kate Hardy to Emma Hardy, dated 1882, now in the 'Thomas Hardy Memorial Collection' at the Dorset County Museum, Dorchester. I am grateful to the Curator of DCM, Mr Richard de Peyer, for granting me access to this letter. Michael Millgate also quotes this line from Kate Hardy's letter in his *Thomas Hardy : A Biography* ( Oxford : Oxford Univ. Press, 1982 ; rev. ed., Clarendon pbk, 1992), p.351.

made strong while the inexorable laws of nature remain what they are. (pp.160-61)

This biological determinism is something that Lyndall is forced to recognize at a very tender age. In words that will surely find an echo in the consciousness of many a young girl even today, she bitterly tells Waldo :

'They begin to shape us to our cursed end . . . when we are tiny things in shoes and socks. We sit with our little feet drawn up under us in the window, and look out at the boys in their happy play. We want to go. Then a loving hand is laid on us : "Little one, you cannot go," they say ; "your little face will burn, and your nice white dress be spoiled." We feel it must be for our good, it is so lovingly said ; but we cannot understand ; and we kneel still with one little cheek wistfully pressed against the pane. Afterwards we go and thread blue beads, and make a string for our neck ; and we go and stand before the glass. We see the complexion we were not to spoil, and the white frock, and we look into our own great eyes. Then the curse begins to act on us . . . We fit our spheres as a Chinese woman's foot fits her shoe, exactly. . . . The parts we are not to use have been quite atrophied, and have even dropped off . . . We wear the bandages, but our limbs have not grown to them ; we know that we are compressed, and chafe against them.' (p.155)

Of course there are rebels who refuse to submit to this gender - conditioning and Sue can 'do things that only boys do, as a rule. I've seen her hit in and steer down the long slide on yonder pond, with her little curls blowing, one of a file of twenty . . . All boys except herself ; and then they'd cheer her . . . ' (pp.133-34). Sue's spirit of defiance would sometimes lead her to walk 'into the pond with her shoes and stockings off, and her petticoats pulled above her knees', saucily crying out : 'Move on, aunty ! This is no sight for modest eyes !' (p.132). But such youthful rebellion is crushed out of both Sue and Lyndall, by precisely the same emotional process.

Both Sue and Lyndall begin by rejecting marriage. As Lyndall declares to her timid cousin Em, 'I am not in so great a hurry to put my neck beneath any man's foot' (p.150). But it is not just a case of being emotionally unprepared ; it is a more radical questioning of the very nature of institutionalized marriage. When her anonymous lover tries to persuade her to marry him, Lyndall unequivocally replies : 'I cannot marry you . . . because I cannot be *tied* ; but, if you wish, you may take me away with you, and take care of me ; then when we do not love any more we can say good-bye' (p.206; my italic). Sue too feels 'how hopelessly vulgar an institution legal marriage is' (p.285), and that 'it is destructive to a passion whose essence is its gratuitousness' (p.286). According to Sue, marriage is 'a sordid contract, based on material convenience in householding, rating, and taxing, and the inheritance of land and money by the children . . .' (p.227); it is a 'dreadful contract to feel in a particular way in a matter whose essence is its voluntariness !' (p.230). Sue is afraid 'lest an iron contract should extinguish [Jude's] tenderness' (p.273) for her and hers for him and, to the 'New Woman', a loveless marriage was no better than prostitution. When Sue pleads with Phillotson to give her her freedom from a distasteful union, she does not shrink from telling her husband : 'For a man and woman to live on intimate terms when one feels as I do is adultery, in any circumstances, however legal' (p.239). Later, when Sue decides to return to Phillotson and re-marry him, after she has been chastened by the tragic deaths of her children, Jude implores her to reconsider her decision : 'Error -- perversity ! . . . Do you care for him ? Do you love him ? You know you don't ! It will be a fanatic prostitution -- God forgive me, yes -- that's what it will be !' (p.368).

This equation of a loveless marriage with prostitution must have been startling to a society which idealized the sanctity of home and hearth, and insisted on keeping the 'good' and the 'bad' women socially segregated.

But such an equation was common in the 'New Woman' novels and, as early as 1883, Lyndall had scornfully declared :

'With good looks and youth marriage is easy to attain. There are men enough ; but a woman who has sold herself, even for a ring and a new name, need hold her skirt aside for no creature in the street. They both earn their bread in one way. Marriage for love is the beautifullest external symbol of the union of souls ; marriage without it is the uncleanliest traffic that defiles the world.' (p.156)

Lyndall vehemently rejects the 'separate spheres' theory, and she draws from an example of nature her ideal of sex equality. Watching the ostriches on the farm, she notices the cock sitting brooding on the eggs and she tells Waldo : 'I like these birds . . . they share each other's work, and are companions. Do you take an interest in the position of women, Waldo ?' (p.153). Although this is rather a clumsy way of introducing the long dialogue ( monologue, really ) on the 'Woman Question', there can be no doubt about Schreiner's radicalism and her sincerity. Her narrative art in this episode may lack sophistication but her feminist perceptions are strikingly modern and still relevant. To be equal with men, to be their comrades and to share in their intellectual labours is a dream with Sue too. Sue mixes with men -- like the young Oxford undergraduate -- 'almost as one of their own sex' (p.167). She goes on walking tours and reading tours with the Oxford undergraduate, 'like two men almost' (p.168). With a 'curious unconsciousness of gender' (p.169), she even lives with him for fifteen months till she realizes that such an ideal 'sexless' comradeship is not really what interests him. Being an 'epicure in emotions' (p.191), Sue's 'curiosity to hunt up a new sensation' (p.191) leads her into such experiments as living together with the Oxford undergraduate ( and later Jude ). Lyndall, too, when trying to analyse her motive for loving and living together with her unnamed lover, candidly confesses : ' . . . I like to experience, I like to try' (p.206).

But 'experience', for both Lyndall and Sue, is dearly bought. Both these non-conformists are finally broken by the weight of personal tragedy in the shape of the death(s) of their children. Although defiant to the end, in refusing to marry her lover, the death of her three-hour old infant really crushes all rebellion out of Lyndall and she almost wills her own death. Despite being very ill herself, Lyndall goes out one drizzly day and sits for a long time beside the grave of her infant. When she comes back, she takes to her bed and gradually wastes away, dying lingeringly and painfully of what seems to be a psychosomatic illness. Although this wilful death reminds us more of Jude's suicidal trip, on a wet day, to Marygreen (to see Sue for the last time), Lyndall's visit to the grave of her infant is echoed in Sue's visit to the cemetery and her pleading with Jude and the man filling in the newly-dug grave to allow her one last look at her dead babies. The triple hanging completely unhinges Sue and although she does not die, she abjectly re-surrenders herself to Phillotson and lives what can at best be described as a living death. The anonymous critic ( to whom Hardy refers in his 1912 Preface to Jude ) who regretted that the portrait of 'the woman of the feminist movement' was 'left to be drawn by a man', and not 'by one of her own sex, who would never have allowed her to break down at the end' (p.30), was probably unaware of numerous such 'feminist novels of failed rebellion', written by women, which feature a 'collapse from within', a 'breakdown into convention'.<sup>9</sup>

However, in the absence of any reference to Olive Schreiner in the seven volumes of Hardy's Collected Letters ( edited by Purdy and Millgate ) and also in Hardy's notebooks of literary extracts ( edited in two volumes by Lennart A. Bjork ), it is difficult to argue a case for conscious literary influence. If Hardy *had* read The Story of an African Farm , he would at

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<sup>9</sup> Penny Boumelha, Thomas Hardy and Women : Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form (Sussex : Harvester Press; New Jersey : Barnes & Noble, 1982), pp.80-81.

least have been consoled ( in relation to the charge that Jude ends far too bleakly, especially with the gratuitous cruelty of the children's deaths ), by Schreiner's comment, put into the mouth of the precocious Lyndall : 'It is a terrible, hateful ending . . . and the worst is, it is true. I have noticed . . . that it is only the made-up stories that end nicely ; the true ones all end so' (p.14). Perhaps unknown to each other, both writers shared a world-view that is somewhat similar. Schreiner's feeling that '[t]here is no order ; all things are driven about by a blind chance' (p.114) might well be an apt commentary on many of Hardy's novels where blind chance so dominates the lives of the characters. Also, Schreiner's remark : 'If you will take the trouble to scratch the surface anywhere, you will see under the skin a sentient being writhing in impotent anguish' (p.114), although made in the context of (racial) oppression, has a universality which is finely distilled in Hardy's awareness of 'the tragedy that always underlies Comedy if you only scratch it deeply enough'.<sup>10</sup>

A better case for direct (mutual?) influence can be argued with regard to another female firebrand -- 'George Egerton' (pseudonym of Mary Chavelita Dunne/Clairmonte/Bright). When her Keynotes, a collection of short stories, was first published in 1893 they created quite a sensation -- enough to prompt Hardy to write to Florence Henniker in January 1894 : 'I have found out no more about Mrs Clairmont [sic], but if I go to stay with the Jeunes, . . . I may possibly hear something of her, though I am not greatly curious.'<sup>11</sup> Another (self-congratulatory) reference to Egerton comes in a letter Hardy wrote in March 1894 to Emma Hardy : 'The Speaker to-day quotes one of the candid sentences from "Life's Little

<sup>10</sup> Letter of 8 Aug 1926, from Thomas Hardy to J.B. Priestley. See Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate eds. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 7, ( Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.38. Hardy had expressed similar sentiments as early as 1889 in his letter to John Addington Symonds ; see Purdy and Millgate eds. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 1, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1978), p.190.

<sup>11</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 2, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1980), p.47.

I." [sic] & adds -- (*apropos* of women's novels, like *Keynotes* , &c ) "so that the old hands know a thing or two as well as the young 'uns." ' <sup>12</sup>

It was only in November 1895 that the two authors directly corresponded. Some unknown friend had given George Egerton a copy of *Jude* and she enjoyed the book so much that she was prompted to write impulsively to Hardy to thank him for the genuine pleasure provided by the novel, especially in the portrait of Sue :

Sue is a marvellously true psychological study of a temperament less rare than the ordinary male observer supposes. I am not sure that she is not the most intuitively drawn of all your wonderful women. I love her, because she lives -- and I say again, thank you, for her.<sup>13</sup>

At a time when *Jude* was being vilified on all sides -- and a bishop even reportedly burnt the book for its immorality -- such praise from a fellow-artist, and a woman, must have been quite gratifying. Hardy, as usual, was very generous in his response :

My reading of your "Keynotes" came about somewhat as yours did of "Jude". A friend had it presented to her, & after reading it with deep interest she sent it on to me with a request that I would tell her what I thought of it. I need hardly say what my reply was : & how much I felt the verisimilitude of the stories, & how you seemed to make us breathe the atmosphere of the scenes.

I have been intending for years to draw Sue, & it is extraordinary that a type of woman, comparatively common & getting commoner, should have escaped fiction so long.<sup>14</sup>

George Egerton's letter had a very interesting postscript in which she laconically stated that 'the arrival of a little son' had delayed the posting of

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52 ; Hardy's parenthesis.

<sup>13</sup> Letter dated 22 Nov 1895, from George Egerton to Thomas Hardy, now in the Dorset County Museum. Again, I would like to thank the Curator, Mr Richard de Peyer, for allowing me access to this letter. This extract from Egerton's letter is also quoted by Janet B. Wright in 'Hardy and his Contemporaries : The Literary Context of *Jude the Obscure*', *Inscape* , 14 (1980), p.145.

<sup>14</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 2, p.102. For similar comments on Sue, see Hardy's letter ( 20 Nov 1895 ) to his friend Edmund Gosse in *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 2, p.99.

her letter. To this, Hardy's response ( the last line of Hardy's letter quoted above ) is very revealing : 'I congratulate you on the little boy. My children, alas, are all in octavo.' Hardy's life-long regret at his own childlessness -- which may have contributed, not insignificantly, to his pessimism -- is here transparently expressed to a stranger.<sup>15</sup>

The 'friend' who had lent a copy of Keynotes to Hardy was Florence Henniker and this copy, with Hardy's annotations and marginal emphases, is preserved in the 'Richard Little Purdy Collection' of the Beinecke Library, Yale University. In view of the disclaimer -- 'The notes in the margins are mostly not mine' -- signed by 'F. Henniker', it is perhaps safe to assume that most of the marginal comments are by Hardy ( the handwriting certainly resembles that of Hardy's surviving MSS ). Hardy was so taken up by the first story in the collection, 'A Cross Line', that he not only wrote marginal comments on pp.22-23, but he also quoted a substantial portion of these two pages in his 'Literary Notes' notebook under the heading 'The key to woman's seeming contradictions'. There are as many as five consecutive extracts from Keynotes , dated 3 January 1894, in this literary scrapbook of Hardy's<sup>16</sup> and that, at this point, he was interested in speculations on women's nature is attested by the fact that the immediately following entry, headed 'Treachery of Women', is a summary of an article in the Spectator ( January 13, 1894) on this topic.

In 'A Cross Line', which reads somewhat like an Ur-Lady Chatterley's Lover , George Egerton very boldly plumbs the depths of woman's sensual nature :

The why a refined, physically fragile woman will mate with a brute, a mere male animal with primitive passions -- and

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<sup>15</sup> A similar regret touchingly surfaces in Hardy's disguised autobiography where he writes: 'We hear that Jane, our late servant is soon to have a baby. Yet never a sign of one is there for us.' See The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy ed. Michael Millgate ( London : Macmillan, 1984 ; rpt. 1989), p.119.

<sup>16</sup> Lennart A. Bjork ed. The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 2, (London : Macmillan, 1985), pp.60-61 ; Hardy's underlining.



love him -- . . . They have all overlooked the eternal wildness, the untamed primitive savage temperament that lurks in the mildest, best woman.

This passage bears marginal emphasis, with a comment which appears to be in Hardy's hand: 'This if fairly stated, is decidedly the ugly side of woman's nature' (Hardy's emphasis).<sup>17</sup> Egerton's tearing aside of the decorous veil to reveal the frank sexuality of what she calls 'the female animal' (pp. 3, 63) perhaps prompted Hardy's description of Arabella as 'a complete and substantial female animal -- no more, no less' (Jude, p.62). But Arabella did not become a 'female animal' till the 1903 edition of Jude and perhaps of more immediate relevance here is a sentence that Hardy added to his short story 'On the Western Circuit'. Analyzing the attraction that Charles Raye holds for Mrs Edith Harnham, the narrator says: 'That he had been able to seduce another woman in two days was his crowning though unrecognized fascination for her as the she-animal'.<sup>18</sup> This sentence was not present either in the MS or in the story as serialized in The English Illustrated Magazine in December 1891. When Hardy was collecting this story for the volume Life's Little Ironies, this sentence was still missing from the galley proofs which Hardy corrected from 8 to 12 December 1893.<sup>19</sup> It first appears in the book version of Life's Little Ironies, published on 22 February 1894. Therefore, it must have been added at some later proof stage, between 12 December 1893 and 22 February 1894.

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<sup>17</sup> George Egerton, Keynotes (London: Elkin Mathews & John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1893), p.22. I am grateful to Mr William Hemmig, of the Beinecke Library, for sending me a copyflo of Hardy's annotated copy of Keynotes. I would also like to thank Mr Vincent Giroud, Curator of Modern Books and Manuscripts, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, for granting me formal permission to quote Hardy's marginal comments in this copy of Keynotes. Subsequent page references to the stories in Keynotes are to this 1893 edn and are parenthetically incorporated into the text.

<sup>18</sup> 'On the Western Circuit', collected in 'Life's Little Ironies' and 'A Changed Man' ed. F.B. Pinion, New Wessex Edition, (London: Macmillan, 1977), p.97.

<sup>19</sup> I am grateful to Mr Richard de Peyer, Curator of the Dorset County Museum, for sending me photocopies of the galley proofs (of section IV of this short story) which are now at DCM. Neither R.L. Purdy in his Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study (1954) nor Barbara Rosenbaum in her Index of English Literary Manuscripts, Vol. IV: Part 2 (1990), mentions any surviving proofs beyond the galley proof stage.

Interestingly, in December 1893 Hardy had been reading Keynotes because the five extracts from it in his 'Literary Notebook' are dated 3 January 1894. Therefore, it is perhaps not too wild a guess to deduce that Hardy's reading of Egerton's frank treatment of female sexuality emboldened him to add this provocative sentence in his short story.

Some of Egerton's male characters are theoretically quite well versed in the ways of 'the female animal', and the narrator of 'A Little Grey Glove', the only story in the collection that is written from the man's point of view, 'pursue[s] the Eternal Feminine in a spirit of purely scientific investigation' (p.93). But when confronted with a particularly maddening specimen of 'the female species' (p.93), most of Egerton's men are bewildered by her inscrutability. To the average male perception (personified, for example, in the nameless husbands in 'A Cross Line' and 'An Empty Frame' ), women are 'enigmas' (p.21), 'as impenetrable as a sphinx' (p.25), with an 'elusive spirit in her that he divines but cannot seize . . .' (p.29). The 'devilry' in her makes her a 'witch' -- a word that Egerton's characters/narrator use almost compulsively e.g. in 'A Cross Line' (p.23), 'A Little Grey Glove' (p.102), 'An Empty Frame' (p.118), 'Under Northern Sky' (p.144). And when she's not a 'witch', she's a 'gipsy', e.g. in 'A Cross Line' (pp. 3, 14, 26) and in 'Under Northern Sky' (pp. 145, 146, 151).

The nameless wife in 'An Empty Frame' thus soothingly reassures her unnamed husband : 'There, it's all right, boy ! Don't mind me, I have a bit of a complex nature ; you couldn't understand me if you tried to ; you'd better not try !' (p.123). Similarly, the male narrator of 'A Little Grey Glove' finds that although he devotes himself to everything 'in petticoats', 'the more I saw of her, the less I understood her' (p.94). Against this sentence there is an interesting marginal comment by Hardy : 'a woman's view of herself : not a man's.' We must remember that when Hardy read and annotated Keynotes he was working on the final draft of Jude the Obscure

and, despite his disclaimer, the male perception of Sue is just such a baffled awareness of opacity. Sue is a 'riddle' to Jude (p.154) and her conduct is 'one lovely conundrum to him' (p.156). To Phillotson too, she is 'puzzling and unstateable' (p.240), and the state of her heart remains forever a 'mystery' (p.255) -- to Phillotson, to Jude, to the (male) narrator, and even perhaps to Sue herself.

A characteristic that the 'quivering' and 'nervous' Egerton heroines share with Hardy's Sue is their love of being loved. As the female protagonist of 'A Cross Line' confesses to her husband -- 'It isn't the love, you know, it's the being loved' (p.16). And when Jude accuses Sue of being a 'flirt', Sue is equally candid in admitting that '[s]ome women's love of being loved is insatiable' (p.222). Later, trying to justify her marriage to Phillotson, she explains it as 'a woman's *love of being loved* [which] gets the better of her conscience' (p.256 ; Hardy's italics). Before she ultimately leaves Jude to remarry Phillotson, she quite gratuitously reveals to Jude that her love for him 'began in the selfish and cruel wish to make your heart ache for me without letting mine ache for you' (p.361).

Sue's uncontrollable and involuntary physical shrinking from Phillotson is also anticipated by some of Egerton's women characters. The wife in 'Under Northern Sky' betrays her revulsion when her grossly sensual husband demands a kiss from her, and the housekeeper Belinda (in 'The Spell of the White Elf' ) laments : 'If one could only have a child, ma'm, without a husband or the disgrace ; ugh, the disgusting men !' (p.80). What this half-educated woman says is echoed by the more articulate Sue in one of her series of notes to Phillotson, begging for release from their marriage :

'I implore you to be merciful ! I would not ask if I were not almost compelled by what I can't bear ! No poor woman has ever wished more than I that Eve had not fallen, so that ( as

the primitive Christians believed ) some harmless mode of vegetation might have peopled Paradise.' (p.241)

Indeed, this physical disgust seems to be shared by quite a few women, as the female 'writer' who features in 'The Spell of the White Elf' tells us :

'It seems congenital with some women to have deeply rooted in their innermost nature a smouldering enmity, ay, sometimes a physical disgust to men, it is a kind of kin-feeling to the race dislike of white men to black. Perhaps it explains why woman, where her own feelings are not concerned, will always make common cause with woman against him.' (pp.80-81)

Against the last sentence of the above extract is another marginal comment, presumably by Hardy : 'No they will not'.<sup>20</sup> Despite this categorical denial of women's potential for transcending their internecine rivalries, Hardy had himself given a powerful illustration of female solidarity in *The Woodlanders* (1887) where Grace Melbury and Felice Charmond part with a kiss in the woods, despite the latter's devastating disclosure. That 'wife' and 'mistress' can meet on the common ground of womanly sympathy ( it is quite unnecessary to read lesbian implications into this scene ) is illustrated by Egerton too. In 'A Cross Line', enlightened by her personal experience, 'the mistress, who is a wife, puts her arms round the tall maid, who has never had more than a moral claim to the name, and kisses her in her quick way' (p.35). Here, social barriers are swept aside by the realization of a common female identity and a common female experience -- (illegitimate) pregnancy. Again, in 'Under Northern Sky', the generous wife sympathetically allows the 'cow-girl' to kiss her dying husband good-bye, although it appears to be the common gossip that the cow-girl had once been her husband's mistress.

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<sup>20</sup> However, this marginal comment could well be Florence Henniker's as the writing seems somewhat different from Hardy's neat, compact hand.

In their treatment of female relationships it is quite obvious that the 'old hand' knew 'a thing or two' as well as the 'young 'un'. Indeed, correspondences between Egerton's stories and Hardy's prose fiction are numerous enough to suggest a two-way imbibing of literary influence. For instance, the 'writer' in Egerton's story 'The Spell of the White Elf' relates how the child she adopts ( the 'elf' of the title ) bears a striking resemblance to her :

'Well, the elf was born, and now comes the singular part of it. It was a wretched, frail little being with a startling likeness to me. It was as if the evil the mother had wished me had worked on the child, and the constant thought of me stamped my features on its little face.' (p.81)

One is instantly reminded of Hardy's short story 'An Imaginative Woman'<sup>21</sup> where Mrs Marchmill's innocent obsession with the (unseen) poet, Robert Trewe, leads to her son being born with a face that bears so striking a resemblance to the poet's photograph that the *unimaginative* Mr Marchmill ( the child's legal and biological father ) is misled into rejecting his own son.

In 'Now Spring has Come' Egerton's female protagonist is so moved by a book that she impulsively arranges to meet the unknown author who has so stirred her deepest feelings. However, such soul-sympathy with an unknown artist brings only pain and disillusionment in its wake, and we recall Jude's similar impulsive journey to meet the composer of a hymn that has strangely affected him -- only to discover that the writer of the divinely beautiful song is a prosaic and grossly materialistic man. In 'A Little Grey Glove', the male narrator of the story falls in love when his ear is pierced by the hook of the lady's fishing line, very much in the same

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<sup>21</sup> 'An Imaginative Woman', dated 1893, was published in April 1894. But the story may have been originally composed quite earlier because Hardy's note for December 1893 states : 'Found and touched up a short story called "An Imaginative Woman".' See The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy ed. Michael Millgate, p.276.

comic and deflating fashion as when Arabella's love missile ( the pig's pizzle ) hits Jude's ear.

Some correspondences can of course be accounted for by the fact that both writers were drawing from a common stock of ideas current at that time. For instance, Egerton's description of a hawk swooping down and capturing a little brown bird is an image of Darwinian struggle for existence that Hardy had earlier exploited, dramatically and proleptically, in the description of the chase of the duck by the duck-hawk, in the opening chapter of The Hand of Ethelberta (1876). The same Darwinism is again apparent in Egerton's description of nature where the trees 'fight for life in wild confusion' ( 'A Cross Line', p.2 ). This passage is a pale echo of Hardy's more famous and oft-quoted description of nature where the leaf is deformed, the fungi choke the trees, and the ivy strangles to death the promising sapling ( The Woodlanders , Chap. 7 ).

One image common to Schreiner, Egerton and Hardy is that of the captive/caged bird which represents woman's sense of entrapment within the narrow role assigned to her by patriarchal society. A suggestion of claustrophobia, a passionate yearning for liberty, a frustrated chafing against the oppressive rigidity of the iron bars, all coalesce to create a powerful emotive symbol. Schreiner, through Lyndall, tauntingly questions :

'If the bird *does* like its cage, and *does* like its sugar and will not leave it, why keep the door so very carefully shut ? Why not open it, only a little ? Do they know there is many a bird will not break its wings against the bars, but would fly if the doors were open.' (p.159 ; Schreiner's italics)

Egerton too uses this almost archetypal image to anticipate the liberation of the oppressed wife in 'Under Northern Sky'. Prophesying the death of the sensual husband, the old gipsy woman consoles the wife by holding out the hope that, after the rising of seven suns and seven moons, the cage

will open and the bird will be free. Hardy too had used such a proleptic image in the opening scenes of The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886) where the swallow flying out of the furmity woman's tent signifies Susan's release from Michael Henchard ( through the 'wife-sale' ). Later, in Jude the Obscure , when Jude and Sue decide to leave Aldbrickham and all their household furniture ( including Sue's pet birds ) is sold off, Sue goes to the poulterer's shop and seeing her pet pigeons in a hamper she impulsively unfastens the cover and allows them to fly away. Tragically enough, although Sue frees her pet birds, she herself ultimately remains ( wilfully?) self-trapped in the cage of conventional morality.

In 1901 George Egerton married Reginald Golding Bright and although Bright later acted as Hardy's theatrical agent, and quite a few letters passed between them regarding possible dramatizations of 'The Three Wayfarers', Tess , and The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall , there is no suggestion whatsoever that Hardy either met or corresponded again with George Egerton.

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Nor did Hardy seem to take any initiative to establish a personal contact with perhaps the greatest living novelist of his day -- George Eliot. From his debut as a novelist, right till the end of his career, Hardy was upset by the constant (often unfavourable) comparisons of his work with that of George Eliot. He was certainly not at all flattered when the anonymously serialized Far From the Madding Crowd was thought to be the work of George Eliot and all through his life he tried to downplay what critics saw as his indebtedness to her. His 'rustics' were seen as inferior imitations of George Eliot's more memorable creations ; his tendency to indulge in sententiae and aphorisms was ascribed to the influence of her style ; more specifically, his sympathetic description of Fanny Robin's excruciating journey to the Casterbridge workhouse was seen as a pale re-

writing of Hetty's 'Journey in Despair' in Adam Bede. More recently, it has been suggested that the radicalism of 'The Poor Man and the Lady' probably owed something to George Eliot's 'Address to working-men, by Felix Holt';<sup>22</sup> that George Eliot's portrayal of the village choir in 'Amos Barton' ( Scenes of Clerical Life, 1858) probably inspired Under the Greenwood Tree;<sup>23</sup> that the germ of Two on a Tower is probably to be found in Maggie Tulliver's comment on astronomers who 'live up in high towers, and if the women came there, they might talk and hinder them from looking at the stars'.<sup>24</sup>

Understandably suffering from an 'anxiety of influence', Hardy tried to distance himself as much as possible from George Eliot. When Samuel Chew presented Hardy his book, Thomas Hardy : Poet and Novelist (1921), Hardy rejected Chew's hypothesis that George Eliot's 'success in delineating the peasantry of Warwickshire suggested to Hardy' the idea for his Wessex rustics, and insisted on tracing his literary ancestry not to George Eliot but to Shakespeare.<sup>25</sup> In the copious notes containing suggested corrections for the proposed revised edition of Chew's book, Hardy emphatically stated : 'It was Shakespeare's delineation of his Warwickshire clowns (who much resemble the Wessex peasantry) that influenced Hardy most. He found no clowns i.e. farm-labourers or rustics, anywhere in G. Eliot's books, and considered her country characters more like small townspeople than peasantry.' To Chew's use of the phrase 'Hardy borrows the theme', in comparing Hardy's short story 'A Tragedy of Two Ambitions' with Daniel

<sup>22</sup> See Michael Millgate, Thomas Hardy : A Biography, p.111.

<sup>23</sup> See F. B. Pinion, Thomas Hardy : His Life and Friends ( London : Macmillan, 1992 ; rpt. 1994), p.105.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.178. Pinion had first made this point in his book A Hardy Companion ( London : Macmillan ; New York : St Martin's Press, 1968), p.39.

<sup>25</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 6, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1987), pp.153-57. Although the typescript is headed 'Notes on Professor Chew's Book. / by F. E. H.', the accompanying letter to Samuel Chew, sent out over Florence Hardy's signature, makes it quite clear that the 'notes' are 'based entirely on his [ i.e. Hardy's ] own remarks'. The following quotations in the main text are from the same source.



Deronda , Hardy stiffly pointed out : 'If this means that the incident of not attempting to save a drowning person is borrowed from "D. Deronda" [sic] it is an error : kindred incidents are common to hundreds of novels.' This attempt to deny any links with George Eliot is also reflected in his disguised autobiography where, rather disingenuously, he says he could not 'understand' why Far From the Madding Crowd was mistaken to be 'from the pen of George Eliot' because : 'she had never touched the life of the fields : her country-people having seemed to him, too, more like small townfolk than rustics ; and as evidencing a woman's wit cast in country dialogue rather than real country humour, which he regarded as rather of the Shakespeare and Fielding sort.'<sup>26</sup>

In Hardy's opinion, George Eliot was undoubtedly the 'greatest living' 'thinker' of his day but she was 'not a born storyteller by any means' and this to Hardy must have seemed a serious artistic drawback because he passionately believed that : 'We tale-tellers are all Ancient Mariners, and none of us is warranted in stopping Wedding Guests ( in other words, the hurrying public ) unless he has something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experience of every average man and woman.'<sup>27</sup> Hardy also seemed to have reservations regarding George Eliot's delineation of women and he probably concurred with the verdict pronounced in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine (April 1883) that 'George Eliot is the advocate of women ; in Shakespeare we must find their artist'.<sup>28</sup> This is not a case of mean professional rivalry because Hardy also copied from the same Blackwood article the opinion : 'George Eliot's women -- A truly magnificent revelation of the nobleness that is in women. But the other

<sup>26</sup> Millgate ed. The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.100.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.100 & p.268 ; Hardy's parenthesis.

<sup>28</sup> Hardy copied this comment, and the following one, into his 'Literary Notes I' notebook. See Lennart A. Bjork ed. The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 1, ( London : Macmillan, 1985), p.152, nos. 1298 & 1300 ; Hardy's underlining and ellipsis.

side is not fairly shown. The mystery of feminine malignity is barely touched upon . . . . Art ought to be impartially representative.'

Had there been the least inclination on Hardy's part, the opportunity for a meeting between the two novelists would not have been too hard to find since George Eliot lived up to 1880. Had they met, a sympathetic chord might have been touched because George Eliot -- like Hardy -- was one who was aware of the 'ever deepening sense of the pain of the world & the tragedy of sentient being'.<sup>29</sup> But the unpleasantness of being branded 'one of George Eliot's miscarriages'<sup>30</sup> made Hardy determined to keep his distance and later he even declined William Blackwood's offer to write a volume on George Eliot in the proposed 'Modern English Writers' series, pleading that a 'fellow artizan' was not perhaps the one best suited for the task of 'sympathetic criticism'.<sup>31</sup>

However, one older contemporary that Hardy went out of his way to meet was Eliza Lynn Linton. As a young man (in his late twenties), Hardy had read with interest the series of articles on the controversial issue of the 'Woman Question' published anonymously in the Saturday Review from 1866 to 1868 ( later collected, under her own name, as The Girl of the Period and Other Social Essays , 1883 ). Like most readers, he assumed the writer of these critical articles to be a man, as he later confessed to Mrs Linton in 1888 :

If ever you come down into these parts, & I hope you will do so some summer, I shall be able to show you the exact spot -- a green slope in a pasture -- on which I used to sit down & read

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<sup>29</sup> Part of a quotation from an article in The Times , 28 Jan 1911, that Hardy copied into his 'Literary Notes II' notebook. See Bjork ed. The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 2, p.208.

<sup>30</sup> This colourful phrase comes from Hardy's rival, George Moore. Moore's Confessions of a Young Man , first published in 1886, went through as many as nine distinct stages of revision and the phrase in question was added only in 1917. But the idea behind it had plagued Hardy all his life. Hardy's only consolation perhaps lay in the fact that George Eliot too had 'borrowed' the term 'Wessex' -- which Hardy had first used in Far From the Madding Crowd (1874) -- in Daniel Deronda (1876).

<sup>31</sup> Hardy's letter dated 9 Sept 1901 in Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 2, p.299.

your renowned articles in the S. R. [sic]. In my innocence I never suspected the sex of the writer. I always thought that the essay which became most celebrated was not quite so fine & incisive as some of the others that you wrote in the series : but that's how things go in this world.<sup>32</sup>

Hardy ended his letter by lamenting that he was torn 'between my own conviction of what is truest to life, & what editors & critics will tolerate as being true to their conventional principles' and this is the main thrust of his contribution to the symposium on 'Candour in English Fiction' in the New Review (January 1890). The other two contributors were Walter Besant and Eliza Lynn Linton and there is a lot of similarity in the views expressed by Hardy and Mrs Linton. Hardy felt that '[l]ife being a physiological fact, its honest portrayal must be largely concerned with, for one thing, the relations of the sexes' and therefore the 'crash of broken commandments' was a necessary 'accompaniment to the catastrophe of a tragedy'.<sup>33</sup> Mrs Linton too complained of the 'hypocritical' way in which the 'seventh commandment' was handled in English literature and of the combined tyranny of the 'British Matron' and the 'Young Person' which emasculated all fiction to a 'schoolgirl standard'. Casting her vote for the 'locked bookcase' rather than the current 'milk-and-water-literature', she had pointedly asked : 'Must men go without meat because the babes must be fed with milk ?'<sup>34</sup> Quite understandably, Hardy's article was the most trenchant of the three because by January 1890 Hardy had already faced the full force of Grundyism in regard to Tess ( it was rejected by three publishing houses ) and later in the same year he would be compelled to tone down considerably for magazine publication some of the more outspoken stories of A Group of Noble Dames .

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<sup>32</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 7, p.111, under 'Additional Letters'.

<sup>33</sup> Hardy's article is collected in Harold Orel ed. Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings , pp.125-133 ; see pp.127 & 129.

<sup>34</sup> Eliza Lynn Linton, 'Candour in English Fiction', New Review , Jan 1890, pp.10-14.

In Hardy's own words ( in the 1888 letter ), the 'ice [had] been broken' by his gesture of sending Mrs Linton a copy of his recently published story 'A Tragedy of Two Ambitions' (1888) as a Christmas offering. This gesture would later be repeated in reverse towards the end of his life when many eminent young poets and novelists -- both male and female -- would send Hardy their published works, with touching inscriptions, as a token of their love and admiration. And just as Hardy would later warmly respond to such literary homage, Eliza Linton too responded warmly, praising Hardy's story very highly in her reply. Their genuine mutual admiration resulted in Hardy paying Mrs Linton a visit in January 1891, when she was nearing seventy, and this first meeting is best described in Mrs Linton's vivacious epistolary style :

Yesterday a stranger called on me. The boy said *Harvey* . I was in a fume -- could not make out who it was -- went round and round the central point, till the stranger said he was going out of town to-day. 'Where?' says I. 'To Dorchester,' says he. Then I ups with a shout and a clapping of my hands, and says I, 'Oh, now I know who you are ! You are Thomas Hardy and not Harvey' -- (the author of *Far from the Madding Crowd* , etc.). He was so pleased when I was so pleased, and stayed here for two hours. He is a nice bit manny, but of a sadder and more pessimistic nature than I am. It was very nice to see him. We have *missed* each other twenty times. He said his wife wants to see me, she had heard I was so handsome !!! Says I, 'Then tell her I am *not* .' Says he, 'No, I certainly cannot do that, because you *are* !' So there, Miss Lucy, compliments in one's old age !<sup>35</sup>

When a stranger drops in for a chance visit and then goes on to stay for two hours, it argues for a degree of mutual liking and instant rapport.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in George Somes Layard, Mrs Lynn Linton : Her Life, Letters, and Opinions (London : Methuen & Co., 1901), p.277. In the quoted letter ( to her sister Lucy Gedge ) all the italics and parenthesis are Mrs Linton's. Eliza Linton began writing her literary reminiscences so very late in life that when she died they were left incomplete. Her My Literary Life , posthumously published in 1899, contains interesting (if sometimes negative) portraits of G. H. Lewes, Landor, Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot ; but there is no reference to Hardy.

For such a liking to develop at a first meeting, the lady did not necessarily have to be young and beautiful. For instance, when Hardy first met Mary Elizabeth Braddon at the studio of William Powell Frith, in November 1879, he described the impression of that encounter in his autobiography thus : 'Hardy met there too . . . Miss Braddon, who "had a broad, thought-creased, world-beaten face -- a most amiable woman", whom he always liked.'<sup>36</sup> Miss Braddon had been the editor of Belgravia when Hardy's The Return of the Native had been accepted for publication and if Hardy was aware of it he would have been doubly grateful because his old friend and mentor Leslie Stephen had earlier rejected it for the Cornhill as 'he feared that the relations between Eustacia, Wildeve, and Thomasin might develop into something "dangerous" for a family magazine'.<sup>37</sup> Hardy did not share Stephen's editorial timidity and his liking for Miss Braddon seems to have continued despite her unconventional life ( she had lived with the publisher John Maxwell from 1860 to 1874, marrying him officially in 1874 ). Thus in 1925, a decade after her death, Hardy was warmly assuring Gerald Maxwell : 'I well knew your mother "Miss Braddon" ( as she always was to us ), & have a faint recollection of my meeting you at Mrs Henniker's.'<sup>38</sup>

If Mary Braddon and Eliza Linton ( she had separated from her husband ) were unconventional, Margaret Oliphant seems to have been conventionality personified. At least this was the opinion expressed in the Saturday Review (February 1877) and Hardy, perhaps with a certain

<sup>36</sup> Millgate ed. The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy, p.135.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in R. L. Purdy, Thomas Hardy : A Bibliographical Study ( London : Oxford Univ. Press, 1954), p.27. Purdy and Millgate, in their editorial footnotes ( Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 1, p.51n), identify Miss Braddon as the 'Editor' of Belgravia, as does Millgate in his definitive 1982 biography of Hardy (p.188). Simon Gatrell, however, challenges this general assumption and says that when The Return of the Native was offered to Belgravia it was no longer edited and owned by Miss Braddon and her husband John Maxwell. See Simon Gatrell ed. 'The Return of the Native' : A Facsimile of the Manuscript with Related Materials ( New York and London : Garland Publishing Inc., 1986), p. xix.

<sup>38</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 6, p.319.

amount of relish, copied an abridged quotation from its pages : ‘. . . Mrs Oliphant always admires what public opinion has decided that it is right to admire, & patiently repeats the old estimates, & quotes the old stories.’<sup>39</sup> A personal meeting with Mrs Oliphant in May 1885 did nothing to quell this impression for Hardy wrote to his wife Emma : ‘Among others there was Mrs Oliphant, to whom I was introduced. I don’t care a bit for her -- & you lose nothing by not knowing her. She is propriety & primness incarnate.’<sup>40</sup> On the surface, there seems to be nothing to account for this hostile attitude on Hardy’s part because three years earlier, in July 1882, Mrs Oliphant had written an extremely civil letter to Hardy suggesting that he write a sketch on the labouring poor of Dorset, for the publisher Charles James Longman. Hardy had replied equally cordially to her, explaining that he was very busy just then ; but he did eventually follow up her original suggestion because his article on ‘The Dorsetshire Labourer’ was later published in Longman’s Magazine in July 1883.<sup>41</sup> Although Hardy had courteously ended his letter to Mrs Oliphant by saying ‘I welcome this opportunity of a direct communication with a writer I have known in spirit so long’, something must have intervened between July 1882 and May 1885 to change Hardy’s attitude towards her.

What intervened was probably the publication of Two on a Tower in October 1882. Mrs Oliphant could well have privately expressed to friends her disgust at what she later publicly castigated as the ‘grotesque and indecent dishonesty’<sup>42</sup> of Viviette Constantine in marrying Bishop

<sup>39</sup> Bjork ed. The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 1, p.92.

<sup>40</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 1, p.133.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.107. The full text of Mrs Oliphant’s July 1882 letter to Hardy is quoted in John Stock Clarke, ‘The “Rival Novelist” -- Hardy and Mrs Oliphant’, The Thomas Hardy Journal, 5 : 3 (1989), pp.51-61 ; p.57.

<sup>42</sup> The reference occurs in Mrs Oliphant’s review of Tess, Blackwood’s Magazine, March 1892. This review is collected in R. G. Cox ed. Thomas Hardy : The Critical Heritage ( New York : Barnes and Noble, 1970), pp.203-14 ; p.203. It is also reprinted in Graham Clarke ed. Thomas Hardy : Critical Assessments, Vol. I, ( East Sussex : Helm Information Ltd., 1993), pp.203-12 ; p.203.

Helmsdale to legitimize her baby by Swithin. Whatever the cause of offence, the breach between the two novelists widened as Hardy continued to publish one controversial novel after another. Although Mrs Oliphant grudgingly conceded some merit in Tess, her response to Jude -- in 'The Anti-Marriage League' article -- is now a legend. Hardy was so hurt by what he perceived to be her unfair criticisms -- e.g. her accusation that he had made a ' "shameless" double profit' by publishing the story in magazine (expurgated) and book (restored) version -- that although he referred to her as a 'fellow-novelist' in his detached, third person autobiography, in the immediacy of personal letters she becomes the 'rival novelist' sneering at Jude.<sup>43</sup> And in a letter to Grant Allen (January 1896) his anger at Mrs Oliphant's onslaught bursts forth with uncharacteristic vehemence : 'Talk of shamelessness : that a woman who purely for money's sake has for the last 30 years flooded the magazines & starved out scores of better workers, should try to write down rival novelists whose books sell better than her own, caps all the shamelessness of Arabella, to my mind.'<sup>44</sup> In the heat and hurt of the moment, Hardy forgot that Mrs Oliphant's prolific output was her only means of supporting her three fatherless children and also the children of her brother. Writing of this episode in retrospect, in his autobiography, what emerges is a sense of personal betrayal ( of the type more keenly felt when Gosse had told Hardy to his face that Jude was the most indecent novel he had ever read ) :

The unkindest cut of all, however, seemed to him at the time to come from his acquaintance and fellow-novelist Mrs Oliphant, who after abusing him shamelessly in Blackwood as aforesaid, wrote to the bishop commending his action. And yet shortly before this, on hearing that she was ill, Hardy had wasted an afternoon at Windsor in finding her house and

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<sup>43</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy, p.287 ; Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 2, p.105.

<sup>44</sup> Collected Letters, Vol. 2, p.106.

seeing her. Now he, no doubt, thought how these novelists  
love one another !<sup>45</sup>

Although Mrs Oliphant's comments continued to rankle, privately Hardy must have admitted to himself the justice of some of her remarks, e.g. the talk between Arabella and her friends which Mrs Oliphant considered 'a shame to the language' because it revealed a 'depravity' unworthy of even the 'darkest slums'.<sup>46</sup> Significantly enough, in his textual revisions to *Jude* it is just these coarse passages that Hardy took care to tone down. All references to the 'slip of flesh', 'the limp object dangling across the handrail of the bridge', are removed from the description of Jude's first encounter with Arabella. Her friend Anny's comment, after Jude leaves, in the original 1895 Osgood McIlvaine edition had read : ' . . . he's as simple as a child. I could see it as you courted on the bridge, wi' that piece o' the pig hanging between ye -- haw-haw ! What a proper thing to court over !' In the 1903 Macmillan 'New Edition', this is bowdlerized to the innocuous : 'I could see it as you courted on the bridge, when he looked at 'ee as if he had never seen a woman before in his born days.'<sup>47</sup>

A society hostess had once told Hardy that she used Tess as a litmus test to organize her varied assortment of guests into harmonious groups

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<sup>45</sup> *Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, p.295. The veracity of this episode is questioned by John Stock Clarke whose detailed and fairly balanced article is somewhat marred by his concluding accusation that this story is a 'fabrication' on Hardy's part to make Mrs Oliphant seem guilty of 'personal treachery' ( *Thomas Hardy Journal*, 1989, p.60). While Hardy's autobiography is admittedly full of evasions, half-truths, and disingenuous disclaimers, it is perhaps a trifle uncharitable to accuse him of downright lying. Till evidence to the contrary emerges, Hardy surely deserves the benefit of the doubt. In her recent biography of Mrs Oliphant, Elisabeth Jay, too, rather ungenerously insinuates that Hardy was courteous to Mrs Oliphant as long as 'she seemed in a position to offer him work' and that he 'waited till after her death to wreak his revenge' for her review of *Jude* by referring to the 'screaming of a poor lady in *Blackwood*' in the 1912 'Postscript' to *Jude*. See Elisabeth Jay, *Mrs Oliphant : 'A Fiction to Herself' : A Literary Life* ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1995), p.37.

<sup>46</sup> 'The Anti-Marriage League', *Blackwood's Magazine*, Jan 1896. The article is reprinted in R. G. Cox ed. *Critical Heritage*, pp.256-62 (p.259) ; and also in Graham Clarke ed. *Critical Assessments*, Vol. I, pp.248-52 (p.250).

<sup>47</sup> See Robert C. Slack's discussion of Hardy's textual revisions in 'The Text of Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 11 : 4 (1957), pp.261-75. Slack conveniently juxtaposes the 1895 and 1903 texts of *Jude* ; see especially pp. 266-67 of his article.



(based on the question 'Do you support her or not ?' and depending on their positive or negative responses).<sup>48</sup> To Hardy personally, Jude must have seemed such a touchstone helping him to sift his friends from his foes. Hardy had received, among others, warm letters of praise for Jude from George Egerton, Ellen Terry and Pearl Craigie. Pearl Craigie had had a tempestuous life : in 1890 she had left her (syphilitic) husband, divorcing finally in July 1895, and for a brief period she had been George Moore's lover. As such, she was probably among those adult readers into whose soul the iron had entered<sup>49</sup> whom Hardy ideally had in mind as his true audience. Herself a writer of novels which focus persistently on unhappy marriages, she wrote to Hardy in November 1895, 'humbly as a student', to express her unutterable admiration of Jude which deals with the 'marriage question [as it] has never been so dealt with before'.<sup>50</sup> In her 'student's enthusiasm', she ranked Jude 'with Michael Angelo's "Last Judgment" ' and hailed Hardy as 'the supreme master in Europe'.<sup>51</sup>

Hardy had met Pearl Craigie ( writing under the pseudonym 'John Oliver Hobbes' ) in June 1893. Just before this meeting he wrote to Florence Henniker saying : 'I have a dreadful confession to make. In a weak moment I have accepted an invitation to lunch, to meet John Oliver Hobbes ! She is very pretty, they say ; but on my honour that had nothing to do with it -- purely literary reasons only.'<sup>52</sup> That he was sufficiently

<sup>48</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.258.

<sup>49</sup> On 10 Nov 1895 Hardy wrote to Gosse saying that Jude was 'really sent out to those into whose souls the iron has entered, & has entered deeply, at some time of their lives'. On the same day, writing to Florence Henniker, Hardy reiterated that the 'tragedy is really addressed to those into whose souls the iron of adversity has deeply entered at some time of their lives. . . ' See Collected Letters , Vol. 2, pp.93-4.

<sup>50</sup> Pearl Craigie's letter to Hardy, dt. 19 Nov 1895, is now in the Dorset County Museum and I am grateful to the Curator, Mr de Peyer, for granting me access to this letter.

<sup>51</sup> See Pearl Craigie's letter to Hardy, in Dec 1898, quoted in John Morgan Richards, The Life of John Oliver Hobbes Told in Her Correspondence with Numerous Friends ( London : John Murray, 1911), p.141. In a letter to Florence Henniker, dt. 24 Dec 1895, Mrs Craigie had admitted that although she considered Jude a truly great work of art, 'the bedroom scenes are profoundly unpleasant'; see Life of John Oliver Hobbes , p.94.

<sup>52</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 2, p.10.

impressed by Mrs Craigie is evident from the entry in his autobiography where he writes : ‘. . . met for the first time . . . that brilliant woman Mrs Craigie.’<sup>53</sup> This impression does not seem to have changed because after her death (in August 1906) his memories are of her ‘intellectual brilliancy’, and of her being ‘entertaining & ebullient’ and ‘bright as ever’.<sup>54</sup> Hardy’s high opinion of her is indirectly evident from the fact that when Gosse invited him in 1898 to join in signing a tribute to Meredith on his 70th birthday and requested Hardy to think of more names of ‘comrades in letters’, Hardy confessed that the ‘women seem the most ticklish business’ and the *only* name he could immediately think of was ‘J. O. Hobbes’.<sup>55</sup>

That their friendship was not merely a literary one is suggested by the entry for September 1893 in Hardy’s autobiography. During his stay with Sir Francis and Lady Jeune, one ‘Sunday morning Hardy took a two hours’ walk with Mrs Craigie on the moor, when she explained to him her reasons for joining the Roman Catholic Church, a step which had vexed him somewhat. Apparently he did not consider her reasons satisfactory, but their friendship remained unbroken’.<sup>56</sup> That barely three months into acquaintanceship, Mrs Craigie could speak on such a personal matter to Hardy argues for considerable mutual sympathy and trust. Indeed Hardy seemed sometimes to invite such soul-confidences and it is relevant here to remember that very early in his career (in 1875) Leslie Stephen had invited Hardy as the sole witness to his signing of a deed renouncing his holy-orders. Despite their differences in religious outlook, the friendship flourished and in June 1894 Hardy and his wife went to see the first performance of a play by Mrs Craigie at Daly’s Theatre and this was followed by Mrs Craigie’s visit to the Hardys in their London flat (June

<sup>53</sup> *Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, p.272.

<sup>54</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 3, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 221, 239.

<sup>55</sup> *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, p.185.

<sup>56</sup> *Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, p.276.

1895) as part of a large lunch-party which included Florence Henniker. At Mrs Henniker's literary lunch the next year, Hardy again met Mrs Craigie, and -- among others -- 'Lucas Malet' and Rhoda Broughton.

Such social visits and occasional correspondence kept alive the relationship and when in 1899 Mrs Craigie sent Hardy a copy of her one-act tragedy A Repentance, Hardy wrote back complimenting her on her ability to 'do so much work without allowing it to sink below the highest intellectual & artistic level !'<sup>57</sup> Hardy was generally wary of indulging in insincere praise, even to beautiful literary women, and that he genuinely esteemed at least some of her work is suggested by the quotation from Robert Orange (1902, new edition) that he copied into his 'Literary Notebook' : 'The passion of love invariably drives men & women to an extreme step in one direction or another. It will send some to the Cloister, some to the Tribune, some to the stage, some to heroism, some to crime, & all to their natural calling.'<sup>58</sup> Hardy also must have thoroughly agreed with her comment that '[a]n artist aims at the spirit of things'<sup>59</sup> because in his autobiography he says : ' My art is to intensify the expression of things . . . so that the heart and inner meaning is made vividly visible.'<sup>60</sup>

In 1904 William Archer published his conversation with Mrs Craigie in which she spoke of women being 'more complicated psychologically', of '[m]en's women [being] considered miracles' and 'women's men [being] regarded with smiling compassion', of women having the gift of psychological penetration because for centuries they have stood in 'a more or less servile relation to man' and 'slaves learn by very slight tokens to read the mind of their masters'.<sup>61</sup> Archer's Real

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<sup>57</sup> Collected Letters, Vol. 2, p.217.

<sup>58</sup> Bjork ed. Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 2, p.96 ; Hardy's emphasis. One is instantly reminded of Tess whose single-minded love for Angel leads her to commit murder.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.117.

<sup>60</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy, p.183.

<sup>61</sup> William Archer, Real Conversations ( London : William Heinemann, 1904), pp.51-69.

Conversations also included a talk with Hardy who wrote to Archer thanking him for the book 'which I have been looking into with interest. Mrs C's [sic] talk is, I think, the best, as would be natural, she being such an amusing companion. This bears testimony to the honesty of your reports'.<sup>62</sup> After her death, on reading her Life ( compiled by her father ), Hardy's comment that she was a 'remarkable woman ; & yet she achieved nothing solid or enduring'<sup>63</sup> seems rather uncharitable but it has to be balanced with the more sympathetic view expressed in his autobiography :

Have just read of the death of Mrs Craigie in the papers . . . .  
Her description of the artistic temperament is clever ; as being that which 'thinks more than there is to think, feels more than there is to feel, sees more than there is to see'. It reveals a bitterness of heart that was not shown on the surface by that brilliant woman.<sup>64</sup>

And Hardy's final gesture of friendship towards this 'brilliant' woman was to be 'present at the unveiling by Lord Curzon of the memorial to his friend "John Oliver Hobbes" (Mrs Craigie) at University College', London, in July 1908.<sup>65</sup>

Apart from Pearl Craigie, the only other female personality who featured in Archer's Real Conversations was Mary St Leger Harrison, the daughter of Charles Kingsley, and better known by her pseudonym 'Lucas Malet'. In her talk she classed Hardy with Balzac, Flaubert, Zola and Meredith in the 'realist' school of fiction and enthused over Hardy's 'exquisite eye for nature', the absolute truth of his pictures of country life, the fidelity and sensitiveness revealed in his drawing the 'English peasant from the inside, as . . . no other English novelist has'.<sup>66</sup> Hardy must have

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<sup>62</sup> Collected Letters , Vol. 3, p. 104.

<sup>63</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 4, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1984), p.151.

<sup>64</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.357 ; Hardy's ellipsis.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.368 ; Hardy's parenthesis. See also Hardy's letter to his wife Emma, dt. 2 July 1908, in Collected Letters , Vol. 3, p.323.

<sup>66</sup> Archer, Real Conversations , pp.216-234.

been quite pleased to read all this, as coming from a woman who had made quite an impact on him when he first met her. The candid entry in his autobiography reads : 'Called on "Lucas Malet". A striking woman : full, slightly voluptuous mouth, red lips, black hair and eyes : and most likeable.'<sup>67</sup> This 1892 reminiscence is very typical of his entire autobiography where he constantly describes the literary and society women of his acquaintance almost entirely in terms of their beauty ( or lack of it ) -- their eyes and lips especially. Even before they had met, there had been an exchange of letters ; in the first of them (February 1892) Hardy says that he has read two of her novels ' "Colonel Enderby's Wife", & "Mrs Lorimer"', with the deepest interest. The former I consider one of the finest works of fiction of late years. There is not a threadbare place anywhere in it. You are one of the few authors of the other sex who are not afraid of logical consequences'.<sup>68</sup> When she sent him a copy of her most famous work, The Wages of Sin (1891), Hardy's letter of thanks (March 1892) had a very interesting paragraph where he commiserated with her on the handicap of sex :

I have long seen what you say about a woman's disadvantages. And the worst of it is that even when, by accident, she does gain knowledge of matters usually sealed to her sex people will not believe she knows at first hand. However, you have a counterpoise in other matters : there being many scenes in life -- though not so many as in the other case -- wherein the knowledge is to the woman only.<sup>69</sup>

After reading The Wages of Sin , however, Hardy's original opinion of Lucas Malet as 'a thoroughly skilled artist' must have been considerably modified because he records his disappointment in a letter to Millicent Fawcett (April 1892) : 'But the wages [of sin] are that the young man falls over a cliff, & the young woman dies of consumption -- not very

<sup>67</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.258.

<sup>68</sup> Collected Letters , Vol. 7, pp.119-120, under 'Additional Letters'.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.120.

consequent, as I told the authoress.’<sup>70</sup> This complete volte-face from his earlier verdict that in her novels she fearlessly exhibits ‘logical consequences’ could not have pleased Lucas Malet very much, if indeed Hardy had communicated his frank opinion to her. The absence of any quotation from this highly topical novel of the 1890s, in his ‘Literary Notebooks’, may perhaps be taken as a reliable indicator of Hardy’s unflattering estimate of the work.

Another much-talked-of novel of the 1890s does however feature among the extracts in Hardy’s ‘Literary Notebook’. Frances Elizabeth McFall, better known as ‘Sarah Grand’, had sent Hardy a copy of The Heavenly Twins (1893) with the inscription : ‘a very inadequate acknowledgement of all she owes to his genius.’<sup>71</sup> Hardy must have been sufficiently struck by it because he copied an abridged quotation from it, dated May 1893 : ‘We are long past the time when there was only one incident of interest in a woman’s life, & that was its love affair . . . . It is stupid to narrow it [life] down to the indulgence of one particular set of emotions . . . to swamp every faculty by constant cultivation of the animal instincts.’<sup>72</sup> What Hardy’s reactions were when one Monday in June 1893 he reached home to find ‘the author of The Heavenly Twins’ sitting in his drawing-room,<sup>73</sup> can only be a matter of speculation because Hardy does not seem to have left any written impressions of this meeting. About three weeks after this visit Hardy is loyally ( and diplomatically ) reassuring his old friend Florence Henniker that her novel Foiled (1893)

as a transcript from human nature . . . ranks far above some novels that have received much more praise : e.g. The Heavenly Twins. If ever I were to consult any woman on a point in my own novels I should let that woman be yourself

<sup>70</sup> Collected Letters , Vol. 1, p.264.

<sup>71</sup> The Library of Thomas Hardy , Toucan Press Monograph no. 52, p.202.

<sup>72</sup> Bjork ed. Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 2, p.57 ; Hardy’s ellipses and parenthesis.

<sup>73</sup> Hardy’s letter to Florence Henniker in Collected Letters , Vol. 2, p.12.

-- my belief in your insight and your sympathies being strong, and increasing.<sup>74</sup>

It is quite obvious that to Hardy personal friendship ranked far above objective literary assessment because in September 1893 he repeats the same unfavourable comparison between these two women writers and, after sighing over Mrs Henniker's 'conventional views', he advises her :

If you mean to make the world listen to you, you must say now what they will all be thinking & saying five & twenty years hence ; & if you do that you must offend your conventional friends. 'Sarah Grand', who has not, to my mind, such a sympathetic & intuitive knowledge of human nature as you, has yet an immense advantage over you in this respect -- in the fact of having decided to offend her friends (so she told me) -- & now that they are all alienated she can write boldly, & get listened to.<sup>75</sup>

The success of The Heavenly Twins had eclipsed even that of Robert Elsmere (1888), but if the number of extracts in Hardy's 'Literary Notebook' is any yardstick he was probably more impressed by Mrs Humphry Ward's book. As many as fifteen consecutive quotations from Robert Elsmere (some abridged, some with slight variations) were copied by Hardy and one of them -- with which Hardy was obviously in perfect accord -- bears marginal emphasis in red : ' . . . Fate can have neither wit nor conscience to have ordained it so ; but fate has so ordained it.'<sup>76</sup> Mrs Ward's observation that 'Truth has never been, can never be, contained in any one creed or system' surely touched a responsive chord in Hardy and almost as if to illustrate this fact that no philosophical system is *the* ultimate Truth, Hardy also copied her conviction ( so diametrically opposed to his own )

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33.

<sup>76</sup> Bjork ed. Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 1, pp.211-213, i.e. item nos. 1574 to 1588 ; no.1587, Hardy's ellipsis. The four subsequent quotations are also taken from the same source ( i.e. item nos. 1585, 1574, 1576, & 1584 respectively ).

that 'I cannot conceive of God as the arch-plotter against His own creation'.

Nevertheless, she too could not completely ignore the

helplessness of human existence, which, generation after generation, is still so vulnerable, so confiding, so eager. Life after life flowers out from the darkness & sinks back into it again. And in the interval what agony, what disillusion ! All the apparatus of a universe that men may know what it is to hope & fail, to win & lose !

As Hardy copied these lines he must have nodded in agreement because in his subsequent poetry the persistent lament is that the impercipient First Cause has burdened humanity with consciousness which is a curse since without the perceiving consciousness there is no pain. Yet another quotation from the novel that Hardy copied reads : 'Christianity seems to me something small & local. Behind it, around it, including it, I see the great drama of the world sweeping on, led by God.' To this Hardy adds what Robert Gittings calls 'his own satiric and agnostic twist' and the idea surfaces in The Dynasts as :

A local cult called Christianity . . .

Beyond whose span, uninfluenced, unconcerned,

The systems of the sun go sweeping on . . .<sup>77</sup>

Hardy had first met the Humphry Wards in 1886 and he records that he found them 'both amiable people'.<sup>78</sup> When in 1892 Mrs Ward wrote to Hardy requesting him to join a scheme for commemorating Columbus's discovery of America, he responded quite warmly although later (in 1906) he characteristically excused himself from attending a meeting of a committee formed by Mrs Ward to settle a book sellers' dispute.<sup>79</sup> At the personal level Hardy was, as usual, always courteous and when Mrs Ward sent him her novel The Marriage of William Ashe (1905) he declared that

<sup>77</sup> Robert Gittings, The Older Hardy ( London : Heinemann Educational, 1978), p.113.

<sup>78</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy, p.187.

<sup>79</sup> Collected Letters, Vol. 1, p.263 ; and letter to Henry Newbolt in Collected Letters, Vol. 3, pp.233-34.



his great pleasure in the book disqualified him from being able 'to write critically about it -- as I suppose fellow-scribblers ought in wisdom to do with one another's books'.<sup>80</sup> Admitting that he liked the middle part of the book best, he hastens to reassure her : 'I don't mean to say that I think you fell off in the last third, but that the culmination & catastrophe of a story -- which necessarily admit of fewer varieties of form than the development . . . -- must to an old reader appear less novel . . . .' This suggests that although Hardy had long abandoned novel-writing he still pondered on questions of novelistic technique. On a more personal level he tells her that he cannot understand why the women in the novel care for Cliffe and adds disarmingly : 'But I am not a woman, & bow my head.' Raising the knotty question of authorial intention he comments on her heroine : 'Kitty has, I think, more of my sympathy than you wished her to have . . . I know somebody like her, & so do you, & one day I will ask you in an unguarded moment if you had her in mind.'

When in 1913 she sent her novel The Coryston Family to Hardy (through her publishers) she must have been extremely gratified by his admission that he found the book so interesting that he had sat up in bed till '1 a.m.' finishing it. With its 'remarkably distinct & living' characters, Hardy considered it perhaps her finest work and he confesses to having read it with a complete suspension of critical disbelief.<sup>81</sup> To the student of Hardy, however, Mrs Ward's most interesting work is her book of literary reminiscences, A Writer's Recollection (1918). Here she says that she was first 'strongly affected' by The Return of the Native and that 'Tess marked the conversion of the larger public, who then began to read all the earlier books, in that curiously changed mood which sets in when a writer is no

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<sup>80</sup> Collected Letters, Vol. 3, p.163. The three following quotations in this paragraph are taken from this same letter.

<sup>81</sup> Collected Letters, Vol. 4, p.320.

longer on trial, but has, so to speak, “made good”’.<sup>82</sup> Confessing to being a late convert, she ultimately came to value his books for ‘their truth, sincerity and humanity, in spite of the pessimism with which so many of them are tinged’. Hailing *The Dynasts* as ‘the noblest, and possibly one of the most fruitful experiments in recent English letters’, she still has one reservation : ‘I wish Mr Hardy had not written “Jude the Obscure” !’ Although Hardy read this,<sup>83</sup> his friendship with the Wards continued and often when he was in London he took the opportunity of calling on them. Whenever he wrote to Humphry Ward he remembered to send his kind regards to Mrs Ward and when she unexpectedly died in 1920, Hardy’s letter of condolence to her husband recalls ‘how vigorous & zestful she seemed in all relating to literature’.<sup>84</sup>

Hardy’s reaction to the death of another of his literary friends was more emotional and the intensity of feeling took even him by surprise. Chancing on an old photograph of Rosamund Tomson (later Marriott Watson) some time after her death, old memories of ‘framing of rhymes / At idle times’ came flooding back and Hardy instinctively kissed the dimmed portrait -- an experience that he recounts with both tenderness and wry self-amusement in his poem ‘An Old Likeness ( Recalling R.T.)’.<sup>85</sup> Hardy’s association with this beautiful poet, wife of the landscape painter Arthur Tomson, stretched back to over two decades. In June 1889 Hardy was recommending her for membership to the Incorporated Society of Authors and his backing seems to have been successful because she was able to attend the Society’s dinner, the next month, as a member and not as Hardy’s guest.<sup>86</sup> In June 1889 Rosamund Tomson ( writing under the

<sup>82</sup> Mrs Humphry Ward, *A Writer’s Recollection* ( London : W. Collins Sons & Co., 1918), p.359. The three subsequent quotations are from the same page in the same source.

<sup>83</sup> See Florence Hardy’s letter to Sydney Cockerell, dt. 22 Dec 1918, in Michael Millgate ed. *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy* ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1996), p.153.

<sup>84</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 6, p.12.

<sup>85</sup> The poem was collected in *Late Lyrics and Earlier* (1922).

<sup>86</sup> *Collected Letters* , Vol. 1, pp.192 & 193n.

pseudonym 'Graham R. Tomson' ) had published her first volume of verse and she sent a copy of The Bird-Bride to Hardy with the inscribed words 'Thomas Hardy, with the sincere admiration of G.R.T. June, 89'.<sup>87</sup> A few months later she sent Hardy a copy of Selections from the Greek Anthology, edited by her, and while thanking her for the book in his letter of 5 September 1889 Hardy coyly wrote : 'No : wild horses shall not drag it out of me -- that estimate of a poetess's work which came to my ears -- till I see her.'<sup>88</sup> That some sort of mild literary flirtation was going on between them is suggested by Hardy's next surviving letter to her (6 October 1889) where -- in a much-quoted passage -- he is probably sending out a feeler : 'It rains a drizzle here today, so that we cannot see the hills -- But the lovers walk two-&-two just the same, under umbrellas -- or rather under one umbrella ( which makes all the difference ).'<sup>89</sup>

Although briefly dazzled by her, Hardy retained his critical faculties and was able to tell her plainly that 'fiction would do such a publication no good' in response to her request for a literary contribution to her proposed 'painter's weekly'.<sup>90</sup> When she sent him her photographs he gallantly responded saying that 'neither of them does justice to the original' but he remained steadfast in his refusal to write an introduction to her 'Art-World'.<sup>91</sup> Till December 1891 the relationship remained cordial and Mrs Tomson sent Hardy two volumes of poetry : Concerning Cats : A Book of Poems by Many Authors edited by her, which the animal-loving Hardy must have surely enjoyed, and her own collection A Summer Night and Other Poems. But subsequently the relationship soured and in July 1893

<sup>87</sup> See Michael Millgate, 'Thomas Hardy and Rosamund Tomson', Notes and Queries, 20 : 7 (1973), pp.253-55 ; p.253.

<sup>88</sup> Collected Letters, Vol. 1, p.199.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p.201 ; Hardy's parenthesis.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p.202.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 206 & 209.

Hardy wrote to Florence Henniker alluding to his disenchantment with Mrs Tomson. In future, Hardy writes, he will

trust to imagination only for an enfranchised woman. I thought I had found one some years ago -- ( I told you of her ) -- and it is somewhat singular that she contributes some of the best pieces to the volumes of *ballades* you send. Her desire, however, was to use your correspondent as a means of gratifying her vanity by exhibiting him as her admirer, the discovery of which promptly ended the friendship, with considerable disgust on his side.<sup>92</sup>

Matters were exacerbated when Mrs Tomson published in the New York *Independent* a two-part article on Hardy in November 1894. Apparently, there was nothing to offend Hardy in what she wrote ; indeed he could only have been mollified by her characterization of him as 'the most modest of geniuses', by her description of his total 'absence of self-consciousness that is positively charming', of his 'infrequent smile of remarkable sweetness', and of his eyes which though 'keen as a hawk's' were 'full of a quiet *bonhomie*'.<sup>93</sup> But the ever-touchy Hardy took exception to her insinuation that he, after being initially refused the land for Max Gate by the agent of the Duchy of Cornwall, had used his personal influence with the Prince of Wales to gain his request. Hardy's annoyance with such newspaper 'gossip' is evident from the letter he wrote to George Herriot -- the 'agent' in question -- assuring him that he had never found him 'in our dealings to be the disagreeable person described' and adding :

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<sup>92</sup> *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 24. Since twelve poems in *Ballades and Rondeaux* were by 'Graham R. Tomson', the editors Purdy and Millgate identify the lady alluded to as Rosamund Tomson. Robert Gittings however suggests that the lady 'may equally have been another woman poet he knew about this time, Agnes Mary Francis Robinson, who wrote verse in much the same style, and appeared in the same anthology as Rosamund Tomson'. See Gittings, *The Older Hardy*, p.65.

If there was a veiled warning in Hardy's letter, Florence Henniker either failed to read it or take it seriously because about this time she too hurt Hardy by reading aloud in public some of his 'effusive' letters to her. See Hardy's letter of 16 Sept 1893 to Florence Henniker, in *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, p.32.

<sup>93</sup> Mrs Tomson's article as quoted in Millgate, 'Thomas Hardy and Rosamund Tomson', *Notes and Queries* (1973), p.254.

'A woman is at the bottom of it, of course ! I have reason to know that the writer of the account is a London lady, pretty, & well known in society (The signature is not I believe her real name). Why she should have written it I cannot say -- except that it was not to please me . . . .'<sup>94</sup>

But all such bitter memories were wiped clean by death and when the publisher John Lane sent Hardy a copy of her posthumously published The Poems (1912) it is probably the beautiful photograph -- with a dreamy, far-away look in her eyes -- facing the title-page in this book that Hardy instinctively kissed. Two poems in this collection are openly dedicated to Hardy, bearing the title 'Two Songs / To Thomas Hardy'. But these poems are curiously impersonal and there is no annotation by Hardy to suggest that they were of special significance to him. Interestingly enough, another poem in this collection -- 'In a London Garden' -- bears the pencilled words in Hardy's hand : '( 20 St John's W<sup>d</sup> Rd )'.<sup>95</sup> Did the memory of some long-forgotten romantic rendezvous in a London garden flash across Hardy's mind as he read this poem ? Was there more to their relationship than is suggested by the meagre surviving letters but is hinted at in Hardy's own poem with its reference to 'a far season / Of love and unreason' ?

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Among the younger generation, Hardy became almost a cult figure and many writers -- both male and female -- made their literary pilgrimage to Max Gate at least once in Hardy's lifetime. Sassoon, Galsworthy, E. M. Forster, Kipling, Granville-Barker, Edmund Blunden, Walter de la Mare, Robert Graves, John Masefield, John Drinkwater, H. G. Wells, Middleton Murry would all go to pay their homage. Among the many women writers, perhaps the foremost was Virginia Woolf. After reading Hardy's

<sup>94</sup> Collected Letters , Vol. 2, p.66.

<sup>95</sup> Hardy's annotated copy of The Poems of Rosamund Marriott Watson, bearing the label 'From the Library of Thomas Hardy, O.M., Max Gate', is now in the 'Thomas Hardy Memorial Collection' of the Dorset County Museum, Dorchester. I am grateful to the Curator, Mr de Peyer, for allowing me to consult this volume.

poem 'The Schreckhorn' ( collected in Satires of Circumstance , 1914 ), and also his reminiscences of her father in F. W. Maitland's The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen (1906), Virginia Woolf wrote to Hardy in 1915 stating that they were 'incomparably the truest and most imaginative portrait of him in existence, for which alone his children should be always grateful to you'.<sup>96</sup> She also told Hardy that 'I have long wished to tell you how profoundly grateful I am to you for your poems and novels', and ended by adding that the 'younger generation, who care for poetry and literature, owe you an immeasurable debt. . . .' Pleased, Hardy wrote back praising Leslie Stephen's editorial intelligence and saying that he had gladly suffered her father's 'grim & severe criticisms' and 'long silences' for the 'sake of sitting with him'.<sup>97</sup> Almost a decade later, when Virginia and Leonard Woolf published Stephen's Some Early Impressions (1924) -- which contained a brief reference to the serialization of Far From the Madding Crowd in the Cornhill -- Hardy wrote to her to thank 'the daughter of my old friend'.<sup>98</sup> But despite his genuine courtesy, Hardy had his touchy pride too because when in the previous year Virginia Woolf had requested a literary contribution ( for Nation and Athenaeum of which Leonard Woolf had just been made Literary Editor ), Hardy had responded melodramatically : 'alas I have fallen into the sere & yellow leaf, & fear I am unable to undertake writing now . . . But there are plenty of young pens available'.<sup>99</sup> Hardy's pique had probably been prompted by Virginia Woolf's ignorant statement in her 1923 essay 'How It Strikes a Contemporary' that 'Mr Hardy has long since withdrawn from the

<sup>96</sup> Letter dt. 17 Jan 1915 in Nigel Nicolson ed. The Letters of Virginia Woolf , Vol. 2, (London : The Hogarth Press, 1976), p.58. The two subsequent quotations are taken from this same letter.

<sup>97</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 5, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1985), p.76.

<sup>98</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 6, p.255.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p.196.

arena.<sup>100</sup> However, when Virginia Woolf later visited Florence Hardy at a London nursing home (after one of Mrs Hardy's operations) and repeated her request for a literary contribution, Hardy relented and his poem 'Coming up Oxford Street : Evening' did appear in the Nation and Athenaeum on 13 June 1925.

Although Virginia Woolf considered Hardy's The Trumpet Major 'the worst book in the language' and could never understand 'how his reputation ever mounted, considering the flatness, tedium, and complete absence of gift' in this novel, she concluded that 'he had genius and no talent. And the English love genius'.<sup>101</sup> However, she admired his poetry and did not agree with the view that they were 'too melancholy and sordid'.<sup>102</sup> In 1921, Virginia Woolf and her husband were among the 104 signatories to an address congratulating Hardy on his 81st birthday on which occasion he was presented with a 'first edition' of Keats's poems as a token of regard from the younger writers. But it was only in July 1926 that Virginia Woolf actually travelled to Max Gate to meet Hardy -- partly out of pure literary regard and partly because she had been commissioned by the Times Literary Supplement to prepare for an obituary tribute to this grand old man of letters. She came away from the interview with a rather unsympathetic view of Florence Hardy but she was clearly impressed by Hardy's 'extremely affable' manner, his 'cheerful and vigorous' aspect, his 'quizzical bright eyes', and his kindness in seeing anyone who wanted to see him.<sup>103</sup> Despite his aversion later in life to signing copies of his books

<sup>100</sup> This essay originally appeared in TLS, 5 Apr 1923, and was later revised for inclusion in The Common Reader (1925). The essay can be found in Andrew McNeillie ed. The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 3, (London : Hogarth Press, 1988), pp.353-60 ; p.355. The 'curious blunder' was pointed out to Hardy by Vere H. Collins ; see Hardy's letter of 7 Apr 1923 thanking Collins, in Collected Letters, Vol. 6, pp.190-191n.

<sup>101</sup> Nigel Nicolson ed. The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 6, (London : The Hogarth Press, 1980), p.4. Anne Olivier Bell ed. A Moment's Liberty : The Shorter Diary : Virginia Woolf (London : The Hogarth Press, 1990), p.391.

<sup>102</sup> Anne Olivier Bell ed. The Shorter Diary : Virginia Woolf, p.6.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.216-18. Subsequent quotations in this paragraph are all taken from this diary entry headed 'Sunday 25 July' [1926].

on demand, Hardy readily signed Virginia Woolf's copy of Life's Little Ironies and when she told him that she had brought The Mayor of Casterbridge with her to read on the train to Dorchester, his only question was : 'And did it hold your interest ?' To Hardy the teller of tales this was of supreme importance and the 'Ancient Mariner' in him must have been pleased with her truthful reply that she 'could not stop reading it'. Virginia Woolf's final impression as she came away was that of a man who himself withdrawn from the world of literature yet 'had sympathy and pity for those still engaged in it'.

In her 1928 memorial essay,<sup>104</sup> as befitting the occasion, Woolf's tone is warmly adulatory in her assessment of Hardy the man and Hardy the artist. She and her husband had attended the ceremony at Westminster Abbey where Hardy's ashes were interred and in July 1932 she wrote to his widow praising her two-volume 'biography' of Hardy which Macmillan had published in 1928 and 1930. In this letter she confesses to having 'loved [Hardy's] novels, poems, as long as I can remember' and is flattered by Florence Hardy's suggestion ( in her letter praising Virginia Woolf's TLS article on Hardy ) that Virginia Woolf might have undertaken to write Hardy's biography.<sup>105</sup> When Woolf compliments Florence Hardy saying that nobody 'could have improved upon your biography' because 'nobody could have given the book the atmosphere and the unity that you did', one wonders if the thought ever crossed her mind that nobody could have

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<sup>104</sup> Published in Times Literary Supplement , on 19 Jan 1928, as 'Thomas Hardy's Novels', this essay was revised and rpt. in The Common Reader , Second series (1932). See Chapter I of the present thesis for a brief quotation and for a fuller bibliographical reference (of modern editions).

<sup>105</sup> Letter from Virginia Woolf to Florence Hardy, dt 21 July 1932, now in the Dorset County Museum. Again, I am very grateful to the Curator, Mr de Peyer, for allowing me to consult this letter. The subsequent brief quotations are from this same letter.

Surprisingly, this letter does not seem to have been included in the 6-volume edition of Virginia Woolf's letters ed. Nigel Nicolson. It does not feature either in Vol. 5 where it chronologically belongs or in Vol. 6 under the section 'Additional Letters'. A couple of lines from this letter is quoted by Martin Seymour-Smith in his biography Hardy ( London : Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd., 1994), pp.835 & 841.



'improved' the 'biography' because nobody could write better on Hardy than Hardy himself.

Another of the younger novelists who visited Hardy and seems to have struck a chord of genuine friendship (although she had little pretension to beauty) was May Sinclair. She and her American friend Mary Moss had come down to visit Hardy in 1908 and though rain prevented their proposed bicycle trip to Weymouth, Hardy seems to have taken to May Sinclair because he repeatedly kept inviting her to visit Dorset and give him 'another opportunity' to show her round the county. Although his literary engagements prevented him from accepting her tempting offer of lunching aboard a friend's yacht and on a later occasion ill health forced him to miss her lunch invitation, he was not just making up excuses as he often did to wriggle out of more formal (especially speech-making) engagements.<sup>106</sup> This is proved by his letter to her, in August 1909, where he writes : 'Will you be in Dorset this summer ? If so, please let me know ; we could put you up for a night or two *en passant* , with pleasure, if you would care to stay at such a dull house, where there would be nobody else.'<sup>107</sup> For Hardy to make this offer is the supreme act of friendship because while Max Gate received an endless stream of distinguished visitors, only a very few select people had the honour of being house guests. May Sinclair, an active suffragist, could probably have been the 'girl-friend' Hardy referred to when he told the essayist H. W. Nevinson that he was present in the crowd when the suffragists -- 'a girl-friend of mine was one of them' -- attempted to present their 'Bill of Rights' petition to the House of Commons in June 1909.<sup>108</sup> Although Florence Hardy

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<sup>106</sup> See Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 4, pp.31-2, 45, 92, 101.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39. The other possible candidate, according to Purdy and Millgate, is Florence Dugdale (later the second Mrs Hardy ). But given that around this time Florence Dugdale was writing critically of the women's movement ( in The Sphere , under the persona 'Angela' ), referring to it as the 'Symptoms of Suffragitis', May Sinclair seems the more plausible candidate for Hardy's suffragist 'girl-friend'. See Robert Gittings and Jo Manton,

appears to have disapproved of her novels because of their 'sex-mania', Hardy -- who had had similar accusations flung at him -- was sufficiently interested and his reply to May Sinclair, when she sent him her novel The Creators : A Comedy (1910), is worth quoting :

I am much interested in learning from the female characters the things that go on at the back of women's minds -- the invisible rays of their thought ( as is said of the spectrum ) which are beyond the direct sight or intuition of man. I recollect Leslie Stephen once saying to me that he liked women's novels for that reason : they opened to him qualities of observation which could not be got from the ablest of novels by men.<sup>109</sup>

If Hardy, who had given up novel-writing for about a decade and a half, could be so enthusiastic still about women's novels, women's poetry stirred him even more deeply. In 1903 he had met the poet Adela Florence ('Violet') Nicolson -- who wrote under the pseudonym 'Laurence Hope' -- and was deeply struck by this 'most impassioned & beautiful woman'.<sup>110</sup> It is difficult to decide what moved Hardy more : her personal beauty, her 'passionate' verses, or her romantic gesture of committing suicide by 'having poisoned herself in excessive grief at the death of her husband, Gen. Nicolson'.<sup>111</sup> She had sent Hardy presentation copies of two volumes of her poetry, The Garden of Kama (1901) and Stars of the Desert (1903), and when news of her suicide reached Hardy from Madras he was struck by the (Hardyan) 'coincidence' that, apparently, she had died 'on the very day when Hardy and I [i.e. Gosse] (who had never spoken of her to one another before) were discussing her poems at Max Gate'.<sup>112</sup> The death of

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The Second Mrs Hardy ( London : Heinemann ; Seattle : Univ. of Washington Press, 1979), pp. 35, 59.

<sup>109</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 4, p.128 ; Hardy's parenthesis.

<sup>110</sup> Richard Taylor ed. The Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy ( London : Macmillan, 1978), p.290.

<sup>111</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 3, p.142.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p.144n. The words within simple brackets are Gosse's parenthesis in his annotation to Hardy's letter conveying news of her suicide.

this 'gifted and impassioned poetess' prompted Hardy to write a brief obituary notice which was published in the Athenaeum on 29 October 1904.<sup>113</sup> In it Hardy speaks of the 'tropical luxuriance and Sapphic fervour' of her 1901 'series of love lyrics from India' and of the 'firmer intellectual grasp, with no loss of intensity' revealed in her 1903 volume. Quoting a stanza from 'nearly the last page of her last book' where she speaks of her readiness for death, Hardy concludes that 'the tragic circumstances of her death seem but the impassioned closing notes of her impassioned effusions'.<sup>114</sup> Later, at the request of a lady friend, Hardy wrote a preface to her posthumously published volume of poems, Indian Love (1905), and was justifiably irritated with Heinemann for not printing this preface which he had 'gratuitously contributed' to help the sales of the book.<sup>115</sup>

A couple of years after meeting Violet Nicolson, Hardy met another poet, Dora Sigerson Shorter, when he went to Aldeburgh in 1905 to attend the 150th birth anniversary celebrations of George Crabbe. Dora Sigerson had married in 1896 the journalist and editor Clement Shorter with whom Hardy's correspondence stretches from October 1891 to January 1925 and whose signal contribution to the world of Hardy scholarship was his initiative in getting the extant MSS of Hardy's novels professionally bound. In 1902 Hardy had been presented a copy of Mrs Shorter's The Woman Who Went to Hell, and Other Ballads and Lyrics (1902) and he wrote to Clement Shorter saying how charmed he was with the 'vague dreaminess' of one of the poems in this volume.<sup>116</sup> A few years later when he received her Collected Poems (1907), he again wrote to Shorter telling him : 'My wife is so interested in them that she has carried them off to her room, so that I have read only 2 or 3 as yet.'<sup>117</sup> However, it was only during

<sup>113</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.346.

<sup>114</sup> Unsigned obituary notice on 'Laurence Hope' in the Athenaeum , 29 Oct 1904, p.591.

<sup>115</sup> Collected Letters , Vol. 7, pp.135n & 140, under 'Additional Letters'.

<sup>116</sup> Collected Letters , Vol. 3, p.18.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p.319.

his 1911 visit to his friend Clodd at Aldeburgh that he really got 'to know Mrs Shorter much better than I had ever done till then' and he expressed to her husband his delight in finding 'what a sweet woman she was'.<sup>118</sup> Again in 1912, Hardy and the Shorters were guests at Clodd's house and in July 1913 the Shorters and Clodd stayed at Max Gate and then went on to visit Hardy's siblings at Talbothays. Mrs Shorter enjoyed her visit very much and in response to her letter Hardy wrote back saying : 'I shall tell my brother & sisters when I see them that you & Mr Shorter much enjoyed your visit to Talbothays . . . . Their meeting you was quite an event, as they have known of your poetry for years.'<sup>119</sup>

Even in the midst of his grief at the sudden loss of his wife, Hardy noticed Mrs Shorter's poem in the Westminster Gazette and read it 'with much interest', as he courteously mentioned to Shorter while thanking him for their letter of condolence.<sup>120</sup> Subsequent letters to Shorter are sometimes punctuated with expressions of delight at reading a new poem of Mrs Shorter, or of concern regarding her failing health. In June 1917 he wrote to Shorter praising one of her poems : 'It is what you newspaper men would call "Strong". Her pen is more facile than it used to be. I hope she is drawing near health.'<sup>121</sup> But Mrs Shorter died only six months later and on reading the announcement of her death in The Times (7 January 1918), Hardy immediately wrote to Shorter : 'I offer no consolation ; there may be some, but I do not know it. If one has much feeling -- & you have that I know -- such a blow is heavy to bear.'<sup>122</sup> Perhaps remembering the pain of the early days of his own widowerhood, Hardy later commiserated with Shorter : 'Reentering old haunts is inevitably depressing when you

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<sup>118</sup>Collected Letters , Vol. 4, p.151.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p.287.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p.242.

<sup>121</sup> Collected Letters , Vol. 5, p.219.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p.242.

have shared them with another who is no longer there.'<sup>123</sup> In response to Shorter's request, Hardy later wrote a brief 'Prefatory Note' to the posthumous collection of Dora Sigerson Shorter's sketches, A Dull Day in London (1920).<sup>124</sup> More spontaneously, however, Hardy seems to have composed the poem 'How She Went to Ireland' ( Winter Words , 1928 ) in which he speaks of how 'Dora' was taken to Ireland without her being conscious of the journey or of her surroundings -- a reference presumably to Mrs Shorter being taken to Dublin for burial.<sup>125</sup>

Hardy's enthusiasm for Mrs Shorter's poetry was on a much more muted level than his gushing response to Mrs Nicolson. With another poet of the same generation ( all three were born in the late 1860s ), his opinion underwent a radical change from his initial irritation with the 'fashion for obscurity' which he felt spoilt much of Charlotte Mew's poetry.<sup>126</sup> Ultimately he came to regard her as the 'greatest poetess I have come across lately, in my judgement, though so meagre in her output', and he openly expressed his regret to J. C. Squire that his anthology, A Book of Women's Verse (1921), did not include any of her poems.<sup>127</sup> Sydney Cockerell had sent Hardy a copy of Mew's volume The Farmer's Bride (1916) and Hardy was so impressed by her poems that Florence Hardy wrote to Charlotte Mew conveying Hardy's eager desire to meet her, if possible.<sup>128</sup> In response to this invitation, Charlotte Mew visited Max Gate in December 1918 and despite her complete lack of physical charm, her poetry and conversation so captivated Hardy that he persuaded her to stay for two days and they seem to have spent the time reading out their own

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p.320.

<sup>124</sup> The 'Prefatory Note' is collected in Harold Orel ed. Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings, pp.86-7. See also Purdy's Thomas Hardy : A Bibliographical Study , pp.210-11.

<sup>125</sup> See Purdy, Thomas Hardy : A Bibliographical Study , p.260.

<sup>126</sup> Collected Letters , Vol. 5, p.275 ; Hardy's letter of Aug 1918 to Sydney Cockerell.

<sup>127</sup> Collected Letters , Vol. 6, p.113.

<sup>128</sup> Millgate ed. Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy , p.146 (letter dt. 24 Sept 1918).

poems to each other.<sup>129</sup> Later, in spite of his life-long aversion to joining any sort of signature campaign, he actually joined Cockerell, Masfield and de la Mare in securing for her a Civil List pension. When Charlotte Mew wrote, in January 1924, to thank him for his efforts, Hardy replied with characteristic self-deprecation : 'What I did was really infinitesimal : Others did more than I. You are merely to think the little event happened -- a very small one.'<sup>130</sup> Earlier, Charlotte Mew had joined 42 other poets in sending a bound volume of their holograph poems as a gift to Hardy on his 79th birthday. Hardy was so touched by this gesture of homage from the younger generation of poets that he actually took the trouble of personally writing to each one of them to thank them for their efforts. To Charlotte Mew he wrote : 'I shall always value the MS & keep it for your sake, as will my wife also.'<sup>131</sup> Later, Charlotte Mew sent the original MS of two of her poems to Florence Hardy in fond memory of Hardy's warm appreciation of her poetry.

Birthday congratulations for Hardy as he stepped into his eighties came from as far afield as across the Atlantic. In 1920, fourteen American writers sent Hardy a congratulatory cable and among them was Amy Lowell who had visited Hardy in August 1914 at the beginning of the war. She had followed up her visit by sending him a copy of her Sword Blades and Poppy Seed (1914), and while commending her poem 'After Hearing a Waltz' for 'admirably' capturing the 'beat of the waltz' in its 'metre & rhythm' Hardy half-jokingly went on : '. . . but for the difference of sex, critics might be asking you when you committed the murder -- that is, if they are such geese as some of them are here, who in my case devoutly believe that everything written in the first person has been done

<sup>129</sup> See Penelope Fitzgerald, Charlotte Mew and Her Friends ( London : William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd, 1984), pp.171-2.

<sup>130</sup> Collected Letters , Vol. 6, p.228.

<sup>131</sup> Collected Letters , Vol. 5, p.336.

personally.<sup>132</sup> In December 1918 Amy Lowell again wrote to Hardy reminding him of her visit and she also sent him her volume Can Grande's Castle (1918) with its argument for 'polyphonic prose' which completely baffled him. He wrote to her confessing :

I have not yet mastered your argument for 'polyphonic prose' . . . I don't suppose it is what, 40 years ago, we used to call 'word-painting'. Curiously enough, at that time, prose having the rhythm of verse concealed in it, so to speak ( e.g. in the novels of R. D. Blackmore and others ) was considered a fantastic affectation. Earlier still, when used by Lytton, it was nicknamed 'the ever and anon style' . . .<sup>133</sup>

In her reply Amy Lowell patiently explained, while conceding that 'polyphonic prose' was not a 'very good name for it' :

It is not intended to be prose at all, but poetry . . . Of course the way to read it is just to take it the way it comes without accentuating either the rhythm or the rhyme, since they are only used to enrich the form . . . Perhaps it is an impossible form, but when I read it aloud to my audiences . . . I have no difficulty in making them apprehend it.<sup>134</sup>

Hardy appreciated her point about the extra dimension added to one's experience of poetry when one hears the poet herself read aloud her work. 'I am sure it would make all the difference if I could hear you read it as you do at your lectures', he wrote to her in 1924.<sup>135</sup> But Hardy still could not reconcile himself to 'free verse'. In 1914, after mentioning the names of those of her poems which he had especially liked, he had added : 'Whether I should have liked them still better rhymed I do not know.'<sup>136</sup> Almost a decade later, he again frankly expressed his opinion :

I suppose I am too old to do it [ i.e. free verse ] justice. You manage it best ; but do you mind my saying that it too often

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p.67.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p.292 ; Hardy's parenthesis.

<sup>134</sup> Hardy quotes this passage in his autobiography. See Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , pp.420-21. The first of the three ellipses is Hardy's.

<sup>135</sup> Collected Letters , Vol. 6, p.229.

<sup>136</sup> Collected Letters , Vol. 5, p.67.

seems a jumble of notes containing ideas striking, novel, or beautiful, as the case may be, which could be transfused into poetry, but which, as given, are not poetry ? I could not undergo an examination on why (to me) they seem not. Perhaps because there is no expectation raised of a response in sound or beat, and the pleasure of its gratification, as in regular poetry . . . .<sup>137</sup>

This 1923 letter was in response to Amy Lowell sending Hardy a copy of American Poetry 1922 : A Miscellany (1922) which contained, apart from Lowell's poems, eight sonnets by Edna St Vincent Millay. Hardy was so impressed by them that in the same letter to Amy Lowell he expressed his high opinion : 'Edna Millay seems the most promising of the younger poets.' When Edna Millay sent Hardy a copy of her The King's Henchman : A Play in Three Acts (1927) she inscribed in it the words : 'with the admiration and love of many years.'<sup>138</sup> Hardy however preferred her poetry to her drama and frankly told her :

An opinion, from a reading, on a play meant for acting, is not worth much, & I do not attempt to write one : indeed I have not formed one. I have simply let you carry me back to those old times outshadowed, & enjoyed the experience.

I think I was among the early readers on this side of the Atlantic to be struck by your lyrics : & I am not sure that I do not like you better in that form than in the dramatic.<sup>139</sup>

Although he did not approve of Millay's change of literary direction, when Amy Lowell sent him a copy of John Keats (1924) Hardy was all praise for her biography. He commended her on her 'skill & industry', on her careful sifting of 'the legends for & against him', and warned her not to 'take any notice of what our funny men of the newspaper press say' about it.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Collected Letters , Vol. 6, p.186.

<sup>138</sup> The Library of Thomas Hardy , Toucan Press Monograph no. 52, p.212.

<sup>139</sup> Collected Letters , Vol. 7, p.64.

<sup>140</sup> Collected Letters , Vol. 6, p.313.



However, not all the specimens of 'floating nebulous bright intellectuality'<sup>141</sup> who visited Max Gate carried away happy memories of the house and its inmates. When Cicily Isabel Fairfield, better known as Rebecca West, visited Max Gate with her lover H. G. Wells, they were struck by the air of depression about the place and the subsequent cartoon drawing by Wells, glossed by Rebecca West's comments, do not add up to a flattering picture of the Hardys in 1919.<sup>142</sup> Rebecca West had sent an inscribed copy of her novel The Return of the Soldier (1918) to the Hardys and in response to Wells's query whether he could bring her to Max Gate, Hardy had rather endearingly replied :

Will she be angry that I have not read The Return, although I have heard it so much & so well spoken of ? But I feel sure she is one of that excellent sort ( which I flatter myself I am, & I am sure you are ) who don't care a d\_\_ whether friends have read their last book or not, or any of their books. Indeed I am rather glad sometimes when they *haven't* read mine.

Rebecca West later sent the Hardys a copy of her book The Judge (1922) with the inscribed words 'in respectful homage', and at least she cleared Emma Hardy's reputation from one of the malicious rumours that had accumulated over the years around her memory. It has been said that Emma Hardy was fond of reminding her husband that he had married a 'lady' and Rebecca West was supposed to have been a witness on one occasion. She denied this and since she first visited Hardy in 1919, long after Emma's death, this 'story' about Emma Hardy's snobbery is best discounted.<sup>143</sup>

Chance visits quite often fail to do justice to a reticent recluse and a fairer and fuller picture emerges from the account left behind by someone

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<sup>141</sup> Hardy's description of the as yet unmet Rebecca West, in his reply to H.G. Wells dt. 27 Jan 1919 ; see Collected Letters , Vol. 5, p.293. A substantial portion of this letter is quoted at the end of the paragraph (the italic is Hardy's).

<sup>142</sup> See Gordon N. Ray, H. G. Wells and Rebecca West ( London : Macmillan, 1974), pp.94-5.

<sup>143</sup> See Robert Gittings, The Older Hardy , p.131.

who had the opportunity of longer regular visits and the rare intimacy of actually working with Hardy. In her lengthy and affectionate reminiscences, Thomas Hardy : His Secretary Remembers (1965), May O'Rourke portrays a benign, paternal figure who is so considerate towards his young secretary that he refrains from asking her to type out a poem of his containing an 'irreverent line' lest it should hurt her Roman Catholic sentiments. May O'Rourke had first discovered Hardy's poetry among some old magazines in her attic and she had become an instant devotee. When her own volume of poems West Wind Days was published in 1918, a friend sent a copy to Hardy hoping he would encourage this local poet ( she was then living at Fordington Vicarage in the house once occupied by Hardy's friends, the Moules ) and adding that she 'worships you afar off'.<sup>144</sup> Hardy promptly replied that this 'unknown young lady' would always be welcome at Max Gate although he had 'not yet come to any conclusion about her poetry, being a slow critic as well as a very unsafe one'.<sup>145</sup> When May O'Rourke called at Max Gate in July 1918 she was immediately struck by Hardy's 'accessibility and charm' and this impression only deepened when five years later, in 1923, she took up the offer of acting as Hardy's occasional secretary because Florence Hardy's failing health made her unable to cope single-handedly with the sheer volume of typing work that needed to be done.

May O'Rourke very soon came to develop toward Hardy a 'personal loyalty -- the devotion of a very little poet for a poet of supreme magnitude', and the experience of typing The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall was, to a poet, pure 'bliss' because she could appreciate 'where the authentic touch lay bright as dew upon so many of the

<sup>144</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 5, p.271n.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p.270.

words'.<sup>146</sup> Their relationship did not suffer when she ignored Hardy's indirect suggestion that she should write 'poems about nature' or told him quite frankly that she had not read *Jude*. That she filled an emotional void in the life of the childless Hardy is suggested by an incident which she records where Hardy, trying to explain Wessex's ( their notorious dog ) fondness for her, says : 'He likes to see a bright young face.' The 'sadness which vibrated painfully beneath those quiet words' gave O'Rourke a 'glimpse of that longstanding inward regret that no child of his had ever enriched his life'.<sup>147</sup>

The poet in O'Rourke led her to admire the craftsmanship so evident in Hardy's 'carefully spaced lines and stanzas' and when she ventured to comment on his 'feeling for design in his verse', he

was interested, and I think, pleased ; and he asked if I would like him to show me how to do it with a poem of my own. One lay near at hand, so Hardy settled down to loosening the tight pattern I had achieved, it seemed to me, setting the words free as he moved a line a little further in, another line a little further out, till the balance he sought was achieved.<sup>148</sup>

Two touching gestures reveal the depth of May O'Rourke's reverence for Hardy the man and Hardy the poet. When she visited Keats's grave she brought back for Hardy a violet plant which she had 'shielded and cherished' across Europe. On being offered a cutting from the plant for herself, she declined because 'for Hardy to have this token from Keats' grave was only fitting ; to have a share myself would be vandalism.'<sup>149</sup> She continued to work as Hardy's secretary intermittently and after his death, with Florence Hardy's permission, she wrote a tribute which was

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<sup>146</sup> May O'Rourke, *Thomas Hardy : His Secretary Remembers*, Toucan Press Monograph no.8, (1965), pp.28, 34. This monograph is collected in J. Stevens Cox ed. *Thomas Hardy : Materials for a Study of His Life, Times and Works*, Vol. I, ( St Peter Port, Guernsey : Toucan Press, 1968).

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38 ; the monographs have independent pagination.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p.36.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p.43.

published in The Month (September 1928). Surely, there could be no finer compliment to Hardy's poetry than her words : 'Thomas Hardy . . . heeded the cries and guessed the mute anguish of his fellow-citizens on earth. It was an inflamed compassion for his own kind that spurred him . . . into a Job-like argument with God.'<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p.45. O'Rourke quotes from her article in her reminiscences. Although Florence Hardy had read and approved of O'Rourke's article in MS, she later wrote to O'Rourke (7 Sept 1928) accusing her of presumptuously taking a judgemental stand on Hardy's beliefs and castigating her article as 'a carefully veiled attack which does not come gracefully from you' (Mrs Hardy's italic). See Millgate ed. Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy , pp.282-3.

## Chapter X

### Conclusion : 'A Confused Heap of Impressions'

In May 1906 Thomas Hardy sent his sister Kate a picture postcard with a couple of lines describing his attendance at a London women's suffrage meeting : 'One woman rapped out : "We shall have more difficulty in getting the vote than you men had : we have committed the crime of being born woman".'<sup>1</sup> After centuries of injustice and blatant sex-discrimination, women in the second half of the nineteenth century were articulately demanding to be absolved from the 'crime of being born woman'. What came to be known as the 'Woman Question' was really a fight for equality of opportunity at an all-embracing level : it included not just the demand for the vote, but also the campaign for access to higher education, for entry into the professions, for a redress of the iniquities in the marriage and property laws, in short, for the right of a woman to live with dignity as an individual and not just as a socially and economically dependent inferior. Literature cannot be divorced from life, and in order fully to understand Hardy's attitude to women it is necessary to complement the analysis of his presentation of women in his fiction with an examination of his varying reactions to these important feminist issues of his day.

Hardy's changing responses to the suffrage movement make a fascinating study. Although he ultimately sympathized with the demand for women's franchise, he was initially very sceptical and as late as 1892 the author of *Tess* declined an offer to become Vice-President of the Women's Progressive Society on the conscientious ground that 'I have not as yet been converted to a belief in the desirability of the Society's first object' --

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<sup>1</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 7, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1988), p.142, under 'Additional Letters'.

i.e. presumably women's suffrage.<sup>2</sup> This statement is all the more surprising because Hardy's first wife Emma was an enthusiastic supporter of the suffrage movement and there seems to be sufficient justice in her 1894 complaint to Mary Haweis (another active suffragist) : 'His [i.e. Hardy's] interest in the Suffrage Cause is nil, in spite of "Tess" & his opinions on the woman question not in her favour. He understands only the women he *invents* -- the others not at all . . . ' (Emma Hardy's italic).<sup>3</sup> This is not merely an instance of what biographers have seen as Emma's habitual denigration of her husband, because as late as January 1909 Hardy informed Agnes Grove that 'it would be really injuring the women's cause if I were to make known exactly what I think may be [the] result of their success . . . .'<sup>4</sup>

Even after he was 'converted' to the suffrage cause, his attitude seems to be a classic instance of doing the right thing for the wrong reasons. For instance, in an interesting letter to Millicent Fawcett (30 November 1906) Hardy declared :

I have for a long time been in favour of woman-suffrage. I fear I shall spoil the effect of this information (if it has any) in my next sentence by giving you my reasons. I am in favour of it because I think the tendency of the woman's vote will be to break up the present pernicious conventions in respect of manners, customs, religion, illegitimacy, the stereotyped household (that it must be the unit of society), the father of a woman's child (that it is anybody's business but the woman's own, except in cases of disease or insanity), sport (that so-called educated men should be encouraged to harass & kill for pleasure feeble creatures by mean stratagems), slaughter-houses (that they should be dark dens of cruelty), & other

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<sup>2</sup> Hardy's reply to Alice Grenfell, dt. 23 Apr 1892, in Purdy and Millgate eds. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 1, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1978), p.266.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Millgate ed. Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1996), p.6.

<sup>4</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 4, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1984), p.3.

matters which I got into hot water for touching on many years ago.

I do not mean that I think all women, or even a majority, will actively press some or any of the first mentioned of such points, but that their being able to assert themselves will loosen the tongues of men who have not liked to speak out on such subjects while women have been their helpless dependents.<sup>5</sup>

This letter makes curious reading because while Hardy seems capable of advancing the revolutionary idea that the father of a woman's child is nobody's business but her own, he never once voices the simple justification behind the demand for women's suffrage : that if women are to be bound by laws equally with men, they have the inalienable right to share in the process of making those laws. Thus, in a 1909 letter to Clement Shorter, Hardy again airs his unconventional reasons for 'not object[ing] to the coming of woman-suffrage' :

As soon as women have the vote & can take care of themselves men will be able to strike out honestly right & left in a way they cannot do while women are their dependents, without showing unchivalrous meanness. The result will be that all superstitious institutions will be knocked down or rationalized -- theologies, marriage, wealth-worship, labour-worship, hypocritical optimism, & so on. Also some that women will join in putting down : blood-sport, slaughter-house inhumanities, the present blackguard treatment of animals generally, &c, &c. End of my sermon.<sup>6</sup>

Hardy also seems to have been a trifle uncertain, if not apprehensive, of the ultimate consequences of the gaining of the vote because in December 1908 he wrote to Helen Ward, declining her request to contribute to a prospective suffragist newspaper :

Though I hold, as you may know, that women are entitled to the vote as a matter of justice if they want it, I think the action

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<sup>5</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 3, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1982), pp.238-9 ; Hardy's parentheses.

<sup>6</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 4, p.21.

of men therein should be permissive only -- not cooperative. I feel by no means sure that the majority of those who clamour for it realize what it may bring in its train : if they did three-fourths of them would be silent. I refer to such results as the probable break-up of the present marriage-system, the present social rules of other sorts, religious codes, legal arrangements on property, &c (through men's self protective counter-moves.) I do not myself consider that this would be necessarily a bad thing (I should not have written "Jude the Obscure" if I did), but I deem it better that women should take the step unstimulated from outside. So, if they should be terrified at consequences, they will not be able to say to men : "You ought not to have helped bring upon us what we did not foresee."<sup>7</sup>

To Hardy, 'the position of women [was] one of the ninety-nine things in a hundred that are wrong in this so-called civilized time' and though he admitted that 'the vote is theirs by right', he had misgivings about 'whether it will be for their benefit at first'.<sup>8</sup> Therefore he scrupulously kept out of the fray, taking care not to allow his name to appear in public campaigns on either side of the controversial issue. In 1910 he thus solemnly reassured Emma by letter<sup>9</sup> that he had refused Lord Curzon's request to sign the 'Anti Woman-Suffrage Appeal' ( published in the Times , 21 July 1910 ), but at the same time he frankly confessed his 'dilemma' in private to one of the anti-suffragist signatories : 'I hold that a woman has as much right to vote as a man ; but at the same time I doubt if she may not do mischief with her vote. Thus the query is, must we do a wrong thing (by withholding it) because it may be good policy, or a right thing (by granting it) even though it may be bad policy ?'<sup>10</sup> Such eternal soul-searching made Hardy constitutionally unfit to take 'any practical part

<sup>7</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 3, p.360 ; Hardy's parentheses.

<sup>8</sup> Hardy's letter to Henry Nevinston, dt. 5 Aug 1909, in Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 4, p.39.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.106.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.107 ; Hardy's letter to Moberly Bell, dt. 22 July 1910 (Hardy's parentheses).



in controversial politics' and this is the excuse he characteristically offered when in 1916 Evelyn Sharp wrote to him inviting him to become a member of the National Council for Adult Suffrage which was committed to securing votes for women before the end of the First World War.<sup>11</sup>

On the issue of women's education Hardy was far less equivocal as he realized that 'Man is himself responsible for the vacuum in woman's brains'.<sup>12</sup> When Hardy was made a Governor of the Dorchester Grammar School what struck him 'in looking up its history of 350 years, & that of all the many other Grammar Schools of that age & standing, is that it never occurred to any of the pious & practical founders to establish a single Grammar School for women. Every one of these excellent institutions has been for males only'.<sup>13</sup> Thus the women of the age were intellectually starved and Hardy's sympathy with their state of deprivation indirectly comes through in the passage that he copied into his 'Literary Notes II' notebook :

The drama of a woman's soul ; at odds with destiny, as such a soul must needs be, when endowed with great powers & possibilities, under the present social conditions ; where the wish to live, of letting whatever energies you possess have their full play in action, is continually thwarted by the impediments & restrictions of sex.<sup>14</sup>

But women in the late nineteenth century were gradually overcoming the 'restrictions of sex' and with the Universities and the medical colleges -- hitherto hallowed all-male preserves -- gradually and

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<sup>11</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 5, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1985), p.186.

<sup>12</sup> An extract from an unidentified cutting in Hardy's 'Literary Notes II' notebook. See Lennart A. Bjork ed. *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 2, ( London : Macmillan, 1985), p.106.

<sup>13</sup> Hardy's letter to Agnes Grove, dt. 13 Jan 1909, in *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 4, p.3.

<sup>14</sup> Entry, dated 13 May 1890, from the Introduction to *The Journal of Marie Bashkirtseff* ; see Bjork ed. *Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 2, p.12. See also Norman Page, 'Marie Bashkirtseff : A Model for Sue Bridehead ?', *Thomas Hardy Society Review* , 1 : 6 (1980), p.175.

reluctantly opening their doors to female students, educational opportunities for women were brighter than ever before. Also, training colleges for schoolmistresses had been set up -- of the type attended by Sue Bridehead and Hardy's own sisters Mary and Kate, his cousin Tryphena Sparks, and his cousin's wife Annie Sparks (nee Lanham) -- with a view to providing women with both professional training and, ultimately, economic independence. After visiting one such institution, the Whitelands Training College, Hardy recorded in his autobiography :

A community of women, especially young women, inspires not reverence but protective tenderness in the breast of one who views them. Their belief in circumstances, in convention, in the rightness of things which you know to be not only wrong but damnably wrong, makes the heart ache . . . . How far nobler in its aspirations is the life here than the life of those I met at the crush two nights back !<sup>15</sup>

Apart from being a school teacher, which was a traditional feminine role, women were campaigning for entry into other professions and one field that they seem to have invaded in sufficient numbers was journalism -- another traditionally all-male territory. Hardy actively promoted the journalistic aspirations of first Agnes Grove and then Florence Dugdale and he was willing to lend the weight of his name even to those who were not avowedly his 'pupils'. For instance, in 1890, Hardy wrote to the editor of the Contemporary Review on behalf of Mona Caird because she 'preferred this slight introduction to sending it [i.e. her article on Marriage] as a stranger'.<sup>16</sup> But for the nameless, faceless female journalist in the abstract -- or, more specifically, the female reviewer -- Hardy seemed to have scant professional respect. In December 1916, for example, Hardy lamented to Arthur Quiller-Couch regarding the absence of a 'school or science of criticism -- especially in respect of verse. I cannot find a single

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Millgate ed. The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy ( London : Macmillan, 1984 ; rpt. 1989), pp.246-7.

<sup>16</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 1, p.208.

idea in any one of them that is not obvious, but I suppose the verses that come to hand in newspaper offices are put into the hands of the youngest *girl* on the staff' (my italic).<sup>17</sup> About a year later, in February 1918, Hardy refers more scathingly to an unsigned review of his Moments of Vision in a letter to Florence Henniker : 'Did you see the super-precious review of the verses in the Westminster Gazette ? It amused me much (having no weight or value as criticism) as it was obviously written by a woman. It condemned the poem entitled "The pink frock" because the frock described was old-fashioned & Victorian !'<sup>18</sup> It is probably this same hapless (female?) reviewer to whom Hardy sarcastically refers in his autobiography as 'the fair critic who pretended to be a man, but alas, betrayed her sex at the last moment by condemning a poem because its heroine was dressed in a tasteless Victorian skirt !'<sup>19</sup>

Hardy's complaint against female reviewers was not new. As far back as 1904 he had written to Henry Newbolt regarding 'some odd experiences of criticism' in respect of The Dynasts : 'For one thing, I find that my reviewers have largely been women, especially in America. Surely Editors ought to know that such a subject could hardly be expected to appeal to women.'<sup>20</sup> But one review, by a female reviewer, must have appealed to Hardy because this 1908 laudatory article by Grace Alexander was cut and pasted into Hardy's personal scrapbook and it stands unmarked by any of the dismissive marginal comments by Hardy which so often characterize some of the other newspaper clippings. Ever since he had entered the field as a novelist, Hardy's fictional women had drawn most of the critical attention and ire, and Hardy had to keep insisting that 'no satire on the sex is intended in any case by the imperfections of my

<sup>17</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 5, p.194.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.250 ; Hardy's parenthesis.

<sup>19</sup> Millgate ed. Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.414.

<sup>20</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 3, p.112.

heroines' (1874)<sup>21</sup> and nearly two decades later he is still lamenting that many of his novels 'have suffered so much from misrepresentation as being attacks on womankind' (1891).<sup>22</sup> Hence Grace Alexander's review, which drew attention to Hardy's 'delicate and unbroken, one might almost say . . . chivalric, sympathy' for women, must have pleased Hardy. The review opens with a quotation from A Group of Noble Dames, about how men are usually ungenerous to the women dependent on them, and then goes on to say: 'Looking into the world he [i.e. Hardy] has seen that it is the woman, usually, who suffers and the woman who pays, and seemingly with a kind of obligation resting on him he writes as though to offer her artistic compensation.' Therefore, the reviewer concludes, 'women owe to Thomas Hardy a unique debt of gratitude for the fullness and fineness of his comprehension of them'.<sup>23</sup> The personal satisfaction that Hardy probably derived from this sympathetic review must have been of the same kind as that derived from 'numerous communications from mothers (who tell me they are putting "Tess" into their daughters' hands to safeguard their future) & from other women of society who say that my courage has done the whole sex a service (!)'.<sup>24</sup>

If Hardy had little respect for the woman reviewer, his faith in the female editor seems to have been even less. For instance, in July 1921, when Ruth Head proposed to edit a selection of Hardy's writings, he expressed his wish that the extracts would be taken from both his prose and verse and then cautiously hinted: 'The difficulty of selections, in

<sup>21</sup> Hardy's letter to Katharine Macquoid, dt. 17 Nov 1874, in Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 1, p.33.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.250; Hardy's letter to Edmund Yates dt. 31 Dec 1891.

<sup>23</sup> Grace Alexander, 'A Portrait Painter of Real Women: An Inquiry Into the Humanity and Femininity of Thomas Hardy's Heroines . . .', New York Times Saturday Review of Books and Art, 13 June 1908, pp.328-29. The review is pasted into a thick, bound A4 sized notebook labelled 'T.H. (Personal)' which contains numerous other newspaper clippings of interest; unfortunately the pages are not numbered. This 'Scrapbook I' is now in the Dorset County Museum and I am grateful to Mr de Peyer for allowing me to consult it.

<sup>24</sup> Hardy's letter to Edmund Gosse, dt. 20 Jan 1892, in Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 1, p.255; Hardy's parentheses.

poetry particularly, is (if you don't mind my saying it) that though what a woman reader likes a man may usually like, what a man likes most is sometimes what a woman does not like at all. And this especially with my writings.'<sup>25</sup> Hardy must have heaved an immense sigh of relief when he learnt that Ruth Head's husband, the neurologist Henry Head, would be helping her in her editorial task because his next letter to Mrs Head candidly confesses :

I particularly prefer it now that I learn that your husband is giving a kindly eye to your selections. ( This is shockingly ungallant, but how can I be otherwise in a business of this peculiar sort !) In extenuation I humbly add that my writings, particularly in verse -- & I don't care an atom what prose you select -- suffer from the misfortune of being more for men than for women, if I may believe what people say.<sup>26</sup>

However, when a woman translated some of his poems into French, Hardy's ever-ready and genuine sympathy for the translator was expressed in a letter to Edmund Gosse : 'I thought they [i.e. the French translations] were done with unusual fidelity of statement . . . I have been told recently that the translator is an invalid -- a cripple I believe, & that she has worked very hard at them. I hope she will get something out of them to repay her for her trouble. She is quite a stranger to me.'<sup>27</sup> Hardy's generous instincts were always 'quickened', as he himself confessed to Florence Henniker in 1899, by the plight of 'a "woman-writer" struggling with a pen in a Grub street garret'.<sup>28</sup> But after attending a meeting of the Women Writers' Club in 1894, Hardy had to modify radically his mental image of the struggling woman writer. Knowing 'what women writers

<sup>25</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 6, ( Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1987), p.95.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.96 ; letter dt. 7 Aug 1921 (Hardy's parenthesis). See also Hardy's subsequent letter to Henry and Ruth Head (dt. 21 May 1922) congratulating them on their selection and enclosing a list of misprints (*Ibid.*, p.129).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.328 ; letter dt. 3 June 1925.

<sup>28</sup> Purdy and Millgate eds. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 2, (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1980), p.215.

mostly had to put up with', Hardy was 'surprised to find himself in a group of fashionably dressed youngish ladies instead of struggling dowdy females, the Princess Christian being present with other women of rank. "Dear me -- are women-writers like this !" he said with changed views'.<sup>29</sup> For this breed of woman writer Hardy seems to have had nothing but contempt ; as he told Henry Nevinston, he did not much care for the title of 'novelist' 'since innumerable young ladies who have published a tale at their own expense call themselves by that name'.<sup>30</sup> Even more scornful is Hardy's reference to the 'ladies' who failed to turn up for the Lord Mayor's dinner to literature (on 1 July 1893) 'because their husbands were not invited -- So much for their independence'.<sup>31</sup> But for the genuine woman writer of talent, Hardy's admiration was unqualified as is evident from his copying of two poems by Emily Dickinson and pasting a cutting of a poem by 'H.D.' into his 'Literary Notes II' notebook.<sup>32</sup>

Towards the bright, independent, articulate modern women of the turn of the century -- the 'New Women' -- Hardy's attitude was again ambivalent. He appreciated them in literature but in real life he might have conceivably found them a trifle overwhelming. When Florence Henniker sent him one of her stories in 1911, the creator of Sue Bridehead responded enthusiastically to the heroine : 'The girl, though so slightly sketched, is very distinct -- the modern intelligent, mentally emancipated young woman of cities, for whom the married life you kindly provide for her would ultimately prove no great charm -- by far the most interesting type of femininity the world provides for man's eyes at the present day.'<sup>33</sup> However, when these liberated city women went careering down London

<sup>29</sup> *Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* , pp.280-1.

<sup>30</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 3, p.229 ; letter dt. 30 Sept 1906.

<sup>31</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 2, p.20 ; letter to Florence Henniker dt. 2 July 1893.

<sup>32</sup> See Bjork ed. *Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 2, pp.175 & 248.

<sup>33</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 4, p.154.

streets on their bicycles, it was a different proposition altogether and one suspects that Hardy felt a sneaking sympathy for the indignant omnibus conductor whose words he relates, with obvious relish, to his sister Kate :

The young people seem to cycle about the streets here more than ever. I asked an omnibus conductor if the young women (who ride recklessly into the midst of the traffic) did not meet with accidents. He said "Oh, nao ; their sex pertects them. We dares not drive over them, wotever they do ; & they do jist wot they likes. 'Tis their sex, yer see ; & its wot I coll takin' a mean advantage. No man dares to go where they go."<sup>34</sup>

However, Hardy was clear-sighted enough to recognize that this was an exception ; in patriarchal society it was usually the woman who was meanly taken advantage of. Hardy's sympathy for victimized, exploited women, especially women marginalized by society, is repeatedly expressed through his writings. In 1891 Hardy visited a private lunatic asylum and was much affected by listening to women relating 'their stories of their seduction',<sup>35</sup> and his avowed purpose in writing *Tess* was that it had 'been borne in upon my mind for many years that justice has never been done to such women in fiction'.<sup>36</sup> Even though Hardy's local experience was that 'the girls who have made the mistake of Tess almost invariably lead chaste lives thereafter, even under strong temptation', social censure often turned such first-time offenders into permanent outcasts. In his autobiography, Hardy recounts one such touching encounter while returning from an aristocratic evening party :

On coming away there were no cabs to be got . . . and I returned to S.K. [sic] on the top of a 'bus. No sooner was I up there than the rain began again. A girl who had scrambled up after me asked for the shelter of my umbrella, and I gave it, -- when she startled me by holding on tight to my arm and

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<sup>34</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 2, p.193 ; letter dt. 8 May 1898 ( Hardy's parenthesis).

<sup>35</sup> *Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* , p.248.

<sup>36</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 1, p.251 ; letter to Frederic Harrison dt. 1 Jan 1892. The following quotation is from the same letter, on the same page.

bestowing on me many kisses for the trivial kindness. She told me she . . . was tired, and was going home. She had not been drinking. I descended at the South Kensington Station and watched the 'bus bearing her away. An affectionate nature wasted on the streets ! It was a strange contrast to the scene I had just left.<sup>37</sup>

Hardy's indignation at a society which not merely tolerated but tacitly sanctioned and even at times indirectly forced women to go on the streets is evident from a quotation from Victor Hugo that Hardy copied into his '1867' Notebook : 'It is said that slavery has disappeared from European civilization. This is a mistake . . . . It weighs now only upon woman, & is called prostitution.'<sup>38</sup>

Hardy did what little he could for such unfortunate women. At the lunatic asylum, he appealed for the re-examination of a young female inmate who seemed to him to be quite sane. As a member of the jury at the Dorset Assizes, Hardy joined his compeers in acquitting a woman on the charge of the manslaughter of her infant (a real-life The Heart of Mid-Lothian situation), finding her guilty only of the lesser charge of 'concealment of birth : which, of course, being a crime, had to receive a punishment'. Hardy's evident relief and joy at the light sentence handed out to the defendant is clearly revealed in his report of the case in a letter to Florence Dugdale (1912) : 'But as neither the judge nor a single person in court wished her to be punished the judge got over the difficulty by sentencing her to one day's imprisonment, & adding "the day being already begun you have nominally undergone that, so you are free".'<sup>39</sup> Hardy's humane response is quite in keeping with the character of a man who held that : 'That which, socially, is a great tragedy, may be in Nature

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<sup>37</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.281.

<sup>38</sup> See Bjork ed. Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 2, p.479 ; Hardy's ellipsis.

<sup>39</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 4, p.232.



no alarming circumstance.<sup>40</sup> In a less veiled manner, Hardy had challenged the very concept of illegitimacy in his highly controversial poem 'A Sunday Morning Tragedy' ( Time's Laughingstocks , 1909) where the poet in his own voice interrupts the first-person narrative to question parenthetically : '( Ill-motherings ! Why should they be ?) -- '.<sup>41</sup> The mother's lament in this poem -- 'O women ! scourged the worst are we . . .' -- is anticipated by the speaker in the poem 'The Coquette, and After' ( Poems of the Past and the Present , 1901) who regrets that 'Of sinners two / At last *one* pays the penalty -- / The woman -- women always do !' (Hardy's italic).

Hardy's sympathies were broad enough to include not just the 'ruined maid' but also the woman found guilty of murder. In his fiction he remained unflinchingly loyal to Tess even after her murder of Alec, and in real life he responded to the 1923 execution of Edith Jessie Thompson (found guilty of murdering her husband) by writing the poem 'On the Portrait of a Woman about to be Hanged' in which he accused the 'purblind vision' of the Prime 'Causer' who had implanted a 'worm', a 'Clytaemnestra spirit', in its fair handiwork. Hardy sent this poem to J.C. Squire with the challenging words (which unequivocally reveal his stance): 'If your paper is too moral to sympathize with a wicked woman, will you return the enclosed ?'<sup>42</sup> This does not imply that Hardy valued human life so little that he was prepared to condone murder. As he had

<sup>40</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.228. This May 1889 note could well be an allusion to Tess's rape/ seduction as during this time Hardy was engaged in writing the novel which was ultimately named Tess of the d'Urbervilles .

<sup>41</sup> In this poem, a guilt- and grief-stricken mother relates how her fair daughter was seduced, how the lover proved false to his earlier promise of marriage despite her earnest entreaties on her daughter's behalf, and how -- on a shepherd's advice -- she administered a herbal abortifacient to her pregnant daughter so that they could escape social shame. With a characteristic Hardyan irony, the lover later repents and the banns are called in church on the very Sunday on which he comes to the home of his bride-to-be only to find her 'Ghost-white' in death as a result of the crude 'physic'. The poem is dated 'January 1904' but the words below the title read '(circa 186--)' : this suggests that the poem may well have originated in a local incident known personally to Hardy.

<sup>42</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 6, p.178.

tried to explain in a note of 1889, later incorporated into his autobiography: 'When a married woman who has a lover kills the husband, she does not really wish to kill the husband ; she wishes to kill the situation. Of course in Clytaemnestra's case it was not exactly so, since there was the added grievance of Iphigenia, which half-justified her.'<sup>43</sup>

Hardy quite realized that women's images -- both in life and in literature -- were distorted by being refracted through the male point of view. He felt, for example, that Fanny Brawne had not received justice at the hands of Keats's biographers and that she did not really deserve the scorn that has been heaped on her.<sup>44</sup> A woman's story told by a man from a predominantly male perspective is significantly different from a woman's story told by a woman from an intimately female experiential standpoint. Therefore, although poets have dwelt briefly on the 'pathos of the woman's part in time of war', it is a matter of great regret that 'no poet has ever arisen to tell the tale of Troy from Andromache's point of view'.<sup>45</sup> Hardy himself at one point contemplated composing something analogous, because one of his many abandoned ideas for the 'Iliad of Europe from 1789 to 1815' (which finally shaped itself as The Dynasts ) was to call the 'grand drama' 'Josephine'.<sup>46</sup> It would have been interesting if Hardy had worked out this scheme ; then, perhaps, The Dynasts would be more widely read today than it generally is. On a smaller scale, in his dramatic lyrics, Hardy tried to make this imaginative leap by adopting the woman's point of view, by trying to think, feel and express himself as a woman : these poems range from the early 'She, to Him' sonnets (only four survive from this 1866 sequence) to the late poems of expiation,

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<sup>43</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.231. In a letter to Florence Henniker, dt. 27 Oct 1918, Hardy admitted that he admired the courage of Lady Macbeth, Clytaemnestra and such characters ; see Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 5, p.283.

<sup>44</sup> See Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 5, p.248n.

<sup>45</sup> Bjork ed. Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 2, p.155.

<sup>46</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , pp. 110 & 117.

written and published after Emma's death as 'the only amends I can make',<sup>47</sup> quite a few of which were directly inspired by Hardy's reading of his late wife's prose memoirs ( Some Recollections ).

In this last instance, however, there is a suspicion that Hardy made good 'copy' out of Emma -- both of her as a person, and of her creative attempts at literature. For instance, in the 'Notes' supplied for the revision of Samuel Chew's book, Hardy indirectly admitted ( the letter and 'Notes' were sent out over Florence Hardy's signature ) that in A Pair of Blue Eyes 'the character and temperament of the heroine . . . [has] some resemblance to a real person'.<sup>48</sup> To George Dewar, however, Hardy was more forthcoming and in a letter of July 1913, he unequivocally acknowledged that in A Pair of Blue Eyes the 'character of the heroine is somewhat -- indeed, rather largely -- that of my late wife, & the background of the tale the place where she lived. But of course the adventures, lovers, &c. are fictitious entirely, though people used sometimes to ask her why she did this & that . . .'.<sup>49</sup> Of Emma Hardy's literary efforts, 'The Maid on the Shore' is interesting because it offers two striking instances of parallelism in Hardy's own work. In one episode, the hero's wife Boadicea is presented with the family jewels as a wedding gift and she adorns herself with these ornaments reminding the reader of Tess's similar action on her wedding night. In another episode, Boadicea's young sister is chased by a thoughtless boy on horseback and the little girl's fright makes her fall into a convulsive fit followed by a prolonged nervous prostration. In Hardy's (hitherto) uncollected short story 'The Doctor's Legend' (1891),<sup>50</sup> a similar

<sup>47</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 5, p.37 ( letter to Florence Henniker, dt. 17 July 1914).

<sup>48</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 6, p.154.

<sup>49</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 4, p.288.

<sup>50</sup> 'The Doctor's Legend' was published in America in The Independent (New York) in March 1891. It was never printed or collected in England during Hardy's lifetime. It seems to have been first printed / collected in England in the third volume of the New Wessex Edition of Hardy's short stories (1977). It is also included in Pamela Dalziel's edition of Hardy's The Excluded and Collaborative Stories (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1992).

incident occurs when a young girl, chased by an irate Squire, suffers an epileptic fit and in the course of the ensuing nervous malady loses all her hair and teeth so that her playmates come to nickname her the 'Death's Head'.

Of course, one cannot state with any degree of certainty just when Hardy read Emma's novelette but there could well be some justice in Dale Spender's contention that 'Samuel Richardson, Thomas Hardy and William Wordsworth are among other great writers known to have similar propensities for taking the writing of women and using it for their own ends'.<sup>51</sup> Citing the examples of F. Scott Fitzgerald (who plagiarized from his wife Zelda's diaries) and D.H. Lawrence (who freely appropriated the 'solicited notes and reminiscences' of his wife and women friends), Dale Spender argues that throughout literary history male writers have often been guilty of stealing the fruits of women's creative labour. Remarkably enough, this feminist thesis is anticipated by Emma Hardy in her letter to the Editor of The Nation in 1908 : 'Such words [e.g. 'virility'] are untrue as denoting perfection to be an attribute of the masculine intellect, for a good deal that is carried out as original and finished work has been suggested, and often completely thought out, by a woman, though never so acknowledged.'<sup>52</sup>

A small example of such unacknowledged borrowing can be traced to an 1885 conversation that Hardy had with a 'sympathetic group of women', in which the discussion naturally turned to 'love', and 'Lady Camilla informed him that "a woman is never so near being in love with a man she does not love as immediately he has left her after she has refused him"'.<sup>53</sup> In The Woodlanders (1887) Hardy's imaginative alchemy

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<sup>51</sup> Dale Spender, 'Women and Literary History', in Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore eds. The Feminist Reader : Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism ( London : Macmillan, 1989 ; rpt. 1992), p.30.

<sup>52</sup> Millgate ed. Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy , pp.39-40.

<sup>53</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.177.

transformed this into the narrative comment on the fluctuating Grace - Giles relationship :

If it be true, as women themselves have declared, that one of their sex is never so much inclined to throw in her lot with a man for good and all as five minutes after she has told him such a thing cannot be, the probabilities are that something might have been done by the appearance of Winterborne on the ground beside Grace.<sup>54</sup>

Apart from illustrating woman's fickleness, her chronic inability to know her own mind, this passage also reveals another time-honoured male (mis)conception of woman : that a woman's 'No' actually means 'Yes'. This is an arrogant assumption that many a suitor, both in fiction and in real life, has often made and this is the justification that Alec d'Urberville offers for having taken advantage of Tess. When Tess sorrowfully laments 'I didn't understand your meaning till it was too late', Alec scornfully sweeps it aside with the dismissive generalization : 'That's what every woman says.' This suggestion of female hypocrisy stings Tess into vehement protest : 'How can you dare to use such words ! . . . Did it never strike your mind that what every woman says some women may feel?'<sup>55</sup> Tess's 'No' had meant 'No', but Alec had simply not bothered to listen.

If Alec is trapped in traditional patriarchal attitudes, so (apparently) is his creator. The tendency of Hardy's narrator to indulge in negative and reductive generalizations about women has been widely noted. Such generalizations, however, are not just restricted to the novels or short stories but feature in Hardy's notebooks, his autobiography, and even his personal correspondence. Thus, an 1871 notebook entry declares : 'Nothing is so interesting to a woman as herself' ; and a couple of pages later, in 1872, Hardy records a cynical comment about women that he professes to have overheard -- 'She can use the corners of her eyes as well as we can use the

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<sup>54</sup> *The Woodlanders* , New Wessex Edition, ( London : Macmillan, 1975), pp.121-22.

<sup>55</sup> *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* , New Wessex Edition, ( London : Macmillan, 1975), p.106.

middle'.<sup>56</sup> This bit of folk-wisdom was probably metamorphosed into the advice Dick Dewy receives from his father, in Under the Greenwood Tree (1872), about the nature of young maids : 'She'll swear she's dying for thee . . . but she'll fling a look over t'other shoulder at another young feller, though never leaving off dying for thee just the same.'<sup>57</sup> This proverbial (male) equation between 'fickleness' and 'woman' is implied in Hardy's 1865 comment, copied into his autobiography : 'Public opinion is of the nature of a woman.'<sup>58</sup> The very absence of elaboration suggests that the nature of woman is too well known to require explanatory amplification and also assumes that both writer and (male) reader share a common perspective on the 'other' half of creation.

A corollary to woman's fickleness was, reputedly, her vanity. Hardy's 1878 observation succinctly sums up this traditional perception of woman's preoccupation with her physical appearance : 'When a couple are shown to their room at an hotel, before the husband has seen that it is a room at all, the wife has found the looking-glass & is arranging her bonnet.'<sup>59</sup> From a relatively young writer who is trying to establish himself, such comments are hardly surprising. What *is* surprising, however, is that Hardy thought it fit to include these comments when he came to compose his autobiography -- in secret -- during the second decade of the twentieth century. In 1899 Hardy had pasted into his 'Literary Notes II' notebook a cutting of an English translation by Arthur Symons of an original French poem dealing with woman's narcissistic worship of self in front of her mirror, totally unheeded of the perishable quality of her charms.<sup>60</sup> Two decades later, Hardy's conviction about woman's essential

<sup>56</sup> Richard H. Taylor ed. The Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy ( London : Macmillan, 1978), pp. 8 & 10 respectively.

<sup>57</sup> Under the Greenwood Tree, New Wessex Edition, ( London : Macmillan, 1975), p.120.

<sup>58</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy, p.50.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.125.

<sup>60</sup> See Bjork ed. Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 2, p.83.

vanity remained unchanged and he wrote to the president of the Oxford University Dramatic Society (in 1919) regarding its proposed dramatization of The Dynasts : 'My feeling was the same as yours about the Strophe and Antistrophe -- that they should be unseen, and as it were speaking from the sky. But it is, as you hint, doubtful if the two ladies will like to have their charms hidden. Would boys do instead, or ugly ladies with good voices ?'<sup>61</sup> Earlier in the same year, when Alfred Pope sent Hardy the proofs of his book recording the wartime contributions of his daughters (and sons), Hardy made a few 'trifling corrections' and offered the laconic comment : 'By the way will the girls like their birth dates to be mentioned? . . . I am too old to be a judge of the modern feminine mind.'<sup>62</sup>

Despite the negative tenor of such comments, Hardy's sympathy for women is clearly evident from an 1870 observation ( which neatly balances the misogynic comments of the early 1870s quoted earlier ) :

When a young woman is eager to explain her meaning to a lover who has carelessly or purposely misunderstood her, there is something painful to an observer who notices it, although it is evidence of deep love. It somehow bespeaks that in spite of her orders to him to fetch & carry, of his devotion & her rule, he is in essence master.<sup>63</sup>

Hardy's sympathy for women can also be read into the quotation from John Inglesant (1881) that he copied into his 'Literary Notes I' notebook : 'From those high windows behind the flower-pots young girls have looked out upon life, which their instincts told them was made for pleasure, but which year after year convinced them was, somehow or other, given over to pain.'<sup>64</sup> One is instantly reminded of that mixed passage in Jude the Obscure where the narrator, with Darwinian bio-determinism, brands the

<sup>61</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 5, p.347.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p.296.

<sup>63</sup> Taylor ed. Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy , p.5.

<sup>64</sup> Lennart A. Bjork ed. The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 1, ( London : Macmillan, 1985), p.146.

young girls 'The Weaker', but also speaks tenderly of the 'storms and strains of after-years, with their injustice, loneliness, child-bearing, and bereavement'.<sup>65</sup>

The same ambivalence -- i.e. indignation and pity for the 'injustice' that is woman's common lot, coupled with a tacit assumption of woman as being an inferior evolutionary species -- is evident in Hardy's comment to William Archer in 1901 : 'What are my books but one plea against "man's inhumanity to man" -- to woman -- and to the lower animals ?'<sup>66</sup> On one level, it speaks positively of Hardy's passionate hatred for any form of cruelty practised towards man or beast. But the ( unintentional ? ) descending order of the sentence structure lays it open to a less positive interpretation. The abrupt, disconcerting shift from the generic ('man's') to the gender-specific ('man') and the hierarchical placing of 'man', 'woman', and 'lower animals' seem to imply that woman occupies an intermediary position in the evolutionary ladder -- not as lowly as the animals, but not yet quite as exalted as man. If such an interpretation seems to be an overstraining or falsification, one has only to go back a few years to Hardy's 1895 letter to Archer where (in the context of *Jude* ) he reiterates essentially the same idea in words that have the identical descending order : 'I suppose the times are still too barbarous to allow one to strike a blow -- however indirectly, for humanity towards man, woman, or the lower animals.'<sup>67</sup> One would expect a *writer* to be more conscious of the possible implications of his word-order.

Hardy's use of language at times betrays his ideological limitations and reveals how hopelessly he is trapped in *man*-made language. For instance, in a letter explaining the impetus behind *Tess* , Hardy declared : ' "Tess of the d'Urbervilles" was not written to prove anything, either

<sup>65</sup> *Jude the Obscure* , New Wessex Edition, ( London : Macmillan, 1975), p.161.

<sup>66</sup> William Archer, *Real Conversations* ( London : William Heinemann, 1904), pp.46-7.

<sup>67</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* , Vol. 2, p.96.



about Heaven or Earth. A certain character was imagined to feel at a certain time of *his* life that God was not in his Heaven, & there was an end of it, without prejudice' (my italic).<sup>68</sup> Despite his sincere emotional commitment to Tess, and the testimony of an actress that he 'talked of Tess as if she was someone real whom he had known and liked tremendously',<sup>69</sup> Hardy could not rise above the conventional male pronoun which sounds so jarring in the context.<sup>70</sup> It is a good illustration (on a minor level) of the justice of Bathsheba's general complaint that language was made by men to express their feelings and, as such, men's language is an inadequate vehicle to express women's feelings as often there are no precise verbal equivalents for uniquely female experiences.

However, it is not only women who find language a recalcitrant medium. In one of his marginal comments on George Egerton's Keynotes (1893), Hardy tried to defend the undemonstrative male protagonist of the story 'Now Spring has Come' by suggesting : 'It was simply the lack of expressive power : not lack of feeling.'<sup>71</sup> In fact, most of Hardy's annotations in this copy of Keynotes read like those of a man attempting to justify the ways of men to women. Thus, a few pages later in the same story, Hardy again remarked : 'He s.<sup>d</sup> [sic] that because she was not impulsive enough' (p.65 ; Hardy's emphasis). Throughout these stories in which Egerton powerfully projects the woman's point of view, one has the feeling that Hardy's commentary attempts to counter it by presenting the

<sup>68</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 4, p.62, ( letter to Henry Jones dt. 2 Dec 1909).

<sup>69</sup> An extract from a letter by one of the players of the Garrick Theatre who performed Tess in the Max Gate drawing-room in Dec 1925. See Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.463.

<sup>70</sup> The issue is somewhat complicated by the fact that within the novel it is Angel who bitterly and deliberately misquotes these famous lines from Browning (in Chap. 37). So, in his letter, is Hardy suggesting that Angel Clare is the central consciousness of Tess of the d'Urbervilles rather than the eponymous heroine ?

<sup>71</sup> Hardy's annotated copy of George Egerton's Keynotes ( London : Elkin Mathews & John Lane, 1893), p.59. This copy is now in the Beinecke Library, Yale University, and I am grateful to Mr Vincent Giroud, Curator of Modern Books and Manuscripts, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, for granting me formal permission to quote Hardy's marginal comments. Subsequent page references are to this 1893 copy and are parenthetically incorporated into the text.

male point of view. For instance, where Egerton writes : 'A woman must beware of speaking the truth to a man ; he loves her the less for it', Hardy's expansive footnote reads : 'This bears only on sensualism. It is untrue of man in his altruistic regard of woman as a fellow-creature : untrue of his highest affection for her' (p.29). However, Hardy was not content with merely defending his own sex ; a couple of his marginal comments betray positive hostility to women. Where Egerton speaks of the 'untamed primitive savage temperament' lurking in woman, Hardy queries : 'Hence her inferiority to man ??' (p.22). Egerton's thesis is that men, down the ages, have constructed a false ideal of womanhood and therefore women -- in their own self-interest -- hypocritically have to live up to this ideal. Man 'has fashioned a model on imaginary lines . . . and every woman is an unconscious liar, for so man loves her'. Against this passage occurs perhaps the most devastating of Hardy's marginal comments : 'ergo : real woman is abhorrent to man ? hence the failure of matrimony ??' ( p.23 ; Hardy's emphases ).

Hardy had read and annotated Keynotes in December-January 1893-94 and during this time he seems to have grown gradually disenchanted with women ( it is useless to speculate whether Emma Hardy or Florence Henniker was responsible for this disillusion ). An 1893 note incorporated into his autobiography reveals the same sense of mixed hurt and hostility : 'I often think that women, even those who consider themselves experienced in sexual strategy, do not know how to manage an *honest* man' (Hardy's italic).<sup>72</sup> And of the several extracts from Schopenhauer that Hardy copied into his 'Literary Notes II' notebook in 1891, one is headed 'On Women'. It is a miscellaneous collection of abridged quotations, most of them negative : 'Women are childish, frivolous, & short sighted' ; 'Dissimulation [is] innate in woman' ; the natural feeling between women

<sup>72</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy, p.273.

is 'enmity', because of 'trade-jealousy' ; women have not produced any 'great, genuine, or original' work of art ; women are 'a constant stimulus to ignoble ambitions' etc. On the lighter side, Hardy also copied out the philosopher's wonder about how men could 'give the name of the fair sex to that undersized, narrow-should.<sup>d</sup> [sic] broad-hipped & short-legged race'.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, despite Schopenhauer, men down the ages have continued to find women irresistibly attractive and Hardy certainly was no exception.

Like most male artists (and like his fictional Jocelyn Pierston), Hardy was extremely susceptible to female beauty. The narrative of his adolescent years is punctuated with references to girls briefly glimpsed and adored from afar because for Hardy distance lent not only enchantment but also an idealizing halo. As in the case of his own creation, Ella Marchmill, it could be just a photograph which fuelled his romantic dreams and Hardy's autobiography contains a candid confession of his youthful passion for the Austrian Empress (Elizabeth, wife of Francis Joseph I) : 'She was a woman whose beauty, as shown in her portraits, had attracted him greatly in his youthful years, and had inspired some of his early verses, the same romantic passion having also produced the outline of a novel upon her, which he never developed.'<sup>74</sup> Age does not seem to have cured this extreme romantic susceptibility -- the 'throbbings of noontide' persisted -- and Hardy admitted to Harley Granville Barker in 1925 that although on principle he felt that 'to attempt to put a novel on the stage is hopeless, and altogether a mistake in art', he had nevertheless composed a dramatization of Tess because 'having been tempted by many "leading ladies" of the nineties I could not resist'.<sup>75</sup> These 'would-be Tesses' are named in the autobiography as 'Mrs Patrick Campbell, Ellen Terry, Sarah Bernhardt, and

<sup>73</sup> Bjork ed. Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 2, pp.30-31.

<sup>74</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.313.

<sup>75</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 6, p.362.

Eleanora Duse<sup>76</sup> : a truly formidable list and any man can be forgiven for falling a prey to their combined charms. Ultimately, of course, it was a local beauty -- Gertrude Bugler -- whose 'request' resulted in the performance of Tess by the amateur 'Hardy Players'. As Hardy acknowledged to J.C. Squire in 1925, 'I no longer believe in dramatizing novels, & have no dramatic ambitions. Its appearance is entirely owing to the fact that our leading lady down here coaxed me to let her do Tess'.<sup>77</sup>

As a celebrity, Hardy 'found himself continually invited hither and thither to see famous beauties of the time'<sup>78</sup> but his eyes were never really dazzled by the aristocratic beauties on display. He realized that the veneer of beauty really depended on the exigencies of life, on the accidents of birth and fortune, and after attending a 'crush' ( replete with a Princess, a Duchess, and diamond-studded aristocrats ), Hardy commented : 'But these women ! If put into rough wrappers in a turnip-field, where would their beauty be ?'<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, Hardy's artist's eye could not help noticing beautiful women : the 'too statuesque girl' with 'absolutely perfect' features whom he saw in a railway carriage<sup>80</sup> ; the 'young women . . . in fluffy blouses' who 'distracted' him on top of omnibuses<sup>81</sup> ; or the girl in the omnibus whose 'marvellous beauty' and face of 'softened classicality' left him wondering -- 'Where do these women come from ? Who marries them ? Who knows them ?'<sup>82</sup> Hardy seems to have measured women's beauty in terms of their personal desirability as wives. Of Princess May he records : 'she is not a bad-looking girl, and a man might marry a worse.'<sup>83</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.282. See also Taylor ed. Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy , p.83 & n.

<sup>77</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 6, p.359 ; see also Hardy's letter of Nov 1925 to Sir James Barrie ( *Ibid.*, p.369).

<sup>78</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.282.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p.235.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p.130 ; Hardy's italic.

<sup>81</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 3, p.270 ( letter of Aug 1907 to the wife of Kenneth Grahame ).

<sup>82</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.229.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p.269.

More interesting is his response to an unnamed socialite whom he describes as 'an Amazon ; more, an Atalanta ; most, a Faustine. Smokes : Handsome girl : cruel small mouth : she's of the class of interesting women one would be afraid to marry'.<sup>84</sup>

Marriage, of course, features very prominently in Hardy's fiction -- especially the tragedy of indissoluble unions. To Hardy, 'a bad marriage is one of the direst things on earth, & one of the cruellest things',<sup>85</sup> and in the 1912 'Postscript' to the Preface of Jude Hardy stated unequivocally that 'a marriage should be dissolvable as soon as it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties -- being then essentially and morally no marriage . . .'.<sup>86</sup> The marriage question had been very much in Hardy's mind in the 1890s and in his autobiography he records a conversation in 1893 with Lady Londonderry, the Duchess of Manchester and Lady Jeune where 'four of us talked of the marriage-laws . . . also of the difficulties of separation, of terminable marriages where there are children, and of the nervous strain of living with a man when you know he can throw you over at any moment'.<sup>87</sup> Hardy was aware of the waywardness of the sexual instinct -- hinted at, ironically, in the 1895 Preface to The Woodlanders and worked out more fully in The Well-Beloved -- and he was appalled by the social-religious system which imposed a permanent bond on what was essentially a transient physical attraction. Human nature tends to kick against compulsion and Hardy had offered a light-hearted solution to the problem in Far From the Madding Crowd where Bathsheba's father, troubled by his own roving eye, finds a novel remedy for his marital restlessness. He persuades his wife to take off her wedding ring and pretend that she is only his sweetheart and not his 'ticketed' wife : the

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p.221.

<sup>85</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 2, p.98 ( letter of Nov 1895 to Sir George Douglas ).

<sup>86</sup> Jude the Obscure, New Wessex Edition (1975), p.29.

<sup>87</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy, p.273.

pleasurable illusion that he is 'committing the seventh' subsequently keeps his fickle heart from wandering. That truth was even stranger than fiction was proved by a story related to Hardy by his friend Sir Francis Jeune, a judge in the Divorce Court, about a couple who 'being divorced they grew very fond of each other, the former wife becoming the husband's mistress, and living happily with him ever after'.<sup>88</sup>

But such fairy-tale endings were rare in real life and the grim reality of marriage is recounted in Hardy's autobiography :

"Am told that \_\_\_\_ has turned upon her drunken husband at last, and knocks him down without ceremony. In the morning he holds out his trembling hand and says, 'Give me a sixpence for a drop o'brandy -- please do ye, my dear !' " This was a woman Hardy had known as a pretty laughing girl, who had been married for the little money she had.<sup>89</sup>

When a marriage reached such a stage, Hardy felt that some legal redress ought to be available. As he told Florence Henniker in 1911, he had thought for many years 'that marriage should not thwart nature, & that when it does thwart nature it is no real marriage, & the legal contract should therefore be as speedily cancelled as possible. Half the misery of human life would I think disappear if this were made easy'.<sup>90</sup> Thus, Hardy seems to have been sympathetic to Lady Byron's situation in the breakdown of the Byron marriage<sup>91</sup> ; however, in the case of Meredith's daughter, he felt that the couple's strained relations were 'her fault' and there seems to be a faint air of disapproval in his description of her taking 'a flat in London as a bachelor woman'.<sup>92</sup>

Although Hardy definitely hoped that the divorce laws would be made more easy and humane, he did not wish to undermine the

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p.348.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p.133.

<sup>90</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 4, p.177.

<sup>91</sup> See Bjork ed. *Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 2, pp.200-1.

<sup>92</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 3, p.218.

institution of marriage altogether. In fact, he proclaimed himself quite 'offended' with Florence Henniker in 1896 for saying ( probably in the context of Jude ) that he was 'an advocate for "free love" '.<sup>93</sup> But Hardy must have modified his stance considerably because a decade later, in 1907, he wrote to Florence Henniker commenting on the heroine of her novel Our Fatal Shadows :

Of course *I* should not have kept her respectable, & made a nice, decorous, dull woman of her at the end, but shd [sic] have let her go to the d\_\_ for the man . . . But gentle F.H. [sic] naturally had not the heart to do that. The only thing I don't care much about is her marrying the Duke's son -- whom she did not love ; an action quite as immoral, from my point of view, & more so even, than running off with a married man whom she did love would have been. But convention rules still in these things of course.<sup>94</sup> (Hardy's italic)

If The Woodlanders had been composed in 1907 and not in 1887, would Grace Melbury have gone 'to the devil' for Giles Winterborne thus rendering his self-exile from his one-roomed hut (and consequent death) quite unnecessary ? And would Jude have no occasion to accuse Sue of a mean save-your-own-soul-ism because she would be quite prepared to 'go to the devil' with Jude instead of returning to Christianity, Phillotson, and self-annihilation ?

Furthermore, by his own professed moral standards (quoted above), Hardy stands self-convicted in Two on a Tower . The contemporary reviewers, including Mrs Oliphant, who found Lady Constantine's marriage of convenience to Bishop Helmsdale -- whom she does *not* love -- revoltingly immoral and indecent were perhaps not very wrong after all. But Hardy was incensed by the 'screaming' of Mrs Oliphant just as he was provoked by the screaming of another 'maiden lady' ( regarding Jude ) although he tried to laugh it out of court. Hardy's encounter with this

<sup>93</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 2, p.122.

<sup>94</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 3, p.275.

female critic, Miss Jeannette Gilder, is described at length in his autobiography<sup>95</sup> and part of it is worth quoting as it crystallizes Hardy's mixed attitude to women. After (rather excessively) berating the 'immorality' and 'coarseness' of *Jude* in a review in the *New York World*, Miss Gilder had requested an interview with Hardy in order 'to get your side of the argument'. Hardy declined politely but with thinly-veiled 'sarcasm' which Miss Gilder obviously failed to register because she wrote back sincerely thanking him for his 'goodness'. Hardy's comment on this episode is a mixture of self-congratulatory righteousness and a patronizing appreciation of women :

Hardy must indeed have shown some magnanimity in condescending to answer the writer of a review containing such contumelious misrepresentations as hers had contained. But, as he said, *she was a woman*, after all -- *one of the sex that makes up for lack of justice by excess of generosity* -- and she had *screamed* so grotesquely loud in her article that Hardy's sense of the comicality of it had saved his feelings from being much hurt by the outrageous slurs. (My italics)

The sequel to this story is even more interesting because when the 'unsuspecting' Hardy turned up at an evening party he noticed that while he conversed with the hostess, a 'strange lady' joined in -- silent, but attentive. He later discovered that he had been outwitted, that Miss Gilder had indeed obtained her 'interview', as the silent lady was none other than his hostile reviewer who was a friend of his hostess and that the 'whole thing had been carefully schemed'. Hardy's sardonic comment on the

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<sup>95</sup> See *Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, pp. 296-98. All subsequent quotations referring to this episode are taken from these three pages of the autobiography.

Interestingly enough, 'screaming' is a word Hardy seems to have associated almost exclusively with women. In the 1912 'Postscript' to the Preface of *Jude*, Hardy referred to Mrs Oliphant's 'The Anti-Marriage League' article as 'the screaming of a poor lady in *Blackwood*' and in the novel itself he had commented : 'If [Jude] had been a woman he must have screamed under the nervous tension which he was now undergoing' (New Wessex hardback edn, p.145). See Chapter VII of the present thesis.



whole episode was : 'But make the doors upon a woman's wit, and it will out at the casement.'

In the final analysis, it is extremely difficult to pin Hardy down as he himself was continually wary of any 'isms'. Although Hardy was capable of offering the suggestion -- only half-jestingly -- that since the British 'Constitution has worked so much better under queens than kings the Crown should by rights descend from woman to woman',<sup>96</sup> and although he recorded (with tacit admiration ? ) the story of a local girl who refused to adopt her husband's surname after marriage so that 'to the end of their lives the couple were spoken of as "Nanny P\_\_ and John C\_\_" ',<sup>97</sup> he can startle modern readers by the morbid voyeurism of his description of the 1856 hanging of Martha Browne, recalled *seventy* years later : 'I remember what a fine figure she showed against the sky as she hung in the misty rain, & how the tight black silk gown set off her shape as she wheeled half-round & back.'<sup>98</sup> Thus, George Wotton is quite right in his assessment that although Hardy at times 'writes with great sympathy about the subjection of women, at others his comments appear to us now to display the typical male attitudes of his time which would certainly be called sex blind and perhaps sexist'.<sup>99</sup> The conflicting impressions left by Hardy's observations on women, in both his fictional and non-fictional writings, are perhaps best summed up in Hardy's own words as 'a confused heap of impressions, like those of a bewildered child at a conjuring show'.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 2, p.264 ( letter of July 1900).

<sup>97</sup> Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.211.

<sup>98</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 7, p.5 ( letter to Lady Hester Pinney, dt. Jan 1926 ).

<sup>99</sup> George Wotton, Thomas Hardy : Towards a Materialist Criticism ( New Jersey : Barnes & Noble ; Dublin : Gill and Macmillan, 1985), p.122.

<sup>100</sup> Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy , Vol. 6, p.48 ( a 1920 letter to an 'unidentified correspondent' ). As the editors Purdy and Millgate suggest in their footnote, perhaps it was not 'a letter addressed to a particular correspondent but a set of self-justifying arguments cast into epistolary form for purposes of publication in Later Years'. This entire letter is included in Hardy's autobiography ; see Life and Work of Thomas Hardy , p.441.

Hardy always insisted that his 'mood-dictated writing' recorded 'mere impressions that frequently change' and that he was 'only a mere impressionist'.<sup>101</sup> Art / literature was concerned with 'seemings only', with 'impressions, not convictions', and Hardy repeatedly warned against trying to construct a philosophy / ideology out of what were 'mere impressions of the moment'.<sup>102</sup> In the 1895 Preface to *Jude*, Hardy spoke of 'a series of seemings, or personal impressions, the question of their consistency or their discordance, of their permanence or their transitoriness, being regarded as not of the first moment'; and in the 1911 'General preface' to the Wessex Edition (1912) Hardy reiterated that 'consistency' had never been his objective and that he was content with recording 'mere impressions of the moment, and not convictions or arguments'.<sup>103</sup> 'Unadjusted impressions have their value', Hardy declared in the 1901 Preface to *Poems of the Past and the Present*, 'and the road to a true philosophy of life seems to lie in humbly recording diverse readings of its phenomena . . .'. This is exactly what this thesis has attempted to do: to record Hardy's 'diverse readings' and conflicting observations on the nature of 'Woman' and his fluctuating and contradictory responses to women as revealed both in his fiction and in his real life.

These contradictory responses have shaped Hardy's presentation of his fictional women. Thus Viviette Constantine's noble transcendence of self-interest is portrayed with sympathy but it is simultaneously undercut by the recurrent damaging allusions to the Fall and by the narrator's framing misogynic commentary. Hardy's other *femme fatales* -- Eustacia,

<sup>101</sup> See *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 6, p.48; Vol. 7, p.162; & Vol. 5, p.70 respectively.

<sup>102</sup> See *Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, pp. 405, 408, & 439 respectively.

<sup>103</sup> Hardy's Prefaces are all conveniently gathered together in Harold Orel ed. *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings: Prefaces, Literary Opinions, Reminiscences* (London: Macmillan, 1967). For the quotation from the Preface to *Jude*, see pp.32-3; for the extract from the 1911 'General Preface', see p.49; and for the following quotation from the Preface to *Poems of the Past and the Present*, see p.39.

Felice Charmond and Sue -- are subject to the same ambivalence. While manuscript revisions suggest that Hardy ultimately took a sympathetic view of Mrs Charmond, in the case of Eustacia constant textual revisions reveal a gradual withdrawal of, if not authorial sympathy, at least authorial emotional commitment. Hardy portrays Eustacia's rebellion with sympathetic understanding but somehow the rebellion itself seems trivialized by having as its object nothing worth striving for. In the case of Sue, who remains the inscrutable 'Other', the double perspective seems the result of the author / narrator being tugged in two opposite directions : he wishes to internalize Sue's experience and present it from the centre of her tortured consciousness but he cannot resist silently aligning himself with Jude's male point of view and seeing her as a baffling spectacle from the outside, because despite Hardy's denials Jude is a partial self-portrait. Of the heroines analyzed in this study only Ethelberta comes through victorious but her success seems, at best, a pyrrhic victory because the price she pays is too high and in any case Hardy deliberately chose to blind himself to the potential for tragic conflict in Ethelberta.<sup>104</sup> In the briefer compass of the short stories, Hardy's sympathy is less qualified and less complicated and his protest on behalf of the victimized lives of Barbara and Sophy or the emotionally sterile and cramped lives of Ella and Edith is expressed in a more forthright fashion. However, if Hardy were asked to offer a theoretical exposition on the 'Woman Question', he would have declined saying : 'I have troubled myself very little about theories . . . I am content with tentativeness from day to day.'<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> In his autobiography Hardy declared : 'Laughter always means blindness -- either from defect, choice, or accident.' See *Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* , p.116.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p.160.

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