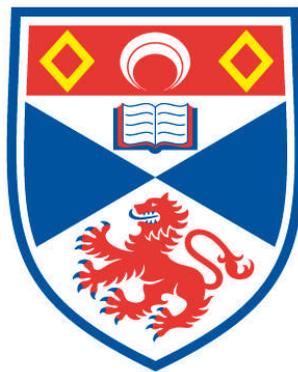


WOMEN AND SEXUALITY IN HARDY

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**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
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WOMEN AND SEXUALITY IN HARDY

by

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This thesis has been composed by me, and the work of which it is a record has been done by myself. It has not been accepted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I have carried out research in the novels of Thomas Hardy in the Department of English, University of St Andrews under the supervision of Philip Mallett. I was admitted as a research student under Ordinance General No.12 in October 1979, and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D. in June 1980.

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I certify that Ms Rosemarie Anne Louise Morgan has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution of the University Court, 1967, No 1 as amended and the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

The work is a study of Thomas Hardy's novels and women. The focus centres upon five major Wessex novels and Hardy's treatment of female sexuality.

An examination of early difficulties of style and characterisation is followed by textual analysis of the more complex structures and discourses developed by Hardy as, with increasing confidence and enhanced reputation the poetic voice successfully accommodates itself to a prose medium. Contemporary sexual ideologies - those to which Hardy was daily exposed through the vociferous medium of periodicals and journals - are drawn into the study. It is argued that Hardy was engaged with contemporary social issues, that the historical process enters into his fiction to shape both characterisation and event, and that contemporary dialogues upon the 'Woman Question' inform his characterisations.

The argument is that Hardy was not a feminist as nineteenth century liberal feminism is understood. It is maintained that he developed a broader vision, which, augmented by both the eclecticism of his readings and his own keen perceptions, ranged beyond nineteenth century liberal feminist ideologies.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface		
Chapter One:	Introduction: Late nineteenth century sexual ideology.	1
Chapter Two:	<u>A Pair of Blue Eyes</u>	34
Chapter Three:	<u>Far From the Madding Crowd</u>	108
Chapter Four:	<u>The Return of the Native</u>	181
Chapter Five:	<u>Tess of the d'Urbervilles</u>	239
Chapter Six:	<u>Jude the Obscure</u>	300
Chapter Seven:	Conclusion 390	390
Appendix A:	The internal dating of <u>Far From the Madding Crowd</u>	396
Bibliography:		399

PREFACE

Throughout this study I have used the fourteen-volume New Wessex Edition of Hardy's novels, published by Macmillan in 1974-6. The exceptions to this are the following editions: Far From the Madding Crowd (Macmillan, London, 1949); The Return of the Native (Macmillan, London, 1943); and Jude the Obscure (Macmillan, London, 1971).

References to these editions are given in parentheses in the text, and are abbreviated as follows:

<u>Desperate Remedies</u>	DR
<u>Under the Greenwood Tree</u>	UGT
<u>A Pair of Blue Eyes</u>	PBE
<u>Far From the Madding Crowd</u>	FFMC
<u>The Return of the Native</u>	RN
<u>Two on a Tower</u>	TT
<u>The Woodlanders</u>	W
<u>Tess of the d'Urbervilles</u>	TD
<u>Jude the Obscure</u>	JO

Florence Emily Hardy's The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928 (Macmillan, London, 1975), is abbreviated to Life, and references to this text are also given in parentheses.

NOTE

A study of female sexuality in Hardy's novels necessarily excludes other aspects of his treatment of relationships between the sexes. Whilst acknowledging that all textual interpretations have limitations, and that to reveal one aspect of a work often means ignoring or eclipsing others, it needs to be said that if, in shading over Hardy's treatment of male sexuality, the hero appears to be unduly backgrounded, or even rendered a relative being, this is purely accidental.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Recent studies on Victorian sexual ideologies, codes and practices have yet to provide a fully documented analysis of what F. Barry Smith claims in Sexuality in Britain is a badly neglected area of historical study [1]. Twentieth century notions of Victorian female sexual norms tend to concentrate upon the polarised stereotypes of Madonna and Whore so fondly fostered by Victorians themselves. Yet this was a period of vast compass and change - a period of rapid industrialisation, urbanization, class and sex polarisation, spanning half a century or more. Just as it is important not to project current conceptions of class on to the classes of the nineteenth century, so it is equally important not to project notions of a single sexual ideology on to so complex and diverse a social infrastructure. The pendulum swung in the nineteenth century as in any other. The 1870s for example, which saw the publication of Hardy's first novel, was a decade of deeper pessimism, doubt and anxiety than the buoyant 1850s. The later period, marked by economic decline and a mood of

uncertainty, turned its back upon the vivacious 'Girl of the Period' of the 1860s and felt the impact instead of the grave, sedate liberal feminist expending her maidenly (and in some cases matronly) energies in reconstructing woman's role and status in society.

The Victorians themselves devised, or rather evolved, two entirely separate sexual ideologies for middle-class and working class women. The social roles of women in these classes were almost diametrically opposed. For the affluent, society prescribed a life of leisured indolence; for the labouring classes, back-breaking toil. No single ideology could justify both social roles. Accordingly, bio-medical thought had to provide two distinct views of women, one appropriate to the upper middle-classes (to which all other upwardly mobile classes aspired), and one appropriate to poor, working class women. Affluent women were regarded as inherently too refined and weak for anything but the most sedentary, trifling task, while the labouring poor were held to be vigorous and robust - equipped for hard labour. The former was inherently frail and sickly (the cult of female hypochondria), and the latter sickening - dirty, infected, a carrier of disease [2]. The double standard was not, therefore, restricted to an ideology promoting the well-known separate spheres desideratum. It was extended to compound class separation within a single sex - woman, in other words, was divided against her own kind.

To the modern reader of nineteenth century periodicals

and journals, it is evident that yet another twentieth-century preconception about Victorian sexology requires revision. This is the notion that the unspeakable subject itself remained unspoken. It did not - by men. From the most rudimentary of dialogues - the competitive interchange between commercial advertisers - which employed the delicate euphemistic language of the drawing room to enjoin women to purchase Dr X's potent remedy (abortifacient) for female 'troubles'; to the medical journals' dialogues upon, say, the efficacy of leech application to female sex organs as a cure for amenorrhea, or, alternatively the problems arising from use of the speculum (that usage could cause sexual arousal in the patient), public discussions upon issues of female sexuality were diverse, detailed, enthusiastically debated.

Recent revisionist theories on Victorian sexology notwithstanding, certain facts remain unsassailable. The silencing of women upon the subject of sex is one. Placing as many obstacles imaginable in the path of women seeking admittance to the medical profession, the male dominated establishment effectively elided the feminine voice from contemporary discussions on sex, as simultaneously that same establishment proceeded to anatomize each and every available aspect of female sexuality. There is also the inescapable fact of the middle-class woman's sexual incarceration. The middle-class male had available to him a means of sexual gratification which the female did not. The nineteenth-century brothel catered for a variety of

sexual tastes, and moreover, did so in a tacitly institutionalised form following the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864-69. Following the repeal of these Acts in 1886, males frequenting these establishments did not necessarily curtail their activities. If Ronald Pearsall's 'sin map' of London may be regarded as an index, business flourished [3]. With the possible exception of taverns, more geographical space was allocated to accommodate this particular custom than any other - including religious worship. For middle-class women on the other hand, sexual ignorance and chastity - deemed innocence - was of the essence. A pure woman had not simply to be virgin, she had also to be without sexual knowledge. Chastity and sexual ignorance was the fate of the middle-class wife obliged by law to submit to her husband's desires, where her equally unfortunate sexually active sister - the prostitute - was obliged by law to submit to periodic municipal cleansings of her person that she too might secure a living. It was a morality, Fernando Henriques writes, which fostered prurience and hypocrisy. From the stronghold of the chaste, monogamous family it enabled the individual to fulminate against all vicious living while clandestinely he sowed his wild oats. It encouraged wives to become ninnies while their husbands contracted venereal disease. It hounded 'fallen' women to become whores in the name of God. [4]

The earnest efforts - notably of Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill - to eradicate the separate spheres desideratum in which the sexual double standard was rooted, had to contend not only with a strong reactionary

opposition, but also with a virtually unassailable logic. This argued that sexually active, independent or assertive women would be threatened with a loss of what men called solicitude, and which feminists might call patriarchal tyranny.

Females from infancy to age are in a state of subjection, nor ought they to consider this a misfortune, on the contrary, it should convince them they are the objects of the fondest solicitude. [5]

No longer lovingly indulged, no longer accorded the special privileges enjoyed by domestic pets, but threatened instead by the daunting prospect that she would be expected to prove her worth in a world that had for so long inculcated in her a sense of her innate inadequacy and inferiority - the subjected wife was by no means always convinced that elimination of the double-standard would necessarily constitute an improvement in her condition. For, as one contemporary observed:

So long as...the marriage contract is what it is, the larger and more important section of the women of England must be legal nonentities. [6]

And legal nonentities require protection - solicitude.

But, as this same observer perceived:

That the effect of this is to limit the aspirations, to paralyze the energies, and to demoralize the characters of women, is not to be denied. They are born and educated, as it were, for total absorption. [7]

To what extent, in reality, the theories of the authoritative Dr Acton shaped a feminine consciousness - a

denial of the sexual self - remains controversial. Dr Acton argued that to ascribe erotic passions to healthy women was to cast a vile aspersion upon them. He pointed out that whereas female sexual activity was much in evidence in lunatic asylums - a characteristic of the abnormal, the diseased and the insane - healthy women were free from these drives [8]. Clearly if the Victorian wife, denied pre-marital sexual knowledge and experience, entered the nuptial bed out of fear and obligation, she was further disadvantaged by medical prognostications as to her innate sexual anaesthesia. Her bride-night anxieties, already manifold, had also to accommodate the notion of sexual activity as debilitating to her health (another current theory [9]). Her fond husband could only compound these fears and anxieties since however skilled he might be in the arts of defloration, he must inevitably take his pleasure at her expense - tension and frigidity do not make for painless sexual intercourse. Thereafter, given the limited opportunities, both moral and logistical, of breaking this sexual pattern with an alternative partner, the Victorian wife would surely end as she began, fearful, repelled, frigid. Did Dr Acton diagnose or prognosticate a condition? Either way, according to Pearsall, he was sufficiently influential to sway fellow medical practitioners into passing on his theories in surgeries throughout the country [10]; although of the important medical journals only The Lancet saw fit to uphold his views. Acton writes that:

as a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband, but only to please him, and but for the desire of maternity, would far rather be relieved of these attentions [11].

But 'as a general rule' the modest woman would enter the surgery for reasons of pathological disorder, so how representative of the 'general rule' would she be? Nevertheless, given the inordinate power exercised by the medical practitioner over the lives of Victorian women, we too are obliged to hearken to his voice. It is not difficult to imagine how women fleeing to the surgery with symptoms of nausea, abdominal pains, insomnia, sickness, headaches and so forth, would invite normative generalisations from their doctors. In the interests of professional reputation a sagacious manner and ready remedy might well have been imperative. Hence the prescription of analgesics or suppressive drugs, together with some fond advice about taking bed-rest and purges in equal measure, would implicitly underwrite Acton's prognostications. Possessing no remedy for the cause of the complaint, but having fostered hypochondria and invalidism in his patient, which would in turn confine her to the sick-bed as opposed to the matrimonial bed, the medical practitioner intentionally or otherwise, confirmed in her the suspicion that relieved of her husband's attentions her health would improve, whilst at the same time effectively relieving her - by virtue of his prescriptions - of those same attentions.

Acton's theories did not go unchallenged. The most vociferous members of the opposition were the socialist university lecturer Karl Pearson and the theorist and medical practitioner G.R.Drysdale. Each insisted that sexual satisfaction in both sexes was essential for the physical and moral well-being of the individual and society [12]. Pearson, calling for sexual equality and free sexual selection, reasoned that:

the sex-relationship, both as to form and substance, ought to be a pure question of taste, a simple matter of agreement between the man and the woman. [13]

It may plausibly be argued however, that these theories would have been totally meaningless to repressed, sexually inhibited Victorian wives denied all knowledge, or access to knowledge of what constituted their own 'pure...taste'. It is not surprising then that Acton's theories flourished right up to the end of the century, (his works were still published in the 1890s), and that subjected Victorian wives clung fiercely to the familiar sexless Madonna role.

The Madonna imago - which underwent subtle shifts from what George Eliot referred to as a 'doll-woman', to Coventry Patmore's 'Angel in the House', to Ruskin's 'stainless sceptre of womanhood', to the 'ennobled' figure of liberal feminist ideologies (increasing in iron stature as the century proceeds) - had its origins in pre-Victorian social changes. Françoise Basch writes that the emergence of the Madonna, a disembodied figure with symbolic references to the Virgin Mary:

was perhaps the most obvious result of an historical and ideological change which began in England well before Victoria, with the gradual climb to power of a middle-class imbued first with Calvinist Protestantism and, later, with Methodism... the cultural expression of this image reaches its climax...in the mid-Victorian age.[14]

The feminine ideal was an essential factor in the evolutionary dynamic of the middle-classes. As with all ruling-class values, Basch writes, its effect permeated the whole of society: 'The artisan William Lovett - although a militant trade-unionist and Chartist - paid homage to his wife in her role as guardian angel, and glorified 'woman's mission' in terms worthy of Mrs Ellis or Ruskin in Of Queens Gardens' [15].

Ruskin disposed of the 'rights' of women (his own quotation marks) by allotting, or rather claiming that God had allotted, separate spheres to the two sexes - the woman's being of course the hearth, and man's any portion of the world which remains. In common with Coventry Patmore he offered Victorian womankind gilded dreams of a veiled, grave and meek womanhood, whose power lay in wielding influence behind the throne. Thus the cherished toy-wife, pampered, medicated, eulogised by the great poets - her sceptre-bearing image concordant with the Motherland's banner-waving imperialistic expansionism - achieved, by the 1870s, her ideological seniority.

At a more prosaic level she also became a commodity. The more conspicuously idle and ornamental, the better she served as a status symbol for her prosperous spouse. Her

sexual ignorance bespoke her moral innocence, invalidism implicitly testified to her ultra-refined sensibility, and her costly, decorative presence proclaimed her husband's worldly success. Ridicule and patronisation were effective weapons against the occasional rebel, whose only course was to conform or flee. Florence Nightingale, who demanded to know why women were endowed with passion, intellect, moral sense, yet were allotted a place in society where none of these could be exercised, fled [16]. Intellectually gifted women took to the nom-de-plume and their less fortunate sisters to hysteria. Hysteria appeared, write Barabara

Ehrenreich and Deidre English:

not only as fits and fainting, but in every other form: hysterical loss of voice, loss of appetite, hysterical coughing or sneezing, and, of course, hysterical screaming, laughing, and crying. The disease spread wildly, yet almost exclusively in a select clientele of urban middle and upper-middle-class...women between the ages of fifteen and forty-five.

Doctors became obsessed with this 'most confusing, mysterious and rebellious of diseases'. In some ways it was the ideal disease for doctors: it was never fatal, and it required an almost endless amount of medical attention. But it was not an ideal disease from the point of view of the husband and family of the afflicted woman. Gentle invalidism had been one thing; violent fits were quite another. So hysteria put doctors on the spot. It was essential to their professional self-esteem either to find an organic basis for the disease, and cure it, or to expose it as a clever charade.

There was plenty of evidence for the latter point of view. With mounting suspicion, the medical literature began to observe that hysterics never had fits when alone, and only when there was something soft to fall on...The doctor's accusations had some truth to them: the hysterical fit, for many women, must have been the only acceptable outburst - of rage, of despair, or simply of energy - possible. [17]

Treatment of hysteria - prior to Sigmund Freud's dissection of the female nature by psychoanalysis - ranged from giving the patient cold baths, shaving her head, suffocating her until the fit passed, beating her about the face and body with wet towels, and embarrassing her in front of family and friends. 'Ridicule to a woman of sensitive mind, is a powerful weapon', advised a certain Dr.F.C.Skey, 'but there is not an emotion equal to fear and threat of personal chastisement' [18]. But the ultimate 'cure' was effected

by gynaecological dissection:

It was the field of gynaecological surgery that provided the most brutally direct medical treatments of female 'personality disorders'...At least one of their treatments was effective: surgical removal of the clitoris as a cure for sexual arousal...More widely practised was the surgical removal of the ovaries - ovariectomy, or 'female castration'. Thousands of these operations were performed from 1860 to 1890...Patients were often brought in by their husbands, who complained of their unruly behaviour. When returned to their husbands, 'castrated', they were 'tractable, orderly, industrious and cleanly', according to Dr. Battey. (Today ovariectomy, accompanying a hysterectomy, for example, is not known to have these effects on the personality. One can only wonder what, if any, personality changes Dr. Battey's patients really went through). Whatever the effects, some doctors claimed to have removed from fifteen hundred to two thousand ovaries; in Barker-Benfield's words, they 'handed them around at medical society meetings on plates like trophies'. [19]

With hysteria, the cult of hypochondria was carried to its

logical conclusion:

Society had assigned affluent women to a life of confinement and inactivity, and medicine had justified this assignment by describing women as innately sick. In the epidemic of hysteria, women were both accepting their inherent 'sickness' and finding a way to rebel against an intolerable social role. [20]

This then was the 1870s socio-sexual climate of biological class-warfare into which the young Thomas Hardy brazenly attempted a literary foray. It was entitled The Poor Man and the Lady and it failed. A more circumspect work followed in 1871, claimed a literary market, and with one eye on the proprieties and another upon developing a poetic prose style to codify in metacommentary the authentic iconoclastic 'voice', he successfully established a reputation within the decade. With each successive novel he drew increasingly closer to his original critique - his attack upon class and sex division in a society in which women were subjected and exploited by men. The talented, physically fit heroine brought by male coercive devaluations of her person to a submissive, defeated, and in many cases an entombed demise, constitutes a major theme in Hardy's novels.

From Elfride's struggle to nerve herself as an individual seeking to assert her talents and desires in a man's world - mastering his games, submitting her work to his editorship - who wishes to confront her lover candidly on matters of sex, through to Sue Bridehead's quest for liberation and a world in which she may live free from the strictures of a moral code preordained by men and alien to her consciousness, the Wessex heroine struggles arduously to survive in a world which unreasonably demands more of her than - in Darwinian terms - mere habitat adaptation. As an intelligent, educated adult, she anticipates forming her own plan of living as do her male peers, but is denied

this right by society. Even where she is not formally denied this right she is effectively discouraged by her enforced subjection, from pursuing her own ends. The 'opiate' of subjection, Mill said in his 1867 debates, 'benumbs' the mind and conscience of many women. Hardy's heroines number among the many. Subjected to male authority, condescension, prejudice and exploitation, the Wessex heroine is brought from youthful vigour to, either, psychological entombment or an untimely death. It is not - of course - Hardy's intention to treat with triumph but with struggle. And since his sympathies are with the oppressed classes struggling for equal rights and opportunities, the implicit criticism at the heart of his texts is directed against a society which seeks to suppress its dissidents and silence its radicals: the women who would rebel are psychologically maimed that they may not strike back at their oppressors.

Humanity's ability to channel the energy and resources of the natural world is to Hardy the hallmark of human achievement. Mankind obstructing the energy and potential of so creative a body in nature as its own womankind clearly defeats its own ends. What might be termed the eugenical backlash in Hardy's dénouements is that the intelligent and fit are in danger of being bred out. There is no regeneration of the genetically strong, healthy and intelligent woman in Hardy. The subtly subversive effect of this upon the late Victorian reader would have been profound. The post-Darwinian age was deeply concerned with

the perfectibility of the species - the nation was as strong and powerful as its healthy breeding members. In terms of evolutionary struggle such sheer waste can only threaten the species as a whole for whom individual variation within the group, and its preservation through regeneration, as every Victorian evolutionist would have known, is critical to species adaptation. Hardy's microcosmic Victorian world reveals therefore an alarming retardation. This in evolutionary terms predicates a fall from optimum survival chances. It is the case in Hardy after all, that his less conventional heroines are not only fertile but are also potentially fine human specimens - classic models for the eugenicist, as their author, with his close following of contemporary debates in this area, would have been aware [21]. In his, and his heroines' challenge to the status quo - which favours and fosters a more uniformly conventional feminine model (Henry Knight's virginal, sexually untried maiden; Gabriel Oak's meek and comely woman; Angel Clare's child-of-nature innocent; and Jude's ethereal, sexless Alma Mater), the call is for a reassessment of socio-sexual codes. That is to say, Hardy is arguing against the perpetuation of the subjected type as an ideal to be promoted and nurtured (the object of fondest solicitude), which is virginal (unproductive), inutile (redundant) and subordinate (inferior): in other words a type programmed for obsolescence.

Feminist critics have argued that to create the kind of painful denouement Hardy creates for his heroines is to

'punish' them. How this argument survives the Wessex novels seems problematical. For Hardy's world from first to last, is one in which the strong creative individual is seen to be crushed by a social system in which power is to be retained at all costs by a privileged, reactionary few. It is not a world in which non-conformism or rebellion will be tolerated. Consequently the oppressed classes - men of the working-classes and women of both the middle and working-classes - include among their number such casualties as Stephen Smith whose low expectations of success obstruct his pursuit of the beloved, and Jude whose too easily defeated spirit is also characteristic of the culturally conditioned low achiever. Stephen is, at the last, deprived of love and fulfilment, and Jude of life itself. Other Hardy heroes of more indeterminate class - Troy, Wildeve, Clym, Alec and Giles - also suffer deprivation and/or death. If, and this seems highly improbable, it is Hardy's intention to 'punish' his characters, then this is meted out in relatively equal measures. More to the point is the fact of sheer waste. The sensual, adventurous, rebellious heroine can only be crushed (as her sister in life was 'castrated') under the conditions that prevail. She is - in Darwinian terms - a being fully developed:

through natural selection, or survival of the fittest...(to) compete with other beings, and thus increase (her) number.

(But), pain or suffering of any kind, if long continued, causes depression and lessens the power of action. [22]

It is narrow and supersubtle to speak in terms of punishing the heroine. It is society's self-inflicted punishment which is more to the point. The pain and suffering inflicted upon woman lessens the power of action in society as a whole which would benefit considerably from a little more of the inchoate self-delight and rebounding vigour characteristic of so many Hardy heroines. Or, as Darwin argued the case: if pain and suffering depresses and lessens the power of action, 'pleasurable sensations on the other hand may be long continued without any depressing effect; on the contrary, they stimulate the whole system to increased action' [23].

From 1873 and the publication of his third novel to 1897 and his last, Hardy was alternately approved and ridiculed for creating heroines who did not conform to Mrs Grundy's book of rules. Critics levelled accusations of misogynism at him for detailing imperfections in his women - traits Hardy clearly regarded as realistic, as compounding the whole person. It is after all the doll-madonna stereotype that degrades by depersonalisation. Hardy created heroines as unlike the contemporary media-promoted stereotype as possible that each might be apprehended as lovable in her own right - human and imperfect. This is fundamental to the equality of the sexes principle since the imperfect male's lovability is not contingent upon his angelic perfection.

Latterly, charges against Hardy turned upon what Mrs Oliphant described as Zola-esque filth [24]. The less

acerbic R.Y Tyrrell writing in The Fortnightly Review (1896), perceived that:

Mr.Hardy has been creeping nearer and nearer the fruit which has been so profitable to the French novelists but which till quite recently his English fellow-craftsman has been forbidden to touch. The Woodlanders, A Pair of Blue Eyes, and above all Tess, have shown Mr. Hardy's eminent skill in going as near French lubricité as a writer can venture without awakening the non-conformist conscience in our strangely-constituted society, in fact in hoodwinking the not very perspicacious Mr.Podsnap and Mrs. Grundy. [25]

Hardy endured twenty-three years of polemical sexological commentary from his critics. It was tantamount to over-exposure in an age of 'not very perspicacious' Mr Podsnaps and Mrs Grundys. He was unable to distance himself from critical attacks and never ceased to experience these with the utmost pain. Why? Because his feminine creations were sublimations of an alter-ego? Because they were the restored lost loved object, the lost young mother of infancy? [26]. We may only conjecture, but one thing is plain: Hardy's identification with his heroines, which Irving Howe perceives as his 'openness to the feminine principle' [27], verges upon immersion so profound that public rejection of their acceptability becomes in turn Hardy's sense of his own unacceptability - he too is alien and the pain is acute. Notice for example how the sentiment of his poem 'In Tenebris II' [28] in which the speaker fears himself to be as one 'shaped awry', a misfit, coheres with a cancelled passage of the Life which speaks of,

that absolute want of principle in a reviewer which

gives one a start of fear as to a possible crime he may commit against one's person, such as a stab or a shot in a dark lane for righteousness' sake. [29]

These manifestations of incipient paranoia occurred at a time when Hardy was mourning attacks upon Tess in the early 1890s.

Did he, one wonders, ever perceive his own experience as a fragmented individual alternately inflated and diminished, reassured and ridiculed by public acclaim and censure, to be analogous to the predicament of the oppressed Victorian woman? Certainly the intensity of his heroines' struggle to assert self and identity, while remaining permanently on the brink of male judgement, seems at times to be Hardy's own emotional pain as he enters this into the Life (see Chapter VI).

In addition to this prolonged exposure to sexological polemics Hardy was also daily confronted with pedagogical diatribes upon women in the press. He was a regular reader of the major periodicals [30] - the right-wing, and in Hardy's words, 'influential' Saturday Review [31], the liberal Fortnightly Review, and the would be inoffensive Cornhill under editorship of Leslie Stephen which cautiously rejected The Return of the Native. This latter event seems to have been the consequence of publication difficulties encountered by Stephen and Hardy over the serialisation of Far From the Madding Crowd which provoked complaints of impropriety despite Stephen's efforts at

circumspection. Of the remaining major periodicals the 'gentle' Spectator (Stephen's adjective) was also regularly studied by Hardy. The word studied is used advisedly, for Hardy did not merely read, he took notes - copiously [32].

These autobiographical factors are important for the following reasons. Firstly, there is the fact of Hardy's keen, continuing interest in current affairs. Media researchers comment that:

Readers may not only learn about public issues and other matters from the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis the media places upon it.

The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think but it is stunningly successful in telling people what to think about. [33]

Secondly, there is the fact that the Victorian press, while successfully telling people what to think about, tells its own prejudices. In the constricted space of its formatted columns it tells of a deep-seated hostility towards women. Barbed jibes and cold censure jostle with eulogies upon the Angel/Madonna as if the male writer - armed with the pen/phallus [34], a thrusting style and a columnist's pinning-down urgency - sought literally to assault womankind with the aid of the black and white letter and the killing word.

The point to be made then is this. Hardy appears to have been totally resistant to the sexism that lay behind these dialogues. Possibly he was forearmed from the outset with what ultimately became his lifelong fidelity to

Fourier-ist notions of free womanhood, free love, free sexual association. For there is a noticeable lack of quotations on woman-related topics drawn from contemporary sources in the Hardy notebooks. Yet clearly he was closely in touch with current views and events, and there exists, anterior to each and every one of his female characterisations a contemporary feminine dilemma. If it is not the struggle to break out of the stereotyped role prescribed for her by man and society, it is the attempt to flee the constraints of convention (but without Florence Nightingale's success), or a refutation of Victorian marriage codes, or a struggle to attain selfhood or liberation. Throughout Hardy's discourses (in contrast to those of Dickens), hostile, degrading, ridiculing or patronising language is noticeably absent. With the exception of Grundyan overtones invoked (and subsequently abalienated) by Hardy to glaze the text of A Pair of Blue Eyes with a veneer of propriety (see Chapter II), the voice of censorship and disapproval is barely detectable in the Wessex novels, whereas it announces itself stridently in the press. This is not to say that Hardy did not pick up questions and idioms in current view or review as, daily reading about the world he corporeally inhabited he daily wrote about another. There are, for example, floating images of property and theft in Far From the Madding Crowd which suggest he might well have picked up images from current feminist debates upon the Married Woman's Property Act (1870). There are also

possible linguistic/imagistic links between
The Saturday Review's post-mortem on George Sand and
The Return of the Native (see Chapters 111 and IV
respectively).

E.M. Palmegiano writes that the interest in women was part of that favourite Victorian pastime, evaluating the effects of industrialisation:

In magazine after magazine, every aspect of that phenomenon was microscopically detailed. It seemed logical in the course of this scrupulous investigation, to see how the majority of the population, the female, had fared. How to understand a group so disparate? It seemed essential to discover some 'law of femininity'. Once society knew what woman was supposed to be, it could make adjustments in her condition, could bring her back to her proper orbit. But the more that writers sought to delineate true womanhood, the more confused they appeared. [35]

Daily, weekly, monthly, Hardy would then have been presented with stimulating, exhausting and exhaustive commentaries upon the condition of women in Victorian society. Or rather they were promotional commentaries. One thing strikes the modern reader of these writings - their authors appear to have been better equipped for pedagogy than pupilage. Inquiry couches itself in proselytism, and setting the world to rights in missionary zeal. It is clear from an overall reading of the papers that to teach rather than to question the rules of behaviour, sexual codes, even the sexual expectations laid down for women, motivated the majority of these authors - as in Hardy's fiction it also motivates the pedagogical reviewer Henry Knight.

It is noteworthy, Palmegiano writes:
that the majority of known writers, as well as editors and publishers, were men, even among the personnel of those publications directed specifically to women...it appears that men...had a voice in shaping attitudes about the female. [36]

Palmegiano makes the additional observation that research has uncovered almost no concern about the behavioural patterns of men in the particular male roles of husband, father, or son: 'Does this omission, the author wonders, indicate such confidence about what constituted masculinity as to make discussion unnecessary or such insecurity as to make it terrifying?' [37] It is a moot point and one which aptly expresses what we understand to be a typical Victorian dichotomy.

Hardy was no collectivist. 'A law of femininity' would have sounded dangerously simplistic to him. If contemporary dialogues upon the Woman Question, their unremitting pedagogy, their thirst for constructing categories - for pinning woman down - find little parallel in his own fiction, this would be wholly intentional. He would have his women, his heroines, 'act as they will' he says in Candour in English Fiction [38]. This was of course subject to public permission and the public did not (at first) permit - women should not act as they will. This would be foolhardy, anti-social, and unfeminine. Obedience to the common will was imperative - and the common will was male. But obedience and self-suppression in the Hardy heroine, as has already been stressed, leads

only to misery and destruction. By the time Hardy comes to Tess this is openly his stand. The middle-class parson's son concedes at the last his own foolhardy, anti-social behaviour. It is his hypocritical double-standard which destabilises the love-bond and initiates the tragic destruction of lives.

Hardy was clearly no convert to periodical gossellings. Or to invert that statement, it is evident from close readings of nineteenth century periodical literatures, that there is no identifiable Hardy 'voice' there. From the liberal feminist voices of Millicent Garrett Fawcett and John Morley in The Fortnightly - very smooth, bland, and cool in their deliveries - or the placatory tones of Leslie Stephen in The Cornhill; to the strident exhortations of Andrew Lang in the New Review and Longmans Magazine and Mrs Lynn Linton's eruptions in The Saturday, there is not one that can be singled out as recognisably Hardyian. It might be argued that the voice of the liberal feminist is detectable in the locutions of his Sue Bridehead. But as is argued in Chapter VI, this is more apparent than real.

Hardy's attitude to the liberal feminist, in so far as this may be determined from his private correspondence, may be outlined as follows. There is evidence of his support of the suffragists [39], and yet more constructive support of the radical feminist Mona Caird [40]. But there are, in his dealings with the liberal feminist Millicent Garrett Fawcett, signs of diffidence. He declined her request to

write a short story 'showing how the trifling with the physical element in love leads to corruption' [41].

Tactfully he suggests that,

to do the thing well there should be no mincing of matters, and all details should be clear and directly given. This I fear the British public would not stand just now; though we are educating it by degrees [42].

Hardy's ideas about trifling with the physical element in love are not Millicent Fawcett's. His treatment of Alec d'Urberville's and Angel Clare's manner of trifling with the voluptuous Tess, is hardly likely to be followed up with a work which - not 'mincing' matters - would satisfy Millicent Fawcett's prudent notions of a suitable book of instruction for 'boys and girls' [43]. Personal dealings apart, Hardy nowhere exhibits signs of sympathy for the woman-as-man's-conscience desideratum promoted by some liberal feminists who found common areas between Mill's free individual (and, because free, therefore above mediocre - even 'noble'), and the Ruskinian ideal. Nor did he share the liberal feminist's idealisation of marriage as a lay version of holy orders into which woman entered out of a sense of vocation [44]. Nor would he have felt that the decorous, genteel, middle-class suffragist augured well - in terms of psychological adaptation - for liberation [45]. Non-alignment might best describe Hardy's attitude to the feminists - although the unequivocal support he gave to Mona Caird points, if anywhere, to his leanings towards the radical socialist fringe.

By rights, if there was any contemporary 'voice' at all with whom Hardy might have allied, it should have been Frederick Harrison's. Harrison wrote for The Fortnightly and also addressed the public face to face at Positivist meetings at Newton Hall (Life p220). Of all influential Victorians, Harrison was best known to Hardy. He owned his books, went to his meetings, familiarised himself with his thought 'through what appears to have been both extensive and careful reading of his works' [46], and, most important of all perhaps, became his longstanding friend. But while Hardy neither radically opposes nor supports Harrison's views in the public arena, possibly from feelings of loyalty, he quietly, methodically works against them in the novels. Harrison, for example, railed against sex outside marriage, declaring a 'loose man' to be 'a foul man...anti-social a beast'. 'It is not a subject', Harrison claimed, 'that decent men do discuss' [47]. The decent Hardy discusses it. From Sergeant Troy to Alec d'Urberville, loose men, less than foul and beastly, and certainly no more anti-social than the puritanical moral bullies, enter the Wessex novels. To Harrison's assertion that women are unfitted by the laws of nature to undertake work outside the home, Hardy answers with Tess. 'Let us teach them that this specious agitation (to work) must ultimately degrade them, sterilize them, unsex them', Harrison pleaded:

The glory of woman is to be tender, loving, pure, inspiring in her home; it is to raise the moral tone of every household, to refine every man with whom, as wife, daughter, sister, or friend she has

intimate converse...the higher duties of love, beauty, patience, and compassion, can only be performed by by women, and by women only so long as it is recognised to be their true and essential field...Women must choose to be either women or abortive men...the Family is the real social unit...and in the Family woman is as completely supreme as is man in the State. [48]

(How to achieve complete supremacy in the family with no legal existence?) Harrison's use of the upper-case elsewhere in this article is particularly revealing. Throughout his address, first delivered at Newton Hall, on September 5th 1891, and published in the Fortnightly in the following month, the stress is upon 'Home' and 'Family' throughout. But the point to be made is this. Hardy's Tess - degraded by labour certainly - is neither sterilized nor unsexed by work. Neither is she an abortive man. On the contrary, she is Harrison's tender, loving, pure, inspiring woman conspicuously located by Hardy outside the domestic sphere and at some considerable distance from the citadel/Home.

In the final analysis it is apparent that despite total immersion in the vigorous and continuing debates upon women, Hardy's ideological platform, while addressing a contemporary auditor upon contemporary problems, is broadly compassed. His glance sweeps back through history to Sappho and classical Greece and forward to the twentieth century through George Sand and the French socialist Fourier, to rest inquiringly but not approvingly upon his own time and clime.

In conclusion there are one or two minor points to be made. The first relates to the problematical concept of a feminine consciousness. There is in Hardy a distinction implicitly made between 'female' and 'feminine'. He recognised the need for considering the life of the sensations - notably feminine sensations - and this he treats with in the sense of a psychological or a cultural rather than a biological 'femininity'. His implicit distinction between 'female' and 'feminine' (see intersexual imagery, Chapter IV) is similar to Robert J. Stoller's use of the terms in distinguishing sex and gender:

Gender is a term that has psychological or cultural rather than biological connotations. If the proper terms for sex are 'male' and 'female', the corresponding terms for gender are 'masculine' and 'feminine'; these latter may be quite independent of sex. [50]

Secondly, and as a corollary to this, Hardy accentuates, by invocation of Greek allusions, the nascent sexual interdependency of his characters. Greek goddesses have this advantage for Hardy who for aesthetic reasons needs to preserve the uniqueness and stature of his central character that, unlike the Christian Madonna, they are accorded mortal weaknesses and lusts. This tacitly dispenses with the bourgeois stereotype. Moreover since there is, in Greek mythology, no concept of a single divinity or a single devil, the implicit polarisation between good and evil is eliminated in Hardy's world. His characters, including women, are accorded virtues and vices

in varying degrees - both sexes partaking of a moral universe in which variability and transmutation predicate positive adaptation not to preordained roles but to immediate human concerns.

Finally, it needs to be said that fictional characters cannot be considered reflections of reality any more than the fictional stereotypes promoted by the Victorian media represented 'real' persons. But, as Francoise Basch points out:

It must always be borne in mind that the work of a novelist...is not only an individual creation ex-nihilo but comes from deep within the culture and ideology of a period; and the ideology is in part determined by the economic and social infrastructure. [51]

So it is for Thomas Hardy. In addressing himself to, or describing a reality - the reality of the subjective consciousness or creative vision in which personal bias, interest, genius, come into play, as does mere fantasy - he draws deeply from the culture and ideology of his period, but indubitably with a profound sense of his own separation from it. The intelligent, exiled consciousness acutely aware of the alien in himself unacclimatized to the world in perspective, draws from it self-consciously and hyper-critically - longing, we sense, to peel away the over-hardened attitudes of his time and clime to see into the heart of things - as he might have put it.

'Novels', writes Valentine Cunningham, loose, baggy monsters, mixed media - have had more overt intercourse with society, with - to borrow the Marxist term - the economic and social base, than any other literary mode. And in Victorian

novels - looser, baggier, more monstrously spacious, and more mixed, as a rule, than novels before or since - the bonds of this relationship are that much more clamorously obvious. [52]

In its closeness to social actualities, Cunningham continues, 'the Victorian novel urges upon us all...the importance of its contingency and of the particularity of its characters...One must boldly declare that (it) badly needs a lot more of what E.M.Forster unfairly contemned as pseudo-scholarship' [53].

Treatment of sexual relationships - specifically female sexuality - within the limits more or less readable by Mrs Grundy, which this thesis proceeds to examine in the context of Hardy's major novels, demanded of the Victorian prose poet a complex sub-textual encoding of meaning. That Hardy felt the need poetically to explore an area otherwise confined to the pedagogical literatures of the day and to the anatomized analyses of medical scientists, when all that was required of a successful novelist was, in terms of contingency, conventional treatment of love and marriage, testifies to a personal need in him to restore to human love relationships their fundamental sexual dynamic. Perhaps too, it testifies to a need to hand back to woman the sexual nature that is her birthright - the life-enhancing, self-delighting healthy appetite that he accords to so many of his heroines but which the world they inhabit, as was the case with their sisters in life, cannot permit them to own.

NOTES

1. F. Barry Smith, 'Sexuality in Britain 1800-1900', A Widening Sphere (Bloomington, Indiana, 1971) Edited by Martha Vicinus, pp182-198. See also Fraser Harrison's The Dark Angel (Glasgow, 1977); Steven Marcus' The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England (London, 1967); Eric Trudgill's Madonnas and Magdalens: the Origins and Development of Victorian Sexual Attitudes (London, 1976); and Brian Harrison, 'Underneath the Victorians', Victorian Studies 10, 1966 - 1967, pp239,262
2. See Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness (New York, 1974) pp23-33
3. Ronald Pearsall The Worm in the Bud :The World of Victorian Sexuality (Middlesex, 1969) Frontispiece.
4. Fernando Henriques, 'Modern Sexuality', Prostitution and Society, Vol 111 (London, 1968) p 231
5. Quoted by Katherine Moore in her introduction to Victorian Wives (London, 1974) xiv
6. North British Review Aug. 1855. xlvi, pp557-8
7. ibid., p558
8. See William Acton The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs in Childhood, Youth, Adult Age, and Advanced Life Considered in their Physiological, Social, and Moral Relations (London, 1857; 3rd ed., London 1862)
9. Ehrenreich and English, op. cit., p25
10. See Pearsall's discussions on medical practice, health and hygiene, op. cit.
11. Acton, op. cit., pp101,2
12. Lloyd Fernando New Women in the Late Victorian Novel (Pennsylvania and London, 1977) p14
13. ibid., p16
14. Francois Basch Relative Creatures : Victorian Women in Society and the Novel. 1837-67 (London, 1974) xviii, translated by Anthony Rudolf
15. ibid., xviii

16. Quoted by Moore, op.cit., xiii See also Florence Nightingale's Cassandra (1852), also referred to by Elaine Showalter in A Literature of Their Own: British Novelists from Bronte to Lessing (London, 1987)
17. Ehrenreich and English, op.cit., pp40,41
18. Ehrenreich and English, op.cit., p42
19. Ehrenreich and English, op.cit., pp34,35
20. Ehrenreich and English, op.cit., pp42,43
21. See Hardy's notebook entries published in The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy (Gothenburg, 1974) 2 vols. Edited by Lennart Bjork Vol.1 pp95,145,153
22. Quoted by Harold Y.Vanderpool (Editor) Darwin and Darwinism (London, 1973) p63
23. Ibid., p63
24. Mrs Oliphant, 'The Anti-Marriage League', Blackwood's Magazine, Jan. 1896, clix, pp135-49
25. R.Y.Tyrrell, The Fortnightly Review June 1896, lxxv, n.s.lxxv, pp857-64
26. See Hanna Segal, 'A Psycho-analytical Approach to Aesthetics', International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, 1952, xxxiii, pp196-207
27. Irving Howe Thomas Hardy (London, 1968) p109
28. The Variorum Edition of the Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy, (London, 1979) Edited by James Gibson, p168
29. F.R.S. Southerington Hardy's Vision of Man (London, 1971) p136
30. See references in the Life to The Saturday Review, pp 39, 60, 75, 88, 91, 95, 295; to The Spectator, pp 7, 84, 91, 98, 417; to The Fortnightly Review, pp 225, 332, 354, 355, 365, 375, 436; and to Cornhill Magazine, pp 95, 96, 97, 102, 103, 127, 305, 318, 323, 385
31. See Life p 95.
32. See notebook entries, Bjork, op. cit.
33. D.L.Shaw and Maxwell E.McCombs Mass Media and Society (London, 1979) pp411,412
34. This is Sandra M.Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's collocation. See their introduction to The Madwoman in the Attic (London, 1979)

35. E.M. Palmegiano Women and British Periodicals. 1832-1867 (New York and London, 1976) xi
36. Ibid., xvii
37. Ibid., xvii
38. Quoted by Harold Orel (Editor) Hardy's Personal Writings (Kansas, 1966) pp128 - 130
39. See Hardy's letter to Lady Agnes Grove, Aug 11. 1899, published in The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, 2 vols., Vol 2, p226, edited by Richard L. Purdy and Michael Millgate.
Hardy writes: 'I have read with much interest your article on the Objections to Woman-Suffrage, partly because I agree with you in most of your opinions, and further because the article is itself a forcible piece of rhetoric'.
The article was published in The Humanitarian, Aug 1899. The Purdy/Millgate footnote (ibid.) does not mention however that Agnes Grove argues forcibly against 'Objections to Woman's Suffrage'.
40. Cf. Hardy's letter to Percy Bunting, 13.1.90. Published in Purdy and Millgate, op. cit., Vol.1. pp207,8
41. Letter from Hardy to Fawcett dated Apr 14. 1892. Purdy and Millgate Vol I, op.cit., pp263,4
42. Purdy and Millgate op.cit., p263,4
43. Purdy and Millgate op.cit., p263,4
44. For a fuller discussion of all these points see Chapter VI
45. See Hardy's letter to Fawcett, Nov 30 1906, held in the Fawcett Library, London. Hardy here invests some hope in the woman's vote, that, 'it will break up the present pernicious convention in respect of manners, customs, religions, 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 sanity)'.
46. See Bjork, op.cit., Vol I. p362. Bjork writes: 'Of the many personal contacts that Hardy had with the English Positivists, the one with Frederick Harrison may well have been the most important. Despite occasional differences of opinion - made public on both sides (see, for instance, the 'Apology', Orel, p.53) - their friendship lasted more than forty years, as Hardy affectionately recalled, on hearing about Harrison's death, in a letter to his friend's son in 1923: "...I had known him for probably a longer period than you may be aware of: from the time when he was living

in Westbourne Terrace, and I was a resident in a London suburb, you being then a boy" '.

For a more detailed discussion of Hardy and Harrison see Bjork's forthcoming Psychological Vision and Social Criticism in the Novels of Thomas Hardy

47. Quoted by Gertrude Himmelfarb in On Liberty and Liberalism (New York, 1974) p301
48. Frederick Harrison, 'The Emancipation of Women', The Fortnightly Review cxcviii, Oct 1 1891. pp437-452
49. Robert J. Stoller Sex and Gender: On the Development of Masculinity and Femininity (New York, 1968) x; see also Eleanor E. Maccoby The Development of Sex Differences (Stanford, 1966)
50. Stoller, *ibid.*, p9
51. Françoise Basch, *op.cit.*, xviii
52. Valentine Cunningham Everywhere Spoken Against. Dissent in the Victorian Novel (Oxford, 1977) pp1,2
53. *ibid.*, pp5,7

Chapter Two

A Pair of Blue Eyes

It is evident to readers of the Life that while struggling to observe the proprieties in the early days, Hardy felt more ambivalent than deferential towards the socio/sexual codes and conventions to which he was expected to conform. One mid-Victorian convention held for example, that any discussion of female sexuality should properly be confined to the medical journals where it would be examined under the heading of disorders and malfunctions of the female organism. And although this kind of scientificism [1] would have been familiar enough to Hardy who deplored the use of what he called 'empirical panaceas' as solutions to social ills, and who was in turn accused of rendering his women too voluptuous for a public taste that equated voluptuousness with mental and moral disorder; it must nonetheless have presented something of a conundrum to the young poet whose early verse reveals no instinctive impulse to make the same equation.

Hardy the auto-didact, who negotiated Fourier, John Stuart Mill and the Greek Testament in the same eclectic breath so to speak, and who turned to folk custom not bourgeois urban convention for his sexual guidelines, seems

to have been singularly ill-equipped for novel and serial writing with their strict, puritanical codes. He was not, and was never to become, a media writer in the sense of desiring to communicate interpositionally. Yet paradoxically this was precisely what was required of periodical writers - that is, a facility for speaking for, and on behalf of, the community. Hardy had evidently determined that he would be able to circumnavigate those proprieties that his editors were from time to time obliged to spell out to him. And despite the anarchic streak in his nature which would not admit of rule, (to the enrichment of his prose and verse as it transpired), he conformed remarkably well; particularly given the added burden of his having to accommodate a profound and continuing sense of his own alienation - his life-long sense of being an "outsider".

After an initial foray into what Hardy called a 'socialist story' (Life p143) - The Poor Man and the Lady [2] - the immediate tendency was to avoid polemics. Giving vent to what he referred to as his revolutionary fervour, but what Alexander Macmillan preferred to describe as 'chastisement' that falls 'harmless from its very excess' (Life p58), gave way to the adoption of a more circumspect revisionist line. A 'passion for reforming the (class-divided sex-divided) world' (Life p 61), was duly moderated and a more disciplined, strategic approach became Hardy's modus operandi. Similarly, towards that other equally controversial, intensely debated subject - sexual

relationships - circumspection and strategy would come before open opposition. This last disputatious area was for Hardy not only a less touchy area than that of class-warfare, but also one more immediately accessible to his deeper knowledge, intuition and insight. For whatever those fugitive youthful Dorset days had forbidden him, it was not an intimate contact with, or understanding of, the opposite sex.

However, it was now demanded of him that he address himself to a less permissive sexual ethic - a demand that he met adroitly, and with no irreparable loss to his personal integrity and vision. For by side-stepping certain of the more unacceptable (to Hardy) culturally circumscriptive conventions, he managed to contain his revolutionary zeal without unduly compromising those ideals which fuelled it. There was for example, the literary convention of marriage; the de rigueur line which stressed marriage as the ultimate and most desirable goal. Kenneth Graham writes,

The happy ending...can be considered a critical principle more by its tacit acceptance than by its open recommendation. [3]

But it was not tacitly accepted by Hardy. Paying lip-service in the early years was the most he would concede; a lip-service that in fact bespoke its own nominalism by replacing conviction with equivocation: the author's testimonial to his own scepticism. Alternatively, there was the literary convention of holding out

growth-to-self-knowledge or moral-consciousness as the ultimate line of progression. Behind this convention lay the the assumption that the process of becoming, or being brought to perfection, was synonymous with becoming socialised according to prevailing moral codes and social mores - clearly not an assumption that Hardy made. Such conventions as these, or rather the ethical systems they exemplified and promoted, did not accord in any way with his reconstructionist theories. And if they could not be openly controverted, which Hardy's early writing experience told him they could not, they could perhaps be disabled. Instead, for example, of making the prerequisite association between love and marriage there would be no such link. Love, including sexual passion, would lead to no fulfilling union of the institutionalised kind. It would remain a feature of human nature not a feature of a system. It would await, not the bridal chamber, but the (as yet unforeseeable) day of liberation for men and women and their sexual equality. Sexual love, Hardy insisted, is a physiological fact, a thing in itself, and it cannot and should not be tailored to such illfitting social institutions as the Victorian Institution of Matrimony.

Where, for example, sexuality hovered on the fringes of the popular literatures of the day, where heroines might (analogically or metonymically) flush, blush, glow, pant, tremble and palpitate, and heroes might stalk, strut, transfix, or thrust - or display erectile signals of stiffened bearing and stalwart posture, (accented

imagistically by the ubiquitous cane or umbrella) - the perceptible flow of all such gestural (sexual) indicators would openly tend in a single direction. This was not towards sexual consummation for its own erotic sake, but marriage. Passion - in other words - would, and should, be clearly seen to be a means to an end and not an end in itself.

To this ethic Hardy made few concessions - although, as he later wrote in Candour in English Fiction there were in fact, only two courses open to him. Either he produced in his characters:

the spurious effect of their being in harmony with social forms and ordinances... (Or) by leaving them alone to act as they will, he must bring down the thunders of respectability upon his head.

He deplored what he described as, the false colouring best expressed by the regulation finish that "they married and were happy ever after"... (which meant) ...arranging a dénouement...indescribably unreal and meretricious, but dear to the Grundyist and subscriber.

In representations of the world, the passions ought to be proportioned as in the world itself, life being a physiological fact. [4]

But at the same time he was not slow to exploit the epistemology of the prose romancer and turn it to his own advantage. He evidently perceived that, while it might be the poet's instinctive response to language to take it beyond its literal meaning, the Victorian lay reader of fiction might be safely relied upon to stay within the limits of literal interpretation. Alternatively should the

reader explore further, then the proverbial mind-of-the beholder dictum would surely disarm him.

One thing is clear to the modern reader engaged with Hardy's texts at this level. This is that both the orgasmic Bathsheba and Tess, for example, were so remote from the Victorian puritan consciousness enthusiastically attuned to the literal mode - the one erotically engulfed in the 'Ferns' episode, her 'blood beating...stinging as if aflame to the very hollows of her feet', 'enlarged' and 'swamped' with emotion, liquidly streaming, with tears in her eyes [5] ; the other undulating on her sexual plateau in the 'Garden' sequence, beyond 'consciousness of time and space', in 'exaltation', 'tears in her eyes' [6] - that neither heroine conveyed, in these instances, any kind of intelligible sexual state to the Victorian reader whatsoever. Critical vilification was directed solely at Hardy's literal presentation of the heroine's sexual contact - however innocuous - with men. Beyond this, and the conditional aspect - that a woman's sexuality was by definition relative - the autonomous erotic nature of Hardy's Bathsheba and Tess simply failed to signify.

On the other hand, literary convention does seem to have sanctioned an evocation of feminine eroticism where it could be seen to be overtly linked with the aggrandisement of the hero. Yielding up nothing more compromising than adulation, the heroine could pant and glow with impunity in her role as an admiring male supporter. The greater her 'feminine' response, the greater his 'masculine' stature.

For example, narrating his prowess Charles Reade style, as an inspiration to 'the young ladies' who might be edified thereby, (Charles Reade intimates), the hero could quite acceptably induce in them an excitement that to all intents and purposes bears as close a resemblance to sexual arousal as it might be possible to evoke. That is to say, with the author now furnished with an opportunity of portraying his 'young ladies' in highly suggestive terms, so in thrall they engage in quasi-sexual postures: that is 'hung panting and glowing on his words' as Reade chooses to describe it [7]. Moreover, that the 'young ladies' display responses that also bear a remarkably close resemblance to overheated pets panting at their Master's heels, renders their physical state not only acceptable but properly subordinate. The author, it might facetiously be observed, has struck precisely the right note here!

All in all, panting, glowing, palpitating, flushing, womankind, linked to any form of feminine weakness, was regarded as entirely proper. Emotional instability, hysteria or physical exhaustion - any ailing condition which set the heroine alternately trembling and glowing would be appropriate. All that was then required was the intervention of the dashing hero who would raise the hitherto sinking creature to her feet and provide her with a steady shoulder upon which she might lean for support thereafter; thus confirming for all readers that womanly passions remained, for all their ailing, debilitating effect, in want only of that potent remedy for all feminine

ills - a husband.

Hardy, filled with judicious intent but with, as yet, little cognizance of urban, middle-class ethical priorities, fell back, in the first instance, upon characterising a noble, antiseptic, sexless model of womankind who was not by nature however, of swooning inclination. On the contrary Cytherea Graye reveals herself to be emotionally resilient, independent of mind and body, and if anything her brother's 'steady shoulder' rather than vice-versa. She is something of a hybrid - part archetypal Victorian heroine part Picaresque (possibly this last for reasons of adventure-story form) - but is, in all, safely conventional. So far so good. Hardy's conformity is demonstrably in evidence. But there is just one very small Hardyian impertinence in Desperate Remedies, which he has tucked unobtrusively but wholly unbidden into the text. This is where it is said of Cytherea's rival that,

She had been a girl of that kind which mothers praise as not forward, by way of contrast, when disparaging those warmer ones with whom loving is an end and not a means. (DR p148)

This tacit approval of loving as an end in itself (the key word is of course 'warmer'), is too insignificant, unrelated and understressed to be of any importance in its immediate context. But although it barely signifies here as the narrative sweeps on apace, it does of course signify in the wider context of Hardy's commitment to a sexual ethic which later denounces the rigorous

institutionalisation of bonding relationships and asserts the psychodynamism of erotic passion as an end itself. Hence we might conclude that this brief glimmer of nascent heterodoxy reveals to us an author who is consciously or unconsciously unreconciled to his guise of respectability, even in this his very first novel.

Cautious circumspection is, nevertheless, the modus operandi in Desperate Remedies. But to Hardy's utter consternation, he found that despite his earnest efforts he had not after all, struck the right note. The point of contention was not that his aristocratic Miss Aldclyffe had nurtured a sensual attachment for the heroine, seeking her in her bed at night and begging caresses and kisses from her through the dark hours. This the women could do with impunity. They were after all respectable and sexless, and there was not in any case a single male in their proximity to give sexual definition to their feminine embraces. As merely the emotional release of maternal or filial wells of feeling, such tender gestures were wholly innocuous. No doubt Hardy was gratified that in this respect at least, his presentation of a deeply sensual feminine experience had passed over the heads of his vilifiers. What did confound him was that he should be attacked for 'daring to suppose it possible that an unmarried lady owning an estate could have an illegitimate child' (Life p84). That this should be the most perfidious of indiscretions was stupefying indeed!

It was becoming increasingly apparent to both Hardy

and his editors that the essentially subjective nature of all attempts to define what was or was not contentious material in the commercial sphere, defied all reasonable analysis. Even Leslie Stephen found the Grundyans perverse and exasperating in their unpredictability (Life p99). Hardy no doubt found them more so. For whether from an unconscious resistance to prevailing codes and conventions, or whether from sheer perplexity at the unintelligibility of the same, he was still not striking quite the right note, even by the time of writing his fourth novel Far From the Madding Crowd. He was aware by now, that the 'fallen' maid of his draft version would require considerable refashioning if she was to enter the Victorian drawing room without causing offence. But he appears to have been less able to determine the extent of the refashioning required. Transformed from the gay-young-woman-about-town of the draft version (after the manner of 'Melia in his poem 'The Ruined Maid' of 1866 [8]), Fanny Robin emerges in Far From the Madding Crowd as a salutary figure cruelly suffering for her 'sins' - piteous, rejected, a destitute mother-to-be. But despite this revised characterisation, and abashed by what he called his 'excessive prudery', Leslie Stephen nonetheless called for yet more judiciousness: 'The seduction of Fanny Robin must be treated in a "gingerly fashion"' he insisted to the bemused author, who with hindsight rationalises this incident as an amusing example of one of the hazards of serial writing (Life pp98,99).

But censorship was to become in reality far more harrowing than amusing to Hardy. He later called it paralysing. On the other hand, time and practice and a rapidly growing reputation encouraged him to develop auxilliary literary muscles - an artful elaboration of symbols and literary structures, and a more complex and suggestive use of harmonious and congruous metaphorical elements. This accommodation of the poetic voice, or rather its assimilation to a prose medium, must almost certainly have alleviated some measure of his psychological anguish and artistic frustration.

Hardy's was a development, David Lodge writes, which was,

directed towards a mode of writing in which every scene, gesture and image would function simultaneously on several different levels: as a vivid and precise imitation of actuality, as a link in a chain of causation, as symbolic action and as part of a formal pattern of parallels, contrasts and correspondences. [9]

Nonetheless, while this literary rearmament may have partially compensated for the crippling effect of censorship upon Hardy's faculties, there are clear signs of underlying strain in the early novels - a ruptured coherency and stylistic awkwardness which noticeably affects both both his characterisation and his critique. This is most noticeable in A Pair of Blue Eyes, which R. Kincaid is not alone in finding 'a manifestly vaporous and contradictory text' [10].

It is important that these textual defects in

A Pair of Blue Eyes - specifically the incoherency effected by the emergence of contradictory 'voices' and a ponderously intrusive proprietary consciousness - be differentiated from the stylistic defects that occur in Desperate Remedies. Whether arising from sciolism, or from a disaffection with a mode none too appealing to a poet already committed to the literary medium of verse, the textual defects in the earlier novel reflect no self-induced attempt at circumspection, but rather an awkwardness in engaging with subject matter - an awkwardness which is, in fact, shortly resolved. To be despatched as Hardy had been (following the rejection of his first book The Poor Man and the Lady), to try his hand at a Wilkie Collins type novel - to the writing of which, if his subsequent literary direction is indicative, he was not in the slightest degree predisposed - would almost certainly have given rise to problems of composition. These difficulties can and should be, differentiated from those arising from the conflict he experienced over censorship, which led to a different set of stylistic problems altogether. As an analysis of these two early texts will disclose, the manner of writing as if adrift in an uncharted area - as in his first novel - results in stylistical flaws which are wholly unlike those that spring from Hardy's sense that he must cover his trespassing tracks as and when he feels he has passed out of bounds. And it is this last self-imposed constraint which had the longer lasting detrimental - or paralysing - effect upon

his creative imagination where running adrift in the new medium was soon remedied. It is also this factor which noticeably affects his characterisation, particularly of Elfride Swancourt who is subjected to a mass of contradictions, ambivalent authorial attitudes and equivocations as a result.

It required in fact a full seventeen years and the successful publication of at least eight novels, before Hardy felt sufficiently assured of his talent and reputation to put the latter to the test by openly avowing his allegiance to his unorthodox creation. Openly to pledge himself to what he understood to be a truthful presentation of a 'pure woman' - the Tess for whom loving is indeed an end and not a means - whilst it finally emancipated Hardy from the Sisyphean task of manipulating a text or a characterisation against its natural direction, was nevertheless a commitment that he could not possibly have foreseen in the straitened days of the early 1870s.

Before moving on to examine the effects of censorship constraint upon Hardy's stylistics in A Pair of Blue Eyes, his uphill task with Elfride, and what Carl Weber calls his 'inartistic prolixities' [11], a closer look at the different kind of compositional flaw that arises in Desperate Remedies will put matters in perspective.

Hardy's greatest difficulty in his first novel appears to have been with the preliminaries. Totally absent is the poet's ability to summon innovative ways and means of engaging with his subject. He is completely at sea. What

is required of him is that he shakes down to a narrative style most pleasing and acceptable to Mudie's devotees in search of a good story precipitously developed - a tale in which the narrator must deputise, as does the balladist, for the public voice which has not a particularist point of view, but who speaks on behalf of the community, broad, general, detached. This was not a stance Hardy found easy. The 'community', urban and bourgeois, was alien and remote to one whose inner life, as Hardy put it, was a 'life twisted of three strands - the professional life, the scholar's life, and the rustic life' (Life p32). Moreover, precipitously developed detective stories were not altogether the most natural of progressions to make from the classic literatures of his pupilage. Settling down to an adventurous racy pace was then problematical. The ability to move into his text - to engage with his subject in media res, in the self-immersing manner of the poet of verse - seems entirely to elude; and the result is an opening chapter embarrassingly pitted with falls.

First Hardy enumerates a chronology as if in lieu of a sense of time passing. But if the aim is to evoke a temporal dimension then unhappily the aim misfires: the impression is far too tabular. Simultaneously, there appears a list of settings presumably in lieu of evocation of place: Hocbridge, Christminster, Bloomsbury, Cambridge, London, Dukery St, and Russell Square - a mass of topographical data compressed into the introductory paragraphs on Page One! Finally, wedged awkwardly between

the proliferation of dates and place-names, a dramatis personae emerges which is as barren within the text as the aforementioned timetable is lacklustre. Faceless, featureless, and without any apparent role or function, the characters Cytherea Graye, Edward Springrove, Ambrose Graye, Huntway and Bradleigh are trundled out on to the page, directory fashion - again all on Page One - defying description, defying even the imagination. And when the moment arrives for one or other of them to give utterance, the most colourless of dialogues emerges - as dramatically useless as all else. All attempts to establish a spatial, or a temporal dimension - let alone a character typology - utterly fail. Apart from a bafflingly indeterminate focus, all that remains is an impressionistic sense of being in the company of a very uncomfortable Hardy.

Fortunately this awkwardness in effecting an entry to his text does not disable Hardy once he gets into his stride, from which point onwards he displays - albeit erratically - a narrative ease and imaginative vision which augurs well. By the time he has negotiated Under the Greenwood Tree - far more at home we sense, with the painterly technique he employs here - to embark upon the writing of A Pair of Blue Eyes, most glaringly awkward stylistic flaws have been ironed out. All that remains are literary impedimenta of the prolix/moralistic kind - the bland generalisation, the empty platitude, the superintendent 'voice' of circumspection and propriety.

Why should moral props of this kind be necessary? The

answer lies in Hardy's characterisation in this novel, of the first of a line of Wessex heroines who is defined not in terms of nobility but ability. That is to say, Elfride Swancourt has not the impeccable virtues of her predecessor Cytherea, nor of her successors Elizabeth Jane and Grace Melbury. She is no paradigm of virtue, no model of what Ruskin spoke of as 'the stainless sceptre of womanhood'. She is no noble stereotype. If we know her, sympathise with her, identify with her, it is not because she is all manner of things to be desired or emulated, but because she is a challenging, sensitive, open-hearted spirit. We care for her.

Problems arise for Hardy because he too cares for her. This is not a problem which arises where his noble heroines are concerned. He can be seen to ally himself with any one of them with impunity. But openly to express his allegiances where Elfride is concerned, would be to invite critical censure, for while she is captivating she is also human and flawed. More important she is sexy. She exists as a sexual being in her own right; an aspect of her nature which Hardy does not treat as relative. Nor does he treat with it as a minor elaboration upon a major theme modulating into a 'proper' dénouement: a happy marriage. Elfride's sexual nature exists independently of the institution which should 'properly' define her womanhood. The distinction and demarcation between maid (virgin) and matron (mother) so fondly fostered by the Victorian seeking to assimilate feminine sexuality to marriage and

motherhood, is not fostered by Hardy. It is not Elfride's virgin maidenhood which informs her womanhood, but her sexual awareness; she possesses in other words what woman-as-maid and woman-as-mother ideally did not possess: an erotic nature. Moreover, Hardy does not channel this, either thematically, or more insinuatingly - linguistically - towards the aggrandisement of Stephen or Knight. Neither here enlarges in stature under Elfride's passionate gaze. It is she who sets the sexual temperature - not her lovers. Stephen, we are told, is not man enough for her and Knight is not all he might be. There is always the sense therefore, that Elfride is not only positively sexually instigative where her lovers are less so, but that it is she who sets the sexual pace. This is subtly subversive since male control of the female depends to some extent upon his activating, and thereby regulating, the woman's sexual response - thus maintaining his supremacy (as in the Reade extract). As it stands, Elfride activates and regulates her own sexual responses long before Knight enters her life; as Hardy illustrates by presenting his heroine as sufficiently knowledgeable on the subject of both her own, and Knight's sexual nature, to be in a position to evaluate the latter's adequacy:

'I almost wish you were of a grosser nature, Harry; in truth I do! Or rather, I wish I could have the advantages such a nature in you would afford me, and yet have you as you are'.

'What advantages would they be?'

'Less anxiety, and more security. Ordinary men are not so delicate in their tastes as you; and where the lover or husband is not fastidious, and refined, and of a deep nature things seem to go better, I fancy - as far as I have been able to

observe the world.' (PBE pp324/5)

As the poor girl flounders through these words to her chilling lover - the tonal alteration in her language aptly reflecting what we imagine to be his coldly appraising stare - so candour is replaced, first by caution, then by fear. For not a little sexual experience informs her judgement - or so she appears to feel as step by step she camouflages her original meaning. Eagerly speaking first of a 'grosser nature' (sexually passionate in Victorian parlance), then of 'not so delicate tastes', her argument gradually loses impetus. By the time 'fastidious' and 'delicate' have been hastily covered by 'refined' the volte-face from open criticism to approval-seeking is virtually concluded. 'Deep natured' compounds the retrenchment. Nonetheless she has said it - she has given Knight her considered opinion of his insipid sexuality; and he is coldly aware of the fact. Cutting right across her argument, he replies:

Yes I suppose it is right. Shallowness has this advantage, that you can't be drowned there. (PBE p325)

Knight certainly maintains his control and supremacy, but not by erotic means. He does not instinctively bond Elfride to him by sexually exciting her - holding her in rapture - or by manifestations of sexual tenderness. If she cleaves to him at all it is out of fear of his disapproval and loss of love.

Hardy's heroine then, with her inclination to assess her lover's sexual acceptability rather than (conventionally) his wealth or social status, together with her instinctive urge to challenge him intellectually, presents her author with problems he has not as yet had to face with her strictly conventional compeers - Cytherea Graye and Fancy Day. In danger of becoming alarmingly unwomanly (the gentle sex did not own to knowledge of, let alone utter knowledge of, sexual matters), Elfride is also potentially far too self-assertive, independent and dominant to be morally edifying to the Young British Person and her Grundyan guardian. Hardy therefore, by virtue in the main of permitting authorial censure and withdrawal of sympathy to colour his characterisation, enforces upon his heroine a more straitened role. Self-assertiveness becomes - by a shift in the moral register - either duplicity or filial disobedience, as in those instances where she deliberately withholds information from her father and Knight. By the same token independence becomes wilfulness, and a sexually passionate nature - in that it is now to be linked to the vexed problem of those not-untried lips - becomes far more a question of fickleheartedness and inconstancy than sexual responsiveness, warmheartedness, ingenuousness. Elfride is thereby rendered, not a great Romantic figure of Wertherian proportions likely to lead the nation's young to destruction, (as critics anxiously predicted of Tess), but, to all intents and purposes, a salutary model of weak and

wayward womanhood: a caution to her sisters in life.

This then is Hardy's method in A Pair of Blue Eyes. With all the circumspection he can muster he applies himself to the task of sitting in moral judgement upon his heroine. But that he musters it awkwardly is significant - and almost certainly to his credit. Conviction and poetic inspiration do not underpin his moralising discourses. The tonal alteration they effect within the text introduces a dissonant note. Compositionally the mode is tactical - designed to appeal to the ear of the contemporary auditor to whom the Grundyan tone would have been reassuringly familiar. No doubt the Victorian habituated to prose texts thick with censorious overtones, found A Pair of Blue Eyes a relatively fluent read. But since Hardy himself deplored the use of the moralistic aside:

The besetting sin of modern literature is its insincerity. Half its utterances are qualified, even contradicted, by an aside, and this particularly in morals and religion...(Life p215)

it would seem that in making use of it here, he is introducing a dissonant note quite deliberately to nudge the reader into a conscious (or otherwise) awareness of opposing discourses. That is to say, the sub-textual structure of the work is strictly dialectical in form - a series of voices or discourses set in antithesis against the narrative proper.

A brief comparison of the two texts - Desperate Remedies and A Pair of Blue Eyes - will reveal both the absence of this internal dialogue in the earlier

novel where Hardy does not feel it to be incumbent upon himself to censure his heroine, and its existence in the later work where a dialectical structure is felt to be imperative. Taking first the 'voice' of propriety as it emerges in the earlier novel, it is apparent that Hardy does not feel the need to censure Cytherea at all. And in being thus unfettered from the irksome task of having to invoke a ponderous overseer, so the frequency or incidence of moralistic generalisations are kept to a minimum. They barely intrude, and where they do, they carry no overtones of severity.

The first noticeable intrusion occurs approximately halfway through the book. Here the heroine - Cytherea - has occasion to call on her rival on behalf of Miss Aldclyffe's 'Ladies Association'. The interview goes smoothly - Cytherea delicately probing Miss Hinton for confirmation of the latter's formal engagement to Edward; Cytherea's own lover. Gaining little ground by oblique promptings however, the heroine alters her approach midcourse and adopts a more imperative manner. Hardy comments upon this tactical change:

Women are persistently imitative. No sooner did a thought flash through Cytherea's mind that the man was a lover than she became a Miss Aldclyffe in a mild form.

'I imagine he's a lover,' she said. (DRp150)

More insightful than astringent, this reference to role-playing tells us something of the deep influence Miss Aldclyffe has had upon the heroine which is not intended by

Hardy to reflect pejoratively upon the latter. The triteness of the generalisation however, does tend to lead away from authorial sympathy towards a 'superior' worldly-wise stance. And this is not controverted by what follows as Hardy shifts his attention to Miss Hinton, towards whom the moralistic aside had possibly been flowing. First Miss Hinton confirms the accuracy of Cytherea's rhetorical observation by smiling 'a smile of experience in that line', and it is then that the chiding 'voice' falls:

Few women, if taxed with having an admirer, are so free from vanity as to deny the impeachment, even if it is utterly untrue. When it does happen to be true, they look pityingly away from the person who is so benighted as to have got no further than suspecting it. (DR p150)

The magisterial tone here which catches at the formal interrogative language of the bench, is possibly Hardy at his most pompous in Desperate Remedies. There is certainly nothing more acerbic. If anything the tendency is to become blander, more benign; as this comment upon woman's defence of woman in the face of calumnious slurs from gossipier Crickett, tends to convey:

Women who are bad enough to divide against themselves under a man's partiality are good enough to instantly unite in a common cause against his attack. (DRp268)

Here the language and tone scarcely suggests remonstrance. Colloquialisms such as 'bad' and 'good', 'divide' and 'common cause' are not in any way loaded with stricture as are those more lofty figures of speech of the earlier

passage. 'Taxed', 'deny', 'impeachment', 'utterly untrue' and 'suspecting', have been quite deliberately selected for their legalistic, authoritarian overtones. Having shifted then from the magisterial inquisitor to the affable bystander, Hardy continues in this vein. Commenting upon the androgyne in his hero, Edward, who finds 'echoes of himself...sometimes (in) men, sometimes women..' Hardy (not of the 'separate spheres' school) explains:

For in spite of a fashion which pervades the whole community at the present day - the habit of exclaiming that woman is not undeveloped man, but diverse, the fact remains that after all, women are Mankind, and that in many of the sentiments of life the difference of sex is but a difference of degree. (DRp206)

This is an intriguingly Jungian perception of the innate bisexuality of human nature. But there are no signs whatsoever of the earlier cavilling overtones. In fact it is doubtful whether such an observation comes within the category of intrusive moralistic discourse at all. For far from being mere vapid generalisation, (women-are-thus), or alternatively openly pedagogical, (women-should-be-thus), the tone here is contemplative - unusually so for a racy, detective tale - and the subject matter thought-provoking. However, if we may regard this as the representative 'voice' in Desperate Remedies - the representative moralistic 'voice' that is - then it warrants our attention in so far as it establishes the point that Hardy does not feel it to be incumbent upon himself to glaze this particular text with unmistakeably censorious overtones.

In fact so assured does he appear to be of his toe-ing the line quite nicely, that he animadverts upon the practice of putting down women without displaying the least anxiety as to whether this may, or may not, infringe upon his moral duty as an edifying, exemplary author: that is to say, the exemplary author who shows a proper regard for keeping woman in her place and that place subordinate.

In the following animadversion there is no hint of pomposity, nor indeed any reliance upon the ballasted rhetoric or high-sounding phrase that is a characteristic feature of Victorian discourses upon women, within and beyond the novel. On the contrary, the narrative posture is neighbourly and the vernacular ambience informal. Moreover, there is certainly no air of turning aside from the envisioned to the reader's world, or any look askance which incurs a loss of authorial or readerly identification with the former. Hardy writes:

Of all the ingenious and cruel satires that from the beginning till now have been stuck like knives into womankind, surely there is not one so lacerating to them, and to us who love them, as the trite old fact, that the most wretched of men can, in the twinkling of an eye, find a wife ready to be more wretched still for the sake of his company.
(DRp332/3)

All in all there is nothing excessively awkward, pretentious or contradictory about any of these observations. They can be trite, as in the second of our examples, and they can border upon trivialisation. But in contrast to the self-consciously censorious tone in A Pair of Blue Eyes and the unremitting focus placed upon

the heroine in this context, they neither wittingly nor unwittingly anathematise their subject as is the case in Hardy's later novel.

As the first of a line of unconventional Wessex heroines, Elfride suffers the brunt of Hardy's anxiety/ambivalence. With the 'voice' of propriety fading into obscurity as his literary reputation escalates, we can only infer that it is invoked with greater zest in this instance to countermand what Hardy feels might be interpreted as too much authorial sympathy for a wayward heroine.

If for reasons of triteness alone his moralistic generalisations seem programmed to self-destruct, unfortunately it is for that same reason of triteness that the modern reader is inclined to disregard their content and simply read on - registering probably, a certain disaffection in the event. This is unfortunate because the insinuating voice is not, in the immediate moment, disabled. It carries too much weight. And if, as seems not improbable, Hardy is relying upon the triteness of the generalisation to prompt a readerly quizzing of his text, then his reliance is misplaced. We may be beguiled, irritated or simply indifferent to the superintendent 'voice' but having no precedents set, it is unlikely we would, without instruction, stop in our tracks and examine it. In that case it would become apparent that the 'voice' betokens, in fact, a proprietary consciousness superimposed over the text - but with which the author declines an

alliance.

Let us now proceed to examine Hardy's treatment of Elfride in order to determine the extent of the factitiousness of the censorious 'voice' and the veracity of the alternative textual evidence set against it. It is important too, not to lose sight of the fact that as they enter the text most moralistic asides in A Pair of Blue Eyes - which locate the speaker somewhere among the Grundyans - also have the effect of displacing Hardy from his visionary world. The necessity of enforcing a moral consciousness apparently induces a disorientation which he finds difficult to resolve. This results in his momentary loss of identification with his central character who suffers a withdrawal of authorial sympathy in the event.

Following directly upon a deeply disturbing confrontation between Elfride and Stephen, in which she has somewhat clumsily revealed that she had had an earlier admirer and that her present lover is now seated upon his grave; and in which he had revealed that he is not the blue-blood Parson Swancourt has assumed him to be, but a local stonemason's son, Hardy writes:

Oppressed, in spite of themselves, by a foresight of impending complications, Elfride and Stephen returned down the hill hand in hand. At the door they paused wistfully, like children late at school.

And then:

Women accept their destiny more readily than men. Elfride had now resigned herself to the overwhelming idea of her lover's antecedents;

Stephen had not forgotten the trifling grievance that Elfride had known earlier admiration than his own (PBE p110).

At first sight, we gather the impression that Elfride's acceptance of Stephen's working class background has more to do with her passivity than with her integrity. After all if Stephen is struggling to come to terms with his small disillusion, should not Elfride be more actively engaged with her greater one - if only to argue it out in her mind from all vantage points. This would ensure that some argumentation has been prepared in anticipation of a confrontation with her father. It would also strengthen her position - her resistance to her father's will which is more likely to be swayed by reasoned argument than by the resignation to which the speaker refers. But not so. If we are to trust the captious 'voice' then we must accept Elfride's unquestioning acceptance of her destiny, as we must also accept that for unrevealed reasons the author has closed his mind to her native wit and intelligence. The temptation simply to rely on this verdict and read on, seems to have been almost contrived by the nature of the impasse that has been created here. At the same time there is no relief from the misgivings here engendered, as to the fact of Elfride's deeper nature, which doubts, in lingering unresolved, may even give rise later to critical attacks upon Hardy for creating an incoherent, contradictory characterisation. For surely we have been led to believe that Elfride is not this shallow? Moreover, if we consider

further, surely her lack of class prejudice should be to her credit? That it should be implied that it springs solely from an indiscriminative sense, a blanket acceptance of all possible fates, trivialises it beyond measure. The question to consider then is whether it is true of Elfride that she accepts her destiny more readily than men. The answer can only be in the negative. The truth of the matter is that she alters her course, not once but twice where Stephen is concerned, (the broken elopement and the broken date to meet in the church), and finally rejects altogether the fate of becoming his wife. And she is patently not resigned to Knight's sexual fastidiousness. Furthermore, while guilt and fear do - en passant - arrest her, she does not accept his rejection of her at the last, but pursues him hotly to London where, on the brink of a reconciliation she is restrained by the interception of her father who snatches her back to Endelstow.

Contrary to the simplistic generalisation (Grundyan in implication in that it presupposes a formulated 'feminine' response), if any character readily accepts his destiny it is Stephen. His discovery that Elfride has become engaged to Knight in his absence, spurs no hot pursuit of her, no impassioned attempts at a reconciliation, but instead, a somewhat passive - though not unemotional - retreat from the locality. And where it is not Stephen it is Knight; Knight the pathetic victim of his own self-ordained fate, whose celibate's anxieties and, we infer, atrophied sexual potency, has bred in him a predilection for what he calls

'untried' lips (metonymically, virgins). This predilection so moulds his destiny that he is incapable of claiming the passionate Elfride and thus altering his fixed course; an alteration of direction which might well alleviate his sexual anxieties into the bargain - his lover being both tender-hearted and sexually responsive.

If then this categorical observation (above) upon the nature of women in general and upon Elfride in particular is emptied of veracity and meaning, how can it be in any way useful? What is its function here? A probable answer is that, firstly, it fulfils the function of sounding authoritative, masculine-superior wise and knowing - presumably for the benefit of those Victorian readers requiring this kind of judicious omniscient stance. Secondly, it permits Hardy just enough distance from his heroine to enable all sympathies to flow in Stephen's direction who shortly has to face banishment from Elfride's life by her class-conscious father. It is therefore an essential prop in terms of both textual structure and publication politics. But that it does not cohere with the remaining scenario - that it is opposed or contradicted by the more substantial thematic evidence which strips it of meaning; that it draws attention to itself by altering the direction of the narrative, says a good deal more about Hardy than about his heroine: he may be paying lip-service to his role of public advocate, but he does not intend winning the case.

This contradiction between the moralistic 'voice' and

Hardy's characterisation of his heroine elsewhere in A Pair of Blue Eyes, occurs with enough frequency throughout the novel to persuade us of an intentional, purposeful conflict. That is to say, it seems reasonable to suppose that Hardy does not intend his moralistic asides to carry credibility, but merely a token gesture of disapproval.

But let us take another example:

Woman's ruling passion to fascinate and influence those more powerful than she - though operant in Elfride, was decidedly purposeless. She had wanted her friend Knight's good opinion from the first: how much more than that elementary ingredient of friendship she now desired, her fears would hardly allow her to think. In originally wishing to please the highest class of man she had ever intimately known, there was no disloyalty to Stephen. She could not - and few women can - realize the possible vastness of an issue which has only an insignificant begetting. (PBEp218,19)

Problems arise here as earlier. It is not Hardy's focus upon Elfride which posits a contradiction, but as previously, the prefatory and summary glance aside at 'all women'. If we examine Hardy's point carefully we discover that it is, in fact, devoid of truthfulness. For if Woman's/Elfride's 'ruling passion (is) decidedly purposeless' why does there immediately arrive on the scene a smitten Knight racing back to Endelstow before the allotted time? This thematically refutes the generalisation, which has no bearing upon, (except to trivialise), Elfride's desire for 'much more than that elementary ingredient of friendship', or her desire to 'please the highest class of man she had ever intimately

known'.

Delete the generalisation and there is no contradiction. Elfride wants, desires, and fears, (although not yet broken with Stephen), and not one of those feelings fails to draw a response in Knight, who, as has been already noticed, is racing back to her prematurely. Reinstate the generalisation and there are immediate difficulties. Even superficially the inference that Elfride (supposedly owning a 'ruling passion to fascinate and influence') is vain and coquettish - a woman-of-the-world - openly conflicts with what we know of her, quite apart from the fact that it is impugned by what follows: Hardy's evocation of her tremulous, fearful heart.

Similar problems arise over the speaker's final observation. Textual and thematic evidence show that it is not Elfride who could not 'realize the possible vastness of an issue which has only an insignificant begetting', but Knight. It is the hero who lacks perspicacity, who narrows Elfride's world; as by means of 'instinctive acts so minute' he has forcibly narrowed his own.

Perhaps his lifelong constraint towards women, which he had attributed to accident, was not chance after all, but the natural result of instinctive acts so minute as to be indiscernible even by himself. (PBE p345)

Upon the insignificantly begotten issue of their first encounter as reviewer and reviewed, which becomes the less insignificant issue of their early intimacy, it is Knight,

not Elfride, who imposes limitations. Not broadness of vision but purblindness - which is exacerbated by his fastidious sense of his own corporeality, his mincing sexuality - informs Knight's understanding of the world, human nature, himself, Elfride.

From the outset he engages obsessively in his relationship with her. Hardy explicates this imaginatively by paralleling the 'earring' quest with the quest of the lover in pursuit of the beloved. It happens thus. Knight begins by ridiculing her perfectly natural liking for bodily adornment, then patronising it, then feverishly hunting down exactly the right pair of earrings, then racing back to Endelstow to press them on her, then having had them spurned and 'feeling less her master than heretofore' (PBEp221), pressing them on her again: 'let me dress you in them' (PBE p300). Finally, with his gifts accepted he presses himself, emotionally, upon her: 'Elfride, when shall we be married?' (PBEp302). The pattern of Knight's courtship is neatly and suggestively paralleled by his obsession with the artifacts which adorn her - those fated earrings which she admits to liking but omits to hold in safe-keeping. (Unlike her genuine satisfaction with her native endowments - her luxuriant hair for example - which Knight discredits, but which she deeply cherishes).

Knight's need alternately to ridicule, patronise, dominate, 'dress', and at the last, to belittle Elfride is particularly revealing: 'How can you be so fond of finery?

I believe you are corrupting me into a taste for it' he accuses (PBEp303). This accusation appropriately mirrors his ego-maniacal obsession with reducing her to guilt-ridden, child-like dependency; the role so necessary to the assertion of his male supremacy. His obsession with the trifling and small; the miniature artefacts which will afford him the opportunity of touching her person, is equally instructive. For his sensual gestures - in love-making terms the roaming caress, or even the warm clasping of hands - are wholly confined to fussy, fiddling activities. These are also accompanied by a contraction of his world to an area the size of a pinhead - the minute perforations in Elfride's lobes. This contracted focus, as we shall shortly discover, aptly coheres with Hardy's characterisation of Knight elsewhere in the novel.

Take for example Hardy's expository treatment of Knight's leave-taking of Elfride - his dismissive, almost casual farewell - which takes into consideration none of the possible consequences that such an action might trigger. This provides an apt, if sad, logical, or rather psychological, conclusion to an affair which has been conducted by Knight in unremitting condescension. From his self-erected platform of superiority he can only look down. And look down on Elfride he does. When she threatens his dominant position as she does so often by exhibiting a largeness of heart, a breadth of vision and an exuberant sexuality which unnerves him - shakes his self-important image of himself as being the more commanding, the more

stable of the two - so he is driven to reduce her; to undermine and trivialise her, in order that he might be able to accommodate her to his own contracted world. Hardy, pointing prefiguratively towards Knight's final, dismissive retreat from Elfride's life, reflects that:

It is a melancholy thought that men who at first will not allow the verdict of perfection they pronounce upon their sweethearts or wives to be disturbed by God's own testimony to the contrary, will, once suspecting their purity, morally hang them upon evidence they would be ashamed to admit in judging a dog. [PBEp358]

Uncharacteristically, Hardy incorporates into this specimen of generalised commentary, no inherent contradictions. That is to say, it is not thematically contradicted, nor is it impugned by a conflicting characterisation. For sure enough Knight does dismiss Elfride just as if she were indeed, a dog! 'Remain' (PBEp360), 'You will not follow me' (PBEp359), are the orders uttered and recalled. Whereupon, leaving the stricken girl, racked with 'convulsive sobs (which) took all the nerve out of her utterance', Knight

withdrew his eyes from the scene, swept his hand across them, as if to brush away the sight, breathed a low groan, and went on. (PBE p 359)

As Knight's dismissive words and blotting-out gestures indicate, and as Hardy's spatial allocations emphasise - Elfride 'in the midst of it - up against the sky' (PBEp360), Knight passing on into an interior world, 'going indoors' (PBEp359) and thence to 'chambers' (PBEp360) - there is no perspective on Knight's horizon that he does

not constrict to a small. The world, humanity, Elfride are reduced to specks by this man, who comes close to perceiving this for himself as, to Stephen, he ruminates:
All I know...is a mass of generalities. I plod along, and occasionally lift my eyes and skim the weltering surface of mankind lying between me and the horizon as a crow might; no more. (PBE p162)

This is also the man, we recall, who had initially so reduced Elfride as to 'make her weep most bitterly at her own insignificance' (PBE p244); who has purposefully 'impregnated [her] with sentiments of her own smallness to an uncomfortable degree of distinctness' (PBE p206); and who was himself to 'be with the small in his death'(PBEp240).

Elfride, by contrast, with her attempts at self-beguilement might struggle to divert attention away from conflictful issues, but she does not mentally, or emotionally, constrict her world. On the contrary, in her efforts to conceal her past from Knight, she reveals an intense awareness of the enormity of the most insignificant of begotten issues. If anything she is too aware!

Has Hardy invoked the 'voice' of propriety so antithetically to his inner vision that he instinctively needs to abjure or 'forget' it later? For subsequently it occurs that haunted by her past, and terrified by the prospect of its possible repercussions upon her relationship with Knight, Elfride is presented as not at all the vapid creature of Grundyan prescriptions, but as singularly thoughtful and prescient:

I would gladly have told you; for I knew and know I had done wrong. But I dared not; I loved you too well! You have been everything in the world to me - and you are now. Will you not forgive me? (PBEp358)

These are not the words of a woman who lacks perspicacity, foresight, a sense of responsibility and her own culpability. Hardy - forgetful (intentionally or otherwise) of the earlier Grundyan stance - confirms as much as he continues:

The reluctance to tell, arose from Elfride's simplicity in thinking herself so much more culpable than she really was... (PBEp358)

In her reduced state of dependency upon Knight - the compliance and docility he has induced - Elfride's earlier independence and defiance seems to herself, by contrast, desperately outrageous. The issue of her indiscretion, which had earlier 'grieved her' (PBEp219), has now grown out of all proportion to its insignificant begetting, and has become fully realised in all its implications.

There does not seem to be much doubt, in the final analysis, that of Hardy's two central characters, it is Elfride who owns a facility for enlarged emotion, deep perceptions, ranging vision; for projecting the self into the possible vastness of any possible issue. There is, we must conclude, no reconciliation between the worldly-wise commentator's observation, and the characterisation and events which precede and follow it.

This conflict at the heart of Hardy's text, while it

reveals a strong authorial attachment to a reified being - a delightfully ingenuous and bright, but highly unconventional young woman, (a stronger attachment than it would be circumspect to vaunt), does, as is evident, make taxing demands upon the reader faced with the problem of deciphering Hardy's inconsistencies and contradictions. As it stands, he provides no adequately differentiated syntactical arrangement marking off the discourses in opposition. Tonal dissonance does not, in itself, provide an adequate directive. Further narrative devices schematically worked, would offer the reader some kind of guideline as to how to read Hardy correctly in this context, although their presence might well betray authorial intentions more openly than would be circumspect. There are no clear or adequate directives. Prefatory phrases such as 'to an observer Elfride seemed thus...', or 'those who knew her might have said...', would almost certainly differentiate the narrative discourses or concretise their function. But Hardy offers no such schema - or rather, no such readily accessible schema. As we have observed, the larger units of thematic and character construction may, on the one hand invalidate the smaller units of pocket-moral observation, (more often the case than not), or, as in Knight's casting Elfride aside as if she were a dog - compound them. This inconsistency does of course further the argument that there is a topical differentiating factor of sex-discrimination involved - that, for instance, at the structural level of

contradictory discourses, Hardy is declaring his intention to stand by his speaker's cavilling at man, but refuses to stand by that same speaker's cavilling at woman, (an oppositional stance, which directly conflicts with media 'voices' generally, which dictate only to women). If this is the case, and in the event of a more emphatic and coherent working, it would be possible to argue that Hardy is, very deviously, denying himself the right and privilege of standing in male judgement upon woman. And whereas we suspect that this is his impulse, and that quite plausibly he does not wish to ally himself with the pedagogical attitudes to women that saturate the literatures of the day, he remains too elusive in this role (at any rate at a casual reading), for any concrete textual evidence to accrue in his favour in this respect. For whereas the heavy didacticism or sheer inanity of the Grundyan discourse may mark it off from the remainder of the narrative where it is controverted, thus supporting the anti-pedagogical point of view; where the discourses are less well differentiated problems begin to arise. This is a rare occurrence, but where it does occur, there is a disconcerting chameleon effect which frustrates the reader's attempt to distinguish between the discourses and thus arrive at some understanding of Hardy's method and ultimate, (if subterranean), aims.

Such an effect generated by the un-differentiated discourses, or rather, non-segregated discourses, occurs in the vault scene. Here, Hardy is so intent upon distancing

himself from Elfride in the early stages of this chapter, prior to the vault encounter where she will be obliged to face her two lovers and be shamed, that he allows the Grundyan speaker to enter the narration far too unobtrusively. The characteristic dissonance that we can rely upon as distinctive, as the moralising speaker intrusively enters the text, is absent. And where there are implicit contradictions, they have become so abstruse in the confusion, that they cannot cleanly be traced. The chapter opens in neutral tones. 'Love', Hardy writes, 'frequently dies of time alone - much more frequently of displacement' (PBE p279). And then the authorial shift begins to take place. But, in contradistinction to the customary platitudinous moralising 'voice', the locutions here are neither intrusive nor stylistically awkward, nor even thick with censure. To set the thing in motion, a key word 'displacement' is introduced. And then unobtrusively, Hardy shifts the central character - Elfride - from her axis; to replace her at the very last, with the amorphous everywoman of the Grundyan discourses. It happens thus:

With Elfride Swancourt a powerful reason why the displacement should be successful was that the new-comer was a greater man than the first. By the side of the instructive and piquant snubbings she received from Knight, Stephen's general agreeableness seemed watery; by the side of Knight's spare love-making, Stephen's continual outflow seemed lackadaisical. She had begun to sigh for somebody further on in manhood. Stephen was hardly enough of a man. (PBE p279)

Syntactical displacement of Elfride's proper noun status, and the reiteration of her third person, pronoun status,

very subtly effects an atrophy of her felt presence, which, if we make some excisions in Hardy's text, looks like this:
Elfride Swancourt...the new-comer...a greater
man...she...Knight, Stephen...
Knight...Stephen...she...Stephen...a man.

Seemingly poised or caught between her two lovers here, Elfride (by means of pronoun substitution) is gradually distanced from them - from the close-up focus that is placed on Knight and Stephen, who have mannerisms as well as Christian names. Meanwhile a shift of a slightly different kind is taking place. Again this is effected syntactically. Elfride is not only phased into the background; she is also phased into Knight's background. From the reiteration of 'displacement...displacement' to the reiteration of 'by the side of...by the side of', we register just the smallest sensation of drift. His heroine now edged off-stage, Hardy sets about discussing her 'proneness to inconstancy', her 'plastic and ready sympathies', with an unflinching objectivity which is not so much chastising as aloof. It is at this stage that it becomes apparent that Hardy can disparage his heroine without adopting the worldly-wise stance - albeit not categorically nor with conviction, but ambivalently, with the ever-ready gentle qualifier to hand: the 'Perhaps' and the 'Partly'.

It would be to misrepresent Hardy to suggest that each and every negative criticism directed at Elfride, is painstakingly controverted by more comprehensive textual

evidence. This would place him rather more squarely in the Ruskin camp advocating a model of 'Stainless...Womanhood' than he would find appropriate. It is certainly not his intention to present woman with so exalted a concept of herself that she must inevitably fall short of the ideal. Hardy is working towards a different end. His Elfride is human and flawed but also lovable and worthy in her own right. She is, in other words, to be approved, not for what she ought to be, but for what she is. The only judgement her author seeks to controvert is that of the pedagogue who insists upon prescribing otherwise.

However there still remains the task of separating the 'voices'; which in this particular episode leading up to the vault confrontation, is an onerous task indeed. If we need to map it out, Hardy's procedure, if it can be so termed, goes thus. As has been noticed, there is firstly the 'displacement' of the heroine. This is followed by ambivalent commentary, (Elfride's proneness to inconstancy etc.), and then there occurs an unobtrusive glide into worldly-wisdom, which in its ease of modulation takes the reader somewhat unawares:

Stephen's failure to make his hold on her heart a permanent one was his too timid habit of dispraising himself to her - a peculiarity which, exercised towards sensible men, stirs a kindly chord of attachment that a marked assertiveness would leave untouched, but inevitably leads the most sensible woman in the world to undervalue him who practises it. (PBE p279)

Because Hardy leads out towards 'the most sensible woman in the world' from an earlier more equivocal stance, we are

beguiled. And before we know where we are, we are right back with the moralist:

Directly domineering ceases in the man, snubbing begins in the woman; the trite but no less unfortunate fact being that the gentler creature rarely has the capacity to appreciate treatment from her natural complement. (PBE p279)

Fortunately there are verbal prompts here which should by now, be registering their muffled cues. The 'creature' who 'rarely has the capacity' for this, that, or the other, has that familiar enfeebled air about her which Hardy's choice of the word 'trite' assists us in recalling. Thus alerted, it then becomes evident that Hardy has lost sight of Elfride altogether, who was never - in the first place - subject to domineering with Stephen, and who has not, to our knowledge, wittingly snubbed him - not even in the event of his being but a learner at the game of chess where she had displayed above average skills. Hence when we meet with the following reference to Elfride:

To such girls poverty may not be, as to the more worldly masses of humanity, a sin in itself; but it is a sin because graceful and dainty manners seldom exist in such an atmosphere. Few women of old family can be thoroughly taught that a fine soul may wear a smock-frock, and an admittedly common man in one is but a worm in their eyes (PBE p279),

we realise that we have come a long way from the Elfride we knew and that Hardy appears to have lost. 'Such girls' are not Elfride - the girl whose rejoinder to Stephen's misery at his lowly origins had been:

'No; don't take trouble to say more...It has become a normal thing that millionaires commence by going up to London with their tools at their back,

and half-a-crown in their pockets. That sort of origin is getting so respected,' she continued cheerfully, 'that it is acquiring some of the odour of Norman ancestry.' (PBE p 106)

Elfride cannot be accused of snobbery. Her opposition to her class-divisive father is plainly outlined by Hardy. Even her impatient dismissal of Jethway as 'not good enough, even if I had loved him' (PBE p109), is delivered more in the way of non-specific value judgement than class specific disparagement. In fact, in employing the same expression later, but with reference to herself, her meaning is, by contrast, quite plain: 'If I had only known you had been coming' she tells Knight, 'what a nunnery I would have lived in to have been good enough for you!' (PBE p 344). An appropriate match is clearly the inference here.

Elfride is perfectly aware that Jethway comes from a respectable, well-to-do background, although she is equally aware that her father - who is solely concerned with pedigree and not altogether satisfied with Knight's social status at that - would certainly not accept the former into the Swancourt family.

The issue of class in the Jethway colloquy, is actually introduced, not by Elfride, but by Stephen, who, for obvious reasons, reacts over-anxiously to any hint of the subject. Elfride's class attitudes are, in the final analysis, best determined, not so much by her opposition to her father's views or those she expresses supportively to

Stephen, but by her customary behaviour and actions. It is her lack of concern for her own blue-blood, her disregard for appearances as she rides hatless on horseback through the surrounding neighbourhood and towns where she stops en route to talk casually 'to old men and women' (PBE p136), and her amicable relationship with sexton Cannister (PBE p110), which furnishes the most reliable testimony. All of this coheres perfectly with the nature of her relationship with parlour-maid Unity, which is more sisterly than superior (PBE p88,151). Elfride evidently does not strike Unity as the kind of woman to whom the 'common man...is but a worm'. To Knight's questioning of Lord Luxellian's affection for Elfride - 'Was he very fond of her?' (PBE p402) - Unity replies:

Twas her nature to win people more when they knew her well. (PBE p402)

While this is a Hardyan backhander at Knight, who, in not having been won to Elfride as has her husband and 'people' generally, is necessarily placed in a category of persons who never came to know her deeply; it also implies that her capacity for winning people to her was not bounded by class. Unity speaks not only on Lord Luxellian's behalf but upon her own and 'people's' generally.

However, to conclude an analysis of the contradictory 'voices' in the vault scene on so positive a note, may be misleading. The argument has led away from a discussion of inconclusive to conclusive findings. That the Grundyan assertion has once more been controverted was not the

original point under discussion. It was not Hardy's successful refutation of the 'accusation' which concerned us, but his unsuccessful manner of having too many 'voices' speaking at once. The textually integrated 'voice' which notices 'Stephen's failure to make his hold on her heart a permanent one', in that it tends to lead out towards the unsympathetic observation upon Elfride in the same breath, comes dangerously close to participating in the proprietary consciousness which elsewhere in the novel remains non-allied to Hardy's own. It could be argued that the prescient author has, in this instance, failed to retain his grip upon the narrative. This seems to confirm that we cannot speak in terms of a consciously worked schema in A Pair of Blue Eyes. Or, alternatively, it could be the case that the dialectical structure of opposing 'voices' elsewhere in the text has been sufficiently well worked, as far as Hardy is concerned, to permit of a little slack at this point. Either way, and despite the fact that the 'vault' passage is awkward to negotiate, it is doubtful whether, overall, it disables what Hardy has already established - an authorial non-alliance with the Grundyan speaker. In a separate context entirely, Roland Barthes describes this dualistic mode of narration as incorporating 'a proprietary consciousness which retains the mastery of what it states without participating in it' [12]. This is evidently (consciously or otherwise), Hardy's methodology - successfully mastered or not, as the case may be.

There are two other instances of opposing discourses

in A Pair of Blue Eyes, which require clarification before concluding this analysis. The first may be dealt with briefly. Of Elfride's self-concealment we are told:
When women are secret they are secret indeed; and more often than not they only begin to be secret with the advent of a second lover. (PBE p281)

The contradiction that this assertion posits does not need much deciphering. Firstly, there are enough precedents set in this novel, to establish the withholding of information, or the practice of secrecy, as normative; and not, as the above observation implies, the practice of inconstant women generally, or Elfride in particular. Parson Swancourt woos and weds Elfride's stepmother, in secret. Stephen is secretive as to his true social origins; secretive with Knight in London as to the nature of Elfride's commitment to him, and when he confronts Knight in the vault, his bare acknowledgement of Elfride leads his rival falsely to assume, as he says, that the couple are mere acquaintances. Stephen does not argue the point. Knight too, is not exempted from Hardy's list. In fact, his deliberate attempt to deceive his trusted friend, is the most treacherous of deceptions overall. Lulling his rival into a sense of false security, Knight determines to reach Endelstow that he might claim Elfride - the woman he has just been vociferously disclaiming - before Stephen has time to do the same (PBE pp382-7). That unknown to him, Stephen has changed his plans, and is simultaneously making a dash for the ten o'clock train from Paddington, is a

rough justice that Hardy, with his predilection for chastening converging courses, cannot resist.

Secondly, Hardy provides alternative thematic evidence to show that Elfride is prone to secrecy, as is her father, right from the start. There is the minor concealment of the sermon writing, the less minor one of her elopement, and of course the major issue of her secret love. These concealments are in evidence long before Knight's arrival on the scene and are by no means contingent upon his 'advent'. Consequently the imputation that 'women' and by inference, Elfride, have an innate tendency to deceive lovers - an observation deemed sufficiently noteworthy to justify its being handed on as if it were a universal truth - says more about the sexual prejudices of the worldly-wise speaker than about the heroine.

Yet again Hardy's alternative evidence is convincing. And in the above instance, none too esoteric - as is the case in the sequence which now follows, which treats with the issue of Elfride's 'vanity'. We are invited to consider that:

Perhaps to a woman it is almost as dreadful to think of losing her beauty as of losing her reputation. (PBE p299)

This is a reference to Elfride's reaction to Knight's baiting, where he has argued that, a luxuriant head of hair exhaust(s) itself and get(s) thin as the years go on from eighteen to eight-and-twenty.(PBEp298)

Elfride, slighted and alarmed, becomes increasingly

agitated as Knight deviously adds that he is quite certain statistical evidence would bear out his (so-called) facts - that luxuriantly-tressed women approaching sexual maturity are likely to be afflicted with alopecia. All our sympathies are with the cruelly baited girl. That is, until the narrative sheers off in a different direction and moralistically insinuates that she is not so much sinned against as sinning: that 'to a woman it is almost as dreadful to think of losing her beauty as of losing her reputation'. This is an unpleasant turn, for were the reader to trust this assertion this would necessitate distrusting both personal judgement and Hardy's characterisation. Surely candid self-appraisal is not to be read as vanity? As earlier, the authorial attempt to render Elfride unlovely - in this instance vain - in order then to censure that vanity, is to manipulate characterisation against its natural direction. We have long since been aware that the heroine has a healthy, bounding awareness of her youth and beauty. But she is by no means the peacock that is here implied. She has nothing in common with the coquette who displays allure and enticement but is empty of genuine feeling for her admirer. And as the following spontaneous outburst suggests, (or would have suggested, had not a contradiction arisen), she still strikes Hardy as more ingenuous than vain. Elfride cries out to Knight:

it is dreadful to hear you talk so. For whatever dreadful name the weakness may deserve, I must candidly own that I am terrified to think my hair may ever get thin. (PBE p299)

In actuality, there is as much, if not more, vanity apparent in Knight's presentation of himself - the upright, steely, masculine stance signalling power and potency, where psycho-sexually he is a starveling - than there is in a single toss of the well-adorned Swancourt head [13]. However, if there is more sophistry than truth in the generalisation that Elfride's horror at the thought of losing her hair 'would be difficult for men to understand' (PBE p299) - the suggestion is that women are too unconscionably vain for any man's understanding - it would no doubt be true of Knight. Hardy has in fact prepared for this contingency. Knight would fail to understand Elfride's shocked response for several reasons - most of all because he, himself, is balding! (PBE p203) Hence a spontaneous (undignified) admission of anxiety on such a subject would be almost inconceivable to this proud man. Moreover, that the woman he loves expresses such an aversion for thinning hair, reflects very poorly upon him, so his immediate defensive reaction is to scorn her feelings. This, in turn, permits him to misunderstand them. And of course he barely comprehends - repressed soul that he is - Elfride's lack of inhibition, her ability to express her emotions so candidly. Such a show of emotional concern over any issue, let alone over so unmentionable a subject as one's own feminine endowments, would be, to the puritanical Knight, as unseemly as it would be unsettling.

Without a doubt Knight would find Elfride's 'smouldering uneasiness' (PBE p299) difficult to understand

- not only for the reasons here outlined. Knight also lacks insight. Had he owned a less conventional perspective, he would have sensed, not only an unsubordinated spirit in Elfride unaffected by guile, but also a healthy preoccupation with personal adornment which is but the outward expression of an innate grooming instinct. This perfectly natural instinct takes woman, with her assistant, to the looking-glass, and man, with his barber, likewise. There is, in other words, nothing morally reprehensible about Elfride's preoccupation with her luxuriant locks. She owns a perfectly natural desire to enhance her display which will in turn serve to attract and signal, sexual interest.

Although Knight might find the notion preposterous, his own cultivation of,
a curly beard, and crisp moustache: the latter running into the beard on each side of the mouth, and...hiding the real expression of that organ under a chronic aspect of impassivity (PBEp159),

springs from a similar desire to enhance display; as does his adoption of certain other grooming enhancers, which Hardy takes some pains to bring to the reader's attention. There is the urbane cosmopolitan for example, who sports a 'stout walking-stick', a fashionable 'brown-holland sun-hat', not to mention a battered (well-travelled) leather case on his first foray out from the city to the Cornish wilds (PBE p183).

Both lovers then, are concerned with personal presentation in their different ways. If Elfride is at all

representative of her time and clime (if not of her urban, bourgeois peers, many of whom were sporting hair-pieces during this period), she will make a good deal of her hair - displaying it to its fullest advantage and drawing as much attention to its luxuriance as possible.

It goes without saying that Knight would scarcely recognise his own proud posture, and the cultivation of a hirsute persona, as vanity. But Elfride's preoccupations are an altogether different matter of course. Her innocent delight in drawing attention to her woman's body, may not go unchecked - Knight clearly feels. Self-delight may degenerate into a feminine voluptuousness which, to a man of his disposition would be deeply threatening. He has, after all, developed a taste for 'untried' lips and all that that implies. Were Elfride in reality as vain as Knight would have her be, she would pose no threat. She would be empty of deep feeling for him and her gestures would be mannered rather than imbued with those subtle sex signals which he evidently finds too unsettling to handle.

On the other hand, he does come quite close to discerning the true nature and function of what he calls, variously, 'vanity', 'womanly artifice', and 'showing off' (PBE p203). In his observations of Elfride's testing out of her attractions on Endelstow Tower, he notes:

An innocent vanity is of course the origin of these displays. 'Look at me,' say these youthful beginners in womanly artifice, without reflecting whether or not it may be to their advantage to show so very much of themselves. (PBE p203)

Suspending a deeply entrenched moral consciousness is however, beyond Knight. His perception of Elfride's look-at-me sexual display, is instantly derogated, to a single, dangerously over-simplified explanation: vanity. In circumscribing his own perceptions and rendering them thus in wholly moral terms, Knight enacts the exemplary Victorian. So high is his moral seriousness that it effectively colours the world which his sense-perceptions initially register for him quite accurately. Consequently sexual receptivity in Elfride is marked down as vanity. In going unrecognised, unacknowledged, her sexuality remains unapproved as well as unproven, and (thankfully Knight would say), unfronted.

If Hardy faced a dilemma in his presentation of an unconventional heroine whom he would have preferred to let alone to act as she will [14], but who, instead, has to be constantly monitored in the interests of propriety, with Knight he faces relatively few problems. Both characters take life from the inside - the kernel of the author's consciousness [15] - but Hardy is less driven to straighten his characterisation of Knight at the more self-conscious level of writing where a concern for the proprieties is superinduced. This is not to say that the hero does not make demands upon his author. For just as Elfride springs to life as more winning in her waywardness than Hardy can safely permit, so Knight veers slightly off course. It is not that he discloses a masculine-superior condescension to women, or that he regards himself as a cut above his peers.

These traits might have been antipathetical to Hardy but they certainly would not have offended against the proprieties. It is rather the unfolding of his puerility which becomes problematical. To the reader born and bred to value and uphold the cult image of British manhood as virile and chivalrous, (and this, much vaunted in the media [16]), the discovery of adolescent sexual fears lurking behind the morally upright authoritarian figure who has no odour of sexuality about him whatsoever, would have been, to such a reader, implausible if not offensive. Nor does it help matters that Hardy has reversed the Western literary chivalric tradition in A Pair of Blue Eyes to have woman play knight gallant to the hero in a scene which also goes some way to discredit the latter's intelligence about the world around him. Added to which gathering heterodoxies, Elfride openly questions her lover on matters of sex in a potentially critical manner. Consequently, to check the ostensibly mature hero's incipient puerility - his mulish taunting and baiting of an immature girl and his adolescent need to aggrandise himself by putting her down - Hardy takes pains to highlight his hero's larger stature as and when he deems it necessary. Clearly he does not have to invoke the Grundyan commentator where Knight is concerned, whose tight respectability and air of orthodoxy is more overtly persuasive than the fearful (unmanly) psyche it conceals. But it is nonetheless evident that promoting Knight becomes consciously tactical at times. This is felt to be the case because it is exclusively by

means of Elfride's discreditation that he is brought into favour; that is, he gains status by default. Where Hardy is at his most uncomfortable having just negotiated such stylistic awkwardnesses as the abrupt shift in discourse and the authorial intrusion, Knight is nudged into a more favourable light almost as though summoned in the wake of the Grundyan commentator who stands in judgement upon the heroine. This does not, as with Elfride, demand counter-intuitive moves on Hardy's part, but rather reinforcing moves - Knight simply occupies the space that Elfride has vacated.

It occurs for example, that as Elfride turns away, conscience-stricken, from her earlier lover Stephen, to her second lover, Knight, so this is matched by Hardy's own turning away from her in the same moment; a turning away at a time when, in a sense, she needs his support most. To abandon Elfride now, seems at first sight, harsh treatment on Hardy's part; she is after all, vulnerable and in anguish. On the other hand she has just jilted Stephen without offering him the least explanation for her action, so possibly Hardy senses that if she has to be checked at all, the post-jilt moment is timely. Perhaps too, he has pledged himself rather too openly in the preceding sequences. Sympathetically penetrating the heart of the distressed girl, he has stressed her 'natural honesty', her 'tongue so frank...and a mind so straightforward', and what he calls that 'intense fear which accompanies intense love in young women' (PBE p281). So now is the moment for

a more dispassionate stance which will in turn, provide an opportunity for presenting Knight as a worthy rival to Stephen.

Knight in fact, by the very nature of his rectitude, also fulfils the function of introducing high moral tone at a very delicate point in the text where Hardy's sympathetic treatment of a young girl's acquisition of three lovers in short succession, (if we include Jethway), is fast leading him into treacherous waters. The foregrounded Knight can therefore be relied upon to carry the action forward and on into safer, more circumspect channels. However, before promoting the hero, Hardy has first to complete the loosening of Elfride's hold on himself. The procedure is by now, familiar; although in this instance Hardy almost seems to need to preface his withdrawal of sympathy with an apology:

It is difficult to frame rules which shall apply to both sexes, and Elfride, an undeveloped girl, must, perhaps, hardly be laden with the moral responsibilities which attach to a man in like circumstances. (PBE p289)

As the convoluted syntactical arrangement here suggests, together with the backward thrust of the modifier 'perhaps', stylistic features which combine to give irregular evolution to the sentiment, Hardy is very uncomfortable with his own tendentiousness. He is apparently aware that of all characters in A Pair of Blue Eyes it is Elfride who is most laden with moral responsibility - just as her peers in life would be

under like circumstances. The only rules framed or unframed that pertained to inconstancy in women, were those which unloaded guilt and responsibility on to them. However, in so far as a contradictory element invariably attends such authorial shifts in direct relation to the imminent arrival of the worldly-wise censor, this is stylistically consistent. Hardy proceeds. Now in the persuasive tones of the Platonist he declares:

But if honesty is a virtue in itself, Elfride, having none of it now, seemed, being for being, scarcely good enough for Knight. (PBE p289)

'If' and 'seemed' here, clearly save Hardy from becoming the strict moral censor that a small excision or two would endorse. Nonetheless Elfride is now sufficiently well backgrounded and Knight moves into the ascendant. Hitherto a little acid and lecturing, he now displays solicitousness, tenderness, and more - a distinct moral superiority over Elfride and Stephen.

The process of 'approving' Knight can be determined by a brief examination of a before and after comment of Hardy's; the earlier of which reads thus:

As Knight meditatively addressed his juniors thus, unconscious of the deception practised, for different reasons, by the severed hearts at his side, and of the scenes that had in earlier days united them, each one felt that he and she did not gain by contrast with their musing mentor. (PBE p288)

And later:

His obtuseness to the cause of her indisposition, by evidencing his entire freedom from the suspicion of anything behind the scenes, showed how incapable Knight was of deception himself, rather than any

inherent dulness in him regarding human nature.
(PBE p292)

With obtuseness rather unconvincingly assimilated to an unsuspecting nature, together with the apologetic manner of delivery, the author reserves his commitment. On the other hand, somewhat sophisticatedly, the 'unconscious' Knight is recast as unsuspecting-and-therefore-innocent Knight. And of course there are no 'severed hearts' at his side in the later event, to deflect readerly sympathy away towards Elfride and Stephen. In actuality Knight's incapacity for deception is wholly relative. As has already been noticed (above), he has a capacity for the most treacherous of deceptions; not simply self-concealment but deliberate misrepresentation of his intentions.

That there is this element of contradiction serves as a reminder that Hardy is not at this point, fully engaged either with his text or his character. He elevates Knight but is by no means committed to doing so. Knight has acquired honesty entirely by default as it were. Nonetheless, a little softened to Knight the reader must inevitably be. To be excluded from a commonly shared secret is, in this context, to be indemnified against aversion. And although Knight is not aware of his exclusion, Hardy makes the reader aware on his account; and while this implicates us in the conspiracy, so it also draws us towards the proud man so humiliated.

This lack of engagement on Hardy's part is later

partially resolved; although it never becomes a total commitment to Knight. As the hero's self-destructive pride - which leads him unknowingly into self-delusion - culminates in his rejection of Elfride and feelings of loss and desolation, so Hardy draws closer to his hero and engages with him more sympathetically in his moments of deepest pain. Through ambivalence then, Hardy proceeds to a deeper involvement with Knight - but it is an erratic effortful course. As Knight proposes marriage, so Hardy enhances his moral stature. It is clearly critical - in terms of plausibility - that the high-principled man who is to reject Elfride on moral grounds is presented as morally above reproach at this stage in the novel. Hardy proceeds accordingly. Elfride's distancing has of course already been effected in the interlude which focussed upon her alleged vanity; where Knight's cruel taunts unexpectedly meet with insinuations as to woman's deep fascination with her looks and beauty. There then occurs the earring fastening sequence, with Knight just as fascinated with his lover's bodily adornments as she. And as the moment for Knight's proposal of marriage looms, so Hardy adopts a less negative attitude towards his hero.

Elfride, aroused by Knight's suggestion that it should be he who fastens the earrings in her lobes, expresses misgivings as to the rectitude of this little intimacy.

Knight however, seizes the moment:

'Then I will!' he rejoined, with that singular earnestness about a small matter...which is only found in deep natures who have been wholly unused to toying with womankind. (PBE p301)

Promptly, authorial equivocation gives way to a fuller engagement with the hero, as, with one last shot in Elfride's direction, which brings down the 'blasting reproaches' of Mrs Jethway in mid-discourse, Hardy reminds both the reader and himself that the heroine's 'fickleness' is now 'painted...as an enormity' (PBE p302). Saluting Knight without demur, Hardy now declares:

Knight was as honourable a man as was ever loved and deluded by woman. It may be said that his blindness in love proved the point, for shrewdness in love usually goes with meanness in general. Once the passion mastered him, insight began to be blurred. (PBE p302)

This is Hardy's most full-blooded defence of Knight. Although, as pride crumbles under feelings of deep humiliation, so to this 'man...now absolutely in pain' (PBE p329) he extends, for the duration, a sympathetic hand.

However, Hardy cannot (or will not) generate more sympathy than immediate circumstances demand, and as the underside of raw ego-centricity begins to surface through the noble, proud, exterior, so authorial commiseration is replaced by a bitter irony which, we sense, has long lain dormant. In his reaction to Elfride's confession, Knight is ego-defensive in the extreme. It now becomes plain that it is not so much Elfride's past which finally humiliates him, but the fact of his having been deceived by a young girl over whom he had been convinced he had exerted absolute power and control. Nothing hits Knight so hard as this assault upon his ego. Hardy illustrates this expertly in one of the last conversations between Stephen and Knight

- each consumed with an ego-defensive need to claim Elfride's death as directly caused by himself. Conflated, the rivals' dialogue reads thus:

'Can it be that I have killed her?'/ 'You have killed her more than I?'

'I wish the most abject confession...could...make amends to my darling'/ 'Your darling!...Any man can say that, I suppose: any man can. I know this, she was my darling before she was yours; and after too. If anybody has a right to call her his own, it is I'. (PBE p396)

The identity of the speakers is immaterial. Both reveal an alarming monomania for conquest. This is all the more disconcerting for its sudden upsurge at the untoward moment of the gentle Elfride's death. Contemplating the two rivals from his now remote stance of bitter irony, Hardy leaves the sexual jousting that informs the bragadoccio to speak for itself.

Stylistical prolixities, authorial ambivalence, and contradictory accounts notwithstanding, Hardy does succeed in A Pair of Blue Eyes in breaking new ground without jeopardising his reputation in any way. Firstly, without offending against the proprieties he quietly, but emphatically, reverses the Western literary chivalric tradition in his depiction of a heroine of some courage and nerve who comes to the rescue of an imperilled (fallen) hero. It is a subtle move in fact, which paves the way for an even greater heroine who will later put her life at risk in order to stand by the man she has rescued - not from physical death but moral and psychological degradation -

the Tess who forces the 'fallen' Angel Clare to confront his own hypocrisy and sexual double-standard. Secondly, Hardy also succeeds in A Pair of Blue Eyes, in creating in Elfride a woman not only of courage and nerve, but of singular sexual assertiveness, whose demand is for recognition of her self as a person in her own right:

Am I such a - mere characterless toy - as to have no attract - tion in me, apart from - freshness? Haven't I brains? You said - I was clever and ingenious in my thoughts, and - isn't that anything? Have I not some beauty? I think I have a little - and I know I have - yes I do! You have praised my voice, and my manner, and my accomplishments. Yet all these together are so much rubbish because I - accidentally saw a man before you! (PBE p344)

Knight is quick of course to subvert Elfride's meaning by his customary method of re-stating the grounds of her argument.

O come Elfride."Accidentally saw a man" is very cool. You loved him remember. (PBE p344)

The intrepid Elfride has the ground cut away from under her yet again.

But Hardy will not endorse this denial of her worth and self. Returning the two heroes back to Endelstow at the last, each intent upon claiming Elfride as his own prize, he purposefully denies her to them. Neither is given the right or privilege to claim the woman whom they still, unashamedly patronise. Nor will Hardy give either the satisfaction of claiming her death as their trophy. Elfride dies bearing another man's love and another man's life in her body. There will be no revendication for

either hero. Each has forfeited all rights as claimant in such a case.

That Hardy draws Elfride right out of Knight's sphere to die offstage, provides a fitting conclusion to a characterisation which has demanded diverse alternating shifts and displacements of her person. Excluding her from Knight's urban, middle-class world of male-domination is Hardy's way of vindicating his heroine, who dies the woman she claimed the right in life, to be. She is loved and lovable in her own right, as Unity testifies. Her accomplishments and beauty, her ingenious thoughts and so forth, are not only imprinted upon the hearts of those who know her deeply, but are also no longer subject to effacement at the hands of time or change. Neither man nor circumstance can render her personal qualities 'so much rubbish', nor can either reduce her to a 'mere characterless toy'.

The bitter irony of the dénouement, with Knight's journeying by train to the same destination as his dead beloved (adjacently located in her coffin), yet moving in an altogether different direction - that is not towards burying her but 'bedding' her - aesthetically provides the most perfect of finishes to the parallel voyages and their significances, that take place throughout the novel. Not only does Hardy's narrative abound in restless authorial shifts, but so too does the plot. Elfride's conflictful growth to womanhood is mapped out in a series of hazardous journeys, each of which finds her accompanied by one or

other of her lovers. One thing is plain, Elfride journeying alone is safe! None of her solitary, wild, equestrian exploits endangers her. But every one of her voyages, ascents, or traversings with Knight, (and to a lesser extent with Stephen), puts her at risk. Moreover, on each of these journeys, there is a divergence of inner courses. Elfride mentally or emotionally voyages in one direction - towards an exploration and understanding of the world - and Knight in quite the opposite. In common with many Hardy heroes, Knight would make a world to suit his own requirements.

The Cliff scene is of course pivotal in this context. And not only at the obvious level of risk. Underlying this, there is the incipient tension of hearts diverging inwardly one from the other. Elfride sets out to watch for Stephen; but Knight tracks her down and in joining her on her cliff walk inadvertently sets her off course. She has set out in a fairly depressed mood - in accord, Hardy tells us, with the overcast skies above (PBE p230) - but with Knight's arrival on the scene, a deeper turbulence sets in, although he, by contrast, remains in sanguine mood. The pattern of convergent/divergent courses takes shape. The couple scale the heights - Elfride searching the horizon to her left, Knight looking out to Cam Beak on the right (PBE p233). Even at the climax of the scene, when the rescued Knight rushes to embrace his rescuer in a surge of relief and gratitude, she is still preoccupied with broader horizons. Her eyes are sweeping the coastline for sight of

Stephen's steamboat (PBE p246). Earlier, traversing the tower parapet she had been similarly fraught with distress and conflict. She had felt slighted by Knight's peremptory, superior manner for some days. So now, but 'without reflecting in the least upon what she was doing' (PBE p191) she embarks upon a perilous walk, as has been her wont in earlier days. She mounts the parapet. But instead of commanding Knight's admiration, as she had unconsciously desired, she receives a schoolmasterly reprimand and, unnerved, trips, loses her balance and falls.

Here, as in the Cliff ascent, Elfride's needs are not met, but frustrated by Knight. In the Tower scene he frustrates them perversely; in the Cliff scene, out of carelessness. He, on the other hand, is the beneficiary on both occasions. He is saved from certain death on the Cliff, and, at a far more mundane level, manages to gather from the Tower incident a useful amount of behavioural data for his researches. Moreover, he is offered in each instance, a bona-fide opportunity for a close, physical embrace with the young girl.

Hardy is, in other words, maintaining throughout the text, a strong undercurrent of sexual exploitation - even parasiticism. As Elfride shrinks and wastes Knight thrives and grows:

It was very odd to himself to look at his theories on the subject of love, and reading them now by the full light of experience, to see how much more his sentences meant than he had felt them to mean when they were written. People often discover the real force of a trite old maxim only when it is thrust

upon them by a chance adventure; but Knight had never before known the case of a man who learnt the full compass of his own epigrams by such means. (PBE p216)

As Elfride passes from emotional conflict to oppressive fear, deep humiliation and pain at Knight's instigation, so this is matched by the repression of her sexual energies to guilt and shame. This 'rite of passage' (growth to Victorian womanhood) - finds its correlative journey in the sea-trip from London to the West Country which locates, yet again, the lovers travelling to the same destination but with hearts divergent within. As the 'staunch vessel' ploughs its way through 'floundering...rushing...dim and moaning' 'antagonistic currents' (PBE pp314,315), so the young girl, longing to throw off the burden of her secret past, attempts a confrontation with her lover. But he is clearly not making the same 'journey' at all. In the face of her tremulousness he is hearty: 'a certain happy pride in his tone' (PBE p315); to her falteringness he responds with self-assurance (PBE p316); to her unease he is confident (PBE p317); and as she is chilled by the minute both physically and emotionally - 'chilled...like a frost' - so he, by direct contrast, is 'warmed...all over' (PBE p316). Yet again the 'journey' Elfride wishes to make - this time towards a closer sexual intimacy and understanding with her lover - is obstructed. But she is intrepid. Like the staunch little vessel that bears her, she rushes on:
You are severe on women, are you not? (PBE p317)

To her attempt to soften him, Knight blandly responds with:
No, I think not. I had a right to please my taste,
and that was for untried lips. Other men than
those of my sort acquire the taste as they get
older - but don't find an Elfride - (PBE p317)

Stricken by his assumptions - needing to curb his train of
thought before presupposition hardens to conviction - she
cries out with a revealing projection of her inner fears on
to the outer world: 'What horrid sound is that we hear
when we pitch forward?'. But Knight, impervious, 'pitches'
on regardless:

Only the screw - don't find an Elfride as I did.
To think that I...(PBE p317)

Blandly overriding her feelings, Knight has just proved
Elfride right: he is severe indeed.

The congruent metaphors Hardy introduces in this
sequence are richly suggestive. We can hardly mistake his
meaning. From chilly unease, to a turbulence staunchly
contained, Elfride, now drained of all her youthful,
buoyant energies, has become impregnated with Knight's own
sexual fears and inhibitions. Riveted by the 'horrid
sound' of his steely words expressing only distaste for all
but untried lips, and with his words falling 'upon her like
a weight' (PBE p318), she drifts into a 'dim and moaning',
restless, sleep; later to awaken in terror at her own
nightmares, to hear her lover calmly assuring her that 'the
clouds have completely cleared off whilst you have been
sleeping' (PBE p319). But unknown to the obtuse Knight
they have amassed in Elfride's heart.

Embarking upon courtship - a testing time for the young, impulsive girl - had begun with Stephen and lighthearted excursions across the cliffs. These forays had culminated in her rash flight to London. That had been a time for a playful testing of her immature sexuality, which later led to her greater need to develop nerve - the nerve which had so failed her with Stephen. Her first flight from the nest had brought her down to earth with a bump. It had been a precipitate flight. Hardy elucidates this well in his treatment of the 'journey' motif. He tells us, by way of a prefatory leader, that it had long since been Elfride's girlish practice to set out on small journeys from which she would return with little treasures she had found (PBE p142). But there are no prizes to be had on the journey to London with Stephen. Hardy takes pains to show, by metaphorically shaping Elfride's prefigurative journey on horseback to meet Stephen as a journey without direction, that she is by no means ready to be launched into the adult world. Emotionally and sexually she lacks direction - she is patently unready. Addressing himself to the most appropriate of symbolic actions - the young girl's manner of riding - Hardy contrives that all prose rhythms cluster around the motion of her horse; the motion of turn and turn about. This aptly mirrors Elfride's strife-of-thought and vacillation between the emotional states of anxiety and expectation which now engulf her; while at the same time the accelerating/decelerating equestrian pace bears as close a

rhythmic resemblance to the advance/retreat sexual states of an uncertain feminine response to the overtures of the opposite sex, as might be conjured under the circumstances. Unable to locate her true destination - onward or back - Elfride rides a distracted mental roundabout: patently unready for Stephen.

This premature journey - Elfride's first major attempt at finding direction, alone, unaided, and with only the ardent pressurings of her lover to guide her - might plausibly be seen as the prologue to all other journeys that take place in her short career. By the time the day comes for embarking upon her sea-trip with Knight, expectation and anxiety have intensified to become, not closely related states which in turn propel and retard her direction, but inseparable, unsegregated states. The rhythmic patterns and tensions of the earlier sequence - the gentle, rocking motion of the amenable pony - have become enlarged, more complex, more dissonant: the heaving, plunging motion of the sea-going vessel. Simultaneously, a contrapuntal effect - introduced by the lovers' opposing moods - is sustained by Hardy, highlighting the tension. Knight's mood is genial, Elfride's nerve-wracked. The complacent mind and the questing, share no common ground. But the world - as far as Hardy is concerned - is not in accord with Knight. It is not with sanguine indifference that the staunch vessel's crew successfully navigates antagonistic currents, but with the applied energy, nerve and intuition that are,

analogically, Elfride's own gifts. She however, has to manoeuvre alone and unaided upon a journey, the speed and direction of which she can no longer control. Moreover, there can be no voluntary turning back on this voyage. To complete the sequence, Hardy reintroduces Mrs Jethway, who, as the personification of guilt and punishment, (drawing herself inexorably into a shadowy association with Knight), is fast closing in on Elfride. On the London trip she had made her appearance at the last terminus; now she appears mid-course - some time before disembarkation.

The implications are clear. There is to be no voyage to self-discovery for Elfride, no working towards sexual understanding, no drawing closer to Knight and no candid confrontations with him. He is incapable of offering her direction despite his years and experience of the world. He has no intention of encouraging her to be the kind of person she wants to be - feels herself to be - an emotionally resilient, self-disciplined but warmly responsive woman. If to Hardy she is an invigorating personality, to Knight she is threatening. It is not vigour or nerve or sexual responsiveness that he seeks or needs in Elfride. He might love, but cannot make love to such a woman. He badly needs to feel the larger of the two at whatever cost.

Elfride's last journey brings no prizes for anyone of course. On the contrary, it brings forfeits for Stephen and Knight. This seems a harsh sentence upon the younger man whose only failing has been to misplace his loyalties -

pledging too much trust, respect and confidence in Knight. Stephen has placed his affections too indiscriminately; and possibly as a 'Knight' in the making (as his close identification with the older man seems to threaten), he has to be repudiated by the author at the last. There are clearly heavy penalties to be paid for allying with this upright, establishment figure so closely affiliated to the Grundyan world - and Stephen has to pay. Nonetheless Hardy's perfunctory treatment of the younger hero sounds a jarring note in what appears - in the final analysis - to be a more coherently worked text than has, in some cases, been credited. Alternately displacing and reinstating his heroine as he grapples with the proprieties on the one hand and an unconventional characterisation on the other, Hardy has also mapped out a coherent series of increasingly fruitless voyages for Elfride, to illustrate that bleak journey to womanhood that leads nowhere - except that is, to marriage and an untimely entombment.

One of Hardy's greatest achievements in this novel is that he never permits himself to lose sight of his central character long enough to allow the Grundyan Knight the supremacy he demands for himself, and which propriety also demands of him. Neither the hero nor the superinduced proprietary consciousness so limits Hardy that he cannot find ways and means of steering between both and back to Elfride's struggle to 'come into being' - as D.H Lawrence expresses it [17]. 'This', writes Lawrence,
is the tragedy of Hardy...the tragedy of those who,
more or less pioneers, have died in the

wilderness...Remain quite within convention, and you are good, safe, and happy in the long run, though you never have the vivid pang of sympathy on your side: or, on the other hand, be passionate, individual, wilful, you will find the security of convention a walled prison, you will escape, and you will die, either from your own lack of strength to bear the isolation and the exposure, or by direct revenge from the community, or from both.
[18]

It is not surprising that Hardy nourished a lifelong fondness for A Pair of Blue Eyes under the circumstances of its troublesome genesis and final successful delivery. He badly wanted it kept in print; partly, we might conjecture, in order to keep his heroine 'alive'. Were Elfride modelled on Emma as opposed to borrowing from her, Hardy's desire to keep the book in print might appear a little perverse (she is after all, untimely buried). By the same token, his hindsight comment upon Emma as model would also seem to be somewhat perverse - were it not thoroughly suspect as camouflage. But with kin-related unions to the fore, (Elfride's husband-to-be is her step-mother's cousin, and she is herself kin to Luxellian); certain physiognomical discrepancies such as Emma's grey eyes, corn-gold hair [19], which contrasts with Elfride's blue eyes and 'palest brown' hair (PBE p205); together with Hardy's implicit theme of the lost beloved - the lost prize to be buried and mourned; there appears to be a very good case for arguing in favour of Tryphena as the more vivid model - the Emma associations interwoven.

A Pair of Blue Eyes was well received. Hardy,

gratified with its success which surpassed all his expectations (Life p95), was further rewarded by acclaim from Coventry Patmore and Tennyson - which he evidently deeply valued since he enters both appraisals into the Life verbatim (p104,5 and p137 respectively). Secretly, he must also have relished the Saturday Review's critical evaluation. Harboursing misgivings as to the fact that Hardy had designed 'a mode of life led by the heroine and her lovers with a kind of defiance of conventionality' [20], it is evident that for once the detective eye of the Saturday Review has failed to locate the true textual source and evidence of Hardy's defiance of convention. There was then, no hostile criticism and no opprobrium. On the contrary, the novel was an immediate success and continued to be 'surprisingly popular up to about the end of the century' [22].

NOTES

1. 'Scientificism' is a term applied to studies of the social sciences. Lyell (1830), De Morgan (1853) and Black (1883) all referred to men of science as 'scientific'; and Morley (1886) writes 'The whole of our knowledge will be impressed with...the character of positivity or scientificity'. See A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles Edited by J. A. H. Murray, (London, 1914) V111, Part 2. p223. The more popular scientificists included among their number: phrenologists, physiognomists, and eugenicists.
2. According to Hardy, this first novel was: 'A sweeping satire of the squirearchy and nobility, the vulgarity of the middle-class, modern Christianity, Church restoration, and political and domestic morals in general' (Life p61).
Further reading on The Poor Man and the Lady. Carl Weber Hardy of Wessex; Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy; W R. Rutland, Thomas Hardy : A Study of his Writings and Their Backgrounds
3. Kenneth Graham English Criticism of the Novel. 1865-1900 (London, 1965) p 33
4. Quoted by Harold Orel (editor) in Hardy's Personal Writings (Kansas, 1966) pp 128,130.
See also G. W. Sherman's retelling of the Hardy anecdote concerning his story 'The Distracted Preacher' (1879). This provides an apt illustration of the 'de rigueur' in English literary periodicals. Sherman writes that Hardy's is 'an audacious tale of rum-smuggling - Cherbourg to Weymouth - involving a mild-mannered landlady, a Wesleyan minister, and a smuggler, Jim, of which he says in a footnote that "the ending of the story, with the marriage of Lizzy and the Minister, was almost de rigueur in an English Magazine at the time of writing". But he restored the original version in which Lizzy, much to her credit, "stuck with Jim" and after their marriage they emigrated to Wisconsin.' G.W. Sherman The Pessimism of Thomas Hardy (New Jersey and London, 1976) p60
5. Far From the Madding Crowd p162
6. Tess of the d'Urbervilles p218
7. Charles Reade Love Me Little Love Me Long (London and Glasgow, 1890) p80
8. Thomas Hardy, 'The Ruined Maid', The Variorum Edition of The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy Edited by James Gibson (London, 1979) p128
9. David Lodge, 'Introduction' to The Woodlanders p10. See

- also sections on Hardy in David Lodge's The Modes of Modern Writing (London, 1977)
10. R. Kincaid, 'Coherency in "A Pair of Blue Eyes"', Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy Edited by Dale Kramer (London, 1979) p 202
 11. See 'Note on the Text', A Pair of Blue Eyes p420
 12. Roland Barthes, 'To Write: An Intransitive Verb', The Structuralist Controversy edited by R.Macksey and E.Donato (Baltimore, 1972) p140
 13. Hardy has already pointed to a certain vanity in Knight, whose cultivation of an imposing manner, and preservation of this facade at all costs, is implicit in the paragraph beginning 'Knight certainly...' and ending '...of their frankness' (PBE p 187).
 14. Harold Orel op. cit., pp128, 130
 15. As a rider to this, it is worth noting that in appraising both his texts and his critics, Hardy commented more than once upon the fact of there being more in a literary text than the author consciously puts there.
 16. The cult of virility: 'Strength, in all its forms, is Life and Manhood' according to Fitzjames Stephen - 'to be less strong is to be less of a man'. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, edited by R J.White (Cambridge, 1967) p199 [First published in 1873, as an answer to Mill's On Liberty]
 17. D H.Lawrence Lawrence on Hardy and Painting . 'A Study of Thomas Hardy' and 'Introduction to these paintings' (London, 1973) p22 Edited by J V.Davies
 18. *ibid.*, p23
 19. See also Peter Coxon's forthcoming article 'Hardy's use of the hair motif' in A Thomas Hardy Annual 1 (1982) Edited by Norman Page.
 20. R.G.Cox Thomas Hardy :The Critical Heritage (London, 1970) p15
 21. Cox *ibid.*, xvii

Far From the Madding Crowd

If there are signs in A Pair of Blue Eyes of a 'kind of defiance of conventionality', which, together with oblique authorial clues might lead us to a more discriminating reading of this early Hardy text, in Far From the Madding Crowd the authorial directives are by no means so maladroit or abstruse. They issue in the first instance from Hardy's allusion to Thomas Gray, whose 'Elegy written in a Country Churchyard' lent him his title:

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;
Along the cool sequester'd vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way. [1]

Embedded in Hardy's title, which refers not to Gray's 'cool sequester'd vale', but to his own Wessex weltanschauung, there is an implicit irony. For Hardy's microcosmic world holds out no freedom from 'ignoble strife' for the reader's delectation.

With characteristic understatement Hardy sketched out his novel to Leslie Stephen as a pastoral story about 'a young woman-farmer, a shepherd, and a sergeant of cavalry' (Life p95). But as G. W. Sherman notes, Far From the Madding Crowd...the best known and least understood of Hardy's Wessex novels...is only

superficially a Pastoral Romance. [2]

And although, as Hardy says by way of extenuation in the Life, 'he was aware of the pecuniary value of a reputation for a speciality' (Life p102), he did not have any intention - as Sherman argues, of restricting his literary horizon to the sheepfolds of Wessex, when he had already widened it to the thoroughfares of London. [3]

Hardy's use of the Pastoral genre as a vehicle through which to channel far less innocuous subject matter than the rising fortunes of a good shepherd, the amours of a young, unconventional woman farmer, and the profligate exploits of a cavalry sergeant, is sufficiently purposeful and ingenious to warrant a comprehensive analysis of a text which has been passed down to us shrouded by Victorian critical interpretations. For far too long we have relied, as did Hardy's contemporaries, upon an escape-world urban consciousness which reflects sentimentally upon a rustic world the reality of which could rapidly disenchant. Looking to Hardy to provide us with pastoral elegies, idylls, or even to construct for us a landscape which 'assumes a kind of mother-quality' [4], reveals more in fact about the reader than the writer of the Wessex novels for whom the natural world is nowhere so idealised. Indeed Hardy's diverse landscapes seem at times to be too deeply infused with an exile consciousness to be psychologically nourishing. From the wastelands that give sanctuary to

gaunt, spectral visitants in Tess, to the 'Limbo' of Egdon [5], and the dark interiority of The Woodlanders where the visitor seeking admission loses himself finding the place [6], a rootless, deracinated, consciousness pervades - unhoused of secure haven or refuge. The peaceful and secure community is noticeably absent and the natural world - to Hardy 'played out as a Beauty...but not as a mystery' (Life p185) - is by no means an automatic source of peace and comfort to those who inhabit it.

Escape worlds fill a deep psychological need, but it is important that we emerge from them with fresh or refreshed perspectives. And no doubt many a Victorian did so emerge from Hardy's envisaged 'Wessex...the escape world so dear to industrial England's iron time of doubts and fears' [7]. But while there was delight at Hardy's vivid rendering of verdant pastures, there was also frustration. His characters would continually 'break out' - as the Victorian critic R H.Hutton expressed it - from what should have been their 'heavy bovine character' [8]. 'Illiterate clods' [9], according to another critic, should have been more in evidence. Hardy's rustics clearly did not epitomise the veritable Hodge of urban, bourgeois imaginings.

The animated response Far From the Madding Crowd generated, was, in the main, tinged with an anxiety that so frequently bordered upon the inquisitorial it was evident Hardy had touched a few raw nerves. For as hotly as the dissenting voices declaimed against what was felt to be his

textual inconsistency and inappropriate characterisation, so reflexively there was a falling back upon the psychological purgative of investing in dreams of a lost stable world - the Albion of the reader's longings: a world of 'Boeotians' become 'Athenians' [10], living out their 'idyllic...rustic life' [11], in an 'immobile rural existence' [12]. The great merit of the book, the French critic Leon Boucher claimed in his article entitled (typically) 'Le Roman pastoral en Angleterre', lies in its rejuvenation of 'le genre antique et souvent ennuyeux de la pastoral' [13].

Sensing the dissonance underlying their 'Pastoral idyll', Victorians reacted not by asking the reason why, but by displacing Hardy's Wessex world altogether by insisting upon its exteriority, or its 'otherness'; its quaintness, its rustic humour, its idyllic quality. These were epithets which, whether consciously or unconsciously applied, set the Wessex world inexorably apart from that of the Victorian middle-class reader. And while Hardy's reputation rested securely upon this - or rather his 'reputation for a speciality' - the success of Far From the Madding Crowd was partly due to the fact that such readerly emphases had removed the novel's subject matter from the drawing room to a world in which rustics and unconventional woman-farmers were safely distanced.

The Guardian for example (24.Feb. 1875), lauded the book as 'in truth a purely pastoral idyll' [14]; likewise The Times (25.Jan. 1875), for whom:

Mr Hardy...transforms, with skilful touch, the matter-of-fact prosaic details of everyday life into an idyl or a pastoral poem...This idyllic or romantic element is never violent or forced...Mr Hardy has his subject well in hand. [15]

And from The Saturday Review (9.Jan. 1875), there came compliments to Mr Hardy upon his still 'lingering in the pleasant byways of pastoral and agricultural life' [16].

At the same time critics did voice misgivings which expressed more mystification than frustration. Henry James was one, who found Hardy's characterisation of his heroine not at all what it should have been. She is 'inconsequential, wilful and mettlesome', complains James, 'and we cannot say that we either understand or like her' (The Nation 24.Dec. 1874. [17]). The Observer (13.Jan. 1875) liked her even less:

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. [18]

Unacceptable too, was Oak's rising 'somewhat too much above the class he lives amongst', and the fact that his love was 'rather too high-toned for the general pitch of the work' [19].

All in all opinion was divided, confused, and embarrassed; the more so for the fact that George Eliot had erroneously been dubbed author of Far From the Madding Crowd by early enthusiasts. This

provoked many an embarrassed reviewer to lean heavily upon making comparative analyses of Hardy/Eliot stylistics as if in extenuation of his or her own critical assumptions. Hardy's imitation, and in some cases his besting of Eliot's style provided the basis for a vigorous debate in which the subject matter of his novel took second - or last - place.

But that for many critics Hardy's characters did not 'fit', did not urge any reviewer to consider whether or not a category mistake might have been made in assigning Hardy's novel to the Pastoral genre. The Observer critic without detecting the incongruity, actually speaks in the present tense about 'women in whatever rank of society' and then continues in the same breath to criticise Hardy's 'incorrigible hussy' for causing offence. Yet it does not appear to occur to the writer that in arguing thus, the discussion has led away from pastoral topics altogether, to contemporary predicaments and modern ethics approached from a strictly contemporary, middle-class point-of-view.

No reviewer then, dwelt analytically either upon Hardy's text or the literary logic of the prevailing critical point-of-view. Not one discussed the problem of incongruity, except at the level of pure stylistics. Yet each in turn had detected inherent inconsistencies: the 'gross improbabilities' of characterisation, (The Athenaeum. 5.Dec. 1874. [20]); Hardy's not 'quite trustworthy' presentation, (The Spectator. 19.Dec. 1874. [21]); that it was doubtful whether 'Mr Hardy's pictures may be trusted', (*ibid.*, [22]); that 'the only things we

believe in are the sheep and the dogs', (Henry James in The Nation. 24.Dec. 1874. [23]); that Bathsheba was 'a character not to be admired, as (Mr Hardy) would seem to intimate', (Westminster Review. Jan. 1875. [24]); that 'our confidence in the truthfulness of many of the idyllic incidents of rustic life' is uncertain, (The Saturday Review. 9.Jan. 1875. [25]); and that 'we are led to question the truthfulness' of such scenes as these (ibid.). And so on and so forth in that vein.

Upon Hardy's 'Pastoral idyll', in the final analysis, there was imposed - paradoxically - a recognisably Victorian standard of morality. And if the critic could not care one straw for Bathsheba, it was because she did not fit the writer's idea, not of rustic woman-farmers, but of conventional Victorian womankind; as the critical reference to Hardy's treatment of the first interview between Troy and Bathsheba, leads us on to discover. Hardy, the accusation goes, represents the heroine in so 'odious a light' that she not only offends against all modesty and reserve, but alienates the reviewer into the bargain. So what is it that so offends against decorum in this interview? The episode may be paraphrased thus. The heroine is walking home alone through the woods, in the dark. She passes on the narrow path, so closely to another - who turns out to be both stranger and male - that upon contact with his person she feels, through his clothes, the heat of his man's body (FFMC p186). Simultaneously she discovers that her gown has become entangled in his

soldierly apparel: his spur. Disentangling herself then involves her in a considerable amount of touching and handling of his person (and vice-versa) notably his spur; and not a little unseemly bending over 'for the performance' (FFMC p187). In the meantime her unaverted eyes have taken in the youthful physique of the 'young and slim' soldier (FFMC p187). This together with his flirtatious flatteries have embarrassed her - not however to shun, but to know more of, him. It is for this reason that, as the protracted course of her delivery from 'captivity' (FFMC p188) is concluded, instead of walking home demurely in a dignified assertion of womanly pride and reserve, she runs. She arrives home flushed and 'panting' (FFMC p190); sets about quizzing her maid as to the possible identity of the mysterious stranger; and finally ascends to her bedchamber - not to kneel in penitential prayer, but to relish sweet, retrospective frissons of delight instead!

So 'odious' a representation as this, would have been all the more offensive for the absence of any moralising overtones within the text. The author does not defer to his reader's sense of propriety at any point - there is no cautioning or censuring of the heroine whatsoever.

It is easy to see how the Victorian, deeply sensitive to appearances, behaviour and decorum, would have found this episode offensive; that is if a readerly identification with Hardy's characters and situation had been provoked - which clearly it had. Paradoxically the

attempt to distance the novel's subject matter has not, in this instance, succeeded. However in the main, emphasis upon the 'Pastoral' did provide an escape-route as well as an escape-world for the Victorian reader. And the emphasis stuck. Even twenty years later, in the 1890s, the insistence, echoing down from two decades past, was that Hardy's genre was the Pastoral and he should remain faithful to it. Locating his sphere by neat sleight-of-hand, the critic tells the reader that, in his representation of Tess, 'Mr Hardy parades his heroine like a horse dealer' [26] - an equine turn of phrase which designates Hardy's 'proper' sphere in a single stroke. Proceeding to a closer examination of Tess, the writer also asserts:

Mr Hardy...indeed...is too apt to affect a preciousness of phrase which has a somewhat incongruous effect in a tale of rustic life; he is too fond...of making experiments in a form of language which he does not seem clearly to understand, and in a style for which he was assuredly not born. It is a pity, for Mr Hardy had a very good style once, and one moreover excellently suited to the subjects he knew and was then content to deal with. [27]

The reviewer is not in a position to know perhaps, that the subjects Hardy knew and was content to deal with, were not linked to shepherdesses and sheep. Nor would there have been, given the persistent, persuasive focus upon Hardy's pastoral theme, any full cognizance that in this context 'the most outstanding thing about Hardy's novels is the constancy with which he returned to his satire of London society begun in

The Poor Man and the Lady' [28]. Nineteenth-century propaganda did not favour Hardy in this light; despite the fact that by the 1890s, Wessex heroines were marrying middle-class doctors, mayors, and the sons of clerics. With hindsight it seems extraordinary that Hardy's subject matter should still have been parcelled off as topically suitable only to the barnyard - when both the author and his characters were indisputably entrenched in the modern world. But the fin-de-siècle critic for whom 'realism' in the novel was the 'Daemon of the epoch' [29]; and who harboured considerably more enthusiasm for the pastoral romance; did not conceal a deep resentment that Hardy was not offering his readers a good deal more of the latter.

Ironically it was his literary excursion from the 'barnyard' into the cultural echelons of the bourgeoisie which fuelled the outrage. His iconoclasm and critical attacks upon Victorian middle-class society were the more resented for his not having been to the manner born - as it were. That he had not in the first instance inhabited either the 'barnyard' of his texts, or the peasant's cottage of his purported origins in life, was not information the critic wished to hear. The greater the distance set between Thomas Hardy and the 'drawing-room' the better.

The layperson's image of Hardy as a Victorian metamorphosed Hodge still persists today. This scarcely takes into account the fact that he enjoyed an unusually cultured childhood - the music, the dance, the Virgil; the

company and instruction of one French governess (Life p25), and of course the yet more instructive company of Mrs Julia Martin. Politicised at an early age (Life p21), and in adolescence a suitable candidate for a higher education in architecture, this son of the property-holding Bockhampton Hardys had neither peasant nor even (in the Marxist sense of the word) proletarian origins. But to borrow Michael Alexander's apposite phrase, 'This Tolpuddle curmudgeon is not of course, Thomas Hardy, but the image has stuck' [30].

The elasticity afforded by the much lauded 'pastoral' had clear advantages in that it could render thematic material less overtly offensive than a clearly identifiable Victorian middle-class setting, with its palpable immediacy, would have allowed. Bathsheba as woman-farmer turned bailiff's wife, was, after all, acceptable in a way that Tess - candidate for teacher-training turned parson's daughter-in-law - could never be. If Tess was 'dangerous to the moral fibre of young readers' [31], this was not only because she was 'fallen-woman'/kept-woman, but also because she was the beloved of two well-born middle-class Englishmen: a parson's son and a 'reformed' seducer/preacher. To the modern reader, such an interpretation of Alec in particular, seems eccentric to say the least. But it does go some way to illustrating the intractability of the socio/sexual prejudices that Hardy had to contend with. Summarising Hardy's Tess plot, the critic writes:

At length they marry, and then he confesses to her that once upon a time he committed adultery or

fornication. She forgives him, and feeling that now in response to her magnanimity he will forgive her, tells her story of shame. [32]

Fornication for man on the one hand - shame for woman on the other. A fairytale 'once-upon-a-time' pretty colouration upon Angel's indiscretion - but an eschatological emphasis upon Tess's. And if Angel is thus exculpated, so too is Alec, who emerges rather better from the (same) reviewer's pen, than from Hardy's:

(Tess) goes into a church and sees in the pulpit preaching the man who in the first instance seduced her. He sees her, seeks her out and tries to convert her; but in fact she converts him to infidelity and he quits preaching, falls into a cursing and swearing and seduces her again. [33]

Idiosyncratic as such an interpretation of Hardy's Tess must seem, it at least alerts us to the necessity for both a closer reading and more comprehensive evaluative analysis of his texts. 'Modern criticism', R G.Cox writes, is marked by a strong sense that Hardy's work is very mixed in quality and that its positive merits require careful disentangling: as yet the process can hardly be said to be complete. [34]

Far From the Madding Crowd is no exception. It is one of the most challenging dialectical literary texts to be found among the early Wessex novels, and there is much 'careful disentangling' yet to be undertaken.

Critical focus, having rested primarily upon Hardy's Pastoral theme, has tended to stress his evocation of a passing, agrarian-based culture - a stress which has in turn invited critical analysis to devolve upon the source

of order and stability in the novel, of which Gabriel Oak has been regarded as the agent. Such a focus, in that it has been concerned with applauding and thence perpetuating the moral status quo of the Victorian overworld of the novel, has inevitably enforced a continuance of the Victorian critical emphasis upon decorum:

When the (eighteen) nineties are reached, some radical change might have been expected in the moral aspects of novel-theory. But in spite of Wilde's dictum, 'There is no such thing as a moral or immoral book. Books are either well written, or badly written. That is all,' late Victorian critics of the novel were remarkably unaffected by the ideas of Aestheticism, and the moral-utilitarian strain in English thought still predominated. [35]

More recently however, with the move away from genre criticism towards structural/textual criticism, focus has shifted from preoccupations with the Pastoral idyll towards Hardy's deeper concerns - notably human sexual relationships and issues of class. It is, then, in furtherance of this criticism that the following textual analysis proceeds - to focus upon the 'real world' in Far From the Madding Crowd; Hardy's 'hard prosaic reality' (FFMC p469); his representation of a 'modern' Victorian consciousness and 'modern' concerns, such as, for example, the rise of capitalism, the Victorian institution of marriage, and socio/sexual attitudes to woman.

Taking a backward glance at the critic who accused Hardy of placing his heroine in an 'odious light' in her first interview with Troy, it has to be said that by comparison, modern criticism has already unravelled a good

many of Hardy's positive literary merits in this sequence [36]. To the modern reader Hardy's representation of Bathsheba is far from 'odious'. Poetically suggestive, artistically delineative, and psychologically realistic, are the phrases which spring more readily to mind. The sexual implications of the scene are, to the modern mind, conveyed with unquestionable poetic skill. Metonymically the soft, feminine folds of the woman's drapery pierced through by the man's sharp projecting organ suggest (and prefigure) not only the act of lovemaking; but as material representations of inner, intangible desires, they also evoke the erotic seizure which is now taking a hold upon Hardy's two young lovers.

Robert C. Schweik interprets Hardy in similar vein:
In rendering Troy's attractiveness to Bathsheba, Hardy relied primarily on a more oblique and evocative dramatizing of situations - and with considerably more persuasive art. This more dense and suggestive mode, involving a close interaction of setting, incident, and dialogue, first appears in Chapter XXIV, where the meeting of Troy and Bathsheba in the fir plantation is developed in such a way which emphasizes the meeting as a sexual encounter. [37]

It might also be added that the specific nature settings Hardy appoints for Bathsheba's erotic encounters with Troy, (in contrast to the work environments and interior settings that are frequently chosen for the more intimate meetings that occur between Bathsheba and the Farmers Boldwood and Oak), also signify expositionally at the level of temperament: Bathsheba's in particular. Her youthful desire is for nothing more natural (nature-like)

than to express her vibrant sexuality. On the threshold of sexual maturity, her impulse is to explore and experiment freely - a freedom which is of course denied her - notably by Oak the exemplar of Victorian moral rectitude. The embryonic Eve in Bathsheba's nature, derives from no sin-laden Edenic archetype, but as with the embryonic 'Melia in Fanny Robin, (whom Hardy was obliged to recast in more conventional mould [38]), she is endowed with an authorially approved, life-enhancing sexuality. In essence, Bathsheba has a close affinity with Eve Greensleeves who features in Hardy's poem 'Voices from Things Growing in a Churchyard'. This is the 'pure-woman' so beloved of the author, who would give herself up to Hellenistic joy and voluptuousness; to be
 Kissed by men from many a clime,
 Beneath sun, stars, in blaze, in breeze,
 As now by glowworms and by bees... [39]

Encompassed about by vibrant, nature images, she is in her genesis, as Tom Paulin so eloquently describes Hardy's Eve, 'eternally virgin and promiscuous' - her world,
 of dazzling light fresh breezes and life giving warmth...become(s) the expression of her free sexuality and her innocent trust. As ever she is eternally virgin and promiscuous. [40]

This is the Bathsheba of Hardy's opening passages; the 'fair product of nature' (FFMC p5), who takes up her looking glass to perceive for herself that warm creature aglow with the soft heat of her sex that her author also perceives. A feminine sensuousness prompts both the

parting of lips and a roseate tumescent glow. A dawning is clearly taking place and not only in the morning skies. Hardy is here penetrating his heroine's innermost being; his insight or vision contrasting strongly with the clandestinely watchful Oak's more superficial sighting, to whom Bathsheba's whole performance is merely vain.

The disjunction between 'outer' and 'inner' reality is imaginatively emphasised by Hardy's method of setting in juxtaposition the external, material world of objects and the internal, essential world of feeling and sensation. Hitherto, Bathsheba as perceived by both Oak and Hardy, had been settled 'on the summit of the load' of her domestic paraphernalia (FFMC p4) - a motionless, monochromatic, figure set amid a configuration of household possessions and comatose cats. The scene is empty of colour and feeling. 'The only sound in the stillness was the hopping of the canary up and down the perches of its prison' (FFMC p4). But appearances are deceptive. Concealed behind and within the artefactual, there is light, colour and energy; and as Bathsheba is 'moved' so Hardy is also moved to evoke her inner heat and life. The young woman takes up her looking glass and instantaneously the world is transformed. Something of her inner luxuriance fires her author's imagination perhaps, for life and colour now infuse his narrative. An all pervading radiance illumines Bathsheba with a 'scarlet glow', a 'soft lustre', a 'peculiar vernal charm' (FFMC p5); and as this glowing and greening takes place, so too, pure primary colours - reds and greens -

emblazon the inanimate objects which surround her in this transformed, polychromatic, irradiated world (FFMC p5). Gazing at her own image which also takes life from her animate being, Bathsheba smiles as the mirror reflects back to her the motion and shape of her parted lips - clearly she is what she feels and seems what she is, and perceiving herself thus she blushes:

She blushed at herself and seeing her reflection blush, blushed the more. (FFMC p5)

The glow is all pervasive; and the picture is, Hardy says, 'a delicate one'. In recognition it seems, of the indelicacy of the 'delicate', Hardy, after a little preamble, ('What...whether...nobody knows'), shifts his perspective and situates himself a little closer to Oak whose orthodox perspective will colour the scene a little differently. 'Woman's prescriptive infirmity' and Oak's 'cynical inference' of woman's vanity now tailors the narrative to a more circumspect fit. But the mirror does not lie and neither will Hardy. Bathsheba is indeed a 'fair product of nature' and artifice, or vanity, have no place here:

There was no necessity whatever for her looking in the glass. She did not adjust her hat, or pat her hair, or pull a dimple into shape, or do one thing to signify that any such intention had been her motive in taking up the glass. She simply observed herself as a fair product of Nature in the feminine kind... (FFMC p5).

Appearances do not concern Bathsheba. It is what she feels, and that her glass reflects back to her the shape

and colour of what she feels, that concerns and delights her.

Oak's participation in this scene is vital. Just as Henry Knight's moral rectitude injected a tone of propriety into the text of A Pair of Blue Eyes for the benefit of readers discomfited by creeping signs of authorial heterodoxy - so Oak enacts a similar role. He is the very personification of the censor as he observes this 'bed-room' scene from a moral vantage point, properly separated from the subject of his interest by a metaphorical boundary (hedge). In the manner of the censor too, he performs his espial with an inquisitorial eye and then announces with high moral seriousness:

'She has her faults...'

'...and the greatest of them is...'

'...Vanity.' (FFMC p7)

In contradistinction to Knight however, whom Hardy neither consistently discredits nor consistently approves, but who seems permanently to be on the brink of judgement, Oak is not anathematised at any point, but is instead discreetly removed from Hardy's sphere from the outset. His perspective is clearly differentiated from that of the author, who is shortly to clarify his view of Bathsheba's awareness of 'the desirability of her existence' (FFMC p19). Her subjection to Oak's scrutiny of this self-delight, Hardy tells us, produces in her a 'self-consciousness' which is not vanity, but 'would have

been...if a little more pronounced' [my italics] (FFMC p20).

In the opening sequence under discussion, Hardy indicates that Oak's judgement is purely subjective; and although this would seem to the modern reader to be already discernible in so far as his moralising, censorious role conflicts with the author's own aesthetic preoccupations, it is significant that Hardy feels the need openly to assert this. Bathsheba's ability to 'frame' and reconstruct feeling as form, in a manner analagous to the artist's engagement with self-portraiture, is after all, a perspective that only Hardy - as artist - would hold in this context. Yet he insists none-the-less, upon openly dissociating himself from Oak, by reserving for him a 'cynical inference' which 'was irresistible...as he regarded the scene, generous though he fain would have been' (FFMC p5). But it is Oak's role as spy which concretises the differentiation; for this is clearly not a role Hardy either chooses for himself, or needs to choose for himself, since his insight into Bathsheba's nature assumes a prior knowledge and intimate understanding that his hero obviously does not own. It is therefore this espial role which most distances Oak from Hardy - and from the very first chapter. Hence any interpretation of Hardy's characterisation of Bathsheba has, of necessity, to take this factor into account.

Establishing then, from the outset, a set of clearly defined perspectives which will prove crucial to a close

interpretation of his text, Hardy achieves several ends. Firstly, Oak introduces a moral perspective that will permit certain readers predisposed to the hero's point-of-view, access to a text which treats (injudiciously) with woman's free delight in her own sexuality. Secondly, by means of his unobtrusive abalienation of Oak-the-spy/censor, Hardy makes room for an 'alternative' Oak to materialise - a figure far more complex than the homespun "worthy" of received interpretations. And finally, by means of that same interpolated disclaimer which pointed to the subjective nature of Oak's perceptions, Hardy retains for himself, not only an independent perspective, but also the 'odium' that might otherwise be ascribed solely to Bathsheba were he to have allied himself openly with Oak. One aspect of contemporary criticism strikes us plainly in this context; which is that while Bathsheba (and her successors) were subject to criticism in their own right, Hardy's vilifiers came down far more heavily upon him, as their creator. This factor is an important aspect of his treatment of women in the novels. The early struggle to set Elfride apart from the proprietary consciousness which seeks to circumscribe her, but with which the author establishes a non-alliance, becomes a fully realised ambition of total commitment in Tess, which subsequently drew a far heavier load of censure down upon the author's head than upon that of his heroine. If she was culpable this was because she had been authorially 'misrepresented'; if she was to lead

the nation's youth astray this was because Hardy - in 'distorting' the facts - had designed it so [41]. It might be claimed therefore, that he went some way to pre-empting a response in his Victorian reader which instinctively veered towards standing in heavy judgement upon woman and laying the blame automatically at her door. This pre-emption considerably affected the reception of Tess, whose heroine was intended to disturb rather than shock: the latter response effectively closing more minds than it opens. As the critical extract cited above illustrates, (apropos Tess-as-man's-downfall), Victorian ideological resistance to the anti-pedagogue in Hardy who would not lay the blame at Tess's door, could be alarmingly intransigent. Nonetheless Hardy must have been gratified that the question of blame was itself questionable. Having controverted the Edenic view of the voluptuous woman as necessarily the cause of man's downfall, Hardy's 'evidence' had to be sifted. It then emerged that the only way to discredit Tess was either to attack her creator for a faulty production, or to restate Hardy altogether to prove fallaciously a culpability in Tess which could not be proved by fair means. Either way the reader was forced to confront the issue of guilt and punishment and not simply rely upon the assumption that the presence of a 'fallen' woman in the novel spelt sin.

Oak's role is then critical in this context. He is vital to Hardy's presentation of Bathsheba as culpable in the hero's eyes but unconvicted in his own. Human and

flawed as the heroine is to her author, she is not the agent of disorder in Far From the Madding Crowd.

As moral watchdog, with not a few cynical preconceptions where women are concerned, Oak has (for our purposes) already arrived on the scene. But there is also the less censorious Oak of the opening passages who is a man of 'misty views'; his standing 'in the scale of public opinion' as 'a man whose moral colour was a kind of pepper-and-salt mixture' suggesting a more benign figure (FFMC p1). This complementary view of Oak constitutes no disjunction or contradiction in characterisation but posits rather a variant reading of the hero. 'Public opinion' or 'what-is-said' is intentionally set by Hardy, against 'private' observation or 'what-is-done'; and this becomes, as far as Oak's characterisation is concerned, an important part of the author's schema in Far From the Madding Crowd. It inaugurates an opposition - barely detectable but felt by the reader nonetheless - which prompts precisely those doubts expressed by the Victorian critic, whose sense was of having been 'led to question the truthfulness' of Hardy's evidence - as The Saturday Review admitted the point [42].

No longer requiring the use of a schematically worked proprietary consciousness set against textual internal evidence as in A Pair of Blue Eyes, Hardy - with only occasional recourse to the intrusive narrator who 'tells' as opposed to 'shows' - relies extensively in Far From the Madding Crowd upon closely detailed evidence:

dialogue, symbolic action, behaviour, events taking place in time as opposed to discursively summarised; and of course the interweaving of these narrative devices into the poetic underpattern of the novel to reinforce their discrete or plural significance, as the case may be. The tendency in modern criticism has been to regard Hardy's authorial interventions as purely tactical and extrinsic to central concerns. They are unacceptable in one sense for the self-conscious strategy that informs the discourse; and in another sense they remain unconvincing in that the fuller testimony provided by dramatic action and so forth, actually coheres more consistently with those deeper authorial concerns embedded in the sub-text or metacommentary. 'Telling', Hardy is cautious and circumspect, 'showing', he is at his more perceptive and observant. And at the sub-textual level, safeguarded from impropriety by a fine network of codified poetic structures, Hardy is instinctively the visionary poet of astute psychological insight.

Releasing through action matters that he prefers the reader to judge alone, Hardy presents his hero from several vantage points - none of which are readily identifiable as the author's own. Thus we are invited to consider that:

Oak was an intensely humane man...A shadow in his life had always been that his flock ended in mutton - that a day came and found every shepherd an arrant traitor to his defenceless sheep. (FFMC p41)

But turning to the dramatised evidence, it might also be

the case that this unusually sensitive husbander of meat merchandise, whose lack of forethought results in his flock's suffering a far more harrowing slaughter than would be met with by the professional slaughterer's knife, is not so much humane as sentimental. Feeding a dead lamb to an already ill-tempered sheepdog, which gives it 'additional energy and spirits' (FFMC p42) - the kind of bloodlust a shepherd seeks to prevent at all costs - and then leaving the dog on the hillside overnight while seeking out the 'luxury of a bed' (FFMC p39); does not appear to be improvident, but, as Hardy vividly dramatises it, patently careless husbandry. Yet Oak is the man. His now over-excited and unpoliced dog, drives the panic-stricken flock to an untoward death over a precipice, and is then shot: 'tragically shot at twelve o'clock the same day' (FFMC p39).

As in Hardy's earlier novel A Pair of Blue Eyes, the reader is invited to weigh up the evidence in order to complete the dialectical process the author has already instigated. Notwithstanding our sympathy for Oak's pathetic plight, there is an uncomfortable sense that 'humane' does not, in fact, adjectivally suit, as Hardy, deeply sensitive to man's exploitation and abuse of dumb animals, must have also felt.

Earlier in the novel, adopting an indeterminate, philosophical stance, Hardy draws the reader's attention - (by altering his narrative to accommodate a colloquial address to the reader) - to the following:

In making even horizontal and clear inspections we colour and mould according to the wants within us whatever our eyes bring in. (FFMC p16)

This is a reference to Oak's 'void within' which 'affords him the widest scope for his fancy'; but guided a little by Hardy's use of the present continuous tense and his strategic conjoining the reader to his sentiment, it seems plausible to suppose that it is as much to the reader bent upon colouring his or her world, as towards Oak, that this cautionary observation is directed. For Oak's subjective moulding of his world is not so very different from the readerly habit of lighting upon the flute-playing shepherd of Hardy's pastoral tale, in order to reinforce the sense that the rustic world - the idyll - is in truth the 'reality' Hardy presents. But if we allowed our 'eyes to bring in' the well documented information provided, we would 'see' that the shepherd is not in fact a feature of the natural landscape at all, but is enclosed within a dark hut shaped like an Ark - with all the implications of nature-as-threat that the Ark denotes - and from which Oak's music issues forth in muffled, constrained cadences divested of its natural clarity and perfection:

not floating unhindered into the open air...muffled in some way... altogether too curtailed in power to spread high or wide. (FFMC p10)

Is Oak (like Angel Clare) also a little inexpert in his instrumentation? For surely musical sounds that are 'nowhere to be found in nature' can only be unnatural?

(FFMC p10) Taking Hardy's parodic style in this sequence into account, this less than rhapsodic note would be entirely appropriate - as it is clearly appropriate to his thematic concern, not with Pastoral idylls, but prosaic reality. Oak's executive skills apart, it is the case that neither man nor music, as Hardy presents them both, pertain, belong, or have any correspondence, to 'nature'. Instead of sitting 'under thatched hurdles as they did in old times' (FFMC p23), the shepherd inhabits a modern mobile workshop in which he will shortly become suffocated - as his fluty emissions are now 'suffocated' - or as Hardy says: 'muffled'.

As befits this less lyrical more prosaic figure of a Victorian working man, monetary matters 'colour and mould' his world in an important way. Later revived by Bathsheba in the smoke-filled hut, his half conscious thoughts turn spontaneously upon the hard, prosaic reality of cost!

'Ah, the hut!' murmured Gabriel. 'I gave ten pounds for that hut. (FFMC p23)

As the numerical figure is intended to indicate, this is no small investment; it is in fact cost equivalent to a labouring man's wages for five months; and its owner is keenly aware of the fact.

Rustic shepherd or aspiring capitalist, this more materialistic, ambitious Oak, is also the man whose 'sustained efforts of industry and chronic good spirits' (FFMC p11), have enabled him to obtain a financial loan (FFMC p20); to lease a sheep farm of some hundred acres,

and to invest his borrowed capital in two hundred sheep. Unfortunately cost-cutting in the sense of omitting to take out insurance cover and investing in cheap goods, is not always compatible with successful capitalistic enterprise; as Oak soon learns to his cost. The economist in his nature might urge him mentally to value his possessions, but he strikes a poor bargain in purchasing a 'wrong-headed' sheepdog, and no bargain at all in investing in two hundred uninsured sheep. But ambition, opportunism, and the possibility of emigrating to California (FFMC p462) - the Victorian emigrant's dream venue for making a 'fast buck' - sufficiently motivate Oak towards his goal of prosperity; and his economic status steadily improves.

If, on the other hand, opportunism and the ethics of capitalistic enterprise seem to be somewhat at odds with the rural community's laissez-faire economy in Far From the Madding Crowd, Hardy does not permit a felt clash to materialise. Balanced against Oak's private hoarding and acquisitiveness is his willingness to contribute his skills and labour to the common cause - and what could have tilted the scale of sympathy against Oak is skilfully counterweighted. Depending largely upon trust, a good deal of give and take, goodwill and largesse, mutual co-operation is the watchword in Weatherbury:

If you serve me well, so shall I serve you,

Bathsheba tells her men in antiphonal vein (FFMC p 93). And serve her well, in this respect, Oak does.

Nonetheless, as Hardy also emphasises (but his critics do not), there is the fact that behind the scenes Oak is doggedly stocking-up. It is significant for example that deep and enduring unrequited love notwithstanding, it is not Oak but Bathsheba for whom profit-making palls when the heart is stricken:

She kept the farm going, raked in her profits without keenly caring about them, and expended money on ventures because she had done so in bygone days. (FFMC p388)

Efficiency remains unimpaired (an important point), but the heart has gone out of things for Bathsheba. The love-lorn Oak, by contrast, is at the very same moment strutting about,

coming it quite the dand. He now wears shining boots with hardly a hob in 'em, two or three times a-week, and a tall hat a-Sundays, and 'a hardly knows the name of a smock-frock. When I see people strut enough to be cut up into bantam cocks, I stand dormant with wonder and says no more! (FFMC p390).

Appearances are evidently all important to this self-made man, who has improved upon his earlier display of one useless but impressive-looking, silver clock, now to sport a top-hat and new shining boots; but who, in the seclusion of his home, pares his own potatoes, mends his own stockings and makes his own bed. Parsimony or mere habit may motivate Oak privately to conserve his income whilst publicly assuming an affluent air, but his close budgeting behind the scenes does at the same time hint at an avaricious streak in his nature, which would have been

more apparent to Hardy, (and possibly to fellow Victorians also - were they looking in this direction), than to the modern reader. For custom dictated that even the low-income household gave domestic employment to the yet more needy poor - as does for example, Hardy's impecunious Giles Winterborne to his faithful retainer, Robert Creedle.

It seems fairly evident that, endowed with thrift and a sternly resolute heart, Oak has all the makings of a sharp-witted business-man. And this is precisely how Hardy presents him in his prime. His eye firmly fixed on the money-market, he strikes an extraordinarily good bargain with Boldwood:

It was eventually known that Gabriel, though paid a fixed wage by Bathsheba independent of the fluctuations of agricultural profits, had made an engagement with Boldwood by which Oak was to receive a share of the receipts - a small share certainly, yet it was money of a higher quality than mere wages, and capable of expansion in a way that wages were not. (FFMC p390)

The impassioned Boldwood has quite overlooked the fact that agricultural losses should also have been taken into consideration; that Oak's share of the receipts takes care only of the profits - and this at a time, as far as Hardy's readers are concerned, when the home market was being severely threatened by wheat imports, and the first signs of the economic depression of the 1870s setting in.

Oak's instigation of these proceedings, his shrewd accountancy, and his eventual take-over of Boldwood's entire holding, is not in any way incompatible with a "talent" we should already have encountered. There is, for

example, the cool, calculating Oak who reckons the value of Bathsheba's ricks before determining to protect them from storm-damage:

Seven hundred and fifty pounds in the divinest form that money can wear - that of necessary food for man and beast. (FFMC p286)

And with two wheat-ricks covered...

Two hundred pounds were secured...He mounted the third pile of wealth and began operating.(FFMC p290)

So closely linked to his mercantile mentality is Oak's sense of his own manhood - his sexuality - that in the very moment of costing his lover's ricks he also evaluates her worth as a woman:

Should the risk be run of deteriorating this bulk of corn to less than half its value, because of the instability of a woman? 'Never, if I can prevent it!' said Gabriel.

Such was the argument that Oak set outwardly before him. But man, even to himself is a palimpsest, having an ostensible writing, and another beneath the lines. It is possible that there was this golden legend underlying the utilitarian one: 'I will help to my last effort the woman I have loved so dearly.' (FFMC pp286-7)

Hardy's dual theme - the 'golden' and the 'utilitarian', the 'idyll' and 'prosaic reality' - is here openly juxtaposed. We are presented on the one hand with chivalric love, high-minded motives and honour, and on the other with a cost-accountancy assessment of the rural economy, and a typically Victorian assessment of woman. By some curious, but illustrative, male logic, Oak equates a potentially unstable economy with woman's instability:

'Should the risk be run...because of woman's instability?'. Yet the threat to Bathsheba's wheat-ricks, as Hardy makes patently obvious, arises from her husband's irresponsibility and mismanagement since he is at this moment drinking her labour-force insensible.

The associative links Oak instinctively makes between capital and "hearts", between profits and love, between woman and property, are particularly significant. For it is this which locates him squarely - not in Arcadia - but in the 'modern' world.

The 'Golden legend' or 'idyll' is by no means as potent in this episode which treats with man and woman in direct confrontation with Nature, as is Hardy's rendering of hard prosaic reality - should our 'eyes bring it in'. And Hardy intends that they should. He has, after all, dispensed with the 'shepherd' long since, who is first replaced by the bailiff, then the share-holder and finally the farm-manager turned property-owner. The progression, where Oak is concerned, is away from rustic innocence and sylvan idylls and towards a distinctly bourgeois material existence. Hardy has authorised this from the book's very beginning, where Oak's capitalist's consciousness is perceived as the very index of his 'animus':

Love, being an extremely exacting usurer (a sense of exorbitant profit, spiritually, by an exchange of hearts, being at the bottom of pure passions, as that of exorbitant profit, bodily or materially, is at the bottom of those of lower atmosphere), every morning Oak's feelings were as sensitive as the money-market in calculations upon his chances. (FFMC p26)

And shortly after,

I'll make her my wife, or upon my soul I shall be
good for nothing! (FFMC p27)

Oak's proposal is embarrassingly premature, and the impetuous Bathsheba, delighted at the prospect of acquiring a sweetheart, is taken completely by surprise at the prospect of a 'snug little farm' and a husband who would, always be there...whenever I looked up, there he'd be. (FFMC pp33,34)

But the phrase which reverberates throughout this interview, is Bathsheba's 'I hate to be thought of as men's property' (FFMC p32) - a phrase which Hardy anchors poetically to those actions and images which signify as metaphors of psychological retreat, impending flight, and threat. That marriage poses a threat which as yet Bathsheba intuits but can barely grasp, is anticipated on her behalf by Hardy who now stresses the predatory nature of her suitor's approaches - his encroachment upon her 'territory'. This becomes not simply Oak's attempt to close in upon the material space Bathsheba now inhabits - his 'creeping round the holly bush to reach her side' (FFMC p34), and his postural thrusting so

that he seemed to be coming, by the force of his words, straight through the bush and into her arms (FFMC p35),

- but a very seizure of her person as he snatches her hand, prettily extended upon her bosom to still her loud-beating heart. Directly he seized it she put it behind her, so that it slipped through his fingers like an eel. (FFMC p31)

Oak's forward thrusting gestures and attempt to seize the hand (that signifies the hand-in-marriage) closed over the woman's heart, is countered by Bathsheba's unmistakeable gesture of withdrawal. At which point, predictably, Oak's thoughts turn upon the desirable property that he does own: 'I have a nice, snug little farm...A man has advanced me money...' (FFMC p32). This statement of means which is evidently a statement of intent, prompts Oak to take the cue from his own words and immediately to advance himself: 'He went forward and stretched out his arm again' (FFMC p32).

The pattern of male advance and female retreat is clear; but Hardy's is no lyrical rendering of a courtship dance. There emerges, from his invocation of metaphors signifying menace and possible captivity, textually located and undisguised associations between Oak's acquisition of monetary 'advance's and property, and his proposal of marriage. Bathsheba, sensing the oppressor, retreats and takes refuge behind a holly bush - literally to place an obstruction between herself and the man advancing upon her. Symbolically suggestive, her recoil also enacts her need spatially to separate herself from Oak - or in other words, to repudiate the marriage tie that now impends. And if her suitor interprets her actions as gestures of enticement, her author does not. 'Advance' and 'threat' being the semantic stresses he would foreground, Hardy has described Bathsheba's retreat thus:

Bathsheba had overtaken him at a point beside which stood a low stunted holly bush, now laden with red

berries. Seeing his advance take the form of an attitude threatening a possible enclosure, if not compression, of her person, she edged off round the bush. (FFMC p32)

Bathsheba's sense of oppression, her impulse to flee, is palpably felt - Hardy's attentiveness to, and identification with, his heroine's agitation, being well autographed by the vigour of his eager, graphic, narrative and dense detailing of natural objects, which come together evocatively in the image of the stunted, woody growth of the holly bush. Oak, regarding the 'red berries...that seemed in his after life to be a cypher signifying a proposal of marriage' (FFMC p33), has his thoughts firmly centred upon the 'fruit' of his proposal. But Bathsheba, with her inner focus upon the stunted growth that matrimony - to her - threatens, evidently assimilates not the fruit outcrop but the load-bearing, truncated shrub to her consciousness, as she produces a 'terrible wooden story' in her own defence (FFMC p34). It is as if the very prospect of an attenuated life has already corrugated her thoughts to render her utterances, in turn, wooden, stifled and contracted - as the 'yawn' she now also contracts 'to an inoffensive smallness' also emphasises (FFMC p34).

Bathsheba's later experience is that marriage does stifle and compress her existence. It effectively dispossesses her of her entitlement and control of her estates; nullifies her legal existence, and renders her man's property into the bargain.

But the odds are stacked heavily against her from the outset. Hardy would emphasise her disadvantaged status in the man-made world she inhabits, which promotes a man of Oak's dogged conformism, in that he is permitted absolute freedom to determine his own fate, (and that of dumb animals; which does not provoke reproaches from any source); but which crushes a woman of her energy, intelligence, and initiative. Underpinning his thematic concern with the hard, prosaic reality of Far From the Madding Crowd's modern world, there is, for Hardy, the inescapable fact of male dominance and privilege both rigidly maintained. The privileges accorded to Oak, for example, are not at any point, extended to Bathsheba. Capital is made freely available to the inexperienced new investor, without qualification, supervision, or restriction. Yet despite the fact, that, as Hardy shows, Bathsheba is capable of managing a profitable concern even under the duress of marital breakdown and Troy's squandering of her resources, there is no possibility of her recouping her losses as a married woman whose husband has sole control over her estates. Having already contended with sex discriminating pressures to which Oak is not, of course, subjected, Bathsheba then has to face the 'legal effects of her marriage...upon her position': her tenure as James Everdene's successor, which is now threatened by Troy's legal ownership of her entitlement, and his desertion and jeopardising of her good name (FFMC p383). For she had earlier won the confidence of

Everdene's trustees entirely in her own right, we are told.

Her uncle's testimony before his death, to her cleverness...her vigorous marshalling of the numerous flocks and herds which came suddenly into her hands before negotiations were concluded, had won confidence in her powers. (FFMC p383)

Although, there had originally been shown by the agent to the estate some distrust of Bathsheba as James Everdene's successor, on the score of her sex, her youth, and her beauty. (FFMC p382)

So clearly as single woman Bathsheba is constantly in the position of having to prove herself and submit herself to the critical assessment of the opposite sex - as Oak is not; and as married woman she is even more disadvantaged. She has not even the legal right to obtain capital in her own name that she might attempt to recover the losses incurred by her errant husband. So one way or the other her fortunes are jeopardised - or as she had earlier forecast in a different context, but with prophetic wisdom nonetheless, she would inevitably 'be had' some day (FFMC p32).

Alternatively - legal and sexual discrimination apart - if Bathsheba would struggle to maintain her independence and prove her talents, Oak on the other hand, would struggle to constrain her. And it is this less obtrusive, more insidious form of coercion, that Hardy treats most comprehensively in Far From the Madding Crowd. Ironically, Bathsheba's rejection of Oak's marriage proposal for reasons of the unsuitability of both Institution and

lover, is expressed to Oak at one point as arising from her own unsuitability - she is, she tells him, too independent: 'I want somebody to tame me' (FFMC p35). And while we infer that she is in truth pleading for a more virile suitor, the fact that she should reject Oak on the grounds that he is an unsuitable 'tamer' when in reality he has the power to break her spirit entirely, is a bitter irony indeed.

In the first instance, the pressure upon Bathsheba to be married - and all that that signifies in terms of the dispossession of her identity and entitlements - comes from Oak. And in the second, the stealing of her privacy - the space in which she evaluates and tests her sensory experience of the world - also comes from Oak: his espials featuring crucially in her fate; as will shortly become apparent. For long term psychological effects apart, it is her loss of judgement, free-will and self-determination, induced by means of Oak's espials and his subsequent humiliation of her that leads to her tragic mismatch with Troy, with whom she might otherwise have engaged in private, lighthearted sexual exploration, had she remained in full command of all her faculties.

To Bathsheba,
a watched woman must have very much circumspection
to retain only a little credit (FFMC p418),

and it is Oak who has driven her in to this corner. His is the prying eye which doggedly peers into the private person that is Bathsheba, whose flight from social restraint and

rigid convention urges her to test and appraise her sensual desires in solitary activity - as in the al fresco 'bedroom' vignette.

J. Hillis Miller draws attention to the role of the spy as thief - the watcher, he says, 'secretly steal[s] the other's freedom' by spying [43]. It is an insidious theft and as acquisitive of power as any contracting of property may be; possibly more so in that it seeks to claim by coercion what may not be claimed by consent.

Oak's points of espial are various; from behind hedges and through the crevices of sheds and field-huts - and less clandestinely but just as penetratingly, from behind the bland, unassuming countenance that is his own moon face. From these concealed vantage points, Oak attempts to prise Bathsheba from her privacy and to draw her out into the open, where her unconventional behaviour will of necessity, become restricted and censored. By thus encroaching upon her private space, Oak renders it public, thus depriving Bathsheba of her freedom to act as she will.

At first he simply watches as the young girl, thinking herself alone, takes out her looking-glass and appraises herself as a 'fair product of Nature'. He casts his judgement publicly; but it is his voiced opinions and his later humiliation of Bathsheba following such espials which effects the theft that is to deprive her of self-hood and liberty. Following hard upon the al fresco 'bedroom' scene, Oak spies upon Bathsheba again, but this time intentionally - as 'Milton's Satan first saw Paradise,'

(FFMC p15); that is, overlooking the scene as from a birds-eye-view from above. Little appears to be gained from this espial in the immediate moment; but it soon transpires, as eavesdropping upon Bathsheba's conversation with her companion Oak learns that she has lost her hat, that this may prove to be a means of gaining an expedient introduction. Seizing the moment with alacrity, Oak determines to find the hat that he might restore it to its highly desirable owner.

It might be noted at this point, that Hardy has, with due attention to symbolic detail, situated Oak in the appropriate position of retrieving and restoring to its owner, that precise article of woman's clothing that most denotes decorum - her hat! Subtly shaping the 'nature'/'society' opposition in this episode, he then re-situates Oak-as-spy between the four walls of his ten pound hut, peepholing through a crevice (FFMC p17) with evident curiosity at the spectacle of Bathsheba engaging in yet another of her unorthodox activities - that of riding her horse in outlandish abandon, bareback, astride like a man, or alternatively spread-eagled over its back. The gymnastic sensuousness of the unsuspecting woman freely riding, set in dramatic opposition to the crouching, incarcerated, Oak, clutching to his person the article of decorum he will shortly restore to the object of his interest, compounds the opposition Hardy has already established in the earlier scene: the 'fair product of Nature' is yet again to be scrutinised, assessed, and

judged by her watcher.

However, policing the woman's space does not fully effect a stealing of her liberty all the while the theft remains undivulged. This then occurs - Oak setting out to return the hat and at the same time revealing what he has seen. He lies in wait behind a diminutive hedge, and then, confronting the surprised girl - his 'face rising like the moon behind the hedge' (FFMC 19) - he first fastens his stare so penetratingly upon her person, 'as if...irritating its pink surface by actual touch' (FFMC p20); then blushing at his own impertinence, announces: 'I found a hat' (FFMC p20). And if he is ignorant of his unconscious motive to expose and shame Bathsheba, his author is not. Dramatically positioned in the manner of a signpost with one hand proffering the article of decorum to the woman who gleefully tells him 'it flew away last night' (FFMC p20), yet with both eyes cast in the direction of the plantation - scene of the unorthodox riding - Oak, 'with an aspect excessively knowing with regard to some matter in his mind' (FFMC p21), divulges his sighting quite intentionally. Whereupon the mobile gymnast is immobilised on the spot. Prophetically, it seems, Oak's words 'fix' her in a straightened posture:

misgiving bringing every muscle of her lineaments
and frame to a standstill. (FFMC p21)

The theft is compounded. Or as Hardy notes in the event of Oak's recognition of Bathsheba's shame:

A perception caused him to withdraw his own eyes
from hers as suddenly as if he had been caught in a

theft. (FFMC p21)

Hardy makes his point with keen poetic suggestiveness. The girl who had so delighted author and self in her earlier tumescent blushings, and who has embarked upon this interview displaying a wholly unselfconscious charm:

There was a bright air and manner about her now, by which she seemed to imply that the desirability of her existence could not be questioned; and this rather saucy assumption failed in being offensive, because a beholder felt it to be, upon the whole, true... (FFMC p19)

is now incited to a blushing shame by Oak.

Recollection of the strange antics she had indulged in when passing through the trees was succeeded in the girl by a nettled palpitation, and that by a hot face. It was time to see a woman redden who was not given to reddening as a rule; not a point in the milkmaid but was of the deepest rose-colour. From the Maiden's Blush, through all varieties of the Provence down to the Crimson Tuscany, the countenance of Oak's acquaintance quickly graduated. (FFMC p21)

Discreet in her private abandon to sensuous delight, she is now, in some unpleasant way, exposed, indecorous, shamed. And Hardy, in creating a colour link here, between the blushes of shame (Crimson Tuscany) and Bathsheba's earlier 'scarlet glow' (FFMC p5) makes it quite clear that it is sexual shame that Oak has induced; the subtle progression/ingression of 'From...through...down...' giving additional thrust to the suggestion of a physical, interiorised "wound" penetrated and exposed quite against the young girl's will.

In justice to his heroine's sense of deep injustice,

Hardy lets it be known that Oak's

want of tact had deeply offended her - not by seeing what he could not help, but by letting her know that he had seen it. For as without law there is no sin, without eyes there is no indecorum; and she appeared to feel Gabriel's espial had made her an indecorous woman without her own connivance. (FFMC pp22,22)

Despite her later defiant cry to Oak that she will not allow any man to criticise her private conduct (FFMC p155), Bathsheba is uneasily aware that she has been deprived of that right. Her rage is the rage of the powerless. Oak's 'placid dignity' by contrast evinces not only an unquestionable power, but also the man's complacent awareness of owning the same (FFMC p155).

Privacy violated, private conduct made a public affair, and free self-expression constrained; self-consciousness now takes the place of that winning 'bright air' and manner of self-delight Bathsheba had once owned. The woman has become captive to the man's censure, and her determination to remain free - liberated from that psychological condition of approval-seeking that subjects woman to man - has been efficaciously disabled. Shame has injured the consciousness. It has rendered Bathsheba vulnerable to an anxiety-ridden preoccupation with reputation. Integrity and private conscience have been wrenched round to a total reliance upon social approval, and the distraught girl is compelled to turn increasingly to depend upon Oak to test out the measure of her standing within the community - of which he is the spokesman.

Exposing her bruised conscience to his reproachful eye she is like the child caught out in a secret joy forbidden in an adult world. She provokes repeated confrontations with the figure of authority in order to test out the degree of risk involved. And sadly Oak's censure is wholly inhibiting; guilt and fear inform Bathsheba's actions at the last, where once her instinct had been 'to walk as a queen' in full possession of all her powers (FFMC 103).

Oak's preying upon Bathsheba's guilt in order to straighten her to conformity - to render her the 'thoughtful...meek, and comely woman' (FFMC p153) so esteemed by himself - is less noble to the modern mind than to that of Hardy's contemporary for whom guilt and shame were acceptable psychological states through which woman should pass on the road to virtue. For the Victorian, the induction of such states was an effective means of controlling and subordinating woman in the interests of a society in which male supremacy was, at all costs, to be maintained.

If Gabriel Oak in his rustic guise and manner of shaming the heroine (which in itself may have endeared him to the male critic), was apprehended by the contemporary reader as the noble, worthy redeemer of wilful, wayward, womankind, Bathsheba was, on the other hand, perplexing. Hardy fully intends the note of uncertainty to linger - endeavouring, by subtle subtextual means to ensure that there will be no complacent acceptance of Bathsheba's 'reformation'; no sanguine acceptance of her demise. His

refusal to endorse Oak's moral status, who is patently benign as shepherd but by no means so benign as petit-bourgeois, and to censor Bathsheba as passionate, sensual, wilful woman, was evidently intuitively grasped by the Victorian reader, despite the sway of approval for Oak's methods of subjugation. Charges against the author of incongruity and inappropriate characterisation in their very non-specificity, suggest a recognition of some indefinable discordance at the heart of Hardy's text. This in the present context suggests itself in the incongruity inherent in the concept of marriage as a fitting end, and marriage as threatening the interests of a supposedly unstable woman - a threat which Hardy's floating images of compression, enclosure and theft, have helped to shape in the reader's consciousness. Most indicative of this unconscious recognition of authorial dissent, is the critic's assessment of Bathsheba. A 'hussy' she may have seemed in her sexually luxuriant maidenhood, but as deserted wife, desolated widow and finally the dutiful Mrs Gabriel Oak, she cannot logically be so termed. The Victorian reader has apparently retained the 'maiden' for further 'punishment' (critical attack), but has rejected the 'matron'. There is then an uncomfortable sense that the author has been holding back - that he has not in truth rewarded his reader with an authorised version of reformed womanhood. His regret at the subduing of his heroine has apparently made itself felt, but for the reasons already outlined - the critical focus upon genre, decorum, and

preoccupations with what the author ought to be doing when not engaged in didactic moralising [44] - the textual source and evidence of authorial sympathy for the heroine has remained, for Hardy's peer, too obscure to indict.

Even for the modern reader there is the problem of determining how much weight should be given to Hardy's most persuasive piece of discursive rhetoric in the novel's final sequences: his homiletic discourse upon the well-trying friendship between Oak and Bathsheba. Hardy writes:

They spoke very little of their mutual feelings; pretty phrases and warm expressions being probably unnecessary between such tried friends. Theirs was that substantial affection which arises (if any arises at all) when the two who are thrown together begin first by knowing the rougher sides of each other's character, and not the best till further on, the romance growing up in the interstices of a mass of hard prosaic reality. This good-fellowship - camaraderie - usually occurring through similarity of pursuits, is unfortunately seldom superadded to love between the sexes, because men and women associate, not in their labours, but in their pleasure merely. Where however, happy circumstance permits its development, the compounded feeling proves itself to be the only love which is strong as death - that love which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown, beside which the passion usually called by the name is evanescent as steam. (FFMC pp 468,9)

Persuasive as this homiletic piece may be, there seems to be a good case for arguing against authorial conviction here. The sermonising tone and argumentative length of the tract, which are both uncharacteristic of the iconoclastic Hardy for whom institutionalised bonding is perennially of questionable value, surely betrays to the modern reader nothing more than the author's earnest efforts to establish

a judicious dénouement. Possibly too the invocation of such euphuistic phrases as 'the love which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown', which are glaringly untypical of Hardy, might alert us to a sense that the author is not creatively engaged with his text at this juncture. But in the final analysis it is by weighing this homily against Hardy's narrative structures and discourses elsewhere in the novel, that the measure of its declared commitment or otherwise is best determined.

Equivocation is, for example, not to be found in Hardy's less selfconsciously mannered discourses of poetic narration, where descending from the 'pulpit' he re-engages with his characters and their colloquies without factitious euphuisms, and without recourse to the discursive mode. There seems to be no doubt that Hardy's true poetic medium is the dramatic mode. He even classifies his verse (repeatedly) as 'dramatic monologues', 'dramatic anecdotes' and in 'large degree dramatic or personative' [45]. And that his immediate poetic impulse tends towards dramatic dialogue and symbolic action, is evident from his early drafts. The earliest version of the shearing supper chapter, for example, takes the form of dramatic dialogue and action almost entirely. Descriptive enhancement and illustrative commentary of a more overtly omniscient nature are both entered in the form of extended marginalia and poetic amendment. The latter may then be regarded as less the spontaneous outcrop of the poetic imagination than the dramatic monologue or anecdote of first creative stirrings.

As Hardy engages with his creative text at the 'dramatic' level, there are indications that his deepest impulse is to identify with, and consequently to mourn, his heroine's loss of spirit and vigour - an impulse which, for obvious reasons, must be contained in metacommentary. For example, the lexicon of 'pain' ('suffer', 'torturing sting', 'agonizing', 'aggrieved and wounded', p464) that informs Hardy's narration as he describes Bathsheba's decline, both shapes, and is shaped by, this impulse; although to all intents and purposes the picture is one of a lonely widow about to lose her trusty friend and transactor of her business (FFMC p465). Bathsheba's predicament here, would seem to demand epithets, not of physical pain, but of frustration, despair and sorrow (FFMC p464). But clearly the deeper psycho-sexual wounding of his heroine lingers on in Hardy's creative imagination to surface in his text most tellingly. And it is his profound sense of the woman's wound which moves him to enter into his concluding dramatic dialogue, the following unbidden comment. Bathsheba, he writes, 'never laughed readily now' (FFMC p476). This is a lament which in fact expresses a greater loss than might at first sight be gathered. Bathsheba's incapacity for laughter signifies a more profound deprivation than the subdued spirit it here portends - as the following analysis will disclose.

Hardy relies heavily - in terms of semiotics - upon the natural object metaphor to provide him with a language of sexuality which is not of the fastidious, fey,

'lilies-and-lace' semantic category. In keeping with his unconventional views - that a sexy woman is not mentally or morally degenerate but rather a fair product of nature - accordingly it is upon familiar, everyday 'natural' objects that he relies in order to evoke her healthy sexual nature. For its metaphorical value, a woman's mouth provides a perfectly appropriate, and more important, a legitimised or licensed, erotic symbol. Hence the mobility and expressiveness of Bathsheba's mouth is for Hardy, the very register of her "anima" - her psycho-sexual constitution, her spiritual vigour, her inner luxuriance. As the index of a feminine sexual nature, this oral symbol captures Hardy's poetic imagination indubitably. Placing his focus upon shape, colour, and mobility, lips/mouths metonymically signify as labium; and by means of semantic repetition, they semaphore the perimeter, circumference, margin and border of feminine sexual rhythms - the lowering and heightening of receptivity and the cyclical nature of female sexuality. We learn then something of Bathsheba's intense sexual receptivity through Hardy's tendency to apply enlarged, even cosmic ascriptions to her lips in this context:

When Bathsheba was swayed by an emotion of an earthly sort her lower lip trembled: when by a refined emotion; her upper or heavenward one. (FFMC p155)

Or if not aggrandised by hemispherical allusion, then perhaps by Gothic, where 'exact arch' and 'pointed corners' conjure a distinctly larger-than-life image.

Something in the exact arch of her upper unbroken row of teeth, and in the keenly pointed corners of her red mouth when, with parted lips, she somewhat defiantly turned up her face to argue a point with a tall man, suggested there was potentiality enough in that lithe slip of humanity for alarming exploits of sex, and daring enough to carry them out. (FFMC p102)

Stylistic and poetic usage of the oral symbol in Hardy's oeuvre generally is remarkably consistent. Elizabeth Jane for example, one of his most sexually tepid heroines is effectively without 'lips' (they are mentioned, I think, once!). Tess's renowned mobile, peony mouth, on the other hand, is suggestive of a flowering sexual nature which imagistically recalls - texturally (tissue) and tonally (crimson) - Hardy's reference to gossamer tissue in connection with her defloration in the 'Chase' episode. This is self-evidently a symbol which has been aesthetically structured to some purpose. Alternatively Eustacia's palpable, and seemingly fixed state of sexual tension is appropriately met with by Hardy's highly elaborate reference to the 'cyma-recta or ogee' moulding of her lips. [46]

Bathsheba's obmutescence - her incapacity for laughter - is then indicative of a lost vigour, capacity for joy and sensation, and indeed sexual verve - a loss which may be cleanly traced by examining Hardy's use of, and reliance upon, oral symbolism throughout the novel. The close and detailed focus that he places upon the mobility and expressiveness of his heroine's lips in the early stages of

the novel, which in most cases denotes some form of sexual response, is withdrawn by Hardy in the second half of the novel where attention to Bathsheba's repressed state and marital conflict exacts just such a withdrawal on her author's part. Apprised as we are of Hardy's fascination with this particular feminine feature, and what appears to be, in this context, his relish in poetic 'play' upon the same, it may plausibly be argued that such a withdrawal conveys, not only Bathsheba's loss of vitality, but a certain loss for Hardy too: a personal felt loss of his heroine's palpable sexual presence.

Recalling episodes already discussed - the *al fresco* 'bedroom' scene where the parting-of-lips is closely associated with Hardy's presentation of a young woman on the brink of sexual maturity; or the proposal scene where a stifled yawn approximates the suppression of another of Bathsheba's natural instincts in Oak's contiguity - it becomes evident that Hardy's use of this particular natural object metaphor is poetically utilised and aesthetically structured to some purpose - and no doubt to some authorial satisfaction.

Clearly Hardy relies heavily upon semiotics in his exposition of Boldwood's lascivious fantasies as he contemplates the crimson, globular shape nocturnally glowing suggestively down at him from Bathsheba's valentine in his darkened room. Conjuring images of the valentine's sender, Boldwood muses:

Her mouth - were the lips red or pale, plump or
creased? - had curved itself to a certain

expression...the corners had moved with all their natural tremulousness: what had been the expression? (FFMC p113)

The reality is, however, chastening - or would be, were Boldwood less obsessed with his fantasies. For upon their eventual meeting, Bathsheba's sexual distaste for her benighted suitor is aptly conveyed by a physical compression of her mouth:

all the motion she made was that of closing her lips which had previously been a little parted. (FFMC p145)

But it is, predictably, Oak's proximity to Bathsheba that most readily prompts Hardy to semantic play upon the parting and contracting of feminine lips. The presence of the moral watchdog has, as has already been stressed, a particularly repressive effect upon the young girl. Hence, appropriately enough Hardy ensures that her lips will not move freely for him, but will be compressed and constrained under the hero's policing eye. She greets him variously - 'without parting her lips to any inconvenient extent', (FFMC p15); 'compressing her lips to a demure impassivity' (FFMC p25); and contracting her mouth 'to an inoffensive smallness' (FFMC p34). These images accumulate and logically culminate in 'the close compression of her two red lips' (FFMC p156) as sexual guilt and shame take the place of an innocent delight in her own desirability. In due consequence of this now 'close compression', Bathsheba will experience no freely expressed sexual joy in the

erotic seizure that engulfs her as Troy dips 'his mouth downward upon her own' and kisses her for the very first time. Instead she is overwhelmed by a commingling of sexual ecstasy and sexual shame: she feels 'like one who has sinned a great sin' (FFMC p218). That the vibrant girl should experience her first kiss with such guilt-ridden anguish, is a painful reminder of the degree to which she has become subordinated to a puritanical moral ethic quite against her true nature. And Hardy, who can neither openly condemn such a subordination nor the agent of its enforcement, steers his narrative awkwardly through a morass of equivocations, eventually, upon completion of this 'purge', to lead out tentatively towards a gentle affirmation of Bathsheba's innocence whose love, he writes, was entire as a child's, and though warm as summer it was as fresh as spring. (FFMC p220)

Having established from the very first chapter a textually encoded oral symbolism coherently structured - authorial focus resting in the first instance upon parting lips and in the last upon lips contracted - Hardy then restricts his use of oral symbolism in thematic concert with Bathsheba's repression. From the moment of Troy's kiss and Bathsheba's stunned awareness of her sense of 'sin', the mobility and expressiveness of her mouth no longer features in Hardy's discourses. The incidence of semantic repetition is cut right back from the numerous references to Bathsheba's mouth and lips in the first half of the novel prior to her marriage with Troy (pp 5,15, 23,

25, 102, 145, 147, 155, 156, 161, 163, 176, 188), to thereafter merely three! (pp 351, 353, 445) As the natural object - no longer in focus - 'dies' in the author's imagination, so too Bathsheba is to some extent felt to suffer a loss of life. In so far as her lips latterly lose their colour and lustre - 'there she sat, her mouth blue and dry' (FFMC p445), which is as close to a loss-of-life image as might be evoked in this context - so the sense is of a wasting, a dying. The drift tends in one direction only: 'entombment' or 'burial'.

But Hardy cannot afford his unconventional heroine the stature that a tragic denouement would lend her. With serial readers clamouring for 'Pastoral idylls' and happy endings, Bathsheba must be conjured back to life. She is therefore 'revived' and a 'proper' ending enforced. Poetic vision is, we sense, thus wrenched from its true orientation which was towards a full vindication of the crushed heroine who deserves a more dramatic exit from the oppressive male dominated world she inhabits. Her consignment to wifedom as Mrs Gabriel Oak is unrewardingly anti-climactic.

Deeply embedded then, in the novel's literary structures, Hardy sustains a consistent, caring concern for his heroine. Oak's activity of espial unobtrusively links with denial - the prohibition placed upon Bathsheba's freedom, self-expression, and growth to self knowledge - which ultimately leads to the total enclosure of her space that Oak's wedding ring signifies. This enclosure partakes

of a world of threat and theft which the author painstakingly elicits. Into the matrix of these images of enclosure, threat, and deprivation, Bathsheba's atrophied life - patterned by Hardy in the metonymic detailing of her mouth and lips, is interwoven. The poetic precision with which he outlines the woman's decline from glowing vigour and freedom of expression to enervation and obmutescence, mirrors his own deep empathy and concern with her deprivation: her truncated, feminine existence.

In addition to this significant and skilfully woven poetic underpattern, Hardy also incorporates into the floating images that surround his heroine, metaphors which appropriately parallel - in that their common referent is phallic - the erotic oral symbolism constructed for Bathsheba. Reference has earlier been made to the implicit link that exists between Troy's sexuality and his spur. But in fact Hardy maximises the metaphorical potential of the weapon with yet more poetic skill than this one example indicates. He also suggests, for instance, an implicit link between Troy's ritualised method of penetration with the sword - suggestively linked to his sexual 'offensive' motivated by a desire for conquest - and the 'wounding' of his bride which is both her defloration and the injury to her self-esteem and reputation later inflicted by her husband. But it is Hardy's expert structuring of these weaponry metaphors throughout the novel, which renders them - as indices - symbolically appropriate; as we are led on to discover.

Each and every male suitor is furnished with a killing weapon or a cutting tool - and each enjoins Bathsheba to his own action in handling the same. Hence she is inevitably drawn into the web of male violence or sexual domination that constitutes the darker world of Far From the Madding Crowd. A woman's place in the world, as Hardy perceives it, is by no means that secure, buttressed domain so earnestly mythologised by the more optimistic Victorian. It is rather pitted with traps and falls.

Signifying on diverse but homologous levels, Hardy's weaponry symbolism in this 'Pastoral' tale might be outlined as follows. Troy's weapon in the first instance is his spur, which in isolation serves well enough to indicate his method of controlling the creature he would dominate and subdue. And although, in her first interview with Troy, Bathsheba can hardly be aware of his latent callous streak, Hardy's emphasis upon the entrapment of the woman and her forcible attachment to the man, gestures towards Troy's incipient brutality. Lifted out of the immediate context and entered into the matrix of 'threat' symbols, the spur then signifies at a different level. It enters into the same category of symbols that includes Troy's sword and Boldwood's gun, which as weapons used in the offensive metonymically signify the phallus as organ of conquest. Following closely upon the episode of the ensnaring spur there occurs Troy's sword display. This exhibition of the larger weapon, as it were, drives the

metaphor home. On the offensive he displays well, exercising perfect timing and skilful ritualised penetration - but, that he wields his weapon in showy, braggadocio style would scarcely seem to augur well in love-making terms. Posturing dancing movements and raised arm gestures closely associated with a triumphal bearing, suggest that Troy may well be more of a sexual braggart than tender lover. Should he in reality perform so showily, and subsequently fail to engage privately with the heart of the woman, there might well eventuate more disillusion than tender communion.

Troy is finally destroyed by a blast from Boldwood's shotgun. This in turn aptly mirrors the older man's attempt to take possession of Bathsheba by a moral coercion which erupts emotionally - unlike Oak's dogged pedestrianism - in volcanic bursts from this mentally unbalanced celibate who,
had no more skill than a battering ram. (FFMC p393)

And that Troy is in fact destroyed by Boldwood's gun, confirms the suspicion prompted by Hardy's symbolic representation of the braggart, together with the authorial comment that,
the proud girl...had always looked down on him even whilst it was to love him... (FFMC p408)

that Troy does not, after all, command the ultimate 'weapon'.

Oak on the other hand wields a less aggressive tool -

but a wounding weapon no less - as Hardy dramatises vividly in the 'Shearing' scene. Just as Troy had displayed his skills with the sword, so Oak now displays his skill with the shearing blade. Again Bathsheba is conjoined to the action - to participate in and become intimidated by, the man's manipulation of his cutting blade. The sexual overtones in this scene are as evocative as any to be found in Far From the Madding Crowd. Straddling the nervous she-creature about to be shorn, Oak begins by lopping off 'the tresses about its head...his mistress quietly looking on' (FFMC p168).

'She blushes at the insult,' murmured Bathsheba, watching the pink flush which arose and overspread the neck and shoulders...a flush which was enviable, for its delicacy, by many queens of coteries, and would have been creditable, for its promptness, to any woman in the world. (FFMC p168)

With no prior knowledge that the subject of this piece is in fact a ewe, the reader might conjure a variety of imaginative scenes from this evocation, but it seems doubtful that a sheep-shearing would be one of them. Thus with characteristic literary skill, Hardy lights upon a suitable subject, and turns it to his own ends - subtly shaping the reader's reading as, upon Oak's sexual possession of the heroine, his own imagination turns.

Bathsheba's very real fear is that the soft flesh will be wounded by the blade she is now 'critically regarding'.

But Oak's

skilful shears, which apparently were going to gather up a piece of flesh at every close...never did so. (FFMC p168)

Not yet! The hero, blissful in Bathsheba's proximity, continues to perform with an expertise that draws his lover's fullest admiration:

Full of this dim and temperate bliss, he went on to fling the ewe over upon her other side, covering her head with his knee, gradually running the shears line after line round her dewlap, thence about her flank and back, and finishing over the tail.

'Well done, and done quickly!' said Bathsheba. (FFMC p169)

The implications of this scene, Oak's 'bliss', Bathsheba's responses, and most important Hardy's imagery, are - as the author draws the analogy - evocatively sexual. As the man bares the tender flesh to view with the virgin girl beside him awaiting completion of the task, so Hardy writes:

The clean, sleek creature arose...how perfectly like Aphrodite rising from the foam should have been seen to be realized - looking startled and shy at the loss of its garment...never before exposed...white as snow, and without flaw or blemish of the minutest kind. (FFMC p169)

As the defloration images begin to surface in the text, so Hardy concludes the analogy by pointing to the mark of identity now about to be branded:

'B.E,' is newly stamped upon the shorn skin... (FFMC p169)

and 'Aphrodite...leaps, panting' away. It is apparent from the invocation of images Hardy also employs in Tess's seduction, that this 'shearing' scene is most assuredly alluding to creatures other than sheep. Between the imaginative rendering of the lost garment here described -

'never before exposed...white as snow...without flaw or blemish', and Tess's 'beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet' (TD p90), there stands only the redefinition of the feminine subject.

But the climax of the shearing scene is yet to come - Hardy's symbolic prefiguration of a 'consummation' which will, in reality, bring Bathsheba to Oak already 'wounded' so to speak. Boldwood enters the scene and draws Bathsheba away; whereupon, feeling betrayed and intensely chagrined, Oak loses interest in his task, and,

In endeavouring to continue his shearing at the same time that he watched Boldwood's manner, he snipped the sheep in the groin. The animal plunged; Bathsheba instantly gazed towards it, and saw the blood.

'O, Gabriel!' she exclaimed, with severe remonstrance, 'you who are so strict with the other men - see what you are doing yourself!' (FFMC p171)

In terms of literary aesthetics this episode provides a perfect climax. Firstly there is the inevitable fact of Oak's compulsion to watch: he must spy! And in spying, he wounds - in this case the she-creature in his care - but the analogy is clear. Then there is the question of his dedication and skill. Tender and heedful as he is under Bathsheba's patient approving eye, out of it, he wounds the helpless creature beneath him. This is a mutilating act that aligns him with Troy in fact - with Troy's lunging at Bathsheba and adroitly lancing, not a shorn groin, but a lock of her tresses, but without drawing blood. We might then infer from Hardy's poetic sequence here, that Oak's

maiming of Bathsheba - his cutting her down to size - inflicts a wound as hurtful as any inflicted by Troy. And finally, since it is the 'wounded' woman Oak eventually claims - she at present subject to his constant chafings - the fact that her gesture of turning away provokes him to wound and draw blood, confirms the picture we have formed of an Oak intent upon mastery, control and male domination. Thwarted, he will draw blood.

Presumably the Victorian reviewer would regard Oak in this scene as the strong man distracted in his work by the vagaries of a woman. And superficially, Hardy's bland, objective stance with Oak does not work against this. It is critical to the success of the novel that the 'respectable' Oak, in his 'Pastoral' setting, should carry both the unconventional heroine and her unconventional author into the respectable Victorian drawing room. Hardy provides several scenes which are specifically designed to 'display' Oak in an honourable light, and clearly the intention is that the hero should grow out of these episodes the larger man. Hardy's lack of deep engagement with the vigilant Oak does however, shape his narrative to render these episodes more anecdotal than dramatically charged; and the result is a less than compelling portrait of a hero. Oddly - or tellingly perhaps - Oak's 'big scene', 'Troubles in the Fold', in which he plays Knight Gallant to the beseeching maiden in distress, is narrated by Hardy with a noticeable dearth of heroic images. An obvious contrast would be Elfride's Cliff-top rescue where

the rescuer engages in her task suffering both terror and panic as she summons courage and presence of mind to come to the aid of her endangered companion. This combination of emotional distress and nerve-steeled action is one of the hallmarks of heroism. However in Oak's case there is more regard for the proprieties than there is private anguish - any sense of his inner anxiety, suffering, or pain, is kept to a minimum. He enters the scene proud and proper, having exacted his price: Bathsheba's humiliation. Here as elsewhere, Hardy presents him as a well-meaning but a coolly calculating keeper of ovine welfare and men's morals. And the threat to life becomes, by transference, not a threat to Oak, but to Bathsheba. It is her wounded flock and her wounded feelings that Hardy aligns as Oak plunges his 'holler pipe, with a sharp pricker inside' (FFMC p159) into the belly of the suffering ewe. The woman meanwhile, weeps with pain, frustration and humiliation as the man performs his task usefully but totally devoid of heroic lustre. Here as earlier - in the scene of the rick fires where Bathsheba's economy is again safeguarded by Oak's intervention - there is the sense that Hardy avoids tense drama and stops short of presenting Oak in situations of real danger. And there is always this catch - that the wound is always Bathsheba's. Try as he might to make the man a match for the woman, Hardy only succeeds in accruing for his hero a list of creditable deeds which quantify rather than qualify his worth and heroic status. The centre of caring feeling and intense emotion is

quintessentially Bathsheba's, and Oak, for all his accrued credits, remains invariably on the periphery of heroism.

Thus it is that upon the psychological maiming of his heroine Hardy's sympathies turn. Lost at the last is the young girl of the opening chapters, vibrant, exultant in her youth, sex, health, beauty, and energy. No longer freely riding out, or resourcefully participating in the life of her estate, but instead, joylessly examining farming matters out of sheer necessity in the confined interior space that is now her 'territory', Bathsheba's fearless spirit is entirely spent. 'Properly' dependent, she is even bewildered by the prospect of 'having to rely on her own resources again'; and 'properly' enervated she feels 'she could never again acquire energy sufficient to go to market, barter and sell' (FFMC pp459-465). Oak's efforts to mould her to become the 'thoughtful...meek and comely woman' (FFMC p153) have, with the aid of Troy and to a lesser extent Boldwood, resulted in a very 'tamed' heroine indeed.

It is not surprising that Hardy should be preoccupied with marriage and sex in the early Seventies, for he was, of course, in life, affianced. What is surprising in view of his personal circumstances, is that he should be urged to implicit criticism and dissent - paying only nominal tribute to the literary tradition of offering woman the

prize of marriage and living-happily-ever-after. However, contrary to current orthodoxies of the Dr Robert Gittings' kind concerning Hardy's own marriage - that it was his own domestic unhappiness which prompted the writing of Jude the Obscure - it is rather the case that Hardy held anti-marriage views from the start - probably from his Fourier reading days of the 1860s. Understandably his last novel declaims with iconoclastic verve after twenty long years of constraint at the behest of custom. And by the same token the anti-marriage theme in the early novels is muted - treated with caution. But on the whole Bathsheba's progressive notions and passionately held principles - that she will not be some man's property; that she would have the wedding but not the man (FFMC p34); that she will resist being coerced into marriage for reputation's sake (FFMC p153) - differ from Sue Bridehead's for reasons of character, circumstance, education, and to some extent for reasons of Hardy's more judicious approach in the earlier novel, rather than for ideological reasons: ideologically the two heroines are sisters under the skin.

There is no doubt that Hardy abides by his own dictum in Far From the Madding Crowd - which is to catch at what the world is thinking no matter what it may be saying [47]. For sacrosanct as the institution of Marriage may have been to the Victorian of the 1870s, a groundswell of dissent was gathering force beneath that seemingly unruffled climate of stability and certitude that the historian G. M. Young describes:

The increasing secularism of English thought might have been expected to compel a more critical attitude to the family than in fact we find. Sexual ethic had attracted to itself so great a body of romantic sentiment: it was closely associated, and even identified, with virtue in general, with the elevated, the praiseworthy, the respectable life, that the faintest note of dissidence might attract a disproportionate volume of suspicion and censure. [48]

But if 'English thought' was not disposed to critical analysis or inclined to upset the status-quo, this is not to say that it was not thinking a good deal about these matters behind the scenes. Or so the irrepressible Mrs Lynn Linton suspects, who is evidently determined to counter anti-marriage rumours ab initio:

If...indignation abounds even in a suppressed and smouldering state, we should have heard something of it...a general condemnation of marriage has not yet become common among ladies. Few English novelists, for example, betray even a latent disposition to preach the doctrines of George Sands: even the strongest-minded contemplate some change which shall render man and wife more equal, rather than any revolt against society. [49]

Crushing nuts with steam-hammers is Mrs Lynn Linton's especial skill. But if she has quelled the 'revolt', the 'indignation...suppressed' smoulders on. Hardy has located it. He has picked up the groundswell which will, by the 1890s become a new wave carrying in its wake some of those few novelists to whom Mrs Lynn Linton may be referring: notably Meredith and Gissing.

Women writing history would no doubt focus upon the 1870s as a period of intense feminist reformist activity [50] - a time, if not of 'revolt' then certainly of

ideological reconstruction. This was reflected in the liberal feminist's impressive burst of activity during this period: the formation of Women's Societies, self-help groups, Foundations, journals, and so forth. There were also reflections of reconstruction in the legislature, which brought the nation's youth to order under Forster's Education Act (1870), and the voter to the poll under the protection of the Ballot Act (1872). Both Acts were to affect the status of women, directly or indirectly; the Education Act for reasons that are apparent, and not least for its tacit recognition of the equality of opportunity principle; and the Ballot Act for reasons less apparent. By depriving the anti-Rightist of the chivalrous argument that the vote should be withheld from woman in her own interest, since she would be especially liable to intimidation at hustings and polls, a very real, practical, obstacle was removed which in turn undermined the opposition's resistance to woman's participation in the soiled-and-soiling political arena generally. Of import and consequence too, was the passing of the Married Woman's Property Act (1870), which granted a married woman the right to possess her own earnings - a right her unmarried sister already possessed. It took approximately fifteen years for Parliament to reach this momentous decision. The Bill - introduced in 1855 - was given a second reading two years later, and then hung fire for another decade before its final resolution in 1870. Such gingerly procedure is of course insignificant in comparison with the half-century

it took Parliament to secure the franchise for women: from John Stuart Mill's 1867 proposed amendment to the Representation of the People Bill, to the 1918 enfranchisement of women over thirty. However such a protracted passage is a sign of the times - or as the

Saturday Review discloses, a sign of the times' prejudices: The only persons on whose behalf it (the Married Woman's Property Act) can seriously be pretended that a change in the law is necessary are the wives of working-men immoderately addicted to beer; and it would be monstrous to alter a state of law which is generally beneficial for the sake of a portion of one class of the community...There is absolutely no evidence of the desirableness of the change as regards the middle and upper classes, and it really is going rather too far to propose to make sweeping innovation for the supposed benefit of the lower class. We are sometimes threatened with the coming of a time when the poor will divide among them the property of the rich. But until that time does come the rich may surely be allowed to enjoy their property in their own way. [51]

Or, as Hardy presents the case, as Sergeant Troy enjoys his (wife's) property in his own way! Having purchased his discharge from the Army with Bathsheba's hard-earned monies (FFMC p304), Troy then proceeds to gamble the rest away at race-meetings:

'And you mean, Frank,' said Bathsheba sadly - her voice was painfully lowered from the fulness and vivacity of the previous summer - 'that you have lost more than a hundred pounds in a month by this dreadful horse-racing? O Frank it is cruel! It is foolish of you to take away my money so. We shall have to leave the farm; that will be the end of it! (FFMC p305)

5;Here then surely, is 'evidence of the desirableness of the change as regards the middle-classes'? And Hardy's Troy is by no means unrepresentative - if Millicent Garrett

Fawcett's account is indicative:

In the seventies I was staying with my father at a time when he had convened in his house a meeting of Liberal electors of East Suffolk. We were working then for a Married Woman's Property Bill. The first Act passed in 1870 gave a married woman the right to possess her earnings, but not any other property. I had petition forms with me, and thought the 'Liberal' meeting would afford me a good opportunity of getting signatures to it. So I took it round and explained the aim to the quite average specimens of the Liberal British farmer. 'Am I to understand you, Ma'am, that if this Bill passes, and my wife have a matter of a hundred pound left to her, I should have to ask her for it?' said one of them. The idea appeared monstrous that a man could not take his wife's One hundred pounds without even going through the form of asking her for it. [52]

Far From the Madding Crowd's arrival on the scene as Married Woman's Property reforms were in the air, was, it seems, a timely production. Should quite average specimens be none too critical of Hardy's characterisation of an immoderately addicted gambler-husband, then possibly they might be roused by the abused wife's point of view, who considers that:

there was a certain degradation in renouncing the simplicity of a maiden existence to become the humbler half of an indifferent matrimonial whole. (FFMC p323)

It says a good deal for the efficacy of the Pastoral genre, and the Victorian reader's ability to colour the world according to his or her own fancy, that none of this anti-marriage emphasis impeded Hardy's entry into the middle-class drawing room. On the contrary, as A J. Butler noticed in 1896, Far From the Madding Crowd was not only enthusiastically read in Victorian drawing rooms, but also

'talked about' there, [53]; where possibly not every Victorian reader was so bound upon an escape-world that Hardy's very 'modern' words failed to signify:
O, if she had never stooped to folly of this kind, respectable as it was, and could only stand again...and dare Troy or any other man to pollute a hair of her head by his interference...(FFMC p323)

Perhaps to ask the Victorian of the early 1870s to confront the notion of marriage and husbands as pollutants of womankind would be demanding too much. There is evidently more camouflage than conviction in Hardy's choice of a de rigueur dénouement - inclusive of homiletic epilogues.

Notes

1. The Complete Poems of Thomas Gray Edited by H. W. Starr and J. R. Dickinson (London, 1966) pp37-42. It might be noted that Hardy - in common with Gray - has been lauded as a champion of oppressed humanity. However Hardy's theme does not reflect, but rather reverses, the mood and theme of Gray's poem which celebrates the freedom from social conflict and violence that his countrydweller enjoys. With its atmospheric turbulence and untimely deaths; the harsh inhumanity of Parish relief - highlighted at Fanny Robin's death where one, 'humane', Newfoundland dog is stoned from the door of the Casterbridge Union - together with the emotional temperature of strife and friction, Hardy's world is the very antithesis of Gray's.
2. G.W. Sherman The Pessimism of Thomas Hardy (New Jersey and London, 1976) p126
3. *ibid.*, p108
4. Douglas Brown Thomas Hardy (Connecticut, 1980) p136
5. The Return of the Native p17
6. The Woodlanders p387
7. Brown *op. cit.*, p9
8. Spectator 19.Dec. 1874. Quoted in Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage. Edited by R. G. Cox (London, 1970) p 22
9. Athenaeum 5.Dec. 1874. Cox *ibid.*, p19
10. Saturday Review 9.Jan. 1875. Cox *ibid.*, p41
11. Saturday Review 9.Jan. 1875. Cox *ibid.*, p42
12. Academy 2.Jan. 1875. Cox *ibid.*, p35
13. Published in La Revue des Deux Mondes 15 Dec. 1875. Quoted in Thomas Hardy and His Readers Edited by Laurence Lerner and John Holstrom (London, 1968) pp 41,42
14. Lerner and Holmstrom *ibid.*, p39
15. *ibid.*, pp38,39
16. *ibid.*, p39
17. *ibid.*, pp30,31
18. *ibid.*, p35

19. *ibid.*, p39
20. Cox op. cit., p19
21. Cox op. cit., p22
22. Cox op. cit., p23
23. Cox op. cit., p31
24. Cox op. cit., p34
25. Cox op. cit., p42
26. Quarterly Review April. 1892. Cox op. cit., p221
27. Quarterly Review April. 1892. Cox op. cit., p220
28. Sherman op. cit., p108.
29. Kenneth Graham English Criticism of the Novel 1865-1900 (London, 1965) p66
30. Michael Alexander, 'Hardy Among the Poets', Thomas Hardy After Fifty Years Edited by Lance St. John Butler. (London and Basingstoke, 1978) p51
31. Lerner and Holstrom. op. cit., p81
32. Lerner and Holstrom. op. cit., p 81
33. Lerner and Holstrom. op. cit., p 81
34. Cox op. cit., 'Introduction' XLV
35. Kenneth Graham. op. cit., p93
36. See Raymond Williams' discussion of class and sex division in Hardy. 'The profound disturbances that Hardy records' writes Williams, 'cannot...be seen in sentimental terms of a pastoral'. Cf., Raymond Williams The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence () pp93,94. See also Budmouth Essays Edited by F. B. Pinion (Dorchester, 1976)
37. Robert E. Schweik, 'The Narrative Structure of "Far From the Madding Crowd"', Budmouth Essays *ibid.*, p34
38. See reference to this in Chapter 11. p
39. The Variorum Edition of the Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy Edited by James Gibson (London, 1979) pp623-5
40. Tom Paulin 'Time and Sense Experience: Hardy and T.S. Eliot' Budmouth Essays op. cit., p198

41. 'It matters much less', writes the Saturday Review critic (16.Jan.1892), 'what a story is about than how that story is told, and Mr Hardy...tells an unpleasant story in a very unpleasant way'. [Quoted by Lerner and Holmstrom, op.cit., p68] 'The coarse expression' which Hardy attributes to Tess, writes the Spectator critic (23.Jan. 1892), does not admit of a faithful presentation of a 'pure' woman. 'We deny altogether', the writer continues, 'that Mr Hardy has made out his case for Tess'. [Lerner and Holmstrom, op. cit., p70]. 'The coarseness...of Mr Hardy's manner', writes the Quarterly reviewer (April. 1892), comes 'from within rather than from without' - that is from the author himself. [Lerner and Holmstrom, op. cit., p87]. 'It is probable', writes the Independent critic (25.Feb. 1892), 'that (Hardy's) method is more dangerous to the moral fiber of young readers than the open French method' [Lerner and Holmstrom, op. cit., p81]. 'The influence of so-called "realism"', writes the Review of Reviews critic (Feb. 1892), 'as understood in France in the latter part of the nineteenth century, is strong both for good and ill in Mr Hardy's latest work, which in some respects is Zola-esque to a degree likely to alienate not a few well-meaning persons'. [Lerner and Holmstrom, op. cit., p75].
- 42.Cox. op. cit., p42
- 43.J.Hillis Miller, 'History as Repetition in Thomas Hardy's Poetry: The Example of "Wessex Heights"', Stratford Upon Avon Studies 15. Edited by Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer (London, 1972) p237
- 44.Intrusive moralising generalisations are significantly reduced in number in this novel (but for instances, see pp 133, 184, 219) - Hardy possibly relies firstly upon the 'Pastoral' to safeguard both text and reader from internal improprieties, and secondly upon Oak as moral censor injecting a tone of rectitude.
- 45.The Poems of Thomas Hardy Edited by T.R.M.Creighton (London and Basingstoke, 1977) pp307-11
- 46.Lance St. John Butler is surely right to point to the esotericism of this architectural allusion. He writes: 'Hardy's idiosyncrasy overcomes him when he gets to the mouth, whose curve resembles that "So well known in the arts of design as the cyma-recta or ogee". What seems to be wrong here is that his undeniable talent for detail has led him to unearth the most esoteric detail possible in order to convey the exact curve of Eustacia's mouth. Alas the detail is too remote and it conveys nothing.
See Lance St. John Butler, Thomas Hardy (Cambridge, 1978) p44
But to Hardy (and to the reader furnished with appropriate footnotes) the allusion would seem doubly appropriate. In the age of the Gothic revival it may not,

of course, have been so esoteric. But more important is the fact that the moulding to which he refers describes an undulating curve and rounded profile and hollow orifice respectively. Also at a completely different structural level, the allusion coheres with his Palladian imagery in the 'Atlantean' brow sequence where Eustacia features as the necessary finish to the 'architectural' construct of Rainbarrow.

47. See F.R. Pinion A Hardy Companion (London, Melbourne and Toronto, 1968) p151
48. G. M. Young Portrait of an Age (London, 1978) p133
49. 'Marriage and Free Love', The Saturday Review. Aug 24. 1867. XXIV pp248,249.

50. See Free and Ennobled Edited by Carol Bauer and Lawrence Ritt. (Oxford, 1979) The vigorous activities of the following influential women appear to have gained impetus in the 1860s and to have peaked in the 1870s.

Frances Power Cobbe - founder of the National Anti-Vivisection Society and the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection, was in the 1860s advocating that 'celibacy for women might, in fact, be preferable to marriage and male domination' (ibid., p70). 'When we have made it less women's interest to marry, we shall indeed have less and fewer interested marriages, with all their train of miseries and evils' (ibid., p72).

Jessie Boucherette - active member of the Charity Organization Society, co-founder of the Society for the Employment of Women, member of the Commons Preservation Society, and one of the founders of The National Trust, advocated (1869) the compulsory emigration of men as a solution to the problem of redundant women (ibid., p74).

Mrs William Grey - in a paper read to the Social Science Association (1871) argued that marriage should not be woman's first object [ibid., p118].

Emily Pfeiffer - published poet in the 1870-80s- was an advocate of change and improvements in the 'social and economic position of women [ibid., p159].

Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, MD, founder (and dean 1883-1903) of a dispensary which developed into the New Hospital for Women; first woman to be elected to the London School Board and first woman Mayor, was in 1874, calling for more intellectual work interest and opportunity for women [ibid., pp270,271].

Emily Faithfull - co-founder of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women; named Printer and Publisher in ordinary to the Queen; collaborator with Emily Davies in establishing the monthly Victoria Magazine of which she was editor until 1880; was in 1871, promoting the cause of 'perfect equality of all human beings, men and women' [ibid., p289].

And finally Millicent Garrett Fawcett who, in concert with her feminist peers, was actively working behind the

scenes in the 1870s, in order to promote 'a larger and freer life for women' [ibid., p293].

51. 'The Married Woman's Property Act', The Saturday Review April 10. 1869. XXVII pp 482,483.
52. Millicent Garrett Fawcett Women's Suffrage: A short History of a great movement (London, 1912) p23
53. A J. Butler, 'Mr Hardy as a Decadent', National Review May 1896 XXVII pp384-90.

The Return of the Native

Mr Hardy's heroines are characterised by a yielding to circumstance that is limited by the play of instinct. They are never quite bad. It seems, indeed, that this quality in them, which shuts them out from any high level of goodness, is precisely that which saves them from ever being very bad. They have an instinctive self-respect, an instinctive purity. When they err, it is by caprice, by imagination...One feels compelled to insist on the instinctiveness of these women. There is, in truth, something elemental, something demonic about them. We see at once that they have no souls. [1]

Woman, in Mr Hardy's world, is far from being 'the conscience of man'; it is with the man always that the moral strength lies. [2]

The author is Havelock Ellis and his equation is straightforward enough: Hardy's women are neither good nor bad but instinctive; and in their instinctiveness they are elemental and demonic, without souls or moral strength; in other words, low in the evolutionary scale, godless, but feminine and charming. Ellis also deduces:

The type of womankind that Mr Hardy chiefly loves to study, from Cytherea to Sue, has always been the same, very human, also very feminine, rarely with any marked element of virility. [3]

'Mr Hardy', Ellis continues, 'took these women chiefly at their more obviously charming or pathetic moments'; and since for Ellis 'woman has always been for man the supreme

priestess, or the supreme devil, of Nature' [4], then presumably such women as he describes (without souls/demonic feminine-not-virile) veer towards the latter category.

The question to consider then, is whether such assumptions are rooted in the critic's predilection for yielding, un-reasoning 'feminine' types of puerile inclination, or in Hardy's. What the writer has actually touched upon whilst somewhat diverting its aspect, is an important feature of Hardy's treatment of women generally. This is, that whatever strengths, talents, moral responsibilities they might develop further, male coercion decrees otherwise. To take some examples: Elfride, with encouragement and guidance might well have become a successful woman of letters had Knight not undermined her talents and sense of self-worth from the outset. After all, she produces a more scholarly sermon than does her own Parson father, (equipped with stage-management directions for presentation purposes - which suggests a dramatist's skill); and her first novel is encouragingly received by Lord Luxellian if not by Knight, who proves to be far more generous and encouraging in his tutoring of Stephen. Bathsheba too - with fewer pressures from Oak to be respectable and wed - might also have developed her managerial, administrative skills further, and found for herself a successful career in the world of men. Eustacia, confined to a useless, idle existence on Egdon by a neglectful grandfather, a husband who limits her horizons

to becoming school-matron, and the equally coercive Venn who suggests a career as a lady's companion, is similarly circumscribed by male attitudes which assume that woman should live down to the lowest expectations - a prescription that inevitably undermines self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth. And Tess - candidate for teacher-training - who is appropriated body and mind by the men in her world, is deprived of a more fulfilling career from the outset by a system which cannot admit unmarried mothers to teacher-training candidature. Sue's predicament is analagous. Initially independent and sucessfully establishing a career in art design, she is diverted into teacher-training, which, given her aptitude and skill, augurs well for a future in a 'big school' (JO p140). But her re-admission to teacher training college is not granted by the School Committee (presumably male), in consequence of rumours about her association with Jude; and thereafter her status is reduced to that of assistant teacher-subordinate and not, as had been her aim, levelled up to that of a professional partner.

Is then the psychologist Havelock Ellis, with his extraction of passive, puerile traits from Hardy's characterisations - the 'yielding to circumstance', lack of moral strength, lack of 'virility' of which he speaks - confusing symptom with cause? Hardy's heroines are not 'characterised by a yielding to circumstance' but coerced into submitting to male will. Coerced submission is, as Hardy knows if Ellis does not, repression. The repressed

spirit may present a subdued face concealing conflicting feelings within - as do the majority of Hardy's rebellious heroines - but the authentically submissive nature genuinely desires a passive existence, a dependent role.

Eva Figs detects in Havelock Ellis a 'Swiftian' flavour. His method of reasoning is, she says, 'an example of the prejudicial ability not just to twist the evidence, but to do a double twist in order to express one's own value judgements' [5]. Certainly Ellis' implicit equation between femininity and puerility - that the 'very feminine (is) rarely with any marked element of virility' - exemplifies just such a 'Swiftian' twist. This then prompts the consideration: is Ellis describing Hardy's human and imperfect heroine, or rather working from the assumption that to be feminine-not-virile is necessarily to be weak and passive? Betraying his prejudices unwittingly, Ellis does in fact quite readily work from such an assumption - which urges him elsewhere for example, to speak of Fancy Day's 'little bounds and rebounds...fanciful ardours and repressions', and on the other hand instinctively to omit the use of the diminutive 'little' and the trivialising ascription 'fanciful' where male vacillation is the subject: to speak of Jude as one who 'wavers' [6] between two women as if male indecision were automatically to be assimilated to oceanographical imagery. Why not 'wavers' for Fancy Day also? Her lighthearted premarital dalliances are, after all, little different in kind from Jude's premarital frolics with Arabella; or even

his fanciful ardour for a cousin he has never met, but with whom he subsequently develops too deep a bond to admit of a wavering - as opposed to a rebounding impulse.

Is it not then Ellis who is creating, or recreating from Hardy, 'weak' women, not-virile women? Such 'otherness' as he seeks to elicit from Hardy's characterisations - which he argues along typically Victorian lines, shifting between eschatological (the demonic, without-soul woman) and congenital considerations (instinctive woman) - is, for all his quiet reasoning air, different in degree rather than in kind from the more enraged Victorian critic's labelling of Bathsheba as 'hussy' and Tess as 'indelibly stained'. The latter simply made use of a language of a more forceful kind.

Ellis has his modern disciples. John Bayley is one, who finds in his Victorian predecessor one of Hardy's most sensitive critics:

Havelock Ellis, in his article on Hardy's novels in the Westminster Review in 1883...is interested in the more intimate places of the Hardy psychology, though he probes them with delicacy and tact. He points out that all women in his novels must be weak, even when weakness is an aspect of their strength, as with Bathsheba. They are incapable of moral firmness or ascendancy - the natural birthright of George Eliot's women; if they possessed it they could not attract Hardy, or be seen by him and identified with as they are. Naturally Ellis does not speculate on the reasons for this, though as a doctor and psychologist in training he is clearly thinking about it. [7]

Hardy's own nature, Bayley continues, 'required woman to be as unlike men as possible'; which if we are to follow him correctly means weak. Or is Bayley suggesting that there

is something untoward in the Hardyian psychology? That his identification with the 'weak' woman reveals a latent homosexuality? Either way - Hardy as 'chauvinist' or Hardy as sexually ambivalent - neither interpretation accords with Hardy's own nature as a lover not of weak, but of strong women, as he privately projects this view through his notebooks and correspondence.

There is for example his deep, longlasting affection for the intellectually gifted Florence Henniker [8]; his admiration for women rulers: the British Constitution, he said, 'has worked so much better under Queens than kings the Crown should by rights descend from woman to woman' [9]; and of course his high regard for George Sand [10]. In accordance with a nature that felt an instinctive animosity for pretentious flirts [11], Hardy's love of strong, active, free-thinking women also coloured his attitude to what he called the 'irritated crusty members' of men's clubs who were, he said, 'too selfish' in their reluctance to admit women members to their confines [12].

However, in attempting to dispense with Victorian stereotypes in his fiction, and to replace these with wilful, inquiring, independently motivated, critically minded heroines, for whom marriage is not the most desirable goal, Hardy evidently laid himself open, not only to hostile criticism, but also to misinterpretation. Marriage as compromise, as not the most desirable career for women was, (as has earlier been discussed), Hardy's platform from the outset. If he were a woman, he wrote to

Florence Henniker in the more liberated climate of 1918, he would think twice about entering matrimony 'in these days of emancipation when everything is open to the sex' [13]. But dispensing with the stereotype some decades earlier was problematical. 'The doll of English fiction must be demolished' he wrote to H.W.Massingham in December 1891 [14]; but did such demolition denote misogyny? Evidently to many a Victorian it did, and against these Hardy reacted with justifiable resentment: 'Many of my novels have suffered so much from misrepresentation as being attacks on womankind' he protested to Edmund Yates - to whom he also submitted 'information (derived) from many numerous unexpected letters' testifying to the enthusiastic response generated by Tess [15]. Impartial representation is apparently what he had always intended, as the following observation indicates. In George Eliot he discovered:

A truly magnificent revelation of the nobleness that is in women, [but] the other side is not fairly shown. The mystery of feminine malignity is barely touched upon. Art ought to be impartially representative. [16]

Unlike the bitter misogynist Schopenhauer, for whom women were instinctively treacherous and lying, Hardy found 'feminine malignity' less innate than inexplicable. And none too inexplicable at that, for he unravels the 'mystery' well enough in his creative prose, where neuroticism, caprice and deception are presented by him as the psychological consequence of male disparagement and sex discrimination, and the predictable outcome of that

socially approved method of subordinating women - the inculcation of guilt.

In his private correspondence Hardy reveals a completely spontaneous and unselfconscious acceptance of sexual equality, with not a hint of misogyny - unless a dislike of flirts is that. To Gosse he wrote, again with reference to George Eliot:

It is curious that such a woman of the people as George Eliot should have carried on the prejudice to some extent in her treatment of Hetty, whom she would not have us regard as possessing equal rights with Donnithorne [17]

In declining to write an Introduction to a new publication of Fielding's works, he explains to the publishers that Fielding:

as a local novelist has never been clearly regarded to my mind: and his aristocratic, even feudal attitude towards the peasantry, (eg. his view of Molly as a 'slut' to be ridiculed, not as a simple girl, as worthy a creation of Nature as the lovely Sophia) should be exhibited strongly. [18]

In having 'no great liking for the perfect woman in fiction,' Hardy is at the same time emphatic that 'no satire on the sex is intended in any case by the imperfections of my heroines.' [19]

The implications of an 'imperfect' heroine for the Victorian reader presented with a mimetic equivalent of an everyday counterpart, recognisably contemporary and quite clearly participating in the continuing process of historical change, were evidently troubling and complex. The palpable presence of the Hardy heroine which springs

from her author's sense of her 'felt' life and which renders her sufficiently familiar to command the reader's close identification, seems to have been at once a threat and an incitement. Havelock Ellis inadvertently discloses that this is the case by his purposeful derogation of feminine (never masculine) imperfection to 'weakness'. This effectively permits him a retention of male, moral superiority which by implication and assumption enforces a perpetuation of the status-quo. 'Imperfection' (Hardy's term) has quite different connotations from 'weakness' (the critic's term). What seems to be pertinent here is the fact that virile persons may be imperfect but not weak! Hence by stressing not the imperfect but the pathetic, the silly and weak, the critic has subtly rendered Hardy's women entirely other - feminine creatures to be affectionately patronised. At the same time their 'incitement' potential is, by neat sleight of hand, craftily undermined: the weak, by definition, and unlike the imperfect, are inherently without power.

This kind of rigorous sex differentiation, clearly difficult to eliminate, presented Hardy with several difficulties as he set out to undermine its credibility and force in his fiction. But by apportioning to his heroine and hero alike, corresponding moral, intellectual and physical attributes, he preordains sexual equivalence and destabilises culturally prescribed gender-traits. It was evidently important to reduce, as far as possible without rendering all characters uniform, the 'otherness' that

inevitably opened the way for sex-division/discrimination. The stereotype, enlarging culturally-determined characteristics at the expense of individuality and autonomy, depersonalized woman and assisted in shaping her as a class - 'the sex' in common Victorian parlance. It therefore became critical for Hardy to eliminate the more obvious traits that characterised the stereotype. This would provide room for woman-as-person to emerge. Together with her capacity for arousing strong readerly responses, this might then pave the way for ideological reconstruction of current moral values and socio-sexual codes.

It is to this end - we might conjecture - that 'feminine' passivity becomes, in Hardy, a quality which his male characters also own. Stephen's passive withdrawal from the fact of unrequited love contrasts openly with Elfride's hot pursuit of her lover under similar circumstances. And Giles Winterborne's passive retreat with Fitzpiers' advent similarly contrasts with Marty's stoic attempts to build daily upon her longed for love relationship despite the lack of reciprocity. 'Feminine' caprice likewise, is not the prerogative of the female - Henchard's capricious treatment and dismissal of Farfrae, although never referred to as such by the Victorian critic, is, *mutatis mutandis*, no less capricious than Bathsheba's treatment of Oak. And if Fancy Day has her 'little bounds and rebounds', so too do Wildeve and Fitzpiers. Angel's 'rebound' to Izzie is mitigated by mental stress, but it is fickleness nonetheless. If moral traits are thus equally

apportioned, so too are physical attributes. The invalid woman makes a few brief appearances (significantly brief in the light of the current cult of hypochondria): Elfride becomes fevered following the intense strain of her chess contest with Knight, both Bathsheba and Eustacia suffer temporary mental derangement following the break-up of their respective marriages. Grace temporarily sickens, and Sue of course suffers a severe mental breakdown. But on the other hand Owen Grady suffers prolonged invalidism, Boldwood is mentally deranged, Angel and Clym both verge upon total nervous breakdown, and Giles and Jude both sicken with weak chests. Clearly the sickroom is not reserved for women in Hardy as it was in Victorian society.

Nor is physical beauty exclusive to the female. Hardy draws imaginatively upon intersexual images which relate in more or less equal measure to the hero and heroine respectively. To take an example. Fragmenting his text and eliding the subject to whom the gender-attributes refer, we are presented with the following: a 'full-limbed and somewhat heavy' figure, whose complexion is 'without ruddiness', and whose mouth is 'cut as the point of a spear' - the keenness of which appears to be 'sometimes blunted' as sudden fits of gloom slacken its contours [20]. Or alternatively Hardy offers this portrait. The focus is upon a 'curly margin of very light shining hair, which accord(s) well with the flush upon (the) cheek' and a 'complexion...clear...far removed enough from virgin delicacy' suggests a fair freshness [21] The first subject

is Eustacia and the second Swithin St. Cleeve. If Eustacia's renowned mouth were not such a give-away, no doubt the androgynous effect would be more potent still. The 'masculine' or 'feminine' impression (as the case may be) is rendered most effectively. Hardy's method of insinuating an image by means of invocation and negation - Eustacia is 'without ruddiness', Swithin's complexion is 'far enough removed from virgin delicacy' - satisfactorily conveys by association the desired impression of attractiveness or physical beauty which is human rather than sexual. At the same time this is achieved (in full context) without obscuring the sexual nature of the individual in any way.

It is evident, from the two extracts cited, that the reader is invited to appraise the physical attributes, not only of the female, but also of the male. Equally important is the fact that by raising images of this intersexual kind Hardy employs a language of sexuality which cuts across the linguistic barriers that separate the sexes - thus to some extent modifying the concept of woman as 'other' and opening the way to an ideology of sexual equality. Commutable images clearly assist in blurring sexual divisions where they are not desirable - where it is the inchoate equality of the sexes Hardy would establish as primary fact. That is to say, the sexes are established in equipoise prior to the events, or contingencies of plot, which lead out to a world in which sex-division is rife. This is a division which culminates in female subordination

to the male will and an impoverished existence for those sentenced to life. There is little compromise in Hardy. Sexual inequality annihilates the love-bond. There can be no fulfilment for men or women in the absence of sexual reciprocity.

Where Hardy addresses himself to the sexes in opposition, as relying upon their 'otherness' to gain dominion over the object of desire, exerting, that is, a manipulative power that depends upon conquest of the 'other', he falls back upon conventional gender-attributes - as in his portrayal of Knight, Lucetta, Fitzpiers, Arabella, Alec, and Mrs Charmond. There is nothing bi-sexual, androgynous or polymorphic about these men and women. On the other hand the greater Hardy characters are invariably nascently androgynous. Hardy's original Elfride is boyish to Stephen's girlishness; his Bathsheba (unmoulded by Oak) conducts herself publicly in a forceful, vigorous manner - and privately with an 'unfeminine' physical zest. And Eustacia's guise of Turkish Knight - 'one would think you were one of the bucks' (RN p173) - aptly dramatises what Hardy refers to more than once as the 'force' that underlies her 'drowsy latency' (RN p173). And finally there is Sue, who is of course the epicene in whom the gentle 'feminine' Jude sees his own likeness. Tess is possibly unique. As a fully realised 'pure woman' she is autonomous in her femininity from the outset so perhaps requires no additional characteristics to ensure that she is clearly marked off from the stereotype. Moreover

insofar as the author identifies closely with her 'feminine' states of being, she is neither inscrutable nor 'other' but rather twinned to her author's consciousness. Consequently the reader is led to feel that her psychosocial admixture of assertiveness/compliance, self-willedness/passivity, tenderness/violence, are not gender-specific attributes at all, but sexually cross-linked.

What then emerges in Hardy is a gender index which, in contrast to the Ellis/Bayley extrasexual index, is fundamentally intersexual. It is, in the final analysis, hard to find any marked weakness which is not common to all Hardy's characters in some form or another. Possibly it is precisely this which provokes these critics to regard the Wessex women as weak. 'Woman, in Mr Hardy's world' Ellis has told us, 'is far from being "the conscience of man".' Heroines role-equipped to perform as man's conscience are recognisably noble. Are Hardy's women then somehow debased in these critics' eyes because they are not so role-equipped? But it would scarcely be thinkable to Hardy that there could exist a single, formulated moral code by which all persons at all times should abide, and which an individual, by virtue of sex alone, should personify or exemplify. Ellis and his ilk are determined to enforce both the double-bind and the double-standard. The weak and helpless woman is lovable and the noble, sensible woman - man's conscience - is admirable. And of course the double-bind comes full circle in that woman as 'man's

conscience' will indubitably fail to live up to the high expectations demanded of her. She will inevitably fall short of the ideal to become one of the weak and helpless breed by default. The prescription is familiar enough - and clearly essential to that coterie of males psychologically better equipped to relate to 'inferior' women than to equals. Presumably then, any critical emphasis that renders the lovable woman inferior and 'other' would suit this mentality, although, in the final analysis, this says more about the critic's psychological make-up than Hardy's.

George Sand's words written to Mazzini in 1848 express a criticism which Hardy would willingly have endorsed. Of a young woman called Eliza, she writes:

Man and Woman are everything to her, and the question of sex, in a sense at which the thought of man and woman should never exclusively stop, obliterates in her the idea of the human being, which is always the same being and ought never to perfect itself as a man or as a woman, but as a soul and child of God. [22]

With the exception perhaps of the invocation of the deity which he might have replaced with 'Nature', this expresses a sentiment which could be Hardy's own.

This and previous vindications apart, it remains to be said however, that whilst the censorship convenances of the day exerted upon Hardy, a 'paralysing influence' [23], which no doubt led him to conventionalise his heroines more than he would have wished, at the same time the coercive power of language, which had developed to a nicety to

separate the spheres of man and woman (Ellis' 'little caprices' for woman and 'wavering' for man are idiomatically typical), must also have had its effect. Sexually divisive language, as with politically divisive language, can catch at even the best intentioned unawares - who today might fall into error by preferring the word 'terrorist' over 'freedom-fighter' or vice-versa, when the generic and less emotive term 'guerilla' avails. Hardy could scarcely have been totally immune from the subtle coerciveness of the prevailing idiom. Certainly he caught at the language of the pedagogue - thick with censure - where in A Pair of Blue Eyes he saw the need to glaze his text with judicious overtones. But in rejecting this stylistic armoury as his enhanced literary reputation permitted him greater artistic licence, he also appears to have rejected certain preferred linguistic ascriptions as favoured by the popular literatures of the day: 'the old English ideal...the most beautiful, the most modest, the most essentially womanly (woman)', whose 'modesty of soul', 'purity of taste', 'modesty of appearance', 'tender, loving, retiring' domesticity, 'homage and devotion' are 'an Englishwoman's natural inheritance.' 'All men whose opinion is worth having' this writer claims, 'prefer the simple and genuine girl of the past, with her tender little ways and pretty bashful modesties' [24]. However, despite fairly obvious idiomatic omissions within the Hardy lexicon such as these devotional, cleansing terms, and others in popular currency such as 'flirt' and 'virile' which he

chooses not to employ; in the absence of appropriate philological studies, the extent to which he succeeded in sustaining a language which was not sexually divisive or circumscriptive, has to remain conjectural.

In proposing an ideology of sexual equality, Hardy called first and foremost for self-hood over and above distinctions of sex - believing as did J S.Mill, that, in a liberated world:

each individual will prove his or her capacities in the only way in which capacities can be proved - by trial; and the world will have the benefit of the best faculties of all its inhabitants. [25]

But the world does not benefit, for it is not, of course, a liberated world - a consideration that deeply preoccupied Hardy in the writing of The Return of the Native and underpins his theme in that novel.

During the composition of The Return of the Native in the mid-to-late 1870s, which was a period of tranquillity and equilibrium for Hardy and is described by him, with reference to his private life, as the 'Sturminster idyll...our happiest time' (Life p118), he was also intellectually engaged with George Sand; one of the 'Immortals' of French literature in his opinion [26]. Whilst taking notes from her novel Mauprat, Hardy contemplated the following:

Men imagine that a woman has no individual existence, and that she ought always to be absorbed in them; and yet they love no woman deeply, unless she elevates herself, by her character, above the weakness and inertia of her sex. [27]

Not sharing these 'men's imaginings', Hardy accordingly addressed himself to characterising a heroine endowed with an 'individual existence', as many flaws as virtues, and a lovability which her enforced inertia and resistance to becoming 'absorbed' in her husband's life, do not diminish. And it is into the narration and poetic underpattern of The Return of the Native that Hardy enters his lexicon of intersexual ascriptions and images to some purpose. These are interwoven into those passages which specifically treat with character typology - as for example in the extract already cited which renders Eustacia as sturdy and combative, the mouth 'cut as the point of a spear'. Imagistically complementing this latent 'force' in her nature (RN p173) is 'the beauty here visible' in Clym's face, which is meditative, not quite 'thought-worn' - a look Hardy says, born of 'placid pupilage' (RN pp161,162) - altogether a softer, more passive image. Or alternatively in assimilating his characters to objects in nature, Hardy draws out the metaphorical potential in the hermaphroditic image of the 'mollusc' in order to couple the lovers Eustacia and Wildeve as they wander off to make languid love in the dusky twilight of the heath.

Their black figures sank and disappeared from against the sky. They were as two horns which the sluggish heath had put forth from its crown, like a mollusc, and had now again drawn in. (RN p99)

Reinforcing the sense of mutuality and sexual equivalence which the hermaphrodite (mollusc) image introduces, Hardy also invokes the metonym 'horns' which serves aptly in its

significant plurality - twinned erectile protuberances - to suggest sharpened appetites and tumescence in both his lovers.

More important in this context however, is Egdon itself. Hardy's plot shows class and sexual division and the failure of the sexes to find a common interest. But the background against which the plot is set, suggests alternative possibilities. The symbolism of Egdon suggests an ideal of harmony - a background in which male and female are not divided. This poetically rendered topographical construction presents the reader with a variety of symbolic meanings, one of which is purely ideological. Hardy's prefatory evocation of Egdon - or more specifically Egdon's elevations which take the form of Rainbarrow - derives from an imaginative amalgam of three Barrows which the author has aggrandised, unified and placed centrally within his landscape, where in actuality they are spatially separated and peripheral to the heath. Geographical heights naturally lend themselves to images of elevation, high ideals, transfiguration. Hardy goes further and accords his 'heights' architectural elevations - or what he refers to as the Barrow's fine 'architectural' proportions.

For D H. Lawrence Hardy's Egdon symbolised:

primitive, primal earth, where the instinctive life heaves up...the heath heaved with raw instinct. Egdon, whose dark soil was strong and crude and organic as the body of a beast...the Heath persists. Its body is strong and fecund...here is the sombre latent power that will go on producing, no matter what happens to the product. Here is the deep, black source from whence all these little contents of lives are drawn. [28]

But Hardy's Egdon is not quite so Lawrentian black-body-of-beast. Firstly he conceives of Egdon as a stratified artefact. There are the geological foundations - the Egdon substructure. Superimposed over this there are the imprints of humanity - the Bronze Age burial mound and the Roman road respectively. These too are durable. The one signifies man's commemoration of the immortality of the spirit, and the other his desire and capacity to broaden his horizons, forge new frontiers. These features are essential to Egdon's character - essential to its ascendant quality. 'Almost crystallized to natural products by long continuance' (RN p7), the Barrow, on the one hand, projects the brow of Egdon 'above its natural level' (RN p13), and the ancient highway, on the other, 'traverses from one horizon to another' - leading on and out. And finally there is Hardy's own imaginative ideological superstructure. This he embeds in the 'mass' which he endows with human emotions, proportions, dimensions. But the most important feature of this anthropomorphised landscape is the manner in which all elements and forces interact, reciprocate.

The possibility for action, for change, for the heath community life to draw a richer existence from the 'vast tract of unenclosed wild' (RN p3) cocooned by membranous sky and vegetative earth, seems, as Hardy's illustrative prologue presents the case, virtually imminent. Watchfully intent,

when other things sank brooding to sleep the heath appeared slowly to wake and listen. Every night

its Titanic form seemed to await something; but it had waited thus, unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis - the final overthrow. (RN p4)

The temporal setting is midcentury and revolution is in the air [29]. The great seats of Europe and Eustacia's Paris are in the process of overthrow, or are overthrown. Men speak retrospectively of the decapitation of kings and the Napoleonic wars (RN p124). The modern capital ideologically anterior to Hardy's Egdon is not London but 'the French capital - the centre and vortex of the fashionable world' (RN p128). But Egdon, unlike the overthrown seats of Europe, contains its own turbulence.

Hardy writes:

Intensity was more usually reached by way of the solemn than by way of the brilliant, and such a sort of intensity was often arrived at during winter darkness, tempests and mists. Then Egdon was aroused to reciprocity; for the storm was its lover, and the wind its friend. (RN p5)

Caught in a twilight time however - 'between afternoon and night' - it is not upon contained turbulence, dissonance, or change, that the harrassed mind dwells. The twilight world is dim, hazy, hence the 'mind adrift on change'

searching for outlines seeks the assurance that:

everything around and underneath had been from prehistoric times as unaltered as the stars overhead, (this) gave ballast to the mind adrift on change, and harassed by the irrepressible New. (RN pp6,7)

The mind 'adrift', 'harrassed', and in need of certitudes

is somewhat at odds with this world which manages to contain its own turbulence and can hold to itself the storm as lover the wind as friend. Aligned with humanity's pioneering spirit - the 'slighted and enduring' spirit which forged the now crystallized road and Barrow - indestructible Egdon is only 'perfectly accordant with man's nature' in its capacity to weather atmospheric turbulence and untoward event: 'tragical possibilities' (RN p6). Reciprocity is the key-word, and Hardy's Atlantean brow the pivotal exemplar of this property. Soaring above the heath with its anthropomorphised outlines of concavities and convexities, its aggrandised, mysterious masculine and feminine presences - 'its hillocks, pits, ridges and acclivities', its 'bossy projections' (RN p13) its 'rounds and hollows' (RN p4); not to mention its potential for 'fraternization' (RN p4) - the Barrow assimilates all opposing and complementary forms and binds them together in perfect unity and reciprocity.

Hardy's reference to the heath's 'Titanic' form has already introduced a Hellenic association - a notional opposition to the actual 'modern' life of the heath, whose prime representative is the 'modern' Clym. Clym's modernity, his Arnoldian thought, his idealistic ambition to raise the poor above ignorance and superstition, should by rights meet with little opposition and conflict upon the Egdon wastes. But despite his enthusiasm for the Egdon foreground (his ascent to the heights in place of Eustacia occurs at the end of the book) - the heathlands visible to

his increasingly failing sight - there is nothing compatible between Egdon's Titanic form, its Atlantean elevations and the native, later described by Hardy as 'of no more account (to it) than an insect...a mere parasite of the heath' (RN p326).

Michael Millgate writes:

Both the allusion to Greek tragedy and the evocation of setting are presumably intended to elevate the central story, to project its narrative and thematic patterns as in some sense reflective or representative of permanent elements in human experience at all times and in all places. [30]

But to juxtapose this 'desert tract of pre-civilisation' is, Millgate argues, 'to jar credulity and promote continuous unease' [31]. Presumably Hardy intends the clash; for what his illustrative prologue and the Egdon construct instigates is a series of oppositions in the novel which fundamentally devolve upon the conflict between Hellenic polytheism and Christian monotheism. The opposition is between what David de Laura calls Hardy's 'Hellenic view of life which is also somehow natural' [32], and the Victorian view of life which is cultural (man-made). It is an implicit opposition between the pursuit of happiness (Greek joyousness) and the pursuit of the virtuous life (the Christian redemptive principle); between Nature, which is inclusive of unconstrained, reciprocal sexuality, and Society, which is inclusive of puritanical sexual codes. Consequently Hardy's Greek allusions do not in fact go 'stubbornly against the grain of the novel as a whole' as Millgate suggests [33], but are

counterbalancing or oppositional. They evoke an ideological paradigm against which the plot is set.

To complete the symmetry and unity of his construct, Hardy accordingly names its uppermost reaches 'Atlantean' and places upon its peak the heroine - herself of Greek extraction - who now features as the 'perfect, delicate, and necessary finish' to the whole. For in keeping with the 'architectural demands of the mass', which Hardy's imagery suggests is imaginatively worked and structurally conceived along Palladian or Greek temple lines (RN p13), so with 'Atlantean' signifying the presence of atlantes, the complementary figure of the caryatid is now required to complete the symmetrical form. Hence:

There the form stood, motionless as the hill beneath. Above the plain rose the hill, above the hill rose the barrow, and above the barrow rose the figure. Above the figure was nothing that could be mapped elsewhere than on a celestial globe.

Such a perfect, delicate, and necessary finish did the figure give to the dark pile of hills that it seemed to be the only obvious justification of their outline. Without it, there was the dome without the lantern; with it the architectural demands of the mass were satisfied. The scene was strangely homogeneous, in that the vale, the upland, the barrow, and the figure above it amounted to a unity. (RN p13)

So imaginative a model provides Hardy with an excellent working analogy. Egdon's dual nature (the actual and the symbolic) which has a capacity, we are told, for gaiety and solemnity, serenity and turbulence, not only has an affinity with the slighted and enduring pioneering spirit, but also with the weather-worn architectural mass whose perfectly balanced proportions incorporate a conceptual

design of reciprocation - the idea of the male and the female figures in equipoise - both essential to perfect form. Hardy does however, emphasise the harsh realities - the stresses that have to be weathered and contained if stability, equilibrium and reciprocity are to materialise. Egdon is no picturesque, lyricised world of rococo pastorals. It is not a landscape of 'smiling champagnes of flowers and fruit' (RN p4) redolent of the aristocratic, happy-go-lucky Baroque. It is weatherworn, seasoned, enduring.

The opposition between Greek and modern, unity and disunity, order and disorder has of course yet to be dramatised. This is instigated by the heathdwellers' displacement of the figure from the Atlantean brow, and compounded by her fragmented existence on the heath - she the rare 'Courser' opposed by Venn, the pedestrian tracker. The mood of timelessness - timeless Egdon - is all too shortly disrupted as: 'Humanity appears on the Scene Hand in Hand with Trouble' - at which point we anticipate an unfolding of events as intimated in the Chapter title.

The first figure to appear upon the scene seems innocuous enough, although, as it later transpires, he is the neglectful guardian of the young heroine, and therefore potentially one of the heath's agents of disorder. The second figure, whom we immediately recognise (by his raiment) to be alien to Egdon - his lurid colour anomalous in this setting (RN p6) - enters as a visitant from the 'civilised' world [34] (civilisation - presumably 'society'

- is, we are told, Egdon's enemy [RN p6]). And although there is little to suggest at this early stage that the second figure is also an agent of disorder and confusion, it later transpires that this is precisely his role. Hardy's initial clues are meagre, but apt and prefigurative. Venn, who later secretes himself and his van in the hollows of the heath landscape, now resists his interlocutor and keeps close what information he has about the troubled creature in his care; but at the same time his impulse is to generate an air of secrecy and unease, to unsettle and provoke the unwary bystander. Hardy tells us for example, that Venn makes five separate, provoking visits to peer inside his van - literally inviting inquiry it would seem:

Possibly these two (Venn and Vye) might not have spoken again till their parting, had it not been for the reddleman's visits to his van. When he returned from his fifth time of looking in the old man said, 'You have something inside there besides your load?' (RN p10)

But Venn, despite his manner of teasing out five previews of the unknown 'something inside', remains secretive. The irritated Vye is finally left to draw his own conclusions - to deduce, what turns out in fact, to be common knowledge as to the demise of the 'girl of Blooms-End' (RN p12). This proclivity in Venn to discompose, is but the outward sign of an inner drive which later manifests itself in more disruptive deeds - notably the 'displacement' of Eustacia (RN p101).

Venn is customarily regarded, as is Hardy's Oak, as a

benign agent of order within the community. Such interpretations depend largely upon the reader's need to 'order', or to locate a recognisable regulating force within the world in question. The desire appears to be for a policed community - the locus of order and authoritarian values being then assigned to the moral watchdog who best fulfils such readers' expectations. However it seems doubtful that Hardy in fact intended either the prying Oak or Venn to signify in this way. And in truth benignity does not characterise their roles in this respect.

These readership demands for an ordered world notwithstanding, (in which the moral figure of authority is inevitably designated male and coercive), it emerges from closer inspection of Venn that he is in reality little more than an officious intruder. This is, for example, the furtive stalker who persistently tracks Eustacia in order to catch her out in assignations of which he disapproves. Strongly motivated by a desire to trap the 'rare' 'splendid' woman and to curtail her freedom, Venn rationalises his persecution of Eustacia as activated by a desire to protect Thomasin's interests; but he deceives himself:

His first active step in watching over Thomasin's interests was taken about seven o'clock the next evening, and was dictated by the news which he had learnt from the sad boy. That Eustacia was somehow the cause of Wildeve's carelessness in relation to the marriage had at once been Venn's conclusion on hearing of the secret meeting between them. It did not occur to his mind that Eustacia's love-signal to Wildeve was the tender effect upon the deserted beauty of the intelligence which her grandfather had brought home. His instinct was to regard her as a conspirator against rather than as an

antecedent obstacle to Thomasin's happiness. (RN p93)

There can be no protection of Thomasin's interests with Venn getting his facts wrong; with Wildeve, in any case unreconciled to monogamy; and while an undue concern with the proprieties and personal reputation (both of which coerce Thomasin into matrimony) is more to be valued than the dictates of private conscience. But Venn is obsessed with his mission. He now proceeds to track Eustacia for five consecutive nights - eventually to meet with success 'a day-week' of the lovers' previous meeting. Spying out the trysters, he is frustrated by a cross-wind which obstructs his eavesdropping. Obsession brooks few obstacles however, as Hardy is clearly aware - and events now take a sinister turn. Clothing himself with 'large turves' that he might creep unobserved to spy upon the lovers, Venn appears to Hardy as wormlike - parasitic:

He took two of these (turves) as he lay, and dragged them over him till one covered his head and shoulders, the other his back and legs. The reddleman would now have been quite invisible, even by daylight; the turves, standing upon him with the heather upwards, looked precisely as if they were growing. He crept along again, and the turves on his back crept with him...it was as though he burrowed underground. (RN pp94,95)

Venn is indescribably crude. Intent upon confronting Eustacia, he not only chooses a Sunday morning 'for an interview with Miss Vye - to attack her position as Thomasin's rival either by art or by storm' (RN p101), but embarrassingly arrives at a time when 'folks never call

upon ladies' - that is before they are risen from their beds (RN p102). But Venn is not embarrassed - rather he seeks to embarrass. When eventually greeted by Eustacia he exhibits no 'art' but considerable tactless 'storm'. First, he refers to her lover, not by name, but with a vulgar jerk: 'he jerked his elbow to south-east - the direction of the Quiet Woman' (RN p103). Whereupon, Eustacia, plainly injured turns 'quickly to him. 'Do you mean Mr Wildeve ?' she inquires with dignity. Next, adding insult to injury, he refers to her as 'This other woman' Wildeve 'has picked up with', and then proceeds to tell the picked-up woman that her lover has no intention of marrying her - implying, of course, a slur upon her reputation (RN p103). And finally - his cruellest trick - he reveals his espial. As Oak shamed Bathsheba by revealing his sighting of her spreadeagled in sensuous abandon over her horse, so Venn now shames Eustacia by admitting to having witnessed her tryst with Wildeve - their wandering off together to make love in the dusky twilight of the heath. Eustacia is devastated:

It was a disconcerting lift of the curtain, and the mortification of Candaules' wife glowed in her. The moment had arrived when her lip would tremble in spite of herself, and when the gasp could no longer be kept down. (RN p105)

To humiliate the proud girl so is pure folly on Venn's part. In common with his predecessor, Oak, his impulse is to shame and degrade. And he succeeds: 'I lose all self-respect in talking to you' the poor girl owns (RN

p106). Seizing the moment Venn suggests that she remove herself to Budmouth to become - of all things - a widow-lady's companion. But he underestimates Eustacia's capacity to rebound - 'Is it to wear myself out to please her! I won't go', she cries (RN p108). Venn's clumsy tactics have availed nothing. If Eustacia had fostered the remotest longing to escape Egdon for Budmouth, Venn effectively dispossesses her of all desire by predicating her stagnation there:

As a rule, the word Budmouth meant fascination on Egdon. That Royal port and watering-place, if truly mirrored in the minds of the heath-folk, must have combined, in a charming and indescribable manner, a Carthaginian bustle of building with Tarentine luxuriousness and Baian health and beauty. Eustacia felt little less extravagantly about the place; but she would not sink her independence to get there. (RN p108)

She is perceptively aware that dependently sunk in Budmouth is how Venn would gladly see her.

The reddleman's interference simply alienates Eustacia yet more, where an effort to integrate the lonely, frustrated girl into the community would have served everyone's interests better. Had he, for instance, levelled a little of his 'rough coercion' at the venomous Susan Nonsuch, or even at Captain Vye that the negligent guardian might better attend to his granddaughter's needs, the community might have benefitted, as opposed to forfeiting, from Venn's self-appointed policing role.

It is not therefore as a benign regulating force that the reddleman operates. Ever failing to get his facts

right, he is also the spy who passes Clym's inheritance into the wrong hands - a small interference with inordinately large consequences. Hardy provides in the gambling scene, an appropriate dramatisation of the inherent disorder that exists at the very heart of the community. Here we are presented with 'confusion' and 'vice' well foregrounded as the addled Christian, the drunken Wildeve, and the officious Venn gather on a moonless night to gamble with someone else's inheritance, crouched around the Promethean 'dregs' of burning 'fires' generated in fits and starts from a collection of much abused glowworms. And that it should be Clym's inheritance which will shortly be misappropriated, who is himself reduced to crouching and crawling in an unlit world - 'a mere parasite of the heath' (RN p326) - compounds the sense of ignoble insect lives existing within the hearts of these men as beneath the shards of smaller crawling creatures.

'It was sometimes suggested' Hardy writes, that reddlemen were criminals for whose misdeeds other men had wrongfully suffered: that in escaping the law they had not escaped their own consciences, and had taken to the trade as a lifelong penance. Else why should they have chosen it? In the present case such a question would have been particularly apposite. The reddleman who had entered Egdon that afternoon was an instance of the pleasing being wasted to form the ground-work of the singular, when an ugly foundation would have done just as well for that purpose. (RN p90)

Why should such an 'agreeable specimen of rustic manhood' relinquish 'his proper station in life'? (RN p90). For money it seems.

Yes I am given up body and soul to the making of

money. Money is all my dream. (RN p464)

Venn may jest to Thomasin in all too appropriate Mephistophelian overtones, but his guise of plausibility is in truth darkly sinister. Just as Oak's manner of doing good is wellmeaning to the point of officiousness, so with Venn Hardy goes one step farther taking the reddleman's policing activities beyond the pale of pure solicitude. Venn's interferences have in fact a sinister underside and distinctly Faustian overtones. There is no question of doubt here as there may be with Oak. This particular 'Mephistophelian visitant', with his:

preservation of that respectability which is insured by the never-failing production of a well-lined purse, (RN p89)

and as a 'blood-coloured figure', a 'red ghost' (RN p87) - the personification 'of all the horrid dreams which had afflicted the juvenile spirit since imagination began' (RN p89) - is patently demonic where Oak at least still has one dogged foot in the upper world.

'The reddleman is coming for you!' had been the formulated threat of Wessex mothers for many generations. (RN p89)

And only superficially less sinister in his whitewashed guise at the last, Venn 'comes for' Thomasin as a 'ghost' of altered hue:

(Clym) heard a slight scream from Thomasin, who was sitting inside the room.

'O, how you frightened me!' she said to some one who had entered. 'I thought you were the ghost of yourself.' (RN p454)

Reassured that it is in fact Diggory Venn 'no longer reddleman', Thomasin nonetheless confesses that she could not 'believe that he had got white of his own accord! It seemed supernatural,' she says (RN p455). Those Wessex mothers invoking the reddleman as a punitive force are not a little prophetic. The prophecy is fulfilled most dramatically in the shooting episode - the chapter entitled 'Rough Coercion is Employed' (Chapter 1V). Here, Venn having already set trip-wires to bedevil Wildeve, now takes the law into his own hands 'squadristi' style, and telling himself that he is 'prepared to go to any lengths short of absolutely shooting him', stalks the innkeeper across the heath, cold-bloodedly takes aim and fires:

Had Wildeve known how thoroughly in earnest Venn had become he might have been still more alarmed... The doubtful legitimacy of such rough coercion did not disturb the mind of Venn. (RN p319)

But it evidently disturbs the author who now intervenes. Having reached the climax of the book Hardy is possibly aware that Venn will have to feature in The Return of the Native's (alternative) 'happy ending'. Accordingly the process of 'cleaning up' the reddleman now begins; Venn eventually emerging 'supernaturally' cleansed to become an overnight success with Thomasin - hitherto indifferent to his charms. It is an unsatisfactory reversion, and one Hardy himself acknowledges to be contrary to his 'original conception'. Venn, he says, was to have retained his isolated and weird character to the last, and to have disappeared mysteriously from the heath, nobody knowing whither. (RN p470)

Supernatural, ghostly, Mephistophelian, the reddleman as a more demonic version of the Oak whom Hardy aligned with Milton's Satan early in Far From the Madding Crowd, is now gradually reshaped as a possible suitor for Thomasin. Hardy begins with a highly unconvincing defence of this agent of 'a new and most unpleasant form of menace' (RN p318), and addresses the reader with a short homily on 'rough coercion' which reads thus:

Sometimes this is not to be regretted. From the impeachment of Strafford to Farmer Lynch's short way with the scamps of Virginia there have been many triumphs of justice which are mockeries of law. (RN p319)

This is not unconvincing as a defence of Venn for its tacit sanctioning of anarchic 'triumphs of justice which are mockeries of law', to which the author might well defer, but for the brutal examples Hardy has drawn upon. The short way with Holofernes for example would have set an entirely different tone!

However, Venn's demonic proportions apart, if the reader were looking for a figure in The Return of the Native who best fulfils the role of moral watchdog - and preferably one equipped with punitive instincts, particularly where beautiful, rebellious women are concerned, then the reddleman would of course suit. But it is not Hardy's intention that he should fulfil such a role and be applauded by the author for it.

Venn's first appearance on the scene - in Chapter Two, 'Humanity Appears upon the Scene, Hand in Hand with

'Trouble' - leads us then in gradual steps towards the source of the 'Trouble' with which the reddleman is, as Hardy's title suggests, 'hand in hand'. But before the present confusion is unfolded, which turns out to be a muddle over marriage licences, Hardy shifts the focus back to the Barrow where Eustacia is seen in cameo as the 'perfect and necessary finish' to the architectural mass. The Dorian image is stable, unified and balanced - hence we might anticipate that any dislocation of its order will augur ill. The polarisation of perfect and imperfect states of being takes shape now as Hardy makes the point that any discontinuance of immobility will in fact lead to confusion.

The form was so much like an organic part of the entire motionless structure that to see it move would have impressed the mind as a strange phenomenon. Immobility being the chief characteristic of that whole which the person formed portion of, the discontinuance of immobility in any quarter suggested confusion.

Yet that is precisely what happened. The figure perceptibly gave up its fixity...descended...and then vanished. (RN p13)

The reason for her sudden displacement now appeared...a newcomer... protruded into the sky...A second followed, then a third, a fourth, a fifth, and ultimately the whole barrow was peopled with burdened figures. (RN p14)

The woman, we are told, 'had no relation to the forms who had taken her place' (RN p14); and that they are in fact usurpers, agents of the 'confusion' that now prevails as perfection, balance, and equilibrium is broken, is soon to be revealed.

The imagination of the observer clung by preference to that vanished, solitary figure, as something

more interesting, more important, more likely to have a history worth knowing than these new-comers, and unconsciously regarded them as intruders. (My underscoring. RN p14)

This emphasis upon the Egdon community as the source and agency of confusion is important. For it is critical assumptions of the kind forwarded by Perry Meisel for example, who claims that Eustacia is both the intruder and agent of disorder in The Return of the Native [35], that are in need of reassessment. There is little that supports this view in Hardy's text.

Disorder is now ratified by Hardy - or rather, in the first instance it is heralded by the suggestion of a Boeotian witlessness set in antithesis to Eustacia's Olympian grandeur, as 'like a travelling flock of sheep' the intruders ascend the tumulus. (RN p15) The sense is now one of all perspectives becoming dimmed. The horizon blurs and the heath below becomes 'obliterated' as 'none of its features could be seen now.' (RN p16) As if occupying 'some radiant upper storey of the world' but neither complementing its grandeur nor adding to it any 'necessary finish', the heathfolk can perceive nothing of the world they customarily inhabit - the 'vast abyss', the 'Limbo' (RN p17) of the heath below, where, the muttered articulations of the wind in the hollows were as complaints and petitions from the 'souls of mighty worth' suspended therein. (RN p17)

These are Eustacia's articulations presumably, since it is

she who has been precipitated down in to the 'Limbo' that is to be her Egdon existence. And it is she, Hardy tells us, who listens to the winds - 'the linguistic peculiarity of the heath' (RN p60) - and whose own articulations are carried on the winds:

There mingled with all this wild rhetoric of night a sound which modulated so naturally into the rest that its beginning and ending were hardly to be distinguished. The bluffs, and bushes, and the heather-bells had broken silence; at last, so did the woman; and her articulation was but as another phrase of the same discourse as theirs. Thrown out on the winds it became twined in with them, and with them it flew away. (RN p61)

Hardy's polarisation of the two worlds is now established. The Hellenic/ideal and the 'modern/real' opposition is fully shaped as confusion takes the place of stability and the paradigmatical vision is lost to view.

Within the group, we are told, 'all was unstable':

those whom Nature had depicted as merely quaint became grotesque, and the grotesque became preternatural; for all was in extremity. (RN p18)

Dialogues convey division within the community: the putting-up of Thomasin's wedding banns and Mrs Yeobright's opposition to them; Wildeve's worthiness or not as the case may be; and Thomasin's folly or alternatively her wisdom in accepting Wildeve's suit. Added to these small divisions (all of which devolve upon issues of class and sex) there is also the factor of Christian Cantle's ambiguous sexuality, as well as a good deal of superstitious interchange. Disorder is finally most appropriately foregrounded by the 'whirling of dark

shapes', 'boiling confusion' and 'demoniac' measures trodden out. (RN p33) The poor addled Christian Cantle is beside himself:

They ought not to do it - how the vlankers do fly!
'tis tempting the Wicked one, tis. (RN p33)

And sure enough a 'long, slim, figure' flames up out of the heath before his very eyes, clad in 'tight raiment, and red from top to toe'

For all the world like the Devil in the picture of Temptation. (RN p34)

Venn arrives - summoned by the 'boiling confusion of sparks' and the flying vlankers - to set the seal upon a scene as contrasting to the earlier pacific panoramic vision as could be evoked by Hardy.

Eventually the heathfolk descend and Eustacia ascends once more to 'her old position at the top' (RN p59). But the Atlantean brow is no longer visible in its original form. Instead Eustacia is surrounded by darkness - an atmospheric Limbo:

An incomplete darkness (which) in comparison with the total darkness of the heath below...might have represented a venial beside a mortal sin. (RN p59)

Two motifs are then established in these first chapters. The ascent of woman has been intercepted, the heathfolk's displacement of Eustacia from her summit anticipating Venn's later attempt to displace her, not from the Atlantean brow and equilibrium, but from Egdon life altogether. Hardy, inviting a comparison by prefacing

Venn's declared intention to displace Eustacia (RN p101) with the analogous 'barbarian' who had 'rested neither night nor day' till he had tracked down and shot the 'bird so rare' truanting from 'hotter climes' (RN p100), makes it tacitly understood that the reddleman's plot is unquestionably barbaric and destructive. The second motif Hardy establishes in these opening sequences, is that it is indeed these fringe representatives of the modern-Victorian world - class and sex divided - who are the source and carriers of trouble and disorder.

Hardy's microcosmic Egdon world of heathdwellers, natives and Mephistophelian visitants finds its true parallel in Victorian society where men have no need to display the sign of the headless, silenced 'Quiet Woman' (RN p45) in order to signal their ethical priorities and sexual prejudices. For in the 'real' world the 'headless' woman lives out her 'amputated' life openly for all to approve, under the auspices of the institution of Matrimony, without legal existence or political voice; and with the aid of the cult of the 'doll-madonna', without intellectual freedom of thought and expression. 'Homer's Cimmerian land' (RN p60) is as remote in the everyday world of Hardy's contemporary reader as it is upon Egdon, where woman displaced from her rightful position - her equipoise as an Olympian co-equal with her Atlantean counterpart - is relegated to an isolated, alienated, miserably unfulfilling existence in a world 'not friendly to women now' (RN p60).

Dissatisfaction with life upon Egdon would seem to be

a justifiable response on Eustacia's part - her 'celestial imperiousness, love, wrath, and fervour' proving to be, as Hardy says, 'somewhat thrown away on netherward Egdon' (RN p77). On Olympus, we are told,
she would have done well with a little preparation.
She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman. (RN p75)

The comparison is instructive; as is also the distinction Hardy makes between Egdon's 'radiant upper storey' where woman in equipoise had been placed, and Egdon's 'netherward' regions where 'displaced' the same woman is - as it were - 'thrown away.' The two spheres are evidently differentiated automatically in the imagination of the writer; as is their respective suitability (or otherwise) as domiciles for woman-in-the-ascendant. But Hardy's observation is interesting for another reason. As we have discovered the 'model goddess' belongs to a world in which the balance of power is equally distributed, whereas,
Had it been possible for the earth and mankind to be entirely in her grasp for a while...few in the world would have noticed a change in the government. There would have been the same inequality of lot, the same heaping up of favours here, of contumely there, the same generosity before justice, the same perpetual dilemmas, the same captious alternation of caresses and blows that we endure now. (RN p75)

Clearly 'model goddesses' would fare no better in this respect, in a mortal world, than do mortals themselves. And to take the analogy further still, presumably any descent from Olympus would find the goddess at a

disadvantage in any case. The Hellenic mythological tradition that originated with Kronus of containing the forces of order and disorder within a relatively flexible hierarchical governing order in which goddesses feature importantly, would scarcely prepare the model goddess for mortal despotism and the absolute power that corrupts. But possibly the more important point here is Hardy's implicit redefinition of the woman-goddess concept: the 'model goddess' he writes, has not the makings of the 'model woman'. The model woman in The Return of the Native is clearly Thomasin - the dutiful, submissive, sweet and tender, flawless stereotype. Yet it is not she who is appointed for ascendancy - the unemancipated girl whose womanly occupations are closely detailed by Hardy (where Eustacia's are not) - who selects apples in her aunt's attic, trains her infant in the use of its wobbly young limbs, tends her aunt's potted plants, hunts for lost gloves, and submits to her husband's appropriation of her monies: 'It is my wife's, and what is hers is mine', (RN p270). Against this model of subordinated womankind the rebellious Eustacia is polarised.

Patricia Stubbs makes the point that, beneath the shifts and changes in attitude which have undoubtedly taken place towards woman in the novel, there is a fundamental continuity which firmly places them in a private domestic world where emotions and personal relationships are at once the focus of moral value and the core of women's experience. [36]

It would be fair to claim that Hardy's greater heroines are

not located in a private, domestic world beside the proverbial hearth. Persistently he recalls an outside world - and not a pacific one - which takes woman out into the world of work and situates her beyond the sphere designated woman's realm. Eustacia, unlike Tess and Sue, is not located in the world of work, for clearly it is part of Hardy's purpose in The Return of the Native to expose the anger and frustration suffered by the intelligent mind and energetic body confined to a useless, unemployed existence; but she is not at any point, situated in, or part of, Thomasin's domesticated world. And it is Eustacia whom Hardy would promote in an ideal liberated world. Not dutifulness but 'smouldering rebelliousness' (RN p77) and not sexual passivity but sexual passion characterises this ascendant woman:

To be loved to madness - such was her great desire. Love was to her the one cordial which could drive away the eating loneliness of her days. And she seemed to long for the abstraction called passionate love more than any particular lover. (RN p79)

Hardy would not then promote the conventional, compliant model to sit in the lap of the gods, but the woman of 'Tartarean dignity' - an 'Artemis, Athena, or Hera' (RN p77) - a strong, dominant woman equipped with an active imagination ('seeing nothing of human life now, she imagined all the more of what she had seen,' RN p78), and a firm grasp of realities in equal measure. 'Nothing can ensure the continuance of love', (RN p232), she tells her romantically inclined lover:

You have seen more than I, and have been into cities and among people that I have only heard of, and have lived more years than I; but yet I am older at this than you. I loved another man once, and now I love you. (RN p232)

It says a good deal about Clym that Eustacia can so openly confront him with these truths. Unlike the dismissive Knight who persistently trivialises Elfride's thoughts, words and deeds that she is eventually coerced into falsifying reality altogether; and in contrast to the circumscriptive Angel who enforces upon Tess an image of herself that she cannot accommodate without deceiving him, Clym does not wittingly seek to undermine or discredit Eustacia, nor even to assert his own male superiority. There is no Hardy hero who does not either elevate or debase the woman he loves, but Clym comes nearer to embracing sexual equality than any other. He is, however, shocked to hear Eustacia speaking candidly and casually upon, what is fundamentally, her acceptance of serial monogamy. He expostulates:

In God's mercy don't talk so, Eustacia! (RN p232)

Again it says as much about Clym as about Eustacia that he does not systematically seek to cut her down to size. Relatively liberated - albeit by modern standards short of the ideal - he is, as Hardy says, 'before his time', 'mentally in a provincial future' (RN pp203,204), and it shows. For undeterred the combative Eustacia now argues her point without fear of repression or humiliation. And

it is with tact and diplomacy - both symptomatic of self-assurance - that she deflects Clym from talk of marriage without once reverting to the ego-defensive postures of the capricious, power-hungry woman.

'You must be my wife' Clym announces quite without warning.

'Shall I claim you some day - I don't mean at once?'

'I must think,' Eustacia murmured. 'At present speak of Paris to me. Is there any place like it on earth?'

'It is very beautiful. But will you be mine?'

'I will be nobody else's in the world - does that satisfy you?'

'Yes, for the present.' (RN p233)

With evident perspicacity Eustacia seeks to gain from Clym's responses some kind of reassurance that his return to Paris is a possibility. Aware that the Victorian maid taken in marriage as man's property does not only marry the man but also his way of life, she attempts to canvass Clym's intentions by diverting him mentally back to Paris.

For to be wed to Egdon would be anathema. Hence:

'Now tell me of the Tuileries, and the Louvre,' she continued evasively.

'I hate talking of Paris! Well I remember one sunny... ' (RN p233)

Clym does not hate talking about Paris - his vivid evocation of the place betrays him - but he is discomposed by the enlarged stature that his association with that cultural centre has lent him in the eyes of his women.

He could not but perceive at moments that she loved him rather as a visitant from a gay world to which she rightly belonged than as a man with a purpose opposed to that recent past which so interested her. (RN p236)

'How extraordinary that you and my mother should be of one mind about this!' said Yeobright. 'I have vowed not to go back, Eustacia. (RN p234)

Wilfulness is not an ascription critics apply to Clym. But

Hardy's emphases are plain:

To argue upon the possibility of culture before luxury to the bucolic world may be to argue truly, but it is an attempt to disturb a sequence to which humanity has long been accustomed. Yeobright preaching to the Egdon eremites that they might rise to a serene comprehensiveness without going through the process of enriching themselves, was not unlike arguing to ancient Chaldeans that in ascending from earth to the pure empyrean it was not necessary to pass first into the intervening ether. (RN p204)

Clym's notional plan is, in other words, unrealistic. And his stubborn indifference to both the advice and desires of those who love him, wilful to a fault.

Eustacia underestimates this aspect of his nature. Capitulating to his proposal, and reassured by his instinct to 'set' her in Paris - 'a fitting place for you to live in - the Galerie d'Apollon'; 'the Little Trianon would suit us beautifully to live in, and you might walk in the gardens in the moonlight'; 'you could keep to the lawn in front of the Grand Palace' (RN p233) - and also sensing that she should in turn reassure him that it is not only

Paris that allures, she speaks rashly:

Don't mistake me, Clym: though I should like Paris, I love you for yourself alone. To be your wife and live in Paris would be heaven to me; but I would rather live with you in a hermitage here than not be yours at all. It is gain to me either way, and a very great gain. There's my candid confession. (RN p235)

Whereupon Clym, now showing signs of the more conventional Victorian male instinctively inclined to approve the woman who concedes that to be owned by him is her gain - and a 'very great gain' at that - metaphorically pats the little woman on the head:

Spoken like a woman.... (RN p245)

and instantly the relatively liberated Clym reverts back to the patriarchal attitudes of his forbears.

Sadly, both Eustacia and Clym have missed each other's mental track. In stalling what appears to be an imminent conflict, or clash of wills, each falls back upon a language, upon attitudes that fail to do justice to their individual hopes and needs. Eustacia speaks in terms of submission - male possession of her person - and invokes both a language and an ideology that falsely represents her true feelings and aims. Similarly, Clym, thrown off course, seems reassured by the conventions invoked. He instinctively picks up the drift, adopts a patronising tone, and almost at a stroke, the lover's bond is destabilised.

This is a disappointing regression. But under the circumstances not unexpected. Eustacia overestimates Clym's enlightenment, and he, her maidenly resignation and passivity. Eustacia's languid manner - which Hardy perceives as concealing a latent force - is not, as Clym appears to assume, symptomatic of a yielding pliancy. On the other hand Clym's modernism is more theoretical than

philosophical. In turning his back upon the city of revolution - the cultural soil from which, midcentury, his live contemporary, Marx, was drawing food for thought for his 'Manifesto' - to return to his native class-divided, sex-divided community to 'fain make a globe to suit him' (RN p242), Clym draws increasingly from the social infrastructure of his forbears. The mind has turned in on itself. Egocentricity, and introspection - 'the parasite thought' - devour and intromit the vision that had once urged him to strive 'at high thinking' - to 'become acquainted with ethical systems popular at the time' (RN p203). It is ego that now drives him - as the superfluity of 'I's in the following declarations evidence:

I shall do a great deal of good to my fellow-creatures! (RN p239)

I no longer adhere to my intention of giving with my own mouth rudimentary education to the lowest classes. I can do better. (RN p227)

I shall ultimately, I hope, be at the head of one of the best schools in the county. (RN p227)

'Dreams, dreams!' his exasperated mother remonstrates; but to no avail (RN p239).

Despite the 'waggery of fate' (RN p199) which has afforded Clym a highly privileged start in life, enabling him to test his desires, needs, and skills in both London and Paris with all the social and economic freedom denied to Eustacia, a broadened vision is what he has failed to develop. His dreams are large but his potential for realising them small. Mrs Yeobright and Eustacia both

realise this and tell it. But they are opposed - the right to choose his own way is Clym's male birthright and exercise this right he will.

Eustacia's dreams are by contrast either fragmented or truncated. They could scarcely be anything else. Hardy, acknowledging the extent to which her cut-off life has moulded the deeps of her unconscious, presents even her paradisaical dream in truncated form, with the armoured lover who features in it centrally, fragmenting before the dreamer's very eyes. Her stifling, constricted world has so deprived her of sensory stimulation that her impulse - when walking on the heath - is to pass her thick skeins of hair through the 'prickly' tufts of 'Ulex Europaeus' (RN pp75,76). And her need to ache and suffer in love expresses that deprivation at a deeper level. Repression has drained her of creative energy and emotional paralysis has driven her to the borders of algolagnia. 'Give us back our suffering' demanded Eustacia's peer in life - Florence Nightingale - 'for out of nothing comes nothing. But out of suffering may come the cure. Better have pain than paralysis' [37]. Eustacia too, must test herself through

hurt and pain. To Wildeve, she protests:

I should hate it all to be smooth. Indeed, I think I like you to desert me a little once now and then. Love is the dismallest thing where the lover is quite honest. O, it is a shame to say so; but it is true! ...my low spirits begin at the very idea. Don't you offer me tame love, or away you go! (RN p96)

Eustacia does not want love she wants sex. And she wants

it to hurt. Her spirits begin to rise at the thought of exquisite anguish. She does not want or need her lover to be ever-ready and tame. She wants him vulpine, athwart - a challenge to match her own intensity of feeling - an intensity palpably felt in the the 'Ah!', 'Ah', 'O's of her articulations with Wildeve (RN pp95,96), and the 'O!', 'O', 'O's of those with Clym (RN p244). Eustacia craves sensation, and predictably cannot conceive of adequate objects for her desire. How could she imagine adequacy?

She has been cruelly deprived of what she calls life:
life - music, poetry, passion, war, and all the
beating and pulsing that are going on in the great
arteries of the world. (RN pp333,334)

Untimely awakened from what she calls her 'youthful dream', Eustacia has been denied all that Clym has been so freely offered and so freely squanders. There could be nothing more insulting to the deprived girl in her pain and frustration than the sight of Clym toiling on the surface of the heath with an insect mentality that can sing mindlessly in defeat, and who appears:

not more distinguishable from the scene around him
than the green caterpillar from the leaf it feeds
on,

of no more account than an insect,

a mere parasite of the heath, (RN p326)

Paradoxically, (since his activities are, in the final event, self-destructive), Clym draws emotional soothing relief from his 'curious microscopic' activities (RN p296). Perversely, for he is aware of Eustacia's longing for

'life' and Paris, he blandly regales his less privileged companion, Humphrey, as he had earlier regaled his lover, with 'sketches of Parisian life and character' and songs 'which struck (his) fancy' in Paris. Meanwhile his 'proud fair woman' bows her head and weeps 'in sick despair of the blasting effect upon her own life of that mood and condition in him' (RN pp297,298). And to this same wounded woman condemned to a life of idling at home day after day, Clym's only justification for adopting this untoward life-style is that he needs to occupy himself:

You cannot seriously wish me to stay idling at home all day?' (RN p301).

The ever widening gulf and sexual double-standard that had been initiated in the opening scenes is now fully compounded. The rare woman in this world 'unfriendly to women' can only go down - and down she goes, quite literally. However in contrast to Clym's decline into premature senescence, Eustacia's death calls up a fury in the natural world, which finds her, as it found her Wessex predecessor Lear, stricken with wild and fretful delirium in a world of impetuous blasts - 'nocturnal scenes of disaster' (RN p418). Sinking to the floor of the heath 'as if she were drawn into the Barrow by a hand beneath' (RN p419) Eustacia is lashed earthwards by streaming torrential rain which gathers up her tears in its coursing as her life down-spirals:

Between the drippings of the rain from her umbrella to her mantle, from her mantle to the heather, from the heather to the earth, very similar sounds could be heard coming from her lips; and the tearfulness

of the outer scene was repeated upon her face. The wings of her soul were broken... (RN p419)

The rare creature is finally 'winged' and brought to earth.

Cross-relating his heroine's tragic descent with her displacement from the Barrow, Hardy cannot permit her simply to drown. The skies must break and the Barrow seek to draw her back to her mystical beginnings. Her death must become a victory over life - a life that had been empty of significance and purpose. Who and what had she been? She does nothing, goes nowhere, and apart from her status as Mrs Clym Yeobright she is totally without identity. Unlike Clym, who is not only familiar to everybody but also has an identity to himself, Eustacia is shown by Hardy to be the sum total of male circumscriptive attitudes. To her grandfather who inconsistently chides and neglects her, she is alternately childish or sportive or romantical nonsensical. To Venn she is femme fatale; to the heath folk she is a witch [38]; and to Clym she is first queen then whore.

'Here was action and life', writes D H. Lawrence of Clym,

here was a move in being on his part. But as soon as he got her, she became an idea to him, she had to fit in his system of ideas. According to his way of loving, he knew her already, she was labelled and classed and fixed down. [39]

Hardy, on the other hand, deliberately retains her obscurity - as in the 'Queen of Night' chapter - and renders her abstract, the 'raw material of a divinity' (RN

p75), shrouded in darkness, invisible to her blinded husband, a ranging, restless body in perpetual motion, a masked Turkish Knight, a veiled dancer, a white face at window - but never familiar or close. Predictably Eustacia herself does not know who or what she is: 'How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman' she cries in solitary anguish (RN p420). 'To be', to come into being - she is a soul in search of a self.

The strong Olympian woman displaced from her natural position of equipoise to live out her mortal life confined, inutile, restive and angry - shut up in Wessex - her sepulchred existence sensitively evoked by Hardy's insistence upon her life-by-night consciousness, is prevented from coming into being in a world unfriendly to women. But that world is to be the loser - as Hardy reveals. It is, at the last, emptied of life. The 'Native', now rootless and itinerant, is but a pale shadow of his former self. The strong women are dead. And the good Thomasin with her do-good husband have removed to the very fringe of the heath's reaches. Egdon is inhabited at the last by a coterie of dwellers whose capacity for renewal cannot be guaranteed. The sickly Nonsuch boy and the sexually enfeebled Christian Cantle as the heath's youthful representatives exemplify an etiolated life totally alien to the vigorous, energetic natural world they inhabit.

This then is a world in which, to misquote J.S.Mill, woman's capacities cannot be proved by trial, that the

world might have the benefit of all its inhabitants. And as he lived out the harmonious days of his 'Sturminster idyll', it must have struck Hardy with some force - note-taking from George Sand and in 1876 confronted with the shock of her death - that here too was a woman out-of-place in a world unfriendly to women.

Almost certainly he would have read Victor Hugo's obituary on George Sand [40], as he would also have reflected upon his Victorian peer's hostile response to the same.

The Saturday Review, quoting Hugo, reads:

In this country, whose law is to complete the French Revolution, and begin that of the equality of the sexes, being a part of the equality of men, a great woman was needed. It was necessary to prove that a woman could have all the manly gifts without losing any of her angelic qualities; be strong without ceasing to be tender. George Sand proved it... Whenever one of these powerful human creatures dies we hear, as it were, an immense noise of wings. Something is going; something is coming. The earth, like heaven, has its eclipses; but here, as above, the reappearance follows the appearance. The torch which was in the form of a man or woman, and which is extinguished under that form, reappears under that of an idea. This torch is flaming higher than ever; it will constitute afterwards a part of civilisation, and enter into the vast enlightenment of humanity. [41]

Euphuisms apart, it is interesting to find in Hugo's writing and in Hardy's in The Return of the Native, a set of images common to both authors. This is also case in what follows - in The Saturday Review's rejoinder to Hugo - which launches an attack upon mutinous, rebellious women 'getting tired of what they call the tame and monotonous life':

Although this fantastic estimate...will hardly be accepted by the world at large, it may be admitted that it represents the ideal character - that of a woman who throws off distinctions of sex, and combines, in the free play of natural instinct and impulse, the masculine and the feminine qualities...But the experiment... was by no means a successful one, and...it ought to be taken rather as a warning of what is to be avoided than a pattern to be copied... For our own part, we should think it very deplorable if this eminent woman's views of the ideal of womanhood should ever...constitute 'a part of civilization, and enter into the vast enlightenment of humanity'... One of the most forcible and dangerous currents in modern society is the impatience, and even the mutiny, of a large class of women, not only on the Continent, but here among ourselves, at the conditions of life which have hitherto been imposed upon and accepted by the majority of their sex. Many women would seem to be getting tired of what they call the tame and monotonous sphere in which they are confined, and demand that the same range of active life and personal freedom should be opened up to them which is allowed to men...It may be believed that [George Sand] flung off conventional restraints, not so much under the influence of vicious passions as of rash and presumptuous confidence... It is the harmonious co-operation of the two distinct influences of manly force and womanly tenderness and spirituality, and not the confounding of them in one common form, which keeps society sound and strong. [42]

Whether in any logical sense 'force' can be regarded as potentially compatible with co-operation is questionable. But what is less a matter for doubt is Hardy's response to these dialogues insofar as this can be determined in The Return of the Native. For it would rather seem to be the case that, not 'confounding' but compounding diverse gender attributes 'in one common form' is what, for him, would keep 'society sound and strong'.

Notes

1. Westminster Review April. 1883. Quoted in Thomas Hardy. The Critical Heritage Edited by R.G.Cox (London, 1970) p106
2. Cox *ibid.*, p111
3. Savoy Magazine Oct. 1896. Cox *ibid.*, p306
4. Cox, *ibid.*, p310
5. Eva Figs Patriarchal Attitudes (London, 1970) p119
6. Cox, *op. cit.*, pp304-11
7. John Bayley, An Essay on Hardy (Cambridge, 1978) pp211-212
8. See Evelyn Hardy and Frank Pinion (Editors) One Rare Fair Woman. (London and Basingstoke, 1972) xv
9. Hardy to Earl Hodgson, July 17. 1900. Published in The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy. 1893-1901 2 Vols. Edited by Richard L. Purdy and Michael Millgate (London, 1980) Vol.2 p264
10. See The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy. 2 Vols. Edited by Lennart Bjork Gothenburg, 1974) Vol.1 pp271-2
11. Hardy to Henniker, June 29. 1893. Published in Purdy and Millgate *op. cit.* Vol. 2 p18
12. Hardy to Henniker, July 2. 1893. Published in Purdy and Millgate, *ibid.*, Vol.2 p20
13. See Hardy and Pinion *op. cit.*, p182
14. Purdy and Millgate *op. cit.*, Vol.1 p250
15. Hardy to Yates, Dec. 12. 1891. Published in Purdy and Millgate *op. cit.*, Vol.1 p250
16. See Bjork *op. cit.*, p158
17. Hardy to Gosse, Sep.8. 1898. Published in Purdy and Millgate *op. cit.*, Vol. 2. p200
18. Hardy to Archibald Constable and Co., June 24. 1898. Published in Purdy and Millgate *op. cit.*, Vol. 2. p195
19. Hardy to Katherine.S.Macquoid, Nov.17. 1874. Published in Purdy and Millgate *op. cit.*, Vol. 1. p33

20. The Return of the Native Chapter 7
21. Two on a Tower Chapter 1
22. Quoted in Figes op. cit., p167.
23. Purdy and Millgate op. cit., Vol. 2. p90
24. Eliza Lynn-Linton, 'The Girl of the Period', The Saturday Review, March 14. 1868. Vol XXV pp339,340
25. Quoted by Gertrude Himmelfarb On Liberty and Liberalism A.Knopf, (New York, 1974.) p173
26. See Bjork op. cit., p271
27. See Bjork op. cit., p272. See also p50
28. J.V.Davies (Editor) Lawrence on Hardy and Painting. 'A Study of Thomas Hardy' and 'Introduction to these Paintings'. (London, 1973) p27
29. Hardy dates this novel rather vaguely (with hindsight) as 'set down as between 1840 and 1850' (Preface to RN, 1895). However the internal information he provides within the novel is more precise - suggesting the late 1840s-1850. There is, for example, his precise detailing of Granfer Cattle's age. Now seventy years of age (p36) we are also told that he was in his boyhood during the Napoleonic wars, and a dashing young soldier serving with the 'Bang Up Locals' in year four (p164). If then Granfer Cattle is to be young in year four, as opposed to, say, in his thirties, the setting has to be midcentury. This also coheres with Christian Cattle's recollection of his mother's anecdote on the French Revolution. Christian, now thirty-one (p27), recalls his mother telling him that as a young maid she received news from the parson that the king's head had been cut off (p124). Hardy, with his keen sense of history, would, in back-dating this novel, have in mind the 1848 Revolutions which swept Europe towards the end of the decade. He might also have been aware that Karl Marx was writing the Communist Manifesto in Paris at this time. Clym's study of 'ethical systems popular at the time' (p 203) presumably took in socialist studies. In Britain, the late 1840s saw the rise of Chartism and concomittant fears of social upheaval.
30. Michael Millgate Thomas Hardy :His Career as a Novelist. (London, Sydney, Toronto, 1971) p132
31. *ibid.*, p133
32. David de Laura, 'The Ache of Modernism in Hardy's Later Novels', E.L.H. Vol. 34. Sep. 1967. pp388-99

33. Millgate op. cit., p132. 1968) pp359-361
34. See William Masters Hardy, who tells us that: 'The "ruddle" men or "redding" men', [Hardy appears to have compounded the two and in so doing creates a muddle/meddle internal echo in 'reddle'], 'came from Bristol to supply the farmers and tradesmen with redochre, which was brought in bags slung across donkey's backs, each donkey being accompanied by a man. The term 'redding' was rightly used in designating them, as the men were red, the donkeys were red, the bags were red, and the ochre was red, and no doubt if anyone attempted to molest them, their actions would be readily read in their redness ensuing, for they would certainly be found red-handed.'
- Old Swanage or Purbeck Past and Present (Kidderminster, 1980) p152. First published in 1908 by Dorset County Chronicle printing works.
35. Perry Meisel The Return of the Repressed (New Haven and London, 1972) p76
36. See Patricia Stubbs' Introduction to Women and Fiction : Feminism and the Novel. 1880-1920 (Sussex, 1979)
37. Florence Nightingale's words in Cassandra. 1852. Quoted by Elaine Showalter in A Literature of Their Own. British Novelists from Bronte to Lessing. (London, 1978) p27
38. One of Hardy's most important revisions in the Wessex novels is his recasting of Eustacia. As John Paterson in The Making of 'The Return of the Native' (California, 1960) inadvertently reveals, Hardy's original 'angry' Eustacia would (if not recast) have been subject to misinterpretation.

Claiming that Hardy's original Eustacia is a demonic witch, Paterson draws the following conclusions from the Ur-text: that the heroine's 'anger' and utterances of 'hot words of passion' are "demonic" (Paterson, p18); that Hardy's ascription 'angrily' denotes "satanic pride and willfulness" (ibid., pp 18,19); that Eustacia's venting 'laughs at herself...sighs between her laughs, and sudden listenings between her sighs' signifies "diabolism" (ibid., p19); and that her 'angry despair' is "satanic" (ibid., p21). Readers sharing Paterson's view of angry women, would not, it might be supposed, ascribe demonism to the Christ who vents hot words of passion and anger in the Temple. 'If Eustacia belongs to Nature, she formerly belonged to SuperNature' Paterson argues (ibid., p22). But SuperNature is not necessarily demonic. Certainly Hardy alludes to Macbeth in the Ur-novel when he writes ('Queen of Night' chapter) 'there would have been...the same perpetual dilemmas, the same, sudden changes from fair to foul, from foul to fair', (ibid., p20). But this refers

more specifically to the state of world government than to Eustacia. However Hardy's wisdom clearly saw fit to rephrase this passage for the final version - conceivably with the Patersons of this world in mind - whose reasoning defies all logic. If, for example, the crooked sixpence Eustacia offers Johnny Nonsuch is a "a charm against witchcraft" as Paterson claims (ibid., p22), what then is the 'witch' doing with this charm in the first place? And why would she pass it on to be (presumably) used against her? Hardy's logic is preferable to Paterson's: the true witch on Egdon is Johnny's mother.

Given Hardy's theme of persecution in this novel, it appears likely that if he conceived of Eustacia as a witch in the first instance, that this was a more enlightened conception than Paterson's. There is nothing to indicate that he was not sufficiently without prejudice to have been aware that:

'The young pretty woman was also subject to accusations of witchcraft, probably because of jealousy and unfulfilled sexual desire. The man who looked upon a young woman with lust would accuse the woman of making him lust by means of witchcraft. If the woman did not respond to the man, this too could be the cause for accusations of witchcraft.'

Nancy van Vuuren The Subversion of Women (Philadelphia, 1974) pp 92-96

39. D H. Lawrence. op cit., pp29,30.

40. 'An Emancipated Woman', The Saturday Review. June 17. 1876. Vol.XL1 p771

41. ibid., p771

42. ibid., p771

Tess of the d'Urbervilles

Eustacia Vye resists with suppressed anger and finally with social disobedience the 'Limbo' existence prescribed for her. Her dark misery, frustration and fury, depressively introjected, and unalleviated by restless night roamings, wastes her reserves of energy in inward consumption, as outwardly she burns wasting fires. Tess on the other hand, for whom energy conservation is, for entirely different reasons, equally problematical, does derive a certain therapeutic benefit from externalizing frustration, anger and defiance. Channelled through physical activity, hard labour, and daily abrasive contact with members of the community, Tess's expenditure of emotional, as well as physical energy is prolific. Both women, as representatives of an exploited class - the one subjected to a useless, ornamental role, and the other to physical labour and sexual appropriation - exemplify the predicament of the Victorian woman denied satisfactory physical, emotional, psychical outlets, and the right and opportunity to regulate personal expenditure of mental or physical labour. In short, they are denied control over their respective modes of existence. Each in her different

way is the victim of the sexual double-standard. Tess's dilemma however, lies not in enduring enforced isolation, seclusion and ennui, but in suffering the unremitting appropriation of her person. This active, energetic, self-determining girl is subjected to ceaseless exploitation, from the first day of the dance - the Cerealia - to the night of the last sleep and Aeschylean 'Justice'.

Much is made by critics of the passive Tess who succumbs to circumstance and fate, but this emphasis appears to be, in the main, the legacy of Victorian predilections for weaker, more submissive heroines than Hardy was in fact prepared to characterise. From our very first encounter with Tess we are faced with a boundingly energetic girl of flashing temper and extraordinary physical and emotional resilience. But sex-divisive ideologies dictate that the 'pure woman' is more appropriately apprehended as passive. From Havelock Ellis to Polanski, it is the dumb, gentle, passive Tess who features centrally in Hardy's tale. To the reader experiencing a conceptual difficulty over the synonymy of purity and voluptuousness, or what Tom Paulin in another context speaks of as the eternally virgin and promiscuous [1], Hardy's subtitle possibly seems less obscure, or the 'pure woman' a little more accessible, if she can be regarded as unassertive, passive victim. However this typology, which, in accordance with received views (but against Hardy's) automatically equates purity with chastity

and not with sexual assertiveness, derives less from close interpretation of Hardy's characterisation of Tess than from the creeping exegesis of the 'Victorian' critic.

From her repudiation of an ethic which suggests to her the wisdom of playing the hard-to-get Beauty, that her rich 'cousin' might then be won to provide for his poor relations, to her final execution of the violating, vulgarising 'cousin', the mutinous Tess's least impulse is to 'suffer and be still'. Is it in actuality, a 'passive' Tess who, as is frequently claimed, connives at her own fate by falling asleep at the wrong moment? To argue thus is to do both Tess and Hardy an injustice. The drowsy Tess is after all a very exhausted Tess, and Hardy takes pains to elicit in detail the sheer expenditure of energy and unremitting fatigue his young heroine endures in her efforts to keep body and soul together - her family's as well as her own.

Hardy's emphasis is upon an 'active' Tess from the very first moment. Affiliated to a 'votive sisterhood' (TD p40), remarkable, Hardy says, for its survival:

either the natural shyness of the softer sex, or a sarcastic attitude on the part of male relatives, had denuded such women's clubs as remained...of...their glory and consummation (TD p40),

Tess is first apprehended processing with the 'sisterhood' through the village of Marlott and later participating 'with a certain zest in the dancing' until dusk (TD p46). However, disturbed by 'the incident of her father's odd

appearance' (TD p46), she decides she should return home. Upon arrival she takes charge of her siblings - 'six helpless creatures' in 'the Durbeyfield ship' (TD p51) - and finally retires to bed at eleven o'clock only to be wakened one and a half hours later to undertake the family's marketing requirements (TD p57). That the sixteen year old girl should then drop off to sleep on her journey is surely predictable and hardly symptomatic of an innate passivity, or, as has also been claimed, a tendency to drift. Nor is it evidence of Hardy's idealisation of woman as a somnambulistic, sexually inert consciousness [2]. If anything emerges from his treatment of this incident it is not an exposition of Tess's passive nature but of the exploitation of her natural vigour and good spirits: she does not sleep at an inappropriate moment so much as suffer an appropriation of her sleep!

The 'Prince' incident prefigures Alec's seduction. The shaft penetration, the shedding of blood, the shame and guilt attached to both events, creates a link between the two that in turn reinforces the element of violence inherent in the latter. It might be added that Hardy's thematic concern with sexual exploitation is also introduced in the 'Prince' episode, where the drunken Durbeyfield's total lack of consideration for his daughter's welfare prefigures her exploitation by her lovers and such employers as Farmer Groby. The men in Tess's world are, in one way or another, intent upon appropriating her person; and at considerable cost to her

physical, psychical and emotional energies. Exhausted and defeated at the last she capitulates to Alec, who will appropriate her sleep just as surely as the 'law' will convey her to the gallows - an enervated, comatose, 'lesser creature than a woman' (TD p447).

The oppressive, labour/woman exploitative, machine-grinding world in Tess - its exhausting demands closely linked by Hardy at salient points throughout the text to Tess's states of being - is quite clearly a causal factor in her tragedy; the physical world and its physical effect upon the young girl having immediate, palpably felt repercussions upon her faculties. Hardy's most potent emblematic image in this context, is of course the:
red tyrant that the women had come to serve...which kept a despotic demand upon the endurance of their muscles and nerves. (TD 372)

The 'buzzing red glutton', remorselessly grinding, bears a suggestive resemblance to the lusty Alec - man and machine alike reducing Tess to physical exhaustion and mental stupefaction:

A panting ache ran through the rick...(Tess)...still stood at her post, her flushed and perspiring face coated with the corn-dust, and her white bonnet embrowned by it. She was the only woman whose place was upon the machine so as to be shaken bodily by its spinning, and the decrease of the stack now separated her from Marian and Izz, and prevented their changing duties with her as they had done. The incessant quivering, in which every fibre of her frame participated, had thrown her into a stupefied reverie in which her arms worked on independently of her consciousness. (TD pp380,381)

Hardy's descriptions of the detailed material

processes of labour have, Merryn and Raymond Williams write, 'an intensity of feeling which in most fiction is reserved for interpersonal relationships or for landscape and scene' [3]. 'Intensity of feeling' is clearly what Hardy both feels and projects here as the 'panting ache' induced in Tess by the demonic energy of the threshing machine stuns her to mental insensibility.

The physical exhaustion inducing mental fatigue and stupefaction Hardy describes here, is not to be confused with the hypnogogic state Tess herself induces, in which she still retains a sense of self, sensation, and (equally important) - energy.

'I don't know about ghosts,' she was saying; 'but I do know that our souls can be made to go outside our bodies when we are alive.'

'A very easy way to feel 'em go,' continued Tess, 'is to lie on the grass at night and look straight up at some big bright star; and, by fixing your mind upon it, you will soon find that you are hundreds and hundreds o' miles away from your body, which you don't seem to want at all'. (TD p158)

The young girl's facility for transcendence - for summoning what is commonly known as an 'out-of-body' experience - is either producible at will or instinctively induced. It is not coextensive, as Mary Jacobus suggests, with the stupefied reverie of her exhaustion in labour - 'as close to sleep - to unconsciousness - as is compatible with going about her work' [4]. Nor is it, as Richard Swigg argues with reference to the 'Garden' scene, (and which his use of the passive tense itself asserts), indicative of a Tess possessed - a 'captured, hypnotised creature' undergoing an

'entranced surrender' [5]. Tess in transcendence remains in full possession of all her faculties. She assimilates to her consciousness the larger world of nature - its sounds, odours, its very essences - expanding sensory experience rather than contracting it; possessing, not being possessed. In such a moment of great intensity, time too is transcended or becomes irrelevant to Tess. Elsewhere cognizant of how little the individual is able to control her own existence which is ever subject to the dictates of time and circumstance, Tess in transcendental ecstasy suspends time and effectively controls her own consciousness. 'Time is personal', Karl Kroeber says. It is 'controlled by individual experiences' [6]. Unfortunately individual experiences themselves are not always subject to the control of the human will. But Tess, expanding time to fit her own 'space' - her private world of inner sensation intensified by mental transcendence to reach beyond corporeal bounds - effortlessly shapes the spatial/temporal world to suit her needs and desires. And as a corollary to this, it might also be said that in allocating 'time' to his heroine in the 'Garden' sequence that she might give expression to her psychic/erotic drives and the unconscious life that surges within, Hardy extends to her narrative time - in so far as, paraphrasis or summary description tends to abbreviate or marginalise what dramatic action expands. This is not an unimportant point, since it is to the life of the sensations, and specifically the life of feminine sensations, that Hardy devotes his own

time and creative skills in this novel. The deeper and more diverse these sensations, the less enigmatic and the more individuated the character. It is not enough therefore, that Tess simply recount her transcendental facility. She must be apprehended more intimately demonstrating her remarkable powers. Dramatic action has impact and immediacy, where dialogue conveys a more subjective intimacy - Hardy, in this instance, offers his reader both. Tess in transcendence then, gives free expression to that 'precious life' of which Hardy speaks but which he would not confine to cryptic utterance or enigmatic symbol. Tess's sexuality, says Lance St. John Butler, 'has to remain something of an enigma' [7]. But if this is the case it is not so with Hardy's connivance.

Tess's hypnogogic experience does not belong, as Jacobus suggests, and as Swigg asserts more emphatically, to what the latter calls Hardy's:

other hazily lit, somnambulistic scenes, where tragic yieldings are passively conceded in fog or in the intervals between sleep and waking, in the twilights before complete night and day [8].

Whether 'passively conceding' can also be spoken of as a 'tragic yielding' seems doubtful. Swigg comes awkwardly close here to invalidating his own argument with a negation of terms. Patently misleading on the other hand, is his blurring of Hardy's narrative outlines which distinctly delineate time, space and event to convey the hard, physical fact of a life lived in vigour, in joy, in pain and fatigue, but not in a trance.

Hardy creates, David Lodge observes in a more general context:

a visualised world that is both recognisably real, yet more vivid, intense, and dramatically charged than our ordinary perception of the real world... It is his ability to make concrete the relationship between character and environment in a way that is both sensuously particular and symbolically suggestive that makes him such a powerful and original novelist, in my opinion. [9]

This is particularly apposite in the present context. For there is, in fact, nothing 'hazily lit' or 'sommambulistic' or even passively conceding about Tess's capitulation to Alec in the 'Chase' episode. This is evoked vividly and intensely - Hardy's symbolically suggestive, dramatically charged visualised world is no less detailed and particularised at the moment of his heroine's seduction than at any other time. To interpret Hardy otherwise is first, to read him inattentively, and second, to 'read' his Tess as Angel first 'reads' her - as incorporeal, sanctified, devoid of a sexual consciousness. The somnambulistic emphasis renders Tess the sexually anaesthetized Victorian idealised by Hardy's middle-class peers in life - unconscious in her yielding, sweetly chaste in her sexual oblivion - an object of male sexual fantasies and the demulcent of a guilty male fear of the sexual double-standard.

In truth, Hardy's Tess (unperceived by Angel as unperceived by Swigg), is a physical body inhabiting physical space; and her capitulation to Alec is the uttermost expression of this physicality. She is quite

simply exhausted. Hardy's somatological emphases are numerous. Meticulously he details the miles Tess walks, the hours she works, the meals she goes without. He will not absent her physically and render her the enigmatic, disembodied chimera of Angel's (and many a Victorian's) fantasies.

The pursuit of the woman-enigma chimera was plausibly a psychological necessity in an society in which fears of female sexuality were endemic. The enigma, by definition unknowable, remains an absented, inviolable figure. Hence the projection of male fantasies on to such a figure permits male exploitation to exonerate itself. It cannot defile what it cannot define. It is partly for this reason, it might reasonably be argued, that the 'fallen' woman exercised so potent a hold upon the Victorian imagination. She constituted the living, breathing exemplification of violated womankind, and was accordingly, for her affront to society, portrayed as less than human - a prone, inert, mute icon. Since it is Hardy's purpose openly to treat with sexual exploitation and Tess's violation, yet at the same time to restore life, vigour, and feminine sexual passion to the iconic 'fallen' model, her physical and sexual self needs to be constantly foregrounded. Hardy takes pains to ensure that this familiarisation - or rather this de-familiarisation of the mute, inert, archetype - is effected; retaining for Angel alone, and to a far lesser extent Alec, a hazy mystification of Tess.

We are told for example, that upon this particular fateful day, Tess's 'occupations made her late' in setting out upon her three mile walk to Chaseborough (TD p95). From this information we infer that her employers - in this instance the d'Urbervilles who have appointed her 'supervisor, purveyor, nurse, surgeon and friend' to their 'community of fowls' (TD p88) - require her to labour on Saturdays. Thus, firmly entrenched in an everyday world of work and in no sense anaesthetized, Tess walks the three miles to Chaseborough. She makes her market purchases, and then sets out to find her companions for the night walk home. While she waits for their barn-dancing to conclude, Alec intervenes, and Hardy takes this opportunity to focus upon Tess's physical condition:

She looked round, and saw the red coal of a cigar: Alec d'Urberville was standing there alone. He beckoned to her, and she reluctantly retreated towards him.

'Well, my Beauty, what are you doing here?'

She was so tired after her long day and her walk that she confided her trouble to him - that she had been waiting ever since he saw her to have their company home, because the road at night was strange to her. (TD p97)

But since it seems her companions 'will never leave off', the weary Tess feels she 'will wait no longer' (TD pp97,98). Alec offers to hire a trap and drive her home, but despite fatigue and the lateness of the hour she had 'never quite got over her original mistrust of him', and so declines his offer. Alec, frequently infuriated but rarely cavalier with Tess's feelings of pride and assertions of self-will, departs with the half-approving retort: 'Very

well, Miss Independence. Please yourself...'(TD p98)

Shortly afterwards Tess sets off with her companions upon:

a three-mile walk, along a dry white road, made whiter tonight by the light of the moon. (TD p98)

And if Hardy evokes a hazy consciousness at all, it is quite appropriately on behalf of Tess's inebriated companions who are following the road with a sensation that they were soaring along in a supporting medium...as sublime as the moon and stars above them. (TD p98)

For Tess, by contrast, there is only hard prosaic reality. 'The discovery of their condition', Hardy says, 'spoilt the pleasure she was beginning to feel in the moonlight journey' (TD p99). Somewhat less sanctified than humanly enraged following an imbroglio with the lusty Car Darch and her equally lusty compeers, Tess is eventually provoked to a vituperative assault upon 'whorage', which leaves her 'almost ready to faint, so vivid was her sense of the crisis' (TD p101). And it is at this point that she accepts Alec's offer of escape, and gets 'shot of the screaming cats in a jiffy!' - as he crudely expresses it (TD p100). The mounted couple engage briefly in a conversation that devolves, not upon Tess's passive emotions, but upon her feelings of anger. And from this focus upon her emotional 'burning' to her 'burnt-out' physical energies Hardy swiftly moves:

She was inexpressibly weary. She had risen at five o'clock every morning that week, had been on foot the whole of each day, and on this evening had in

addition walked the three miles to Chaseborough, waited three hours for her neighbours without eating or drinking, her impatience to start them preventing either; she had then walked a mile of the way home, and had undergone the excitement of the quarrel, till, with the slow progress of their steed, it was now nearly one o'clock. Only once, however, was she overcome by actual drowsiness. In that moment of oblivion her head sank gently against him. (TD 104)

Alec naturally takes advantage of this moment of oblivion. He stops the horse and encloses 'her waist with his arms to support her'; whereupon the alerted Tess springs to the defensive, and 'with one of those sudden impulses to reprisal to which she was liable she [gives] him a little push', and almost precipitates him into the road (TD p104).

Hardy's emphases could not be clearer. This is no passive Tess. The picture is one of a self-determined, easily angered, volatile woman. But she is also an inexpressibly weary one! When the couple find themselves lost therefore, (with Alec's connivance), Tess is bedded down upon the leaves he has prepared for her, and, tenderly buttoned into his overcoat for warmth, instantly falls asleep. Sleeping her body is appropriated:

Why was it that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus... (TD p107)

Hardy's word is 'appropriates'. He is not concerned with the polemics of rape. Alec's is an act of theft and that he 'appropriates' Tess suffices to denote the moral nature

of the act.

It is noteworthy that both here and in Tess's wedding-night account of her story to Angel, Hardy omits to detail, or to appraise Tess's defloration as she might tell it. The notion that Hardy's omissions in these two turning points in his heroine's story effect a silencing of the woman's utterances in the event of her attaining a sexual reality, a sexual consciousness - 'Tess's silence, like her purity' says Mary Jacobus, 'makes female desire dumb' [10] - would scarcely make sense to the author who, unlike Alec and Angel, is concerned not to appropriate Tess. Howsoever Tess chooses to tell her personal story to Angel she must, in this instance, speak, as it were, without her author's aid. Consequently he may not even eavesdrop lest he then paraphrase her words and in so doing, recast them. It is not only critical to Hardy's acknowledgement of Tess's autonomy that she should declare herself to Angel in absolute privacy, employing what we have to assume is her own 'feminine' language, and remaining unpenetrated even by her author, but it is also crucial to the whole issue of judgement in Tess. Were we to be offered Tess's declaration would we not analyse it for clues - for evidence of rape or not-rape? Hardy wishes to avoid this focus. The argument then, that Hardy's narrative omissions in both the wedding-night and Chase-night sequences depersonalize and unsex his heroine, rings a little hollow. As we shall shortly discover, there is sufficient evidence of an openly expressed and expressive sexual

consciousness in Tess that testifies, without further need of justification, to her capacity to utter her sexuality lucidly. Clearly not in the verbal sense - this would be entirely implausible for the Victorian heroine deprived, as were her sisters in life, of a language of sexuality - but emissively, gesturally, which in terms of sexual responsiveness constitutes authentic erotic 'utterance'. Important too, is the fact that this form of sexual self-expression is one that Tess's male author may legitimately observe and record without presumption. Moreover the notion that 'female desire' is made dumb by Hardy seems awkward in this context, since it is not the silencing, but the absence of female desire in the 'Chase' episode which signifies. In order therefore, for Hardy to silence Tess's female desire she would first have to articulate it. But clearly she cannot articulate what she does not feel (an erotic desire for Alec). Consequently there is no female desire relating to the 'Chase' episode or the Wedding-night confession that Hardy can silence.

A similar misinterpretation of Hardy's text inheres in the argument that the physically and emotionally exhausted heroine displays an unfortunate habit of falling asleep at inappropriate moments. This is an equally indefensible assertion; primarily because it makes implicit demands upon Tess to be virtually inhuman. Does not flesh and blood require rest and sleep? Paradoxically it is upon Hardy's (purported) representation of an unstateable, disembodied feminine consciousness in Tess, that all such

accusations turn; the critic unconsciously etherealising Tess whose bodily needs are somehow eclipsed in the argument. Richard Swigg goes further and insists, not only upon Hardy's 'hazily lit, somnambulistic scenes' which translate 'sensuality into a spiritually acceptable diffuseness' [11]; but also upon authorial confusion and unfocussed vision in Tess. It is, this critic claims, Hardy's attempt 'to create a sentimental beautifying' of the 'force of impurity' that constitutes 'the blurred consciousness of Tess' [12]. Swigg continues:

From confusion such as this, where physicality and blood are distorted by an unfocused vision, Hardy derives his tragic sense [13].

A straightforward, close critical reading of the 'Prince' and the 'Chase' episodes, to which these (hazy) observations refer, soon reveals however, that the reader is not even required to undertake any complex or exacting deconstruction of Hardy's text in order to detect the presence of a clear, untrammelled vision and an uncomfortably close focus. In the latter sequence it is in fact fairly obvious that it is Alec, not Hardy, who inhabits a hazily lit or foggy world. Take the following brief but illustrative description, which, as is characteristic of Hardy's poetic prose style, summons with the utmost economy an evocative symbolic setting. Hardy focusses upon the woodland ceiling that would be, in the event, Tess's perspective (we might assume):

Above them rose the primeval yews and oaks of the Chase, in which were poised gentle roosting birds in their last nap. (TD p107)

And beneath the upward thrusting, primeval trunks and poised gentle birds in their last nap, a sleeping girl is ravaged. Hardy's world is not only clearly lit, it is spot-lit. From its spatial proportions, which, unlike Alec's befogged world, are extensive, to its horticultural, ornithological sightings, together with its temporal focus upon the 'last nap' of 'poised gentle roosting birds' - which is by transference the gentle girl's last sleep as a virgin - Hardy's vision is as comprehensive as it is percipient.

Closely detailed too, and the more enceinte for its expert poetic structuring, is his account of Alec's act of penetration - the 'coarse pattern' he traces upon Tess's 'beautiful feminine tissue.' Expressing at once the notion of an imprint, which will, at length, take the form of the infant Sorrow (trace to, father upon); as well as the sense of a tracking (tracing) object, which in reality Alec does of course become; there is also the suggestion of phallic interdigitation or the 'tracer's probe 'rooting-out' the (feminine) mystery. And finally there is Hardy's empathetic evocation of the woman's experience of excoriation - the coarse scoring of her 'gossamer tissue'. Again this is a very physical emphasis, as rightly, it should be. For Tess will almost certainly bear the aching smarts of her defloration for days, under the circumstances of her minority and sexual unpreparedness.

In conclusion then, it appears that the invocation of certain exegetical orthodoxies together with too loose an

assessment of Hardy's authorial focus or vision, has brought the critic no closer to an accurate interpretation of this particular Wessex text; which, upon examination, shows no sign of living down to Swiggian expectations. If anything Hardy's focus - or watchfulness - is painfully intent!

Tess then is maid no more. But, some weeks later, debilitated and pregnant she still doggedly resists Alec's attempts to possess and demoralise her. Determined upon flight she packs her belongings and leaves. And it is at this point in the narrative that Hardy introduces the notion of a conscious antagonism inherent in Tess's passive resistance. Paying token submission to the man who demands a farewell kiss, Tess openly insults him by turning her head 'in the same passive way, as one might turn at the request of a sketcher or hairdresser'; and Alec is affronted and hurt:

You don't give me your mouth and kiss me back. You never willingly do that - you'll never love me, I fear. (TD p113)

The woman that Alec knows and that Hardy characterises is no submissive, biddable Victorian archetype. Repressed she is, however, as Hardy subtly conveys through her mannered sufferance of Alec. She rests her eyes, he writes, vaguely...upon the remotest trees in the lane while the kiss was given, as though she were nearly unconscious of what he did. (TD p113)

But repression is not submission. 'The essence of repression' says Freud, 'lies simply in turning something

away...keeping it at a distance from the conscious' [14]. Tess's posture suggests that this is precisely her psychological state. Distancing unwanted sexual advances, she is nonetheless fully cognizant of how best she may repel them. The authentically passive woman would not only fail to exert this kind of self control over her responses, she would possibly also encourage the more abundant flow of those betraying tears that earlier begin to trickle down Tess's cheeks (TD p111). Giving way to emotional release she may then yield and submit to the man in a flood of engulfing emotions which would gratify his ego and simultaneously ease her sense of diminished responsibility in the event.

All women, wrote J.S.Mill:

are brought up from their earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will and self government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. [15]

All women are not Tess however. Alec may have appropriated her body but her spirit remains insubordinate. Depression and despair do nevertheless oppress her, as she reflects upon her relationship with her 'cousin' (and silently dwells upon his 'trace' now enlarging in her body). But anger flames quickly enough as he attempts to appropriate that 'self' that she will so persistently withhold:

She resumed - 'I didn't understand your meaning till it was too late.'

'That's what every woman says.'

How can you dare to use such words!' she cried, turning impetuously upon him, her eyes flashing as

the latent spirit (of which he was to see more some day) awoke in her. 'My God! I could knock you out of the gig! Did it never strike your mind that what every woman says some women may feel? (TD p112)

'Dare', 'flashing', 'spirit', 'knock you out', 'strike' - it is evident that Hardy's perception of the angry Tess shapes his language to elicit active, kinetic emotions quite effortlessly. She resists possession of her person with 'katabolic' [16] anger in defiance of Alec's attempt to gain dominion over her by undermining her utterances and reducing them to an 'Everywoman' amorphousness.

Prouder still the recusant Tess abjures the father of her child because she does not love him and will not submit to a conventional solution to her predicament. 'I have never really loved you, and I think I never can.' She adds 'mournfully',

Perhaps, of all things a lie on this thing would do the most good to me now; but I have honour enough left, little as 'tis, not to tell that lie. If I did love you I may have the best o' causes for letting you know it. But I don't. (TD p113)

Alec clearly does not take her meaning, but then Tess does not openly invite this.

Here as elsewhere Tess would throw down the gauntlet openly to challenge Alec to a battle of wills. Or alternatively she would fling it in his face. Tracking her to the arid chalklands of Flintcomb Ash, Alec first gibes and taunts, but then resorts to more subtle, and we sense, genuinely sympathetic, overtures:

Tess...I don't like you to be working like this,

and I have come on purpose for you. You say you have a husband who is not I. Well, perhaps you have; but I've never seen him, and you've not told me his name; and altogether he seems rather a mythological personage. However, even if you have one, I think I am nearer to you than he is. I, at any rate, try to help you out of trouble, but he does not, bless his invisible face!... Tess, my trap is waiting just under the hill, and darling mine, not his!- you know the rest. (TD p378)

Poor Tess. But it is not to a softened, suggestible, weakening mind and will, that Alec is addressing himself. On the contrary Tess is rising to a 'dull crimson fire' as he speaks. He hastily tries a different approach. He will attempt a little moral coercion:

'You have been the cause of my backsliding,' he continued, stretching his arm towards her waist; 'you should be willing to share it, and leave that mule you call husband for ever.'

One of her leather gloves, which she had taken off to eat her skimmer-cake, lap in her lap, and without the slightest warning she passionately swung the glove by the gauntlet directly in his face. It was heavy and thick as a warrior's, and it struck him flat on the mouth...A scarlet oozing appeared... (TD pp378,379)

Tactically alert, Tess now resists a more violent confrontation as Alec 'fiercely' starts up. She too springs up, but immediately sinks down again:

'Now, punish me!' she said, turning up her eyes to him with the hopeless defiance of the sparrow's gaze before its captor twists its neck. 'Whip me, crush me; you need not mind those people under the rick! I shall not cry out. Once victim, always victim - that's the law!' (TD p379)

Tess knows her man. Just as earlier she had returned to him the passive-insulting other cheek, so now she returns 'hopeless defiance'. She is fully aware that it is not

just her yielding body Alec would own; he would also claim her unyielding mind. It is the rebellious angry Tess that excites him to unceasing pursuance of her person; hence instinctively she defuses his sexual desire by returning to him a docile, pathetic face. Bridled and aggravated he departs.

Finding her shortly afterwards genuinely 'whipped' and 'crushed' and so utterly exhausted from her labours that she has not even the strength to speak above an 'underbreath' - 'weak as a bled calf' (TD 382) - Alec admits to a tender regard for her feelings, but not to a lusty desire for the 'jaded', 'fagged', defeated Tess (TD p382,383). He has evidently learned that in appropriating the inert, enervated body he does not possess the entire woman. He sincerely yearns to claim, it appears, not a submissive, but rather, a sentient, volatile lover. But Tess cannot love him. Unyielding to the last, flinging gauntlets, slamming casements (TD p404), and finally knifing the heart that tirelessly hunts her down; passive resistance gives way increasingly to open violence as in gradual steps she is reduced to a 'lesser creature than a woman' (TD p447).

This then is the self-willed girl whose instinct it is to dismiss the past, tread upon it and put it out. (TD p234)

The past was past; whatever it had been it was no more at hand. (TD p126)

To escape the past and all that appertained thereto was to annihilate it, and to do that she would have to get away. (TD p135)

It was impossible that any event should have left upon her an impression that was not capable of transmutation. (TD p140)

But how to annihilate the past and make new the day, when, in the form of Alec, it becomes very much 'at hand'? And more important still, how to transmute and actualise a renewed 'self' which the world has appropriated, labelled as 'fallen'? Tess's greatest psychological dilemma - from her first encounters with Alec to her last enactment of the role of kept mistress, cashmere wrapped and 'embroidered' (TD p428) - lies in resisting classification. To Alec she is Everywoman and Eve-temptress and to Angel she is first, archetypal Goddess, and later archetypal 'fallen' woman - 'ill', 'unformed', and 'crude' (TD pp272,281). But to Hardy, who shares with Mill the belief that individuals of both sexes are not to be classified, she is complex, diverse, unique. Fierce and gentle, regenerative and destructive, trusting and suspicious, philosophical, mystical, sexy, she is a 'pure woman' unadulterated by Victorian conventions and codes. Accordingly her acceptance of a past she cannot change, reveals, not the insensibility of the iconic 'fallen' woman, but both a passive and an active impulse:

Tess had drifted into a frame of mind which accepted passively the consideration that if she should have to burn for what she had done, burn she must, and there was an end of it. (TD p128)

Instinctively Hardy countermands the passive frame of mind with the active - the decisive, self-willed: 'and there

was an end of it'. (Significantly, this phrase resounds with internal echoes of Tess's own articulations - which 'drifted into a passive frame of mind' does not). Instinctively too, he colours Tess's ratiocinations with raw elemental energy: 'if she should have to burn...then burn she must.'

It is, on the other hand, as one of Hardy's 'insignificant specks' requiring inflation, that Richard Swigg perceives Tess. This viewpoint appears to constitute a modern day critical equivalent of that expressed by the Victorian Havelock Ellis [17]. Ellis claimed, we recall, that Hardy creates puerile (without 'virility') women with no souls, who are pathetic and weak. Hardy's defence of his heroine, Swigg claims in similar vein,

is...most readily exercised on behalf of...Tess when seen as a simple village girl. When Tess baptizes her dead child...without the Church's proper sanction, objections are waived in deference to this personal illusion of rightness. Thus the spiritual light upon her face sentimentally condones and respects the belief, showing her face 'as a thing of immaculate beauty with a touch of dignity which was almost regal'... Hardy needs to inflate the value of the seemingly insignificant specks, who, like Tess, move and labour on vast landscapes, 'like a fly on a billiard table...of no more consequence to the surroundings than that fly.' [18]

The conflation of segregated narrative clusters frequently leads to confusion - or, as in this case, to misinterpretation. Tess's baptism of her infant (Sorrow incidentally is not dead but dying), belongs to a section of the story marked by Hardy 'Phase the Second' [19], and the 'fly' sequence belongs to a later phase marked 'Phase

the Third'. In dispensing with the more customary literary demarcation - 'Book' as opposed to 'Phase' - Hardy deliberately places a temporal accent upon Tess's history: her life as it is lived. It is particularly important then, not to conflate disparate textual clusters, unless Hardy invites this by semaphoric means of symbolic association. For this temporal accentuation aptly mirrors Tess's own periodic capacity for renewal and regeneration; the 'fly' sequence marking just such a 'renewal' turning point. Having only tenuous symbolic links with the baptism scene, this later sequence openly illustrates a stage in the young girl's transition from familial dependency to independence - her second, greater move from home into the world, as we are led on to discover.

Tess has determined to 'escape the past and...get away' (TD p135). Accordingly Hardy offers her a new landscape, a journey, and the challenge of altered perspectives as she traverses an unfamiliar terrain. From the enclosed, familiar world of family and Marlott she moves out into the new and strange, where Hardy's 'spatial images of boundary and enclosure' [20] - the 'curve of the hill' over Marlott's 'interior tract of land' 'engirdled' by railways - are replaced with a 'world drawn to a larger pattern' (TD pp138,139). Hardy's focus now rests upon Tess's desire for transmutation. Contemplating the 'environs of Kingsbere' - the parish of her ancestors - she turns her back upon the whole notion of d'Urberville antecedents. She will repudiate them, 'Pooh', she

expostulates, 'I have as much of mother as father in me!' (TD p139) 'She had no admiration for them now' Hardy adds by way of endorsement:

She almost hated them for the dance they had led her; not a thing of all theirs did she retain but the old seal and spoon. (TD p139)

Caught however between the two worlds, the old and the new, Tess becomes at one point 'not quite sure of her direction'. And it is at this most appropriate juncture - as the young girl feels herself to be lost - that her author also 'loses sight' of her and perceives:

Tess stood still upon the hemmed expanse of verdant flatness, like a fly on a billiard-table of indefinite length, and of no more consequence to the surroundings than that fly. (TD p142)

In observing his heroine as a desolate figure in the vastness - the unknown that she now confronts - Hardy deliberately introduces a note of dislocation. The sudden sense of Tess's insignificance, and of her author's stance of seeming indifference, combine to create for the reader a disquieting unease. Tess seems horribly abandoned!

This passage patently unnerves Hardy readers, as insistent critical references to it evidence. It troubles and disturbs. His method of unsettling his reader and arousing caring feelings in this subtle way, has however drawn a different response from Swigg. Tess is to him primarily an 'insignificant speck' Hardy needs to inflate - hence (for Swigg) the 'sentimental' touches in the baptism scene.

The baptism sequence occurs in Tess's shortest 'Phase', which is entitled 'Maiden no More'. It is a noteworthy scene for several important reasons. But Hardy's need to inflate or spiritualise his heroine is not one of them. One important aspect of his presentation here, is that visually Tess is perceived as if through the eyes of the little ones in attendance. The language employed - the emphasis upon Tess's big words, big gestures (she 'fervently drew an immense cross upon the baby with her forefinger') - plainly indicates an open-eyed, open-mouthed audience. In keeping with this perspective, the minister of the sacrament/big sister Tess, towers hugely, whitely, in her nightgown - an inflated figure in the eyes of her tiny, uncomprehending congregation. Moreover, as will later become evident, this sighting takes into account the presence of a work-worn girl-mother exhibiting - incongruously in the context - stubble-scratches on her wrists and physical exhaustion in her weary eyes. The ideological implications of this scene are then, primarily invoked with all the potency child-like wonder lends to adult formalities. The sense is of a half-ignorant, essentially open-eyed attempt to grasp the seemingly incomprehensible.

Tess takes up her ministerial role:

'SORROW, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.'

She sprinkled the water, and there was silence.

'Say "Amen", children.'

The tiny voices piped in obedient response
'Amen!'

Tess went on:

'We receive this child' - and so forth - 'and do

sign him with the sign of the Cross.'

Here she dipped her hand into the basin, and fervently drew an immense cross upon the baby with her forefinger, continuing with the customary sentences as to his manfully fighting against sin, the world, and the devil, and being a faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end. She duly went on with the Lord's Prayer, the children lisping it after her in a thin gnat-like wail, till, at the conclusion, raising their voices to clerk's pitch, they again piped into the silence, 'Amen!' (TD pp130,131)

As emblematic rite, baptism objectifies sin and guilt and enacts the release of the spirit from the forces of darkness. Tess invokes this rite and utters the words of redemption over her child. Thus empowered to utter the spirit clean and new, Tess - 'fallen woman'/minister of the sacrament - is tacitly vindicated by her author. She cannot logically fulfil both roles. The one invalidates the other. Moreover, should the reader harbour religious objections, the following difficulty arises. Any argument raised against the fittingness of her desire to mediate between Heaven and Hell, salvation and damnation, to anoint redemption upon the object of her 'sin' (permissible - if 'Romish' - practice), automatically places the objector voicing such an argument in a graceless, unforgiving, un-Christian, position. For according to received doctrine no repentant believer is held to be unredeemable; and that includes Tess in her 'ecstasy of faith' (TD p131). Thus, in a sense, Tess utters her own redemption. For as surely as her seduction and subsequent childbearing of Sorrow draws down upon her head 'sin' (in Victorian eyes), so her

baptismal ministrations draw down upon her head 'blessing'.
As repentant, holy consecrator of the sacrament she is
therefore 'tokenly' cleansed.

(Tess) with much augmented confidence in the efficacy of this sacrament, poured forth from the bottom of her heart the thanksgiving that follows, uttering it boldly and triumphantly in the stopt-diapason note which her voice acquired when her heart was in her speech, and which will never be forgotten by those who knew her. The ecstasy of faith almost apotheosized her; it set upon her face a glowing irradiation, and brought a red spot into the middle of each cheek; while the miniature candle-flame inverted in her eye-pupils shone like a diamond. (TD p131)

The word 'tokenly' is used advisedly. For there is in fact, implicit authorial irony in the discourse which follows - which Swigg in his exegetical pursuits has overlooked. Hardy writes facetiously:

Poor Sorrow's campaign against sin, the world, and the devil was doomed to be of limited brilliancy...
(TD p131)

Tess too is sceptical:

In the daylight...she felt her terrors about his soul to have been somewhat exaggerated; whether well founded or not she had no uneasiness now, reasoning that if Providence would not ratify such an act of approximation she, for one, did not value the kind of heaven lost by the irregularity - either for herself or her child. (TD p131)

Hardy's irony and Tess's scepticism introduce a new note. Hardy is evidently paying mere lip-service to an observance of Christian doctrine on the one hand (as do the lisping innocents), and making a mockery of that observance on the other. The notion of a sin-laden Tess, let alone a sin-laden infant is clearly risible in his eyes. Either

way, whether the reader sides with the ironist/sceptic or simply finds his/her performance tasteless, it is evident that Tess's author scorns a cultural ideology that fosters, under the mantle of Christianity, both the myth of the 'fallen' woman's guilt and the guilt of unbaptised innocents.

Nina Auerbach perceives in Hardy an attempt to de-mythologise the archetypal fallen woman. She writes that there was in the Victorian,

a pride as well as a pity at the fallen woman's abasement. Admiration mingled with condemnation, recurs again and again in Victorian treatments of the fallen woman; her prone form becomes so pervasive an image that it takes on the status of a shared cultural mythology. At first glance, the Victorian myth of the fallen woman seems even more harshly degrading than its literary archetype in Paradise Lost. Milton's Eve gives a powerful argumentative voice to her longing to reign rather than serve, while the Victorian fallen woman is usually depicted, even in literature, as a mute enigmatic icon, such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Jenny, who sleeps through the poem that probes her nature. Moreover, Milton's Eve will survive in the triumphant ascending woman whose heel will bruise the serpent's head, while Victorian conventions ordain that woman's fall ends in death. It seems that an age of doubt has grafted the doom of Milton's Satan onto the aspirations of his Eve, generating a creature whose nature it is to fall...Then as now, she seems to enlightened minds a pitiable monster, created by the neurosis of a culture that feared female sexuality and aggression and so enshrined a respectably sadistic tale punishing them both. [21]

Not even Hardy could emerge from this entirely unscathed, although it is true to say that his 'sadistic tale' metes out punishment in as near to equal measures as is consistent with plausibility. As the story nears conclusion, the first to be punished is the 'fallen'

woman's true love, who is brought emaciated and ill through a harrowing 'Brazil' - a 'mere yellow skeleton' at the last (TD p428) - condemned to live out his days with a 'spiritualized Tess' whom he may love but may not marry. [22] And the second to be 'punished' is the 'fallen' woman's seducer, whose death by her hand - which plunges into his body a killling blade - carries clear overtones of divine retribution. It might then be argued that the woman's 'heel will bruise the serpent's head' in Hardy as in Milton - despite her 'end in death'.

Nina Auerbach argues along related lines. Hardy's Tess, she writes, seems vindicated by her narrator from having fallen at all...her affinities with burgeoning nature, her incorrigible will to renewal and joy seems to exempt her from the fallen woman's guilt and sorrow. [23]

The baptism scene features crucially in this exemption. For Hardy's irony apart, which operates at an alternative level of discourse, Tess's sacramental cleansing the infant 'Sorrow's' guilt, enacts her own desire to liberate the innocent soul from damnation - to 'bury' guilt and sorrow purged of all stain. This becomes in turn, her own spiritual regeneration, which following an interregnum - a time for changing from 'simple girl to complex woman' (TD p135) - finds her intent upon departure and a new life.

The woman who usurps the male minister's role and utters her own form of baptism, destabilises the 'mute, enigmatic icon'. And whereas there are echoes of the

Miltonic 'argumentative voice', not in the microscopic fly image, but in Tess's repudiation of her dark ancestry in that same sequence, a closer parallel to the baptismal 'voice' is provided by Hardy in Tess's insistence upon use of her Christian name. Repudiating pseudonymity, Tess gently asserts her own identity when Angel would condense her to a type.

She was no longer the milkmaid, but a visionary essence of woman - a whole sex condensed into one typical form. He called her Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names half teasingly, which she did not like because she did not understand them. (TD p170)

If she had understood them she would have liked them even less for condensing her 'into one typical form'; as she was earlier angered by Alec's nullification of her utterances in his 'Everywoman' ascription. Ignorance of Greek mythology does not prevent Tess from sensing the threat of immanent depersonalisation in Angel's pseudonymous namings. Diffidently (without meeting his eyes) she requests his use of her given name:

'Call me Tess' she would say askance; and he did. (TD p170)

Enjoining Angel to call her by her baptismal name, Tess instinctively seeks to 'cleanse' him of his illusive vision of her, while at a more conscious level she resists his appropriation (by renaming) of her person. Demystification, and self-disclosure of the feminine self as asserted by Tess, are envisaged by Hardy in terms of enlightenment - an unveiling of a hazy, half-lit world.

The world, hitherto screened by 'spectral, half-compounded, aqueous light' (TD p169), by 'luminous gloom', 'neutral shade', and 'mist stratum' (TD p170) - a 'preternatural time' when 'fair women are usually asleep' (TD p169) - now grows instantly, lighter. The envisioned 'fair woman' usually asleep perceived by Angel as only marginally conscious - a disembodied Tess, a 'soul at large' (TD p170)

- names her 'self' and:

Then it would grow lighter, and her features would become simply feminine; they had changed from those of a divinity who could confer bliss to those of a being who craved it. (TD p170)

The ethereal Tess is then merely a dawn trick-of-light apparition; except, that is, to Angel who clings to the chimerical phantasma to create a 'spotless creature' (TD p218) to suit his psychological needs.

This trick-of-light effect also features in Hardy's presentation of Tess earlier in the baptism scene. This is not a question of inflating the 'insignificant speck' (Tess) by bathing her in a 'sentimental', spiritualising light. On the contrary, it is Hardy's deflation of the sentimental and illusive image that renders his Tess less fanciful than palpable - fleshly real:

Her figure looked singularly tall and imposing as she stood in her long white nightgown, a thick cable of twisted dark hair hanging straight down her back to her waist. The kindly dimness of the weak candle abstracted from her form and features the little blemishes which sunlight might have revealed - the stubble scratches upon her wrists, and the weariness of her eyes - her high enthusiasm having a transfiguring effect upon the face which had been her undoing, showing it as a thing of immaculate beauty, with a touch of dignity which was almost regal. (TD p130)

Here as elsewhere, it is the incarnate Tess - formed and featured in sunlight, work-scarred with little blemishes that the candle-light now abstracts to nebulousness - whom Hardy ushers in prelusively. The picture is one of a warm, vibrant, lived-in body. With scarified wrists, tired eyes, and unfastened coils of hair, the reified Tess, unceremoniously nightgowned, and surrounded by sleepy-eyed infants lisping the Lord's Prayer, has less a spiritualised than an intimate 'bedroom' presence. It would not appear to be the case that she is disproportionately aggrandised or unduly 'spiritualised' given the events and circumstances described. First, if the argument is to be pursued along the lines that 'hazily lit' or half-illuminated scenes have a mystifying effect, then it should be stressed that the artificial candle-light with which Hardy illumines his scene, is plainly emphasised as having a distorting effect. And second, it is Tess's inner light - her vibrancy and fervour - that lends a 'transfiguring effect' to her face. Consequently it is not that she is 'bathed in' (passive), so much as 'generates' (active), light. Tess owns, what Hardy elsewhere describes as a 'spiritual beauty (that) bespeaks itself flesh' (TD p210). This implies a homogeneity of spirit and flesh, as it also implies beauty of both soul and body [24].

John Lucas points to the distinction to be made between Tess etherealised by Angel, on the one hand, and 'realised' by Hardy on the other. He notes Hardy's efforts to provide what he calls 'prosaicisms' in order to adjust

or 'correct' Angel's mystifications [25]. Less clear is Lucas' interpretation of Hardy's Talbothays sequence in this context. It is not 'they' who are 'cocooned' against reality as Lucas states, but 'he' - Angel alone. Perhaps Lucas does in fact perceive this disjunction, for shortly after making this observation he suggests that Tess is not so 'cocooned'; that it is she 'who is fearful about the unreality of their love' [26]. Angel is in fact so tightly cocooned in his male egocentric world that he can scarcely conceive of a Tess brought into being without his creation. He first denominates her Goddess - which she opposes and resists. He then appoints her 'unconstrained' child of nature (TD p214) - a creature he alone will endow with existence. He will create her in his own likeness. She will take his name and thereby escape her own (TD p231), he will make her 'the well read woman' (TD p230), and he will carry her off 'as [his] property' (TD p244). She would, he says, depend 'for her happiness entirely upon him' (TD p237).

'I may as well say it now as later, dearest,' he resumed gently. 'I wish to ask you something of a very practical nature, which I have been thinking of ever since that day last week in the meads. I shall soon want to marry, and, being a farmer, you see I shall require for my wife a woman who knows all about the management of farms. Will you be that woman, Tessy?' (TD p211)

'He put it in that way', writes Hardy, that she might not think he had yielded to an impulse of which his head would disapprove. (TD p211)

The tragic irony of this is not lost upon the reader. First, Tess feels she cannot, and does not want to be, married. And second, and this is more to the point, the last thing she she wants to hear from Angel is an announcement of his practical, worldly requirements, and his plans to establish herself as his 'proper' wife in society. Ironically, a declaration of passionate, undying love would have eased the poor girl's misgivings considerably. Such a declaration may even have so warmed and reassured her that a revelation of her past indiscretions might then have found room for expression. As it is she feels hopelessly threatened, and turns, Hardy says, 'quite careworn':

She had bowed to the inevitable result of proximity, the necessity of loving him; but she had not calculated upon this sudden corollary, which, indeed, Clare had put before her without quite meaning himself to do it so soon. With pain that was like the bitterness of dissolution she murmured the words of her indispensable and sworn answer as an honourable woman.

'O Mr Clare - I cannot be your wife - I cannot be!'

The sound of her own decision seemed to break Tess's very heart, and she bowed her face in her grief. (TD p211)

Angel is incredulous. He is 'amazed at her reply, and holding her still more greedily close' he inquires with evident disbelief:

'Do you say no? Surely you love me?'

'O yes, yes! And I would rather be yours than anybody's in the world,' returned the sweet and honest voice of the distressed girl. 'But I cannot marry you!'

'I don't want to marry! I have not thought of doing it. I cannot! I only want to love you.' (TD p212)

Angel cannot take this seriously. These are, to him, but 'the dallyings of coyness' (TD p215). She has after all, he tells himself, 'permitted him to make love to her' which can only signify her consent to wed him (TD p215). Tess, it seems, has been harbouring slightly different expectations. As Hardy points out on her behalf, 'to "sigh gratis" is by no means deemed waste':

love-making being here more often accepted inconsiderately and for its own sweet sake than in the carking anxious homes of the ambitious, where a girl's craving for an establishment paralyzes her healthy thought of a passion as an end (TD p215).

The ideological gap, which will later tragically split the bond that no man should put asunder, now begins to make itself felt. Tess's 'healthy thought of a passion as an end', and Angel's regard for her, coloured as it is by his own 'carking anxious' bourgeois values, are patently ethically incompatible. There exists between Tess and Angel a greater gulf than class division alone. While he dwells upon his bourgeois, practical requirements, his property and his Tess, she contemplates nothing more than their mutual love: 'I only want to love you,' she cries (TD p212). She has every reason to suppose that her impetuous lover is equally content to engage in a summer idyll - a 'brief happiness' (TD p177). His 'resolutions, reticences, prudences, fears' have fallen back, Hardy says, 'like a defeated battalion' - as Tess is made happily aware (TD p191). His ardent leaps to embrace her at untoward moments speak for themselves:

He jumped from his seat, and, leaving his pail to

be kicked over if the milcher had such a mind, went quickly towards the desire of his eyes, and kneeling down beside her, clasped her in his arms.

Tess was taken completely by surprise, and she yielded to his embrace with unreflecting inevitableness. Having seen that it was really her lover who had advanced, and no one else, her lips parted, and she sank upon him in her momentary joy, with something very like an ecstatic cry (TD p191).

He stepped forward... 'Dear, darling Tessy!' he whispered, putting his arm round her, and his face to her flushed cheek. 'Don't, for Heaven's sake, Mister me any more. I have hastened back so soon because of you!'

Tess's excitable heart beat against his by way of reply; and there they stood... as he held her tightly to his breast... At first she would not look straight up at him, but her eyes soon lifted, and his plumbed the deepness of the ever-varying pupils, with their radiating fibrils of blue, and black, and gray, and violet, while she regarded him as Eve at her second waking might have regarded Adam (TD p210).

(Eve, at her second waking regards Adam in his 'nakedness' - according to 'Genesis'). Tess owns then, a fully awakened sexual consciousness. Hardy, with characteristic artistry, places the focus here, not upon parted lips - a physiological response - but upon the 'ever-varying pupils' of her eyes. And while this suggests a physiological response in so far as the 'ever-varying' orbs are now presumably dilating as arousal intensifies with gazing, there is also the more obvious notion of clear, open-eyed 'seeing'.

Disabused (with Tess's aid) of his phantasmas and rarefied visions, she is now to him 'real vitality, real warmth, real incarnation' (TD 190). But Angel must and will still condescend to her. To credit her with an

autonomous existence out of his power and control is wholly alien to his consciousness. Accordingly her refusal to marry does not 'permanently daunt' him, because, as Hardy facetiously observes:

his experience of women was great enough for him to be aware that the negative often meant nothing more than the preface to the affirmative (TD p215).

What experience of women? His near entrapment 'by a woman much older than himself' from whom he had 'escaped not greatly the worse for the experience'? (TD p155) Or his 'experience' of Mercy Chant perhaps? Is it from these two less than profound relationships that Angel has acquired his 'great' experience of women? He may have shed some of his illusions about goddess women, but he has not shed the self-delusion and egocentricism which fuels such fantasies. Contemplating Tess's 'dallyings of coyness' he remains optimistic:

At such times as this, apprehending the grounds of her refusal to be her modest sense of incompetence in matters social and polite, he would say that she was wonderfully well-informed and versatile - which was certainly true, her natural quickness, and her admiration for him, having led her to pick up his vocabulary, his accent, and fragments of his knowledge, to a surprising extent. (TD p216)

But 'at such times as this', Angel does not once consider that he too has picked up, what Hardy describes as 'the aesthetic, sensuous, pagan pleasure in natural life and lush womanhood' (TD p199). Not once does he perceive that he has picked up something of Tess's carpe-diem philosophy - her buoyancy, her lack of pretension, her appetite for

joy, her 'healthy passion'. On the other hand he would say that she was 'wonderfully well-informed and versatile' in her adoption of his own traits and mannerisms. Presumably this male approval of feminine evolution is intentionally expressed by Angel to reinforce her readiness to pick up his traits and mannerisms yet still - her natural lover's empathy, subjected to this one-sided adjustment would then become more gratifyingly (to him) a feminine desire to please. Scarcely aware that in daily proximity to her condescending lover, she is gradually suffering his imprint to trace itself upon her - albeit less tangibly than Alec's - Tess, oppressed by his interminable probings, answers his demands for total possession of her person in marriage, by returning to him, to his evident gratification, the face of one possessed. A face that is, which bears his own imprint. But Tess is not gratified. Silently and alone she mourns her 'self-suppression' (TD p216) and the reawakening of a past she had tried so hard to bury. The struggle now is:

so fearful; her own heart was so strongly on the side of his - two ardent hearts against one poor little conscience - that she tried to fortify her resolution by every means in her power. (TD p216)

Tess had never before known a time in which the thread of her life was so distinctly twisted of two strands, positive pleasure and positive pain. (TD p217)

Free-will and self-determination now have to contend, not only with passion, sexual desire - she is 'such a sheaf of susceptibilities', Hardy writes, that she fears 'her

resistance might break down under her own desire' (TD p217) - but with the resolute will and the 'anxious, carking' conscience of her lover. His earlier resolve not to trifle or toy with her affections (TD p195) expresses an awareness of an instinctively condescending nature, which, to do Angel justice, he does attempt to check. But it also presupposes a naivety in Tess - that she is incapable of distinguishing between lighthearted affection and the committed heart. Assuming naivety, Angel is scarcely likely to regard Tess's history in a favourable light. Her previous sexual experience, her maternity, the very fullness of a life lived without him, could only constitute an affront to his inflated ego. Tess, sensing this, is fraught with conflict. And the strong, rebounding, self-willed, heart fragments to a subdued, ductile, indecisive, fearfulness. Tess is now in truth reduced - microscopic 'fly' lost in the vastness - without direction.

Sensing her lowered resistance, Angel brings his verbal 'rearguard' into action, and charges her with being a 'coquette', a 'coquette of the first urban water!' (TD p217) He observes how 'the remark had cut her' and immediately applies verbal salve - but the scar remains (TD p218). 'Tess knew that she must break down' (TD p222), and taunted further by Angel's branding her - this time 'Miss Flirt' (TD p223) - she does.

Tess then accepts Angel's proposal, but her inner conflict remains unresolved. Inwardly, emotional tumult smoulders as she keeps at bay 'gloom, doubt, fear,

moodiness, care, shame', which were 'waiting like wolves just outside the circumscribing light'. 'She had', Hardy writes, 'long spells of power to keep them in hungry subjection there' (TD pp 236,237). As Hardy's choice metaphors of impending ravage and predation opposed by feminine 'power' indicate, this is no passive surrender. Or as the woman taking the sexual initiative herself proves, there is also an erotic spirit actively kept in hungry subjection there:

She clasped his neck, and for the first time Clare learnt what an impassioned woman's kisses were like upon the lips of one whom she loved with all her heart and soul, as Tess loved him (TD p231).

Unlike the deeply repressed Sue Bridehead, who, following a token submission to marriage conventions, becomes 'dull, cowed, and listless' for days (JO p308), Tess's instinct is to rebound tirelessly. Inherently at odds with Angel's double-standard, she recounts her wedding-night story with characteristic resilience, 'without flinching', without shame (TD p268). 'No exculpatory phrase of any kind' entered her discourse we are told. She had not even wept (TD p270). Instead it is Angel who withers and cowers. In the moment of his 'fall' he weakens and crumbles as Tess in her 'fall' did not.

Objectifying Angel's moral weakness - his fall from caring, cherishing lover, the man who would 'love and cherish and defend her under any conditions, changes, charges, or revelations' (TD p223) - Hardy now changes and charges the world of external objects metaphorically to

accomodate or assimilate to 'substance' the change in 'essence' that is Angel's transmutation.

Hardy uses verbal description, David Lodge writes, as a film director uses the lens of his camera - to select, highlight, distort and enhance the visualised world [27].

This is precisely Hardy's literary method now. Angel's mockery of a philosophy to which he had sworn allegiance - the moral reconstruction of an erstwhile Pauline ethic (TD p154) and a turn to the communistic life (TD p179) - becomes a mockery of both the marriage vow and the woman to whom he has pledged his troth; for she exemplifies the very philosophy he had attempted to embrace. Accordingly the domestic world 'mocks' and is 'mocked':

The complexion even of external things seemed to suffer transmutation as her pronouncement progressed. The fire in the grate looked impish - demoniacally funny, as if it did not care in the least about her strait. The fender grinned idly...All material objects around announced their irresponsibility with terrible iteration. (TD p270)

Instinctively Angel articulates a 'Last Day' judgement upon Tess just as his father and forefathers would have done before him. 'Imagination' says Hardy, 'might have beheld a Last Day luridness in this red-coaled glow' - and it is Angel who performs the 'irrelevant act of stirring the fire...stirring the embers', before leaping demonically to his feet, with 'horrible laughter, as unnatural and ghastly as a laugh in hell' - to disown the woman standing before him: 'The woman I have been loving is not you!' (TD

p270,271). Mirroring his own toady-ing to an ethic he claims to have repudiated, his family jewels give 'a sinister wink like a toad's'. So too the 'torrid waste' of the lurid, glowing, embers peer 'into the loose hair about (Tess's) brow...firing the delicate skin underneath', as if to brand her as Angel surely does (TD p268).

But for all Tess's terror in this 'hellish' scene - Angel 'fitfully' treading the floor, his face 'withered', even his voice 'fallen' to 'commonplace' - (TD p270) she still has nerve enough to oppose him. 'O you cannot be out of your mind!' says Angel, 'you ought to be!' The 'fallen' woman ought of course, to be sick, disabled, infected. But, says Tess, unflinchingly, 'I am not out of my mind' (TD p271). She is however distraught and shocked. Sinking before Angel she movingly utters her defence:

I thought, Angel, that you loved me - me, my very self! If it is I you do love, O how can it be that you look and speak so? It frightens me! Having begun to love you, I love you for ever - in all changes, in all disgraces, because you are yourself. I ask no more. Then how can you, O my own husband, stop loving me? (TD p271)

How can he? By annihilating her. 'I repeat', he reiterates chillingly, 'the woman I have been loving is not you' (TD p271).

Tess breaks. 'Terror was upon her white face', and the mouth which had once reminded Angel of 'roses filled with snow' (TD p191) is abbreviated to 'a round little hole' [28]. 'Deadened...she staggered' and seeing her collapse, Angel becomes conciliatory: 'You are ill', he

tells her (self-reassuringly), ' and it is natural that you should 'be so' (TD p272). There are now premonitions of the 'lesser woman', the 'split' woman perceived by Angel at the last, who is no longer his 'original Tess':

He had a vague consciousness of one thing, though it was not clear to him till later; that his original Tess had spiritually ceased to recognize the body before him as hers - allowing it to drift, like a corpse upon the current, in a direction dissociated from its living will (TD p429).

'Living will' is breaking. Disowning the body appropriated first by Alec and now by Angel, Tess permits it to surge on its own physical current - regarding herself as a pitiable object, she bursts in a fit of weeping. 'Relieved at this change', Angel is, for complex, psychological reasons of egocentricity at war with untoward feelings of fear, insecurity and loss, less bewildered by this broken, 'ill', self-pitying image of Tess. He waits 'patiently, apathetically, till the violence of her grief had worn itself out', whereupon, with her declaration:

I will obey you like your wretched slave, even if it is to lie down and die (TD p272),

he metaphorically pats her on the head with the words 'You are very good' (TD p273) - betraying, as he stamps this seal of approval upon her professed enslavement, that it was after all, the insubordinate spirit in Tess which he most disapproved.

Hardy does not permit the reader to lose sight of Angel's plight. There is always this aspect to his characterisations - that cruel, weak, insensitive,

hypocritical, exploitative and domineering as some of his heroes may be, they are never implausible. We comprehend Angel's reaction even if we do not approve it. He too, is a casualty of his past. His maddened feelings of impotence, disbelief and distraction now pit futilely against the wretched conundrum neither he nor Tess can unriddle - that to herself she is the innocent woman in the guise of a guilty one, but that to him she is the 'guilty woman in the guise of an innocent' (TD p272). It is something of a paradox that the 'pitiabile monster' is rendered thus - the 'dumb, mute, prone, enigmatic icon' - not by the seducer but by the husband. The irony is of course purposeful. Hardy's denunciation of a mythology which promoted the 'fallen' woman as sick and sickening from the very day of her 'fall', comes full circle in the wedding-night scene as the 'demonic' husband becomes the myth-makers' agent and the perpetrator of society's tyranny. Although Tess continues thereafter to muster all her emotional and physical resources to struggle with renewed passive resistance and not a little reactive anger, she never fully rebounds to her earlier unmarried self: 'the formerly free and independent Tess' (TD p284). Her love, a love that bears no division, a strong, unflinching love; and her past, so effortfully stamped out by herself, and for which she was prepared (if sceptically) to pay the price by 'burning'; are both now fully appropriated by Angel. In repudiating the woman - who is, in a sense, the sum of her past in that she has lived through and risen

above it - he renders not only her person but her very life of no account, null and void.

F.B. Pinion, not, one should add, a critic of the Aristotelian school, points to the fact that:

(Tess's) fate is partly due to a Durbeyfield tendency to accept or drift, a willingness to endure which cannot be dissociated from indecisiveness, and a certain d'Urberville strain that shows itself in occasional heedlessness and impulsive outbreaks. [29]

Hardy does not of course demand of his heroine an unrealistic standard of perfection. She is heedless, indecisive, impulsive. She is human. Learning to love the human being and not the idée fixe is the lesson Angel has to learn. But it needs to be emphasised that the will 'to be' is strong in Tess. It is this 'will' which asserts itself even in the exacting moment of 'confession' where to have 'wept' (as in the passive-resistant scene with Alec) would have been voluntarily to yield and submit.

J.T. Laird, in his studies of Hardy's Ur-text [30], provides some useful textual background upon this aspect of Hardy's characterisation of Tess. Laird notices that Hardy 'vacillates' over the question of 'will' - over 'things willed' and 'things conceived' [31]. The element of decisiveness in Tess was clearly critical. The outcome of this vacillation, Laird writes, concluded in 'Hardy's championing of will, and its concomitant, foresight, alertness, and dependability' [32].

It is important therefore, to read Hardy closely and his self-willed Tess clearly; for she demonstrates,

against insuperable odds, that she can and will prove her capacities - as J.S.Mill promulgated:
in the only way in which capacities can be proved - by trial; and the world will have the benefit of the best faculties of all its inhabitants. [33]

This is not, of course, to argue that Tess succeeds in gaining the ascendancy she deserves. She cannot. The world is dominated by dominating middle-class men. But the point is, that her capacity for survival - her moral as well as her physical survival - closely linked by Hardy to her vigorous sexuality, is at no point threatened by 'feminine' physical disabilities, emotional instabilities, intellectual vapidities - or any other 'typically feminine' incapacitating traits. Moreover, it takes the warring odds of two indomitable men and contingent supplies of Farmer Grobys - (or 'people of scrupulous character and great influence' ! TD p402) - finally to break her.

The stress upon heredity inherent in Pinion's statement may be misleading. Tess is far less a victim of 'blood' than environment - or what Hardy calls in The Return of the Native, a 'world unfriendly to women now' [34]. In the light of studies already undertaken upon the theme of heredity in Tess [35] - a thematic line textually superimposed by Hardy during revision and extrinsic to his original conception of the work - it should suffice to quote Lance St.John Butler:

this kind of determinism in Hardy is only apparent... he indulges in it for artistic reasons while making quite sure that we do not take it literally... he always provides us with adequate reasons for all his characters' actions so that we

do not have to resort to believing his fatalistic asides. [36]

It is not the taint of heredity, but rather the world which sets Hardy's heroine at odds with herself. The seducer on the one hand, and spouse on the other aid and abet this division. Tess's body and mind are first split each from each and then severally appropriated. Appropriated, she is then discarded as unfit for society, both as Alec's mistress and Angel's wife. For the 'whole' woman, the 'pure' woman unadulterated by prevailing codes and ethics there is no room in society. As Goddess or Whore, elevated or fallen, spiritual or sexual woman, she may live out her segregated life as best she may; but she may not be spiritual and sexual in one single form - and survive.

Is then the 'Pure Woman faithfully presented' as Hardy claims? Or is she the spiritualised, enigmatic heroine of muted sexual presence that some of his critics claim? Tess's physicality, and Hardy's emphasis upon it - her expenditure of energy, the appropriation, by man and labour, of her hours of rest and recuperation cannot be divorced from her erotic nature, in so far as health and vigour are vital to sexual energy. But it is the breaking of her spirit which finally reduces Tess to a 'lesser creature than a woman' - emotionally, spiritually and sexually enervated.

Hardy's original Tess, autonomous, independent and

free, who has the capacity to rebound to restored vitality all the while spirit and flesh unite as a single energetic entity, owns an erotic nature that Angel, for all his egocentric fantasies about bringing her into being, does not in fact create in her. Clearly, it is as difficult for Angel to conceive of a beloved whom he alone has not shaped, as it was for the patrist fathers to conceive of an Eve not created out of Adam's rib. However, here as elsewhere, Hardy's Eves - notably Elfride and Bathsheba - do not await or need, self-actualisation by male intervention or donation.

From Tess's first recognition of sexual overtures in Alec's fruit thrusting gestures (TD pp70,71) to her experience of sexual ecstasy in the 'Garden' sequence, she is shown to possess a fully awakened responsive erotic nature.

Elaine Showalter points to a dilemma facing Victorian women novelists. The language of sexuality they had available to them, she writes, was fey, fastidious, and 'metaphorically paralyzed' [37]. This was not a problem women writers alone faced. How was Hardy to evoke Tess's 'precious life' unfettered by the tepid, linguistically antiseptic sexual language available to him? Evidently the limitations of language, as with the paralyzing effect of the censorship convenances of the day, had evidently not so far reaching consequences that they crippled Hardy's imaginative powers. Wedding prose narrative to poetic metaphor, to embed within seemingly innocuous figures of

speech a language of sexuality which is neither fastidious nor precious but rather straightforwardly biological-natural, is Hardy's especial art. 'What cannot be discerned by eye and ear', he wrote in the 'Science of Fiction' series (1891), 'may be apprehended...by...mental tactility' [38]. 'Mental tactility' would in turn, intensify 'the expression of things...so that the heart and inner meaning is made vividly visible' [39]. Accordingly he focusses upon the 'expression of things' in nature so that the 'heart and inner meaning' of character as well as landscape is 'made vividly visible'.

Tess of course, in common with her sisters in life, is deprived of a language of sexual affection. She is, for example, at a loss to explain to Angel (as Hardy explains to the reader on her behalf) how she would love him. 'I only want to love you,' she tells her lover (TD p212). But how can she tell him that loving for its own sweet sake is what she wants? Angel is not altogether the most perceptive or imaginative of lovers. Tess's suggestive peeling of the skins of the 'Lords and Ladies' (to which Hardy gives considerable narrative time, [TD pp164,165]), but which, for some perverse reason spurs in Angel the desire to teach her 'history', clearly leaves him, as it does not appear to leave Hardy, oblivious to her natural inclination to arts more sexual than academical.

On the other hand, if Tess may not utter herself verbally, she may gesturally. The narrative mode Hardy employs to emphasise the robust, healthy, vibrant, sexual

energies of his heroine, is to assimilate them to nature metaphors - but not, we note, of the virginal/funereal lilies category. Alec's roses pressed into the young girl's breast are an unsubtle but coherent image - the collocation of pricking thorn, red petals and blood drawn, prefigures of course, the 'Chase' defloration. But for Tess herself - that is to say for her own erotic desires - Hardy reserves less overblown, less poetically soiled imagery. The resemblances or analogies he draws between the external world of natural phenomena and the internal world of feminine sensation, evince and sustain vitality and freshness, and above all naturalness. The Tess enamoured of Angel therefore features centrally in a world of lush fecundity and vigorous seasonal growth:

Rays from the sunrise drew forth the buds and stretched them into long stalks, lifted up sap in noiseless streams, opened petals, and sucked out scents in invisible jets and breathings...Thus passed the leafy time when arborescence seems to be the one thing aimed at out of doors. Tess and Clare...ever balanced on the edge of a passion...were converging, under an irresistible law, as surely as two streams in one vale. (TD p168)

As with Hardy's 'mollusc' imagery in The Return of the Native, which suggestively points to sexual arousal in both sexes, so too with Tess and Angel. The liquescent, odiferous season in which buds and stalks erect, distend and dilate, is Tess's season as much as it is Angel's time for finding something new in nature. It is not organic nature alone which burgeons into life. Tess too - 'the sapling which had rooted down to a poisonous

stratum on the spot of its sowing' - is now 'transplanted to a deeper soil' which 'physically and mentally' suits her so well that she:

had never in her recent life been so happy as she was now, possibly never would be so happy again (TD p168).

Hardy extends use of the analogical metaphor further - to render implicit what he may not render explicit. Tess's most important erotic scene, as has been widely discussed, is the 'Garden' scene. But whereas the suggestive imagery, symbolic setting, metaphorical action, have all been variously interpreted as having their common referent in the Edenic myth, Hardy's parodic overtones appear to have been overlooked. Tess is located for example, on the outskirts of the 'garden', 'behind the hedge' in an uncultivated tract of land where apple trees grow untended (TD p161). Moreover there is no central tree set 'amidst' (as it is located in 'Genesis'), but instead several are placed on the periphery and are patently 'uncovenanted'. Moreover, they are not fruiting (knowledge) but producing blossom (nescience). In keeping with this marginalised setting, the 'Edenic' roles of the central characters are inverted. It is 'Eve' who is lured 'like a fascinated bird', and 'Adam' who lures. Already 'fallen' in that his 'performance' is flawed, Angel sounds the seductive call-note which wanders 'in the still air with a stark quality like that of nudity' (TD p161), while Tess is drawn close to the 'Garden' yet remains on its outskirts

throughout. A travestied Eden is then surely Hardy's intention here? This interpretation alone fulfils the promise of the subtitle. For clearly Hardy does not regard his Eve as sin-laden - in contradistinction to the authors of 'Genesis' who regard the original Eve in her fruit-tasting hubris as humanity's progenitor of sin.

Angel's harp playing provides Hardy with a excellent reason for drawing Tess out, not into a cultivated (man-made) landscape with floral bowers and arbours, or even into Talbothay Dairy's herb garden, but into wild, 'uncultivated' land. Furnished with appropriate images deriving from unadulterated nature, he then elicits, by means of homologous resemblances and symbolic association, her vibrant, earthy sexuality. Far removed from the antisepsis of 'lilies' and the starched delicacy of 'lace', but drawn instead through a 'profusion of growth' and into close proximity to the object of her erotic desires, Tess listens 'like a fascinated bird' - mesmerised but at the same time equipped for flight:

The outskirts of the garden in which Tess found herself had been left uncultivated for some years, and was now damp and rank with juicy grass which sent up mists of pollen at a touch; and with tall blooming weeds emitting offensive smells - weeds whose red and yellow and purple hues formed a polychrome as dazzling as that of cultivated flowers. She went stealthily as a cat through this profusion of growth, gathering cuckoo-spittle on her skirts, cracking snails that were underfoot, staining her hands with thistle-milk and slug-slime, and rubbing off upon her naked arms sticky blights which, though snow-white on the apple-tree trunks, made madder stains on her skin; thus she drew quite near to Clare, still unobserved of him (TD pp161,162).

The seductive moment for Tess, as she moves gradually closer to Angel, moves Hardy in turn - instinctively it seems - to hyphenate the world of nature that it might lean closer to her as she now assimilates her surroundings to her own consciousness. '-Milk', '-spittle', '-slime', 'sticky blights' - the mucosa and emissions of human 'sex' - 'rub off' upon Tess as much from the objects in nature which wet and stain her person, as from Hardy's linguistic hyphenations. With 'damp and rank...juicy grass' bursting pollen at a touch ('rank' incidentally denotes 'luxuriance' in the Hardy lexicon [40]); and upward thrusting 'tall blooming weeds emitting offensive smells', there is no sense of a fastidious, antiseptic, deodorised sexuality in Tess's world. Pungently odiferous (as surely it should be), dazzling hot in hue - 'red and yellow' and Virgilian 'purple' - the physical world Tess assimilates to her erotic consciousness is as unadulterated as her own 'pure' nature [41]. Realistic too, is Hardy's vivid rendering of attraction/repulsion sensations as Tess passes from the intimately physical and elemental wilderness to draw closer and closer to transcendental ecstasy. In her abandonment to the world of sensation, voluptuously gathering nature's secretions and mucosa upon her person - the generative fluids of 'sex' - so now Tess unleashes her passion:

Tess was conscious of neither time nor space. The exaltation which she had described as being producible at will by gazing at a star, came now without any determination of hers; she undulated upon the thin notes of the second-hand harp, and their harmonies passed like breezes through her, bringing tears into her eyes. The floating pollen seemed to be his notes made visible, and the

dampness of the garden the weeping of the garden's sensibility. Though near nightfall, the rank-smelling weed-flowers glowed as if they would not close for intentness, and the waves of colour mixed with the waves of sound (TD p162).

Escalating upon her plateau of sexual ecstasy, Tess reaches such a pitch of intensity that tears spring to her eyes as, at the same time, the world of sight, colour and sound fuses to a synaesthetic brilliance. Fully in keeping with her feminine sensation - her alternating 'waves' of orgasmic dilation - so too the lush, vegetative 'weed-flowers glowed as if they would not close for intentness' - as Tess now glows, 'her cheeks on fire' as Angel approaches (TD p162). Suddenly Tess feels exposed. She draws off from her lover to a safe distance to utter herself in safe, phatic locutions. She speaks of the apple-blossom falling and 'everything so green', but is clearly so immersed in her own de-tumescence that she draws only the 'falling off' in nature to her consciousness. Fending off Angel's probings as to her 'indoor fears', which are at this moment fears of over-exposure, she cannot help but feel that the very trees themselves have 'inquisitive eyes' (TD p163). However finding that her heightened state is unobservable to her lover, she waxes unselfconsciously philosophical and then wanes to a wistfulness - to 'sad imaginings' that bear a close resemblance to post-orgasmic triste (TD p163).

This is Hardy's most penetrating insight into Tess's sexuality. The candour and poetic truthfulness of his

images evoke a sexual consciousness unvarnished and unprettified. Neither sanctified nor trivialised to a delicate niceness, Tess emerges from Hardy's rich, odiferous, liquescent, fecund world as 'pure' and as resplendent as Nature itself. Her sensory self is in complete harmony with the natural world, and as its most vital centre of energy, she absorbs all its exuding essences of generation and re-generation as the original Eve - assimilated not to nature but to man's moral consciousness - cannot. This then is the 'Pure Woman faithfully presented by Thomas Hardy'. And the world that would deny her a physical, sexual reality - expressively described by her author as 'spiritual beauty' that 'bespeaks itself flesh' - is indubitably the loser for its defalcation.

Notes

1. Cf. Tom Paulin, Chapter III, p 122.
2. This view is expressed by Mary Jacobus in 'The Difference of View', Women Writing and Writing about Women (London, 1974) pp 13,14
3. Merryn and Raymond Williams, 'Hardy and Social Class', Thomas Hardy . The Writer and His Background Edited by Norman Page (London, 1980) p39
4. Jacobus, op. cit., p14
5. Richard Swigg, Lawrence, Hardy, and American Literature (London and Toronto, 1972) pp14-16
6. Karl Kroeber, Styles in Fictional Structure (New Jersey, 1971) p166
7. Lance St.John Butler, Thomas Hardy (Cambridge, 1978) p133
8. Swigg, op.cit., p16
9. David Lodge, Working with Structuralism: Essays and Reviews on Nineteenth Century Literature (Boston, London and Henley, 1981) p97
10. Jacobus, op. cit., p14
11. Swigg, op. cit., p16
12. Swigg, op. cit., p18
13. Swigg, op. cit., p18
14. Cf. Rosemary Sumner's comprehensive study of Hardy's anticipation of Freud, Jung and Adler, in Thomas Hardy : Psychological Novelist (London and Basingstoke, 1981) p47
15. This is quoted by Richard Evans in his book The Feminists (London, 1977) p20
16. 'Katabolic' is a term used by some geneticists denoting the energy dispensing nature of men, as opposed to 'anabolic' which is the energy conserving nature of women. 'Katabolic' is deliberately misapplied in relation to Tess in revision of what appears to a spurious, sexist, distinction.
Viola Klein writes: 'The attitude of submissiveness cultivated in women was a far more effective means of their subjection than marriage laws or church precepts. In order to ratify this ostensibly 'innate' submissiveness and

female passivity, the theory was forwarded by nineteenth century geneticists, that males were by nature 'katabolic' and females 'anabolic'. Man it was claimed, consumes energy more readily than woman - she being more conservative of it.'

See Viola Klein Feminine Character. History of an Ideology (London, 1971) pp127-146

17. For a fuller discussion of Havelock Ellis' views see Chapter IV.
18. Swigg, op.cit., p21
19. Michael Millgate notes that private baptisms were practised by Hardy's maternal grandmother. See his biography of Hardy Thomas Hardy :A Biography (Oxford, 1982) pp12-13.

The Baptism scene was omitted from the serial version of Tess of the d'Urbervilles for reasons of censorship. The making of Tess may be briefly outlined - from F.B.Pinion's account - as follows. Pinion writes: 'Plans for publication were begun in the autumn of 1888. About half the novel was accepted by the newspaper syndicate of Tillotson and Son, and it was not until the first sixteen chapters were read at the proof stage...that objections were raised and the agreement cancelled at Hardy's request...The story was later declined by the editors of Murrays Magazine and Macmillan's Magazine. By this time Hardy knew the "fearful price" he had to pay "for the privilege of writing in the English language"...He decided to excise or alter passages which had proved to be unacceptable... The most important serial omissions were the baptism scene, which was published in The Fortnightly Review in May 1891 under the bold title of "The Midnight Baptism: A Study in Christianity", and Chapters x and xi'.

F.B. Pinion A Hardy Companion (London, Melbourne, Toronto, 1968) p 46

20. This is a phrase used by Sarah.M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their discussion of analogical, symbolic, landscapes or spatial allocations in the nineteenth century novel. See their book The Madwoman in the Attic (New Haven and London, 1979) pp108 - 117
21. Nina Auerbach 'The Rise of the Fallen Woman', Nineteenth Century Fiction, June 1980, Vol.35, No.1, p30.
22. The Deceased Wife's Sister Bill, after a lengthy passage through Parliament, was finally passed in 1907.
23. Auerbach, op. cit., p40
24. Joan Grundy forwards the idea that Hardy's observation: 'In a Botticelli the soul is outside the body permeating

the spectator with its emotions' (Life p217) is incorporated into his presentation of Tess. This highly visual, sensual image is projected towards Tess - as in Hardy's reference to her 'spiritual beauty' bespeaking flesh. See Joan Grundy Hardy and the Sister Arts (London and Basingstoke, 1979) p46

25. John Lucas The Literature of Change. Studies in the Nineteenth Century Provincial Novel (Sussex, 1977) p183
26. Ibid., p184
27. Lodge, op. cit., p97
28. See Chapter III for a fuller discussion of Hardy's oral imagery.
29. Pinion, op. cit., p47
30. Cf. J.T.Laird The Shaping of 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles' (London, 1975)
31. Ibid., p42
32. Ibid., p49
33. This quotation from Mill is taken from Gertrude Himmelfarb's study of his writings, On Liberty and Liberalism (New York, 1974) p113
34. The Return of the Native p60
35. See for example F.R.Southerington's discussion of Hardy's heredity theme in Hardy's Vision of Man (London, 1971) See also John Lucas op.cit. pp 177-190
36. Lance St.John Butler, 'How it is for Thomas Hardy', Thomas Hardy After Fifty Years Edited by Lance St.John Butler (London and Basingstoke, 1978) p123
37. Elaine Showalter A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing (London, 1978) p27
38. Quoted by Pinion, op. cit., p143
39. Quoted by Pinion, op. cit., p149
40. The term 'rank' rarely connotes luxuriance in modern parlance. However it appears to be the case that this is Hardy's meaning. Shakespeare's 'rank and unweeded' garden in Hamlet seems tempting apropos the Tess example, but see Hardy's use of the word in The Woodlanders, where he refers to Fitzpiers' midnight readings as 'rank literatures of emotion and passion' (W p153). See also his reference in Jude, where Sue gathers 'huge burdock leaves, parsley, and

other rank growths' in order to wrap her naked statuettes (JO p101). It seems unlikely first, that she would choose foul smelling shrubs, and second, that the musty, organic smell of parsley is properly described as foul.

41. For an alternative reading see Marilyn Stall Fontane's 'The Devil in Tess', The Thomas Hardy Society Review, 1982, pp 250-254. Fontane sees the 'Garden' as 'dirty'. She argues (persuasively) in favour of Angel-as-Devil, Tess's prime contaminator, the most subtle (serpent) beast in the field. While one may be sympathetic to this view, it needs to be said that Hardy is never so black and white about his wrongdoers. There are no 'devils' or 'angels' in his fiction, even if at times the 'subtle beasts in the field' veer netherward rather than heavenward at times.

Chapter V1

Jude the Obscure

It is crucial to the organisation of women for their liberation to understand that it is the monogamous family as an economic unit, at the heart of class society, that is basic to their subjugation. [1]

Unacceptable as Frederick Engels' words undoubtedly would have been to the late nineteenth century feminist, [2] for whom woman's role as the mainstay of the monogamous family unit was still the most desirable of all attainable goals - most others of comparable vogue and status, particularly in the male dominated professions, being in any case denied to all but a pioneering few - there is no doubt that they would have been entirely acceptable to Hardy's Sue Bridehead. Sue declares, that if marriage is only a sordid contract, based on material convenience in housekeeping, rating, and taxing, and the inheritance of land and money by children, making it necessary that the male parent should be known - which it seems to be - why surely a person may say, even proclaim upon the housetops, that it hurts and grieves him or her? (JO p218)

Sue's campaign against the institution of Marriage in Jude is considerably more radical than is Bathsheba's in Far From the Madding Crowd. Moreover as a married woman she argues authoritatively - as one of the cognoscenti. Speaking with a broad-based social concern and a keen political awareness, which adds vigour to her utterances and seriousness to her emotion, Sue's argument is more than

a protest against the condition of married women as men's property. Her fundamental criticism is against marriage as a patriarchal anachronism which should no longer have an anchorage in a modern society. That is to say a modern society pioneering in its radical quarters the movement towards a breaking down of rigid role demarcations and sexual inequality. The call for a total reconstruction of marriage along equitable lines - what Olive Schreiner was to call a decade later 'a fellowship of comrades' [3] - was, of course, by no means revolutionary in theory. But what did seem unprecedented - even to the reformist feminists - was that middle-class women should take up the anti-marriage cause. To speak in plain terms of a working partnership and to reject the liberal feminists' idealisation of marriage with its redemptive emphasis upon woman's vocational calling to devotional wifehood, was radically controversial. And the respectable Woman's Rightist quietly but firmly dissociated herself from this fringe faction.

Millicent Garrett Fawcett, who may be considered 'a spokeswoman for middle-class Victorian feminism' [4], expressed feminist aspirations thus:

Is it not for the benefit of society that the women who have the greatest natural fitness for marriage should marry, whilst those who have fewer natural qualifications for the endurance and enjoyment of the special pains and pleasures of married life, should find other honourable and useful careers open to them? [5].

The line between the (approved) vocational calling to

wifehood on the one hand, and the (less approved) working role, is tacitly drawn here by Mrs Fawcett. Implicit too in her words, is an ideological accomodation of the inequitable relation between husband and wife; he (presumably) finding for himself an 'honourable and useful career' whilst also having the 'greatest natural fitness' for marriage, but she confined to the single role. Hardy's Sue does not, of course, have to walk Mrs Fawcett's tightrope of conformity; although Hardy does appear to have underestimated his critics' threshold of toleration in this respect. But the point to be made here is the nature of Sue's radicalism. In common with her author, she does not hold with the contemporary feminist views on marriage. She would have the system entirely overhauled, it seems - and upon much the lines furthered by Hardy. In a letter to Mrs Fawcett on the subject of the franchise, Hardy takes his stand:

The tendency of the women'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). [6]

John Stuart Mill had earlier drawn the analogy between a woman's status in marriage and that of the slave. 'The wife', he wrote,

is the actual bond-servant of her husband: no less so, as far as legal obligation goes, than slaves commonly so called.

A female slave has (in Christian countries) an admitted right, and is considered under a moral obligation, to refuse to her master the last

familiarity. Not so the wife: however brutal a tyrant she may unfortunately be married to - though she may know that he hates her, though it may be his daily pleasure to torture her, and though she may feel it impossible not to loathe him - he can claim from her and enforce the lowest degradation of a human being, that of being made the instrument of an animal function contrary to her inclinations.
[7]

But Hardy is more concerned in Jude with with the long-term psychological effects of repression and subjection enforced upon woman in the interests of a male dominated society - the preservation of male dominated institutions. His focus here is upon what he elsewhere pinpoints as the central focus of the 'psychical' novel,
in the psychical (novel) the casualty or adventure is held to be of no intrinsic interest, but the effect upon the faculties is the important matter to be depicted. (Life p204)

With the heightened sensitivity of his heroine operating as it were seismographically throughout the novel - registering the most subtle of shocks with the utmost responsiveness - Hardy imaginatively explores her problems of adjustment as she attempts to gain self-liberation: an adjustment severely impeded by the role of dependency and subjection to which she has been conditioned. For it is evident from her every contradictory response and neurotic reaction that the repressions of her childhood and upbringing have shaped her in such a way as to render her psychologically ill-fitted to adjust to a world to which she is physically and intellectually well adapted.

One might plausibly argue, with a glance back at

Mill's analogy, that a correspondence can be drawn between the psychological effects of the rigidly institutionalised Victorian family upon women, and the not dissimilar effects induced in the slave: effects which, it has been claimed, notably by S M.Elkins [8], were induced by the 'institutionalised' North American 'closed' plantation system. (According to social historians, a 'closed' system is one which is not subject to the checks and balances of alternative institutions but rather to its own authoritarian, paternalistic laws; and in which all lines of authority descend from the master).

Both slave and Victorian woman had this much in common, that under the auspices of their respective, highly disciplined 'institutions', both were denied legal rights and equality before the law as a matter of course, and freedom and responsibility as a matter of practice. The psychological effects of this deprivation,(which in the slavery context have not been controverted), were to induce faculty disabilities of the following kind: an impaired ability to take and make decisions and to instigate or take the initiative; an incapacity to exercise judgement; and, in the broader social sphere, an inability to exercise organisational and co-operational drives. At the more personal level, the effect was to pre-empt any growth to autonomy or a sense of self-worth and self-identity. American slave and Victorian woman were alike encouraged to adopt what might be called 'victim' or 'loser' attitudes and roles, as an alternative method of gaining and

retaining social approval; the typical result being submission, compliance, dependency, and the child-like mannerisms we recognise as characteristic of both the Victorian 'doll' and American 'Sambo'. Collaterally the induction of 'victim' roles and 'loser' attitudes necessarily impeded the integration and socialisation of individuals liberated into a 'free' society, where it was that society's political and social policy to institutionalise its weaker, dependent and disabled members. To break the 'second-class-citizen' mould, in other words, it was vital to replace the 'victim' with the 'victor' and the 'loser' with the overtly positive 'champion'. Already handicapped, in the sense of being psychologically conditioned 'losers', Victorian woman embracing the emancipationist's cause, and the freed slave facing liberation in post-bellum America, suffered, therefore, the further handicap of being brought up against the same destructive attitudes and low expectations in the patriarchal societies in which they had hoped to become socialised, as they had experienced in bondage. The groundless myths on which the two male-dominated societies were based, which equated submissiveness, infantilism, intellectual inferiority and so forth with the woman and freed-slave who bore such traits, became more deeply culturally embedded as 'science' stepped in to assert in all empirical seriousness that such traits were in fact, innate [9].

The arguments for confining women to their traditional role on the basis of their natural

capacities were reformulated towards the end of the nineteenth century in terms of evolution and the progress of the human species.

By the turn of the century the work of August Weismann on the continuity of the germ-plasm in reproduction was widely known. Weismann argued that the germ-plasm was the only transmitter of inherited characteristics and the role of environmental factors as a source of variation and change thus became insignificant. In 1900 the work of Mendel on inheritance was rediscovered and it lent its statistical weight to Weismann's theory...The emphasis was now changed; nature rather than nurture became the dominant concern. The efficacy of social reform to improve the environment and hence extend the range of human possibilities received a considerable setback.
[10]

The odds were clearly heavily stacked in favour of the perpetuation of the status-quo. It has to be said, however, that the Victorian daughter, wife, mother, handed from patriarch to patriarch, from father to husband, and having no 'day' of liberation, so to speak, to which she had to adjust without a certain degree of socialisation and politicisation, suffered far fewer traumas - and indeed tragedies - than those endured by the slave precipitated from bondage into liberation unacclimatized.

In this respect the slave analogy suffers limitations, but none sufficient to invalidate its usefulness. And as we shall shortly discover, Hardy was not slow to perceive its deeper psychological implications - he was after all writing to a public for whom ennoblement was deemed the nearest thing yet to woman's liberation insofar as it sought to elevate, not degrade, the feminine sex [11]. That the reality of the 'ennobled' 'doll-madonna' [12] in

her sexual purity and moral superiority is nothing more than just another, but rather more appealing, manifestation of sex discrimination - a pedestal upon which all 'loser' traits are apotheosised - is evidently fully understood by Hardy as we shall shortly discover.

His characterisation of Sue, with her radical views on marriage, has - as has been observed - only a marginal correspondence with the 'ennobled' ideal in life. Marginal too, is her 'New Woman' typicality - although critical opinion still tends to enforce this view [13]. However in so far as she is quite clearly a product of her time - sexually repressed, psychologically conditioned a 'loser' and so forth - she must be to some extent representative of her suffragist peers, who in the public sphere at least, accommodated like frustrations and defeats, and encountered like destructive attitudes.

Lauded for her decorum, her respectability and the sweet reasonableness of her political agitation, the nineteenth century liberal feminist has this much in common with Hardy's Sue, that in order to achieve the most meagre of ends she had to play heavily on all her so-called 'feminine' qualities effectively to gain the male approval or patronage vital to her success. As Sara Delamont and Lorna Duffin point out,

women used the dominant ideas to obtain their own ends and... in order to make their ideas known (they) had to articulate them in a form which was acceptable to men. [14]

The most successful feminist campaigners were those who managed to minimise hostile reactions by manipulating the classification system and not

violating it. These were the pioneers who were able to reorganise the beliefs and values of the dominant male culture, who articulated their ideas in a form acceptable to that dominant male opinion and used the dominant ideas to achieve their own ends. [15]

The suggestion here that feminist success was synonymous with deferential feminist tactics, cannot go unchallenged. For despite the historian's recommendation that it was just this decorous approach which earned womankind sufficient male approval in high places to ensure her enfranchisement in the very near future, the fact that the very near future took nigh on half a century to arrive, suggests that there was something awry in her method of political agitation as well as in the historian's interpretation of it [16].

There does appear, by way of contrast, to be prevalent a rather different attitude towards American feminist tactics. Towards the aggressive methods of the 'National Woman Suffrage Association' (1890), there is expressed, if not open approval, at least a tacit acknowledgement of the efficacy of their militant methods. We are told of the American movement for example, that under the leadership of Susan Anthony, 'the "National Woman Suffrage Association"...resorted to militant tactics that had already gained the vote for women in eleven states before the First World War' [17]; which indicates that militancy was not only effective - as opposed to putting the Cause into jeopardy - but is also acknowledged as such.

The insurrection of women and establishment reaction

to it, is possibly nowhere better expressed in the nineteenth century literatures, than in J.S.Mill's 'Subjection of Women' (1869). Mill writes:

The case of women is now the only case in which to rebel against established rules is still looked upon with the same eyes as was formerly a subject's claim to the right of rebelling against his king.
[18]

And that was a treasonable offence.

There is no doubt that division within the suffragists's camp was an impediment to the Cause - a division or lack of solidarity which cannot be explained away (as so many Victorians tried to do) as evidence of woman's innate inability to unite with her own kind in a common Sisterhood. Mrs Pankhurst's formation of the 'Women's Social and Political Union' in 1903, which, from 1906 to 1914, undertook increasingly militant action to further the suffragette cause, surely gives the lie to that assumption?

Among the many explanations that abounded in the nineteenth century, none cites woman's subordination itself as a causal factor in her failure to achieve solidarity. Yet it seems reasonable to suppose that women displaying all the signs of their subjugation - defiance rather than rebellion, respectability rather than disobedience, approval-seeking as opposed to the disregard for authority the suffragettes showed - should also display the correlated traits of in-group rivalry, hostility and malice. This impaired drive to combine and co-operate with

peer groups accords with S M.Elkins' findings which trace a direct correlation between the degree of psychic impairment induced and the degree of subordination enforced by the more repressive, authoritarian system [19].

It seems therefore, in the light of this analysis, that the late nineteenth century middle-class feminist would have inevitably run up against division within the camp - competing as she was for attention and sanctions from an elite few (men in power) with whom she would choose to identify: he or they possessing precisely those privileges and powers she herself sought to possess.

But the point to be made is this. Division within the camp was not an organisational problem simply, which was itself symptom rather than cause. The failure to achieve solidarity was but the outer manifestation of the division within woman herself, who in abjuring her own sexuality suffered a loss of identification with her own kind [20].

Hardy's Sue is one such woman deeply divided against herself: flesh and spirit locked in opposition. Seizing upon Mill and an ideology of emancipation, she unshackles her intellect but has no way of knowing how to liberate herself in the sense of wresting out the self-respecting 'whole' person that awaits actualisation within.

Conditioned in the behavioural practices all too familiar to Victorian womankind (and other internees), she is motivated to respond to a system of rewards and punishments and reverts instinctively to manipulative behaviour to accommodate this drive. In order to gain

affection/love/attention - or in other words rewards - she invests in a little-girl role to secure her hold on Jude; especially in those moments when she feels threatened by his possible withdrawal of affection.

Lightheartedly enough in the early stages of their relationship, she has occasion to tease him at his prayers, but overdoes the banter and irritates him. She alters her approach:

'Very well - I'll do just as you bid me, and I won't vex you, Jude,' she replied, in the tone of a child who was going to be good ever after. (JO p159)

At this point it is worth noting that Hardy's grasp of the extent to which 'loser' traits are apotheosised in the 'ennobled' role, is very firm indeed. Even in this early stage of the relationship Sue slides quite instinctively from the little-girl role to the ennobled role immediately her emotional anxieties are appeased: both being approval-seeking roles. And although the significance of this alternation of poses is lost on Jude, it becomes clear to the modern reader that what Hardy is doing is mapping a pattern of behaviour which must and does maintain Sue in her subjected, unliberated position. For one thing is certain, childlike or ennobled, every step Sue takes in this direction gains her momentary personal satisfaction - in that each step achieves its desired end of gaining Jude's approval and allegiance - but at the expense of driving an ever thickening wedge of inequity between herself and her lover; since to neither child nor ethereal

paragon can he relate in any sexually fulfilling or mutually rewarding way. He would always have the feeling - or would unwittingly generate in her the feeling - that she is being abused, exploited, or degraded.

So unobtrusively does Sue shift from one role to another that it would seem Hardy fully intends there to be a strong sense of their interaction; that they are two different personas but one and the same self. And that self is an objectified self - both submissive little-girl and woman-on-a-pedestal fulfilling the same function of being objects of approval whilst at the same time providing Sue with a shield against her subjective self which fears constant rejection or disapproval. That she frequently regards her self as an object, is revealed by her unconscious use of the objective case in reference to herself: 'your faulty and tiresome little Sue!' (JO p161) and the 'me' in the 'poor wicked woman who is trying to mend!' (JO p373) being both 'selves' split off from the 'I' who is not referred to in either case.

The unobtrusiveness with which Sue alternates her roles in the 'vespers' scene, is textually conveyed by Hardy with impressive skill and sensitivity. Revealing the inherent instability in her nature, (partly caused we might suppose, by this splitting of the self), he traces her every agitated move as she shifts restlessly from one stance to another trying as it were to feel her way on to emotionally firmer ground.

Teasing, as we have seen, is one of her first ploys to

distract Jude's attention away from his devotions and to herself. But Jude is genuinely irritated, so she unconsciously adopts her childlike posture and 'won't vex' him. Whereupon, feeling she has gained some ground, she shifts position and takes on the ennobling role and offers to deliver Jude from the hypocrisy and humbug of what she calls his falsified biblical text. Something of her astute critical talents begin to show here. But she is struggling too hard to impress, as her language - growing loftier by the minute - reveals. Inadvertently too she begins to take on the very pontificating tone which is, ironically, the one she is condemning; and Jude is not amused:

'And what a literary enormity this is,' she said, as she glanced into the pages of Solomon's Song. 'I mean the synopsis at the head of each chapter, explaining away the real nature of that rhapsody. You needn't be alarmed: nobody claims inspiration for the chapter headings. Indeed, many divines treat them with contempt. It seems the drollest thing to think of the four-and-twenty elders, or bishops, or whatever number they were, sitting with long faces and writing down such stuff.'

Jude looked pained. 'You are quite Voltairean!' he murmured. (JOp159)

Sue is instantly aware that she has displeased and without ado alters her approach:

Her speech had grown spirited, and almost petulant at his rebuke, and her eyes moist. 'I wish I had a friend here to support me; but nobody is ever on my side!' (JO p159)

How the language changes! And so does Jude. From petulance to tears and from tears to reconciliation Sue wins him to her; and having won, declares:

I did want and long to ennoble some man to high aims; and when I saw you...I...thought that man

might be you. (JO p160)

The ground seems firmer now. Jude is just a little pompous which indicates that Sue is pleasing him better.

'Well dear' he begins (fatherly),

I suppose one must take some things on trust. Life isn't long enough to work out everything in Euclid problems before you believe it. I take Christianity. (JO p160)

Sue, puzzled perhaps by the fact that her expressed desire to ennoble Jude seems to soften him in a way that her Voltairean discourse did not, evidently grasps that what is required of her is not that she should ennoble by instruction but by more 'feminine' means - that is by appealing to her lover's better nature. Hence...

'...we are going to be very nice with each other, aren't we, and never never vex each other any more?' She looked up trustfully, and her voice seemed trying to nestle in his breast.

'I shall always care for you!' said Jude. (JO p160)

As their relationship develops however, and it becomes increasingly difficult for Sue to break this pattern of behaviour, so she begins to play on bad-little-Sue where good-little-Sue becomes inappropriate. As it does inexorably. Jude, characteristically, responds to the negative role with a show of equability; but there is also an occasional, small irritation, particularly where it is his intention or desire to have sex with Sue which is of course obstructed by her emotional manipulations.

Following her flight from Phillotson just such a

situation arises. Sue discovers that Jude has presumptuously reserved a double room for the night at Aldbrickham. Panicking, she then alternates between feeling bad and saying so: 'a poor miserable creature,' (JOp250); feeling affronted and 'sitting up...so prim!' that Jude is irritated (JOp251); feeling guiltily that she should try to coax away his anger; but finally feeling, as seems inevitable by now, 'very bad and unprincipled' (JOp252). And as this mood of self-disparagement eventually degenerates into infantilism so the cycle is complete:

'...you shall kiss me just once there - not very long.' She put the tip of her finger gingerly to her cheek; and he did as commanded. 'You do care for me very much, don't you, in spite of my not - you know?' (JOp256)

Poor Jude, needled, since it is a woman in bed he wants and not a reluctant little-girl to whom he is supposed to play reassuring father, can barely suppress his irritation:

'Yes, sweet!' he said with a sigh; and bade her good-night. (JO p256)

Despite her emotional insecurity, her psychological handicaps and the overwhelming pressure of Jude's desire for sex and his ceaseless agitation to be wed, Sue makes an exhaustive (and exhausting) bid for autonomy and independence: a bid which is virtually defeated from the outset by these disabling factors. It is Hardy's intention of course, to show the extent to which both Sue and Jude

have been moulded (psycho-sexually) to 'fit' Victorian standards of sexual behaviour; and the extent to which the 'common enemy coercion' (JO p297) will complete the process. And that he takes seriously the most insignificant of slights and the most seemingly trivial of pains, reveals the extent to which he regards their mutual, daily "struggle to be" to be as grave as it is arduous.

Even the token alteration of Sue's name to Mrs Fawley warrants his attention, together with her sense of psychic loss in the event. The marriage code has this much at least in common with slavecode practice, that both Institutions customarily required the bonded party to take the master's name upon bondage. The implications of this are not lost on Hardy, who, with his fertile imagination, has perhaps considered how it would feel to be placed in such a position himself. Even Jude, for all his willingness to embrace unorthodox ideas, would possibly balk at a convention which required him to take the name Mr Sue Bridehead upon marriage. Women it seems are not supposed to take it amiss; they might even be persuaded that it is a privilege. (Angel Clare has a good try at persuading Tess!) In justice therefore to Sue's deep and genuine resentment of the assumptions that are made about what is appropriate or inappropriate for women, Hardy lets it be known that her taking of Jude's cognominal identity is not, to either author or heroine, a preferment. On the contrary it is nothing more than another wretched defeat. He writes of Sue, that having 'previously been called Mrs Bridehead,'

she 'now openly adopted the name of Mrs Fawley' and was 'dull, cowed, and listless' for days (JO p308). It is to Hardy's credit that he succeeds in making strange, in a textual sense, what is to his heroine strange and estranging in reality. A dull, cowed, and listless bride-like aspect is, to say the least, impressionistically odd.

Passing from the most subtle of slights to the conflict and distress Sue experiences in what might be called her 'resistance' in the field of marriage and sexual coercion, it is evident that Hardy's commitment to her personal endeavour and egalitarian cause is wholehearted. Her irritating idiosyncrasies, in that they are temperamental, do not impinge upon her intellectual credibility; and whereas Jude's Christminster quest is presented by Hardy as, at all times, delusive and personally ambitious, Sue's is neither. Jude would be don, Bishop, pilgrim - the locus of his quest lying in his Christminster phantasma. Sue would simply be liberated. Accordingly there is very little in her criticism of the marriage laws which Hardy does not painstakingly justify by producing evidence in support of her fears.

The legitimisation in the name of marriage of what appears to Sue to be a form of prostitution, (Mill's slave analogy invites a comparison with the form of sexual exploitation known as miscegenation), is what she is driving at when she tells Jude :

I think I should begin to be afraid of you...the moment you had contracted to cherish me under a

Government stamp, and I was licensed to be loved on the premises by you. (JO p267)

Fear of a contracted obligation to submit to a husband who has acquired an overnight legal right to sexual intercourse, is not the kind of anxiety a young, untried bride, bred on romantic dreams, is likely to harbour. But then Sue is neither. She has learned from her experience with Phillotson (as he has also learned), that such a contracted obligation can 'involve one in...a daily, continuous tragedy' (JO p241). That for example, a husband can so absorb himself in his own activities for a whole evening to the exclusion of all else, including his new, young, and 'unusually silent, tense, and restless' wife (JO p225); that he can spend until midnight 'balancing the school registers', and then, muttering on about school Committees and draughty ventilators, can proceed to enter the nuptial chamber with a view to joining his wife quite as if she were, in truth, just part of the furniture (JO pp228,9). Or alternatively he might sit up late 'as was often his custom, trying to get together the materials for his long-neglected hobby of Roman antiquities', and forgetting time and place, ascend 'mechanically to the room that he and his wife had occupied', but which is now hers exclusively, and even go so far as to start undressing before, with the prompt of a terrified scream to alert him, recalling that she had wished to sleep alone (JO p235).

And if a young bride were to assume as does Sue, that

sexual possession should coincide with sexual readiness, married to Phillotson she would learn otherwise: 'What tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes...' (JOp221). Unhappily Phillotson's awareness that he has in fact been 'taking advantage' of a young, inexperienced woman who does not yet know her own mind, emerges all the more tardily for his total self-absorption (JOp239).

There is certainly nothing in the schoolmaster's behaviour to indicate any readiness for love-making, and a good deal to suggest that Sue is quite justified in thinking that the elderly, celibate might be content with his continence. How had he wooed her after all? 'Not kissing me - that I'm certain!' she emphatically asserts to Jude (JO p140). However Phillotson does seem to feel it incumbent upon him to exercise his newly acquired rights, and quite clearly, (astonishing to the modern reader), he feels this to be a moral obligation. Sue, in resisting him, is not in his eyes, simply unresponsive, coldhearted, selfish or unsympathetic as the modern husband may regard his reluctant wife, but morally at fault. 'You vowed to love me' (JO p232) he accuses her, 'you are committing a sin in not liking me' (JO p232).

Understandably Sue is anxious and wary. She now has every reason to question, whether or not a 'legal obligation...is destructive to a passion whose essence is gratuitousness?' (JO p281) If Phillotson can be transformed from a sexually undemanding companion unhabituated to

kissing anything other than the 'dead, pasteboard' (JO p169) photograph of his bride-to-be, to a bitter, jealous spouse driven to spying on his wife when he is not totally oblivious to her needs and desires, what would be the effect upon the immature, developing mind of one such as Jude? And what too of the effect upon herself since she now has every reason to fear the shocking repercussions of years of emotional and sexual repression? One thing is certain. Never again will she be confident of her ability to remain 'proof against the sordid conditions' of the marriage contract (JO p295).

For all its invocation of higher, holier states, marriage seems to Sue, as it must have seemed to so many women, tacitly to demand what beyond the Institution would have been regarded as unlawful, if not criminal activity.

Engels too is mindful of this in writing that the woman in marriage

only differs from the ordinary courtesan in that she does not let out her body on piecework as a wage worker, but sells it once and for all into slavery. [21]

Hardy endorses Sue's anti-marriage views right from the outset, as his prefatory observations upon Jude's and Arabella's nuptials indicate:

the two swore that at every other time of their lives till death took them, they would assuredly believe, feel, and desire precisely as they had believed, felt, and desired during the preceding weeks. What was as remarkable as the undertaking itself was the fact that nobody seemed at all surprised at what they swore. (JO p64)

It has become clear that Hardy has not only taken up a

more radical oppositional stance, an openly heterodoxical position in Jude, and has abandoned his earlier, ambivalent view of marriage as a possible compromise of conflicting interests, but also that his heroine's ideals appear to have as close an affinity with Socialist thought [22], which she has not studied, as with the Liberal philosopher Mill with whom she is familiar. Mill after all - for good tactical reasons - never called for an end to monogamous marriage, even if he did voluntarily relinquish his male rights and privileges when uniting with Harriet Taylor.

Engels, on the other hand, claims that only with the abolition of private ownership, (the transition to full private property paralleling the transition of pairing marriage into monogamy according to Engels' book), will a new generation of women grow up, who have never known what it is to give themselves to a man from any other consideration than real love or refuse to give themselves to their lover from fear of the economic consequences. [23]

Now whilst Sue appears to submit to Phillotson more out of duty than fear of the economic consequences, she nonetheless feels both the gruesomeness of the obligation and the emotional 'torture' (her use of the word 'torture' suggesting a physical pain also) of her predicament (JO p221). And as she explains to Jude later when in a more resilient frame of mind, she does not consider herself an exceptional woman in her shrinking from 'institutionalised' sex:

Fewer women like marriage than you suppose, only they enter into it for the dignity it is assumed to

confer, and the social advantages it gains them sometimes - a dignity and an advantage that I am quite willing to do without. (JO p 268)

Social advantages or economic necessity, however it may be phrased, it is fairly evident that Sue is thinking along much the same lines as Engels - albeit unknowingly.

More knowing is Hardy despite his disclaimer that:

the purpose of a chronicler of moods and deeds does not require him to express his personal views upon the grave controversy (on marriage) above given. (JOp298)

For whilst Sue appears to have acquired her knowledge and ideas - where they are not Millsean, Shellyean, or even as Jude claims, Voltairean - by some osmotic process unrevealed to the reader, Hardy, with his excursions into Socialist thought, has not [24].

To contend that Hardy has now taken up an openly heterodoxical stance is not to suggest that he did not hold this position less openly in the early days. An orthodox front being no true indicator of inner conviction, it is not always easy to gauge Hardy's early stance without first deconstructing his texts. For at first sight orthodoxy supervenes. His first great heroine has to be conventionally brought to heel from willful independence to submissive dependence, and from sexual lack of inhibition to shame and guilt. At the last she is sufficiently chastened to do penance for captivating the heart of a mentally unbalanced man old enough to be her father, a man she does not love but would marry out of duty.

I hate the act of marriage under such circumstances, and the class of woman I should seem to belong to by doing it! (FFMC p 420)

In abhorrence Bathsheba cries out to Oak, who has evidently overlooked the profanity inherent in the suggestion that a woman should give her body to a man because, as it were, she has cost him.

Bathsheba's utterance is potentially subversive, but Hardy cannot permit it to subvert. In keeping with literary convention his heroine falls into a wasting decline; thence into a protracted depression; thence to 'an agonising conviction that everybody abjured her'. (FFMC p464) Whereupon feeling 'despised', 'aggrieved', 'wounded' and 'bewildered', she marries the man who arouses these feelings in her: not Boldwood, but Oak.

Despite Hardy's iterated predications of distress and emotional injury in this last sequence, which suggest an involuntary empathy for his heroine in that they echo his own agonising conviction in the early 'seventies (as recorded in the Life), that everyone abjured him for his failure to conform to the proprieties, nonetheless there is no hint whatsoever that Bathsheba may be prostituting herself in her final capitulation to Oak, for whom she has no erotic love. So whether we are to infer that given Oak's staying power and Bathsheba's innate sexual responsiveness some kind of fulfilment is probable, or whether the heroine's final capitulation betokens a fall from all expectations and nothing more hopeful than the

release of pain, is not conclusively resolved by Hardy who is intent upon establishing a conventionally redemptive dénouement.

Either way Bathsheba's ineluctable truths (or petty grievances, according to the standpoint of the critic or his century!), become absorbed into the moral fogs known as her willful, wayward ways, and do not pass into the circumspect world of Mrs Gabriel Oak.

In Jude the opposite is the case. Sue's ineluctable truths long outlive her tergiversation. Hardy does not permit his heroine's final act to countermand her anti-marriage principles. On the contrary, the unconventional denouement of being married and living unhappily ever after is the most appropriate of graphic obituaries for Sue who had, in her fighting days, demanded the right to broadcast her pain: that if it 'hurts and grieves' it should be proclaimed 'upon the housetops' that it is so (JO p218).

Hardy has taken every step to ensure that his heroine will gain a hearing. Sue has to endure the psychological handicap of having available to her only a language invented by men for men, (Bathsheba's point), which almost certainly fixes her subjection in that to convince Jude of her moral seriousness she is obliged to utter herself - to articulate her ideas - in a form acceptable to his own male point-of-view. But despite this, and although she has no Margaret Mead, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett or Germaine Greer to hand, Sue uses the language she does have

available, with intelligence. Fully aware of its coercive power she too will use it as a weapon - and does. Whilst she cannot escape her psychological conditioning or the perpetuation of her subjugation, she can rail against both persuasively as Jude is made uncomfortably aware.

That Sue is eloquent and verbally articulate is vital. To be taken seriously her erudition and rhetoric must be flawless; as her feminist sisters in life were aware theirs had to be, as:

calmly, with impeccable logic, they methodically demolished the increasingly frenzied arguments of the opposition. The contrast in tone was so striking as to cause an observer to remark that in this debate the feminine champions of emancipation and their masculine opponents seemed to have exchanged roles. It was the men who argued heatedly, irrationally, and emotionally; the women who responded coolly, rationally, and logically.
[25]

Sue then is articulate, rational and well-educated. Notwithstanding her psychological tendency to regress - from which her cool logic can, and does, at times, deliver her - she runs no risk of having ascriptions such as 'empty-headed' or 'frivolous' pinned on her, as did her less fortunate peers in life, deprived of higher education and the opportunity to gain rhetorical skills. And of equal importance to the Victorian reader, she is also endowed with a sexual fastidiousness which for entirely different reasons also ensures that she will be taken seriously. A sexy woman may be 'dumb' to a twentieth century Hollywood-bred public, but to the Victorian, long habituated to such ascriptions as 'diseased' and 'insane',

her credibility would also have been highly questionable. Mrs Fawcett's apologia in her Introduction to Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women [26], which enjoins the reader not to permit the author's 'irregular' life to detract from the moral seriousness of her work, provides an apt illustration of the extent to which these attitudes were felt to be deeply entrenched.

It is possibly for these discriminative reasons that Hardy's 'hussy' in Far From the Madding Crowd failed to interest her live contemporaries in the marriage question. Certainly no Victorian critic found her views worthy of mention. So too the 'Bovarian' Eustacia, whose erotic longings to be loved-to-madness, and moreover loved-to-madness not by one man but by many, have more often led critics to trivialise her as adolescent, than to grant her just a modicum of the estimation accorded to the Don Juans and Casanovas of the male world. Tess too, whose lush sexuality was not 'pure woman' at all to her contemporaries but merely an adjunct to her 'indelibly stained' womanhood, suffered a similar fate as her 'sexy' predecessors but more so: as victim she was taken seriously enough, but as 'pure (sexual) woman' she was entirely implausible [27].

Far less sensual, far less physically demonstrative and the least sexually responsive of all Hardy heroines, with the exception perhaps of Paula Power, (another 'serious' lady in her Laodicean way), Sue has lived with three men in the course of her young life but has remained

sexually unresponsive with each of them. Inhabiting her body as a hermetic object, ignorant of her sexual potential, (never suspecting for a moment that her 'craving to attract' (JO p365) is not gross, deserving of punishment, or unnatural, but quite simply sexual longing in want of sexual fulfilment); well disciplined in the practice of self-concealment and suitably naive about male sexuality, Sue is at first sight an exemplary Victorian woman. And from this position of considerable strength Hardy proceeds to give her a voice which, to the contemporary critic at least, was less exemplary than subversive. 'Sue', wrote Mrs Oliphant in January 1896,
makes virtue vicious by keeping the physical facts of...life in constant prominence by denying, as Arabella does by satisfying them, and even more skilfully and insistently than Arabella - the fantastic raisonneuse, Susan, completes the circle of the unclean. [28]

Her sexual fastidiousness, as Hardy calls it, triggers a heightened (modern feminist) consciousness in her of a woman's right to sole control over her own body. Love, she argues, cannot be given 'continuously to the chamber-officer appointed by the bishop's licence to receive it' (JO p213).

But if sexual fastidiousness is the prime cause of Sue's distaste for conjugal relations, it is not the prime cause of her philosophical rejection of marriage which ordains, she says, that love should be actuated by a contract: 'actuated by a dreadful contract to feel in a particular way in a matter whose essence is voluntariness'

(JO p221/2).

As a suitable basis for ethical inquiry therefore, which extends beyond the personal and the idiosyncratic in Jude, it is obvious that Sue's psycho-sexual nature provides Hardy with an excellent platform upon which the marriage question can be aired. No voluptuous Bathsheba, Eustacia, or Tess, would do as well.

Sexual frigidity in any case strikes the better note for an exposition of a coldly austere convention which still sanctioned in the 1890s (by custom not by law) what Hardy's Phillotson calls the 'right and proper and honourable' act of locking up faithless wives - of putting them 'virtuously under lock and key': an act which the schoolmaster cannot in fact bring himself to perform with Sue despite the supposed rectitude and propriety of the deed (JO p240). But Hardy makes his point well enough. It may not be Phillotson's intention either to take his wife by force or to confine her, even though she prefers spider-infested closets to her husband's bed. Nor may such behaviour be in character: the schoolmaster in the reader's eyes, if not in Sue's, appearing more pruriently mawkish than rapacious. But what Hardy evokes clearly is the fact that Sue has no guarantee whatsoever at this stage, that the coldly chastising husband of her early married days, will not become more pitiless yet; after all he is more concerned to avoid waking the maid than to console Sue on the night of her seeking asylum in the closet. How could she know for certain whether or not her

husband would pursue the 'right and proper and honourable act..' ? For as far as she is concerned, her relationship with him has been a history of fear, guilt, threat and continuous anxiety. Hardy makes this patently clear as Sue measures out her days, making constant appeals to his better nature and carefully avoiding any raising of the emotional temperature beyond a manageable level. Whatever the reader may feel about the obtuse schoolmaster, one thing is certain: his wife is in fear and dread of the absolute authority he has over her.

It is evident from Sue's protest and from the officialese that has infiltrated her language, ('licence', 'chamber-officer', 'contract', 'government stamp', 'on the premises' and so forth), that her sense of utter impotence in the face of authority is not limited to her fear of her husband's power over her existence. She also shows a strong revulsion for all things bureaucratic. Given the emphasis Hardy places upon this revulsion, and the manner in which he employs the language of officialdom to judder not only upon Sue's delicate sensibilities but also upon, or rather within, his own narrative, (as the following extract illustrates), it is apparent that he intends a measure of his critical attack upon marriage to fall upon its secularisation.

Secularisation had brought with it, not only the depersonalising effect of officialese - the mouthpiece of the bureaucratic state - but also a heavy emphasis upon duty, obligation, rights, privileges, conditions and so

forth, together with a loss of simple human values that its ordinances appear to have regulated and regimented out of existence. Into the language of nuptials for example, the brutalising, coercive language we know as legalese or officialese has begun to creep, and it is Sue of course who registers the alienating effect of this. Shocked by her first encounter with bureaucratic form-filling she carefully examines the crudities of its rubric, as Jude signs.

As she read the four-square undertaking, never before seen by her, into which her own and Jude's names were inserted, and by which that very volatile essence, their love for each other, was supposed to be made permanent, her face seemed to grow painfully apprehensive. 'Names and Surnames of the Parties' - (they were to be parties now, not lovers, she thought). 'Condition' -(a horrid idea) - 'Rank or Occupation' - 'Age' - 'Dwelling at' - 'Length of Residence' - 'Church or Building in which the Marriage is to be Solemnized' - 'District and County in which the Parties respectively dwell.'

'It spoils the sentiment, doesn't it !' she said on their way home. 'It seems making a more sordid business of it even than signing the contract in the vestry'. (JO p290)

Clearly a whole new set of difficulties has arisen over the years during the process of secularisation which did not obtain under the old practice of betrothal and church ceremonial.

Whilst a touch of the Fielding frolics - tail-ending into confusion and muddle - attends many acquisitions of marriage licences in early Hardy, there are no such touches in Jude. The Arabella/Jude nuptials are not rendered serio-comic but satiric, and the Jude/Sue ventures are just plain grim.

With its contractual emphasis placed more upon terms - the terms most profitable to the bond-holder - rather than upon the simple exchange of promissory oaths, Victorian marriage has, in Sue's eyes, become less a mutual undertaking than the legitimisation of the authority and power of one individual over another.

'The evolution of the family', writes Lawrence Stone, 'marked by a strong revival of moral reform, paternal authority and sexual repression', gathered strength among the middle classes 'from 1770', to peak in the middle of the nineteenth century [29]. Quoting from 'The English Matron' (1846), Stone presents us with an illustrative example of Victorian marriage guidance counselling:
the government of a household, for the sake of all its inmates, should be a monarchy, but a limited monarchy; of all forms, a democracy is most uncomfortable in domestic life. [30]

'This was fairly moderate advice, but,' (Stone emphasises) 'it was interpreted in a more authoritarian fashion'. And hence

The new ideal of womanhood involved total abnegation, making the wife a slave to convention, propriety, and her husband. [31]

And Sue, with her refusal to enter into any partnership except on equal terms, who works side by side with Jude in mason's yard and church, has absolutely no use whatsoever for this kind of bondage; patterned as it appears to be, upon the laws of capitalism and bureaucratic elaboration which justify the practice of individuals bent upon

maximising their own profit at the expense of an other or others.

Whilst making few concessions to Marxist thought, Stone does concede that:

the new family type is first associated with the upper levels of the urban bourgeoisie and professional classes. To this extent there is certainly a connection with the spirit of capitalism. [32]

The trend towards a re-inforced hierarchical order in the capitalist industrial society, which gave 'one class practically all the rights, and the other class practically all the duties' [33], is a trend that is reflected in that smaller political unit - the family - which bears a structural resemblance to the non-familial model in so far as total authority rests in the patriarchal head, from whom, as with the 'closed' system of the slavery Institution, all lines of authority descend. The familial unit in Hardy reflects just such a trend: the households of Swancourt, Clare and Melbury in particular, showing a closer structural similarity to the extrinsic example than is apparent in the 'matriarchal' households of Paula Power, Bathsheba and Mrs Yeobright, in which the mode of domestic government is far less sternly authoritarian and rigidly hierarchical. Largesse there is, in both types of unit, although it is noticeable that this is more effectively generative of community bonding in the case of the Bathsheba/Yeobright households in contrast to the class-divisiveness perpetuated in (say) the Clare parsonage. There is also a noticeable difference between the concept

and practice of absolute rule, in the different households, the authoritarian will of the father being considerably more despotic than is the will of the mother, or feminine head of household.

The ultimate in matriarchies in Hardy must be Ethelberta's. Yet despite the bizarre domestic arrangement - which should lend itself particularly well to internecine division and autocratic rule - neither is manifest. There is, on the other hand, interdependence, solicitude, and a good deal of self-help and mutual co-operation.

The will and authority of the patriarch in Hardy is patently a negative force. Fathers are not at risk but sons and daughters are; especially those pioneering change as is Sue, who is also unfortunate enough to be the daughter of a severe, repressive and callous father. Mr Bridehead, whose role in Sue's life is the more significant for its absence, (he never actually makes an appearance in Jude), has not only taught his infant daughter to hate and reject her departed mother, but proceeds in turn, to abjure and reject the mother's daughter. Following Sue's decision to live with her student friend in London, her father cuts her off, and makes no appearance in her life thereafter. He is not at her wedding, nor at her confinements, nor is he beside her in the moment of her tragic bereavement, despite the fact that he appears to be living and working in Wessex, and despite the fact that the news of his grandchildren's deaths is reported in the local newspapers. A harsher, more uncaring parent, it would be difficult to

find in Hardy's Wessex.

Sue can only be right therefore, to question the legitimacy of investing so much power and authority in the father/husband. It evidently does not strengthen family unity, or parental responsibility. That it may provide ballast to the ego, and other parenthetical benefits, is hardly sufficient recommendation, given that these can only be gained at the expense of another's loss. Moreover, such an imbalance of power must necessarily distort what is meant to be a union, if only by placing unnatural pressures upon both partners who are obliged to fit individual nature to role, rather than role to individual nature. For Sue then to question all this in relation to the effect it may have upon her own, and Jude's, young, impressionable, developing minds is both enlightened and sane. Of herself she candidly admits that, once legally contracted she would no longer feel free to withhold herself at will, but rather bound in duty to submit; thus cementing, albeit involuntarily, the roles of exploiter and exploited.

Bathsheba had feared this subjection; Sue, not having her compensating erotic nature, fears the more. Her fears are exacerbated by her sensitivity to the cold, impersonal touch of the bureaucratic State upon her delicate, 'ethereal, fine-nerved' sensibilities (JO p228). This cold impersonal touch is far more obtrusive in her world than in Bathsheba's: The Committee of the Melchester Normal School, Her Majesty's School Inspector, the School Committee Managers who sack Phillotson, and the police

presence felt by Sue at the Wessex Agricultural Show.

The encroachment of the machinery of State, of the Law and its representatives in Jude, does not justify its own intrusiveness. Hardy makes it quite clear that, for instance, in the case of Phillotson's dismissal by a government body which holds that 'the private eccentricities of a teacher came quite within their sphere of control', there is no moral justification for their ruling (JOp258). He even goes so far as to provide a token 'battle' on the schoolmaster's behalf which takes place in the schoolroom itself, the partisan faction being 'a curious and interesting group of itinerants...a generous phalanx of supporters, and a few others of independent judgment', who break in on the the meeting to 'express their thoughts strongly' to the opposition which is composed of 'respectable inhabitants and well-to-do-natives of the town' (JO pp258,9).

Hardy's description of the 'battle' itself, with its unconcealed sense of relish at the prospect of dignitaries in combat with 'travelling broom-makers', 'a gingerbread -stall keeper' and other assorted itinerants, is Hardy

demolition at its mischievous best:

This generous phalanx of supporters, and a few others of independent judgment, whose own domestic experiences had not been without vicissitude, came up and warmly shook hands with Phillotson; after which they expressed their thoughts so strongly to the meeting that issue was joined, the result being a general scuffle, wherein a blackboard was split, three panes of the school-windows were broken, an inkbottle was spilled over a town-councillor's shirt-front, a churchwarden was dealt such a topper with the map of Palestine that his head went right through Samaria, and many black eyes and bleeding

noses were given, one of which, to everybody's horror, was the venerable incumbent's, owing to the zeal of an emancipated chimney-sweep, who took the side of Phillotson's party. (JO p259)

To the misrepresented individual, powerless to defend himself against the prejudice and dogma of institutionalised values, Hardy is clearly committed. Yet the spirit of anti-establishment anarchism which moves him here and elsewhere to memorable feats of satiric prose, must contest in the wider political sphere and not confine itself merely to revolution in the classroom (paradigmatical as that may be) if it is to be a felt force and moreover a felt force with some constructive aim.

Hardy does move into the wider arena in Jude, where at various points throughout the novel, he measures the institutionalised values of Church, Law and State, against the independent judgement of his central characters. From the Institution of Marriage and other bureaucratic agencies of the corporate state, right down to the policing of streets, where an offending, protesting Jude is silenced by the strong arm of the law, lest he disturb the order and upset the solemnity of processing Christminster dignitaries, whilst a more offending cab driver assaults his dumb beast with impunity (JOp338), the injustices and iniquities of 'welfare' institutions are exposed.

Institutional wisdom may have told the Victorian that Institutionalised Marriage was a moral necessity. To Hardy such a transfer from the self to the Institution guarantees social regression [34]. So pedagogical an Institution,

whilst it plays God and unites man and woman in the name of Holy Matrimony with or without church ceremonial, or dissolves that union as the case may be, is so closely linked with the forces of law and order that any possibility of associating its ordinances with divine blessings or soothing sacramentals, or with the kind of prayerful hope that might be drawn from religious ceremonial, seems remote. Or so Sue feels, contemplating the brute officialese before her in the Superintendent Registrar's Office, whilst ruefully recalling a less alienating rubric: there is, she comments, at least 'a little poetry in a church' (JOp290). The very term 'Institution of Marriage' itself resounds somewhat chillingly in an age 'Institution' orientated, which subsumes remedial and punitive establishments such as reformatories, mental and penal institutions under the same heading, but reserves 'Association' for the denomination of voluntarily grouped bodies.

Sue with her intellectual acuity picks up the subtle conformations of language, although not always before they have exerted their inevitable moulding influence upon her consciousness. She is as suggestible - or as susceptible to the 'word', (to the 'letter that killeth') - as is Tess to the lurid biblical texts painted on field-gates. In the vivid imaginings of Tess and Sue the 'word' may actualise and in turn externalise hidden fears and repressions; which may then be psychically integrated. But this is not always the case. As Hardy shows with Sue, with her

reliance upon a learned language which gains her self-mastery, the 'word' can assume a dominance which can supersede her own consciousness and reshape it too forcibly. It happens thus. The child who knits her little brows and glares round tragically as she conjures up images of the 'ghastly, grim and ancient Raven...on the Night's Plutonian shore' (JO p119), is the same girl who later shocks Jude by admitting to a sneaking liking for 'ghastly stories of saints, dead limbs of gibbeted Gods!' (JO p157) And this is also the woman who finally subjects herself physically to the ghastly, grim act of offering herself in sexual repulsion to Phillotson.

Sue finally reverts to identifying with an image of herself that was confirmed in her childhood as acceptable. Brought up by a father to 'hate her mother's family' (JO p 118) - which no doubt meant hating her mother in herself - the child Sue, repeatedly smacked for her impertinence and shamelessness, has at least one identity she can superimpose over her bad, hated, feminine self. The pixillated child, seemingly possessed of imaginary furies and spectral terrors - '...you could see un a'most before your very eyes' (JO p120) - has clearly mesmerised her elders with a poetic performance which expresses all that passion, dread and fury repressed in everyday life. So impressive is her performance in its impact and pathos, that it passes through anecdote into perpetuity together with Sue's identification with the central character - herself: that little oddity with her tragic glares - an

object of admiration and pity.

It need hardly be said that this is but a single aspect of a highly complex nature. But Hardy has not troubled to chronicle such matters for no purpose. Consequently when we discover in Sue a facility for being 'always much affected at a picture of herself as an object of pity' (JO p309); or when we are disconcerted by her impulse to act out her ghastly terrors in front of Phillotson; or when we are perplexed by her need to provoke Jude to stupefaction and pity, we have less reason to find her unstateable or unintelligible than has Jude.

When she reverts at the last to the grossest form of subjection, having nerved herself up to the task by purging body, mind, and spirit - 'I've wrestled and struggled, and fasted and prayed. I have nearly brought my body into complete subjection,' (JO p403) - and permits herself to be possessed of grim and tortuous terrors, Sue virtually ceases to be recognisable as the Sue we know and that Jude knows. Except that is, for the little-girl Sue who now takes on her infantilised role with a vengeance. Step by step she regresses to total dependency upon Phillotson - the father figure - and begs for forgiveness, for punishment, for pity. Having longed in her derangement for 'something to take the evil right out' of her, and all her 'monstrous errors' and 'sinful ways', she takes refuge in self-immolation (JO p365). And it seems to be her prostration to the newly invoked biblical word which triggers this final regression - the 'Word' being closely

related to, but aesthetically more persuasive than, the prescriptive, incarcerating language of officialese (the language of Victorian institutions), to which she had been suggestible but resistant in her fighting days. The disturbed mind, more deeply suggestible than ever and craving certitudes, now immerses itself in the images generated from penitential prayers, which act as verbal cues prompting half-forgotten memories of cathartic dramatisations in youth. And it is her childhood identity - the Sue possessed of spectral terrors - that is now recovered. It is psychologically plausible that the terrors externalised by verbalisation and repetitious recall, actually carry 'safe' associations for her, since her dramatisations (acting-out) of the same in youth had drawn social approval and applause. Such a regression is retreat under cover - but is possibly the only means available to Sue for gaining some kind of hold on reality.

But to one member of an earlier order in Jude, so excessive an agitation as Sue (and in her wake, Jude), expresses over the marriage question, is incomprehensible:

I don't know what the times be coming to! Matrimony have growed to be that serious in these days, that one really do feel afeared to move in it at all. In my time we took it more careless; and I don't know that we was any the worse for it! When I and my poor man were jined in it we kept up the junketing all the week, and drunk the parish dry, and had to borrow half-a-crown to begin housekeeping! (JOp380)

Phrased in so lighthearted and so down-to-earth a manner, Sue's anxieties and high seriousness on the subject do, by

contrast, seem somewhat extravagant. Is she (as we sometimes fear) simply over-reacting or exaggerating her fears of the 'jining' that is to Mrs Edlin commonplace?

Hardy presents, in this new contribution to the debate, so contrasting a view of marriage that we are urged to consider Sue's approach to the subject, less from the point of view of her psychological conditioning and handicaps, but more from the sociological standpoint Hardy has now introduced. Times have changed: 'Nobody thought o'being afeard o'matrimony in my time', says Mrs Edlin (JOp297). And it is the nature of that change which Hardy invites his readers (not once, but thrice: pp297,380,412), to consider.

Class, epoch, and an altered consciousness are the major differentiating factors. Mrs Edlin, belonging to a class and clime relatively unencumbered by legalities, institutions, formal ceremonies, rights and obligations, which engaged and disengaged with espousals with relative ease, is not of Sue's generation. She is a member of the same order as the widow of Hardy's anecdote in The Woodlanders, whose husband returns unexpectedly after an absence of twenty-four years:

one night he came home when she was sitting by the fire, and thereupon he sat down himself on the other side of the chimney-corner. "Well" says she, "have ye got any news?" "Don't know as I have," says he; "have you?" "No" says she, "except that my daughter by the husband that succeeded 'ee was married last month, which was a year after I was made a widow by him", "Oh! Anything else?" he says. "No," says she. And there they sat, one on each side of that chimney-corner, and were found by the neighbours sound asleep in their chairs, not having known what

to talk about at all. (W pp 390/391)

Anything less like a Bridehead/Fawley situation could scarcely be imagined! The more relaxed attitudes and greater moral levity that characterised early nineteenth century rural, working class family life, had, we are told, much to do with a more flexible familial hierarchy; a significant feature of which, was the absence of an authoritarian figurehead. By way of explanation, Edward Shorter writes that:

One might plausibly argue that in the course of the eighteenth century population growth decapitated the authority of the lower-class family by creating so many children that the parents had nothing to pass on to their extra-numerous offspring, and hence no control over their behaviour. [35]

We can safely assume that Mrs Edlin and her compeer from The Woodlanders are descendants of this class and clime. Unlike Sue and Jude, and probably for reasons of residential stability and rural occupation, they have not, in impressionable youth, been exposed to, or conditioned by, the puritanical ethic of the rising petit-bourgeois Victorian class. Similarly, the agrarian-rooted Durbeyfield family in Tess, do not at any point voice such middle-class anxieties as that Tess is sullied, or has ruined her prospects of an advantageous marriage, or has threatened the family name and property by virtue of her association with Alec. On the contrary, they encourage the association and only regret, with hindsight, that Tess does not.

If the rural working class family exercised less

strict, authoritarian control over its 'inmates' (as The English Matron classifies women and children) - to which the Fanny Robins, Marions, Izzies, and Rettys of Hardy's Wessex all testify - the authority of the petit-bourgeois family on the other hand did remain inviolate, managing, Shorter says, to control its fertility and:

to preserve the sense of family tradition which said that children would follow in the footsteps of the father. To be sure, young men of middle-class origin responded to a new Zeitgeist of gratification by sleeping with prostitutes; but these liaisons posed no threat to the family. What we know about middle-class daughters suggests that they stayed pure before marriage. Thus the authority of the middle-class family over its offspring remained inviolate, and, as a result, middle-class youth, however sensitised by change, did not actually break out of the web of familial custody and and control. [36]

Together with this culturally and psychologically shaping force handed down from the vanguard middle-classes to a proletariat intent upon upward mobility, there was the great (post-Romantic) trend towards individualism. Shorter speaks of this as a 'great drift toward individual innovation and autonomy, at the cost of community custom and hierarchy' [37]. And this is patently a drift we detect in Hardy; in his deracinés and in the radical privatism of several of his characters, notably Sue Bridehead.

Clearly there is an inherent ideological dichotomy between, on the one hand, the drift towards individualism 'at the cost of community custom and hierarchy', and on the

other, the movement of the vanguard class towards a more uniform, rigid, hierarchical family structure. And of course Hardy's Sue and Jude are right at the centre of this conflict.

If 'Nobody thought...of much else but a cannonball or empty cupboard!' (JOp297) in Mrs Edlin's time and clime, this is no longer the case in the late nineteenth century, where as far as Hardy's Jude and Sue are concerned, the major threat is the 'common enemy coercion' (JOp297). The coercive 'enemy' - they feel - is the body politic whose institutionalised values would compress individuals into stereotypes, their relationships into institutions, and in doing so would annihilate the very self.

But again we might ask, why Sue's high seriousness when the unsatisfactory marriage in Jude appears to be legally dissoluble at will? Surely, given this solution to unworkable unions, her emotion is after all just a little too exquisite? To interpret Sue thus is to misread Hardy as it is also to superimpose a modern consciousness over that of the previous century. Victorian marriages were not dissoluble at will (legally or otherwise), and if Sue is neurotic on the subject of matrimony, this is conceivably one of the reasons why. Perceiving that hers is not one of the natural tragedies of love, 'but a tragedy artificially manufactured for people who in a natural state would find relief in parting!' (JOp224), she levels her criticism once more at state and institution - the agents of the 'artificially manufactured' tragedy.

A closer look at how divorce procedures do in fact operate in Jude may throw into relief certain aspects of Hardy's treatment of the subject, which he omits to highlight possibly on the assumption that his contemporary readers were already only too familiar with the inequities and disabilities of nineteenth century divorce laws. These, despite the much lauded Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, continued to uphold the archaic principle of one law for the rich and another for the poor and women: 'The position of women and poor people being not improved by the 1857 Bill' [38]. To have had certain grounds for divorce from Phillotson, Sue would have had to provide evidence of her husband's 'incestuous Adultery, or of Bigamy with Adultery, or of Rape, or of Sodomy or Bestiality, or of Adultery coupled with such cruelty as without Adultery would have entitled her to a Divorce a Mensa et Thoro, or of Adultery coupled with Desertion, and without reasonable excuse, for Two Years or upwards' [39]; or alternatively, according to the 1878 amendment, 'aggravated' assault within the meaning of the statute 24th, 25th Vic. c100., which simply meant that if the husband had been summarily convicted of aggravated assault, this conviction alone would constitute sufficient grounds for legal termination of the marriage.

Clearly then Sue has no grounds for divorce, (neither incompatibility nor mental cruelty were admissible grounds in the nineteenth century).

Phillotson, on the other hand, does have adequate

grounds. And here the double standard becomes glaringly obvious. For both have agreed to separate, (albeit unlawfully in the divorce context since collusion technically invalidated the plaintiff's case); yet whilst Sue has no legal grounds whatsoever, Phillotson may sue on the most facile of grounds: that his wife has refused his request to stay after, as the schoolmaster puts it, 'I said I had forgiven her' (JO p 263). Phillotson then divorces Sue on the basis of her refusal to continue to cohabit with him; compounded it seems with an accusation of adultery which going undefended is evidently deemed proven by default (JO p 329).

What Hardy does not mention, but what his readers would also have known, is that the husband had the additional entitlement of claiming damages against the co-respondent; a wife had no such entitlement. Hardy's recognition of this contingency is evidenced by his reference to the schoolmaster's suit as 'Phillotson versus Phillotson and Fawley' - which implies a co-respondent (JO p 265). But of course there is no cause for further textual elucidation here, since the schoolmaster would almost certainly, and for obvious reasons, have waived his claim for damages against Jude. But that Hardy offers so meagre a clue to the fact that there were two defendants cited in the case - Sue the 'property' appropriated and Jude the appropriator of the 'property' for which he might be asked to pay - seems to suggest that he is assuming a wider knowledge of such matters than perhaps his modern reader

might possess. The 'meagre clue', on the other hand, sufficiently fulfils its function as a prompt, which is more to the point for our purposes.

Jude, like Phillotson, has perfectly adequate grounds and a perfectly straightforward suit against Arabella, who, being in the same powerless position as Sue, is obliged to plead with her husband for her freedom. Again the double standard is implied. For both Arabella and Jude are living in ostensibly adulterous unions, but since it was the privilege of the husband alone to sue on the grounds of adultery unamended, it is Jude who proceeds with the action. Had women possessed equal rights under the law, Arabella could have obtained her freedom long before, and could thus have avoided committing the criminal act of bigamy.

Although Hardy does not explicitly analyse the rights and wrongs of contemporary Divorce Laws in Jude, it is evident from the procedures and from the responses of his characters, that he finds them iniquitous. Women have to plead, beg and, in Arabella's case, lie and lawbreak. They also suffer the stigma of being the guilty party, which has psychological as well as social repercussions. Men taking the action have of course to bear the cost, although there is no evidence that this is a burden, even to Jude.

Unlike the offending Marriage Laws however, which are felt to grate without relief upon the individual consciousness, the Phillotson/Fawley Divorce proceedings - by contrast - roll on as part of the impersonal machinery

of State which rumbles interminably in the background of the Victorian overworld of the novel. Reaching Sue's and Jude's 'consciousness but as a distant sound, and an occasional missive which they hardly understood' (JO p265), the whole affair is remote and imponderable; the more so to Sue who in fact finds the significance of the Decree Absolute totally unreal. 'Are we - you and I - just as free now as if we had never married at all?', she asks Jude in utter perplexity. 'One thing is certain,' he tells her blandly, 'however the decree is brought about, a marriage is dissolved when it is dissolved' (JO P266).

Jude is very dismissive. But then he is less concerned with the ontological bases of what does, or does not constitute a union, and with whether promissory oaths can be magisterially spirited away as if by divination, than with possessing Sue: 'Well my dearest,' he says at the first opportunity, 'the result of all this is that we can marry after a decent interval' (JO p267).

Sue is not so sure that this is the result. There appears to be the very reasonable doubt in her mind, that to dissolve a legal contract ex cathedra so to speak - that is without her written or verbal consent - is not necessarily the same thing as cancelling a promise which requires the oath-giver to consent to its making, keeping, or breaking. And as far as she is concerned, her agreement with Phillotson was over their living separately, and not her re-marriage to Jude.

Meanwhile what Hardy has also demonstrated is his

heroine's tacit acceptance that she, as Phillotson's benighted wife, has no recourse to law in her own right. She never considers the possibility of divorce, and it certainly does not enter her head to take legal advice. Indeed, so ingrained in her, is her sense that she is totally unprotected, unbefriended - 'a woman tossed about, all alone' (JOp214) - that her entreaties for a separation are based solely upon the notion of a simple renunciation of the promissory oath, and not upon legal considerations at all: 'We made the compact, and surely we can cancel it - not legally of course, but we can morally' (JO p 232).

One way or the other it is evident that Hardy's women do not consider divorce to be a viable option. It is also evident that under the circumstances a simple renunciation of the promissory oath would have been entirely adequate had not the prevailing marriage laws dictated otherwise. Sue's attempt to work towards a mutually acceptable solution, an agreement to separate on amicable terms so that, as she puts it, 'then we might be friends, and meet without pain to either' (JOp232) provides a more satisfactory emotional solution than does the divorce decree which requires that one partner should be deemed the guilty party; and if guilty and female, demands that her lover should be deemed a guilty party also. (Her ameliorative approach incidentally, anticipates modern divorce procedures, in that collusion and breakdown of the marital relationship are both now considered reasonable practice and grounds respectively).

It is apparent that in Hardy's eyes there has been little improvement over the years upon the barbaric method of divorce which was the method of wife-selling as practised by Henchard [40]. In effect one ritualised procedure has been substituted for another but without changing the fundamental principle of male privilege. Once upon a time a man auctioned his wife - custom not law sanctioning the procedure - or simply left her, but now he sues her on much the same basis, in that she still has a price on her head, and he receives the secular law's blessing in so doing.

Hardy's nineteenth century readers would no doubt have been sufficiently well versed in current legal practice to have understood from the outset Sue's and Arabella's lack of equal rights under the law. And although Hardy's emphasis is slight in Jude it adequately points to a predicament which must temper our view of Sue, whose irritating inconsistencies of behaviour are symptomatic of a keenly questing mind confronting a bafflingly incoherent social order.

Attempts to define what was, or was not, acceptable spousal behaviour, presented the secularised divorce courts with difficulties. Lacking all but ecclesiastical precedents, legal practitioners had of necessity to formulate new codes and rulings - attempts at clarification leading to a consolidation of what was deemed normal behavioural standards [41]. This kind of bureaucratic standard-setting conflicted awkwardly with the trend

towards atomistic individualism and the collateral ethic of self-advancement ('self-improvement', 'self-education', and 'self-help'). This is quite clearly painful to the modern consciousness of Hardy's heroine who suffers intensely 'from the rules that produce comfort in others' (JOp232), and is ultimately crushed by what she describes as the 'social moulds civilisation fits us into' which 'have no more relation to our actual shapes than the conventional shapes of the constellations have to the real star-patterns' (JOp214).

Hardy's stolid bourgeois patriarch in The Woodlanders is one other Wessex character to be brought up against the 'system' and left, if not crushed, at any rate considerably chastened. The wretched Melbury, in his fruitless excursion to London to secure his daughter's divorce from Fitzpiers, is caught up in a far greater muddle than is any early Hardy hero grappling with marriage licences. Totally unprepared for the vicissitudes of the 'system', as his suppressed anger at the outcome reveals, Melbury the meritocratic patriarch - given a taste of the (doctrinaire) medicine he has meted out to his daughter for far too long - can hardly contain his rage and frustration when, despite having weathered weeks of prevarication and contradictory information in London, he still cannot secure his daughter's freedom.

Fitzpiers' adultery, compounded with (apparent) desertion, is not cruelty enough to constitute grounds for divorce it seems. 'He has not done you enough harm!'

(Wp321), the embittered parent tells his daughter; in words which catch appropriately at the language of the legal assessor who has presumably quantified such things. What constitutes enough harm? And how could any arbitrating representative of the law so cold-bloodedly assess 'enough' in the absence of the party harmed? Of this contingency, Giles is aware, who appears to have a firmer grasp of realities than either Melbury or his crooked legal adviser:

Even in the hour of Melbury's greatest assurance, Winterborne had harboured a suspicion that no law, new or old, could undo Grace's marriage without her appearance in public. (W p319)

Or as he solemnly confides to Grace:

I am not sure that people may have to appear in a public court even under the new Act. (W p320)

That Giles should have a relatively clear idea of rudimentary procedures, throws into focus Melbury's lack of the same. His obtuseness, lack of perspicacity, and worse, his capricious manipulative handling of Grace and Giles, testify to a gross arrogance in his dealings with others, which had he been a Wessex heroine instead of patriarch, would have provoked heavy censure from that coterie of literary critics prone to fault-finding in women. In Melbury's case, the chaos is originally caused by Beaucock, a defrocked lawyer operating mostly in public bars as a quack practitioner, and charging, what Hardy wily describes as 'astonishingly small fees' (W p298). Beaucock persuades the unsuspecting timber-merchant that 'under the

new law...unmarrying is as easy as marrying' (W p298), and that his daughter may well soon be assured of her freedom.

Now whilst Beaucock cites the new law (so-called) with absolute precision, stating that 'under the new statute, twenty and twenty-one Vic.,cap.eighty-five, unmarried is as easy as marrying. No more Acts of Parliament necessary; no longer one law for the rich and another for the poor' (W p299), this is in fact sheer bluster, or as Hardy puts it, 'dupery'. Certainly the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act, twenty and twenty-one Vic.,cap.eighty-five, made no more Acts of Parliament necessary. But if this is the statute to which Beaucock is referring then he is otherwise in error. No doubt he relies, in order to attract custom, much upon his ability to recall fragments of Parliamentary statutes from his days as a lawyer's clerk. And no doubt the fact that he employs this tactical measure in order to solicit Melbury as a client, testifies to the necessity of this kind of feigned virtuosity where charlatanism is the game. But whether out of 'ignorance' or 'dupery' (Hardy generously offering a choice), one thing is certain, no bona-fide lawyer could possibly, rightfully, claim that the same law that dispensed with the Acts of Parliament qualification, (1857), also made marrying and unmarried easy, let alone made divorce available to rich and poor alike. This is unfortunately what the 1857 Act failed to do [42]. But Melbury cannot be expected to know anything of this even if Beaucock should. For as the timber-merchant says, he 'saw little of newspapers' (W

p299).

Hardy is hinting here that the quack lawyer has in fact been unprofessionally gleaning his information from the press, which is of course entirely in character, and fully explains how misinformation has become assimilated as fact. For even the most scrupulous of review writers could at times fall inadvertently into ambiguities and misnomers. Take for example this extract on the subject of divorce and the 1878 Amendment to the Matrimonial Causes Act, which was published in the same year as the new Act:

Beside this act on their behalf, (the Consolidating Act on Aggravated Assaults 24 and 25 Vic., c100), wives are able to obtain relief in certain cases, under the Divorce Act. That is to say, those women who are able to apply to the Divorce Court may obtain, under section 16 of the Act (20th and 21st Vict. c 85), on proof of cruelty, a sentence of Judicial Separation, which shall have the effect of a divorce a mensa et thoro.

This is taken from Frances Power Cobbes' essay 'Wife-Torture in England' [43] - an eloquent and well researched essay which argues against the inequitable Divorce Laws which failed to protect wives from conjugal brutality despite amendments to the 1857 Act. (Of the cases brought under Summary Jurisdiction there were reported 8,684 cases of cruelty in the years 1874-6) But, I would suggest that the terms employed by Cobbes could confuse. In omitting to mention for example, that proof of cruelty (unamended with adultery), requires evidence of the husband's conviction for aggravated assault within the meaning of the statute, she inadvertently gives the impression that the 1857 Act makes provision for cruelty

per se as acceptable grounds for divorce.

As for Hardy's Beaucock, his falling into ambiguities and misnomers is not inadvertent. He does not even trouble, for instance, to inquire of Melbury until they are in London, whether the plan is to remarry Grace, (which would require a divorce a vinculo - a divorce with permission to remarry); where, upon discovering that this is indeed so, and that the cruelty charge is not watertight, he writes hastily to warn off the unlucky Giles who is already making love to the timber-merchant's daughter in anticipation of her re-marriage. Confusion heaps upon confusion and ignorance upon malpractice, all of which devolves cruelly upon the Woodlander's two 'Arcadian innocents' whose talk of 'imperial law', Hardy writes, 'would have made a humane person weep'; the lovers remaining 'in thought like children in the presence of the incomprehensible' (W p309).

Thus it is that Melbury and his daughter, not surprisingly, fall foul of what Francis Peek, in 1878, denounced in the press as 'bad laws and...hap-hazard execution'. Peek, writing four years after Hardy appears to have first conceived his 'woodland story' and seven years before writing actually commenced, voices the mood of the times - times it seems, that would have thrown up a Beaucock without much difficulty:

The English nation has little right to boast of high culture or practical wisdom, for with us bad laws and a hap-hazard execution of them, are prominent evils... It has long been admitted that English law is in confusion, reaching sometimes to sheer unintelligibility...the point of

unbearableness in public endurance must be nearly reached; and it, consequently, behoves all true reformers to see that well-meant attempts to mitigate some of the evils do not take the place of the thorough revision of our legal procedure which is imperatively demanded. [44]

Perhaps it is not surprising either that Hardy's Sue is driven to upbraid English Laws as inhuman, brutal and unremittingly alien when her author had already pointed in that direction in The Woodlanders and when beyond the novel their 'sheer unintelligibility' was sufficiently iniquitous to be newsworthy.

Hardy's characterisation of Sue with her sexual repressions and inhibitions - her lack of that sensual luxuriance so dear to her author's heart - not only strikes the right note for an attack upon an austere marriage code and an oppressive sexual ethic; but also at a deeper structural level, permits him a clear, untrammelled focus upon the workings of a woman's mind; a focus which might lose something of its clarity were she endowed with a palpable physicality to which Hardy would be tempted to defer at times. Fascination with Sue's volatile, charismatic presence, might almost lure her author into

feeling, touching, and seeing her in the way he does Tess for example; who so captivates Hardy that he is moved to a tactile, sensuous awareness of her body; to reach out to the soft, mushroom-skin of her fore-arm, or into the glistening, red interior of her mouth. With Sue, Hardy averts his glance, and resists nearly all impulses to render her in terms that might lend her a warm, physical immediacy. It is upon Arabella instead that he rests his gaze, relishing her physical presence at every point throughout the novel. From the 'fine, dark-eyed girl' of the opening chapters, with her 'round and prominent bosom, full lips, perfect teeth, and the rich complexion of a Cochin hen's egg' (JOp44), whose 'mouth...bosom...full round naked arms, wet, mottled with the chill of the water, and firm as marble' rivet Jude to the spot against his intention (JOp46), right through to the hymn-singing matron at Kennetbridge Fair, Arabella's form is the object of Hardy's ranging, appreciative eye [45].

Alternatively, with Sue, Hardy permits Jude's more ascetic perceptions, in the main, to carry sway, effectively stemming his own impulse to colour her in more sensual tones. For it is through Jude's eyes primarily that the ethereal, sexless Sue is apprehended; although by permitting alternative sightings to augment those of his hero, notably Arabella's and occasionally his own, Hardy does ensure that a proper distinction is drawn between the respective points of view.

The distinction is an important one. For whilst Hardy

invites a close understanding of Jude, whose fascination with the 'ennobled' Sue has its roots in the hero's culturally conditioned fear and guilt about sex, - her 'sexlessness' being partly a fulfilment of Jude's prophetic imaginings and preconceptions, and partly the consequence of her own background and upbringing - it is also Hardy's intention to permit the reader a glimpse, for evaluative purposes, of the less conjectural Sue who prefigures these circumscriptions. Clearly this is not a Sue that Jude perceives; nor is it indeed a Sue who ever achieves self-actualisation; but it is a Sue that both Arabella and Hardy catch sight of, who is, in the event, more corporeal than ethereal and not, as Jude would have her 'a phantasmal, bodiless creature, one who...has so little animal passion...' (JOp268) *

The assimilation of Sue into Jude's Christminster dream - his dream of a nourishing world in which the 'Alma Mater' of his fantasies will cherish her lost 'beloved son' - is predicated by Hardy in the early chapters of Jude. It is evident from the hero's first sexual encounter with Arabella, that it is not just upon Christminster and Sue that he projects his 'yearning...to find something to anchor on, to cling to' (JO p30). Orphanism and presumably maternal deprivation, loneliness and isolation, have all wrought in him a desperate need for a reassuring, nourishing love object, and at some cost to his psycho-sexual development.

His initial overtures and responses to Arabella are

revealing. The 'dark-eyed' compelling creature who holds him to the spot against his intention excites in him both erotic passion and, contradictorily, a passive, child-like acceptance of her dominance. It is not his virility which is held in question. As he dwells upon his encounter with Arabella, so he is erotically aroused to a readiness which no amount of applying the mind to Greek studies and the hands to the temples will soften:

in the gliding and noiseless current of his life,...he felt as a snake must feel who has sloughed off its winter skin, and cannot understand the brightness and sensitiveness of its new one.

He would not go out to meet her, after all. He sat down, opened the book, and with his elbows firmly planted on the table, and his hands to his temples, began at the beginning... (JO pp48,49)

To no avail; no amount of bending hand and mind to the Greek Testament will harden the spirit against the flesh; or as Hardy so suggestively puts it:

In short, as if materially, a compelling arm of extraordinary muscular power seized hold of him - something which had nothing in common with the spirits and influences that had moved him hitherto. (JO p49)

Ready and able Jude may be, but Hardy's use of the passive tense here, implies a contradictory response in the young man's sexual make-up, which is shortly to reveal itself more overtly in the company of Arabella. For arrayed in his best clothes, Jude, Hardy tells us, 'struck away' over path and field in Arabella's direction where upon arrival he announces himself by knocking on the fair maid's door with the 'knob of his stick' (JO p50); and

then, all this virile masculinity notwithstanding, unexpectedly presents himself to his lover as something rather different - as an utterly puerile young man! As earlier, when he had sensed that he should toy with this voluptuous gratifier of his needs and 'assert more sportiveness' (JO p47); so again he decides to 'be good' and please her - not in any manly or chivalrous sense, or even as a companionable peer - but in an infantile way that inevitably places Arabella in the dominant role, and himself in the role of something resembling an agreeable little boy playing at being grown-up. He talks silly talk - the 'commonest local twaddle' in fact (JO p50) - and when their long walk has created a thirst, it is Arabella who takes the initiative and suggests tea, and when that is not forthcoming, it is she who suggests beer instead. Jude meanwhile is alternately gazing and moping and showing himself to be naive and helpless at every point.

Naturally he is shy and unused. But where is that remarkably efficient young man who can work through the early hours at lighting ovens and making bread, who then, sharp-eyed by day, manages to negotiate the texts of the patristic Fathers whilst driving a bread-cart through winding country lanes and delivering its contents to the community? Something very clinging, submissive and vaguely incompetent creeps into Jude's manner when with Arabella. And whilst we perceive in his over-identification with the departed schoolmaster (Phillotson), a pathetic need for a father figure whom he can emulate, with Arabella he is

easily lulled into a sense of false security which results, after weeks of love-making, in a marriage for which he had not bargained but which he has taken no steps to forfend.

It seems inevitable that Jude's first sexual experience - which reinforces his need for feminine solicitude, but which apparently does not inspire in him an active, assertive sex-drive - should leave him ill-equipped to cope with the sexually inhibited Sue. Whereas she can readily fulfil the role of loving cousin, fond kin, and companionable woman - these are familiar, socially approved roles - she cannot readily relate sexually. Her body as a vehicle of sensual gratification is foreign to her, and her ability to instigate the sexual act (as does Arabella) is impaired by the psychological handicaps inflicted upon her in infancy and girlhood. Hence her experience of being alternately elevated and patronised, leaves her, (as it also leaves Lewis Carroll's Alice - alternately shrunk too small and inflated too large), a very confused and frightened creature. Further repressed by Jude's desire for gratification, as opposed to a desire to gratify, had Sue had only the most tentative of sexual longings, Jude must surely have dispossessed her of them from the outset by high-ranking her over and above the sex act for which she is, he insists, too finely tuned and ethereal.

Even on the night of their sexual consummation, Jude so persistently distances Sue that their union is, as a result, unwittingly abased by the mode of its undertaking. That he is moved to express his desires openly, to declare

himself verbally, not only minimises the sensuality and sensitivity of the moment but also maximises its awkwardness. Moreover this supplicant role inevitably places Sue beyond him as the elevated figure to whom his plea is addressed, and thus necessarily limits the mutuality of the union which should not have to be argued out but rather sounded out by tactile means. Warming, softening gestures, gazing and touching, small affective intimacies, and prolonged body contact - these overtures Sue might have been able to 'answer'. But none of these little intimacies are engaged in. Neither is the hushed voice of rapture anywhere in evidence - Jude hectoring Sue instead from across the expanse of their living quarters:

All that's best and noblest in me loves you, and your freedom from everything that's gross has elevated me, and enabled me to do what I should never have dreamt myself capable of...It is all very well to preach about self-control, and the wickedness of coercing a woman. But I should just like a few virtuous people... to have been in my tantalizing position with you these late weeks.(JOp275)

How could Sue yield herself after this, out of any other feelings than guilt and responsibility, and a frightening sense that at all costs she must not appear 'gross' (sexually passionate), lest she lose that noblest and best love?

Her lover has already intensified her inhibitions by laying a stress upon the blood tie which he longs to foster. Again it is the need to belong, the desire for an anchorage, a yearning for nurturant kin which motivates

him. But this acts upon Sue as an additional repressor; the more Jude plays up the cousinship bond the more she anticipates a platonic bond. She, on the other hand, with her instinct to create or exploit pain-thresholds, seems to be suffering badly from sensory deprivation - and a greater need therefore, to be bonded by touch than by words.

Does Jude ever take seriously, or even take at all, Sue's aggressive/defensive postures? Her sudden animal starts and flights? Her enticement/rejection 'mating' overtures? Her self-confessed impulse to 'kick'? (JO p224) Only in so far as they seem to him to add to her mystification. He fails to perceive them otherwise - as a very pronounced, active, erotic impulse. But whereas he can read Arabella clearly - she is after all a classic text so to speak - Sue requires a good deal of translation. She has, as has been noticed above, been required to restate herself; to repress her physical appetites and to riddle her person with contradictory signals which fail to signify with Jude; whose regard for the 'other sex' (JO p47) as 'beings outside his life and purposes' (JO p46), has scarcely provided him with anything more than the most superficial of insights into human behaviour and the complexities of the human psyche. That Sue could be anything other than the 'phantasmal, bodiless creature' of his vague imaginings does not enter his head.

Hardy's heroine is trapped in this image by Jude, from the moment of his very first sighting of her. As he observes her - illuminating texts in an Anglican bookshop -

so she is assimilated into the atmosphere of Christminster which is also Jude's own atmosphere - he thinks! Having already identified closely with the city of his dreams:
Yes, Christminster shall be my Alma Mater; and I'll be her beloved son, in whom she shall be well pleased. (JOp43)

he shapes his world accordingly:

Although people moved round him he virtually saw none. Not as yet having mingled with the active life of the place it was largely non-existent to him. But the saints and prophets in the window-tracery, the paintings in the galleries, the statues, the busts, the gargoyles, the corbel-heads - these seemed to breathe his atmosphere. (JOp92)

Shifting his focus from dream city to dream woman, Jude then enters the bookshop containing

Anglican books, stationery, texts, and fancy goods: little plaster angels on brackets, Gothic-framed pictures of saints, ebony crosses that were almost crucifixes, prayer-books that were almost missals. He felt very shy of looking at the girl in the desk; she was so pretty that he could not believe it possible that she should belong to him. Then she spoke...and he recognized in the accents certain qualities of his own voice; softened and sweetened, but his own. (JOp95)

Framed by saints and angels, breathing 'his atmosphere' or 'his own' words, Sue is assimilated to Jude's illusive Christminster quite unconsciously: "'A sweet, saintly, Christian business, hers!" thought he' (JOp95). And then, as the 'more or less...ideal character about whose form he began to weave curious and fantastic day-dreams' takes a hold on his imagination, so her physical person takes on 'little plaster angel' likenesses; her pellucid, suggestively china-doll-like 'liquid

untranslatable eyes', keen and tender as they may be to Jude but nonetheless unseeing as they look right through him, and her lips which 'take life from some words just spoken', both lending her the air of an animated effigy, a marionette, a doll-woman (JO p96). She is in no sense fleshly or even a 'complete and substantial female', and certainly no 'complete and substantial female animal' as Arabella had been (JO p44). Instead she is 'all...nervous motion' (JO p96), 'mobile, living' - an electric, rather than a biological presence. To Jude she would be 'a kindly star, an elevating power, a companion in Anglican worship, a tender friend' (JO p97).

That he can so readily make this mental progression from 'star' to 'friend' is a measure of his willingness to blur the distinctions, where Sue is concerned, between illusion and reality. The stellar body, the elevating power, and the nun-like 'companion in Anglican worship' all devolve too swiftly and too weightily upon the 'tender friend' for it to be anything other than crushed.

With his hero subsequently absented so to speak, Hardy proceeds then to introduce his heroine from a contrasting vantage point - his own presumably since there is no other observer on the scene. And this is no ethereal, sainted Sue, but a very corporeal Sue with feet and hands and a restless, active body. 'Light-footed', she sets out on her afternoon's holiday, her 'atmosphere' now organic nature, and her previous sepulchred surroundings significantly distanced, or as Hardy says, 'left behind' (JO p100). And

no plaster angels for Hardy's heroine now, but rather Pagan statuettes which she first fingers, then clasps, then purchases, (after some un-spiritual price-bargaining), and then finally proceeds to carry home. Perceiving with some nervousness how very large and how very naked they are, and how their whitish substance comes off on her gloves and jacket, she wraps them up in 'huge burdock leaves, parsley, and other rank growths' from the hedge (JO p101), in order to bear them home undetected.

This is the first of Hardy's alternative sightings as they may be called. And what strikes us clearly is the noticeable absence of those idealisations and rarefications that abounded in Jude's first sightings. Hardy's Sue is no phantasma, nor is she ethereal, nor is she engaged in any kind of 'sweet, saintly...business.' Instead she bears home her 'heathen load'(JO p101), wraps it up yet again - this time in homespun brown paper and string lest the dreadful Miss Fontover should pounce on its impious contents - and spends the rest of the evening in a state of physical excitement. That is, in a 'great zest for unpacking her objects' she finally stops fingering them and 'unrobes' them, placing them candlelit upon her chest of drawers; and after a restless attempt to read Gibbon - alternately flinging herself on to the bed and jumping up again - she unrobes herself and spends most of the night 'tossing and staring' at her naked, lucent, pagan figurines.

And from this point on it is not Hardy who perpetuates the mystification of Sue, but Jude; his erstwhile sense in

Arabella's proximity of being 'whisked...back to a milk-fed infancy' (JO p189), now becomes a more conscious 'childlike yearning for the one being in the world to whom it seemed possible to fly' (JO p131). His cousin Sue will become his Alma Mater.

It is of course the case that it is Hardy who situates his heroine in the closed, sepulchred spaces of Anglican bookshops and the Cathedral Church of Cardinal College for his hero's delectation; surroundings conducive to Jude's need to nourish dreams of the beloved ensphered by plaster angels and psalmic chantings. But it is Jude, not Hardy, who fixes Sue in these confined, enclosed spheres; her author prefers to follow her out into the 'field' and back into the 'bedroom', where, with girlish nervousness she takes a self-conscious, tremulous glance at her barely-awakened sexual consciousness.

It is a very shortlived glance or exploration. Sue is subsequently drawn into Jude's orbit and thereafter Phillotson's, and there are no more assays of this kind. 'All that's best and noblest' in Jude's love for her is sustained by his belief in her 'freedom from everything that's gross' (JO p275), and Sue has no idea how to break the mould. (She cannot even bring herself to spell out the reasons why Miss Fontover stamped on her statuary; Jude remains under the misapprehension that they were offensive for their Popish-ness!) And in her ever-intensifying perplexity Sue defensively armours herself; she can and will ennoble Jude and she can and will sustain his belief

in her. Learned talk becomes her most effective weapon and her most effective shield. Heavily investing in this facility she is reassured that she is 'mistress of herself' (JOp176); which in turn (predictably) reassures Jude, who is lulled into a pacific awareness that her sweet baffling talk is all part of the Alma Mater mystique that he has no real desire to unriddle.

However if Jude chooses to read Sue thus, Arabella does not. And whereas Jude's perspective is central and Arabella's merely peripheral, hers gains credibility by virtue of being authorised. In the sense that her penetrating insights and less subjective appraisals are supplemented throughout the text by Hardy's own, her perception of Sue becomes in effect an amplification of Hardy's point of view and vice versa: that is to say, they are mutually vindicated.

Arabella is cast in a variety of roles in Jude; maid/seducer, wife/malcontent, lax single-parent, lawbreaker, respectable matron, barmaid, hot-gospeller and so forth. But as Sue's interpreter she is not so chameleon. This is her one immutable role (to date critically unappraised); and the most constructive role Hardy accords her. She perceives and offers one of the most coherent expositions of the heroine ever provided by a secondary antithetical character in the Wessex novels. And in according her this important role Hardy successfully realises two related objectives. Firstly it permits him a retention of critical distance which frees him from

exercising a purely 'masculine' judgement upon his heroine. Arabella 'standing-in' to offer a feminine point-of-view effectively mutes the authorial voice. Her 'last word' sets a seal upon that muted voice which defers to a 'feminine' last judgement upon Sue in the event. And secondly, as a corollary to the first, by drawing upon Arabella's sharp intuitive powers from the vantage point of woman-perceiving-woman unfettered by sexual ideologies and preconceptions, Hardy uses Arabella to ensure that the reader does not fall into the hero's error. Jude's perception of Sue, Hardy is asserting, is but one point of view, and for an alternative, the reader must explore further as Hardy's hero clearly fails to do.

Despite Arabella's living down to the low standards that are expected of her, seemingly conditioned to expect the least of her capabilities to be the best she can achieve, she is a woman of some potential - as Hardy intimates. Her sexual energies - being perhaps the outward expression of latent dynamic, creative energies which must needs find an outlet - do not detract from her physical skills and perceptual, intuitive faculties which are shown by Hardy to be remarkably keen.

Her isolated existence in a lonely roadside cottage, caring for a vegetable garden, a single pig and Jude, is clearly miserably unfulfilling, since she is of an adventurous, young and enquiring mind. But she applies herself to the task in hand with spirited vigour, and shows herself to be capable of performing skilled tasks with a

craftswoman's expertise. She evidently also has a markswoman's eye - she aims her missile at Jude in the chitterling episode and scores a an immediate hit! She evidently also has a discerning palate, being able to distinguish additives in adulterated ale after the briefest spell as a barmaid. And from her farming experience as a young girl she has acquired skills in pig husbandry which draw approval, if not from the reproachful Jude, at least from the professional slaughterer. Not least are her Thespian talents. Hardy describes with undisguised relish the 'extraordinary spectacle' of her performance in front of the Sunday walkers at Alfredstone, where
bonnet-less, her dishevelled hair blowing in the wind, her bodice apart, her sleeves rolled above her elbows for work, and her hands reeking with fat (JOp76),

she enacts, with perfect timing, the serio-comic role of the abused, slatternly maid. Jude needless to say is not amused.

Timing is Arabella's forte. Instinctively she prepares her dramatic exit from her unsatisfactory life with Jude, opportunely and with a flourish that would do credit to any Verismo [46] low-life heroine of the day. She extracts no promises or provisos, nor will she tolerate any long-drawn out scenes. Sue's exit from Jude's life by contrast, modelled as it appears to be upon the more conventional conjugal pattern of rejection, punishment and humiliation, which reduces Jude to grovelling before her and pleading to be 'saved', is a painfully destructive

affair. Mortified and stripped of all dignity and purpose Jude loses not only Sue but also his self-respect in the event.

Although it is not Hardy's purpose to invite us to like or sympathise with Arabella, it is evident that it is mainly by setting the novel's emotional temperature at a mercurial high - the exquisite passions and frenzied emanations flowing from Jude and Sue effectively supercharging the text to the exclusion of most else - that Arabella's more commonplace attributes are swamped. As a voluptuous, sexually active woman, she has of necessity to be gradually backgrounded in this way, in order that her later utterances are not discredited. It is for the same reason, we suspect, that Hardy re-introduces her later into the novel as successively a respectable married woman, a matronly widow, a chapel-goer, and finally as Jude's lawful wife. Arabella then holds her own well enough; and despite the anxious attempts of her prime detractors, Jude and Sue, to set themselves up by putting her down, we are never given any reason to doubt her judgement as a truthful reporter of all she witnesses. Unlike Sue, who makes as many riddles out of mind as out of body, Arabella scorns the language of men - even Jude's; neither does she show any sign of dependency upon creed or doctrine and is healthily free from prejudice and zealotry: that is, with the exception of her brief dalliance with the Chapel-going set. And even this Hardy turns to her advantage, for Arabella is no sooner the sanctimonious prude, than the new

quise is discarded and the woman's native honesty breaks through. Her efforts at salvation fail. But what does emerge from the Chapel incident is an exposition of her total lack of self-deception and pretension. This is all the more apparent for its contrast with Sue's struggle to confront the self, to remain true to it, and make herself responsible for her own actions. Desire and will conflict in Arabella, but piety, whilst it may look good, does not feel good to this earnest hymnist who protests that:

'Do what I will, and though I sing hymns wi' all my strength, I have not been able to help thinking about 'n; which I've no right to do as a chapel member.'

'Can't ye fix your mind upon what was said by the London preacher to-day, and try to get rid of your wandering fancies that way?'

'I do. But my wicked heart will ramble off in spite of myself!' (JOp325)

Unlike Sue in her affliction, who is driven to locate the source of her 'wickedness' in the 'Curse of Adam' (JOp356), Arabella abdicates not a whit of responsibility to any external force. And whilst we are aware that Sue - as the tormented heroine caught in the cross-fire of that 'deadly war' - is trapped in a far wider net, it is also evident that Arabella's spiritual void demands of her something of the courage of the existentialist orphaned from the all-caring, all-loving Divinity.

Had she succumbed to what Hardy describes as 'the serene heights of a soul conscious...of spiritual...superiority' (JOp324), we could trust to her faith but not at all to the integrity of her thoughts and

feelings. Or as Arabella herself expresses it:
Feelings are feelings!..I won't be a creeping
hypocrite any longer. (JOp326)

Hardy's immediate impulse at this stage of the novel has been to countermand the impression Arabella gives to Sue (and the reader) of smug self-righteousness in the moment of her 'serene heights' at the Kennetbridge fair. He leaves no temporal or spatial gaps in his narrative which might allow the reader to consolidate negative feelings against her; but rapidly shifts his focus from the hostilities between the women to Arabella's confrontation with her over-susceptible heart: 'I do dream sometimes o' nights quite against my wishes' (JOp325), she confides - and we are won!

Arabella alternately confounds and disarms us. This is so particularly at the scene of Jude's death where, with her total lack of reverence for death-bed conventions, she flies from the 'beautiful corpse' to the yet more beautiful day that beckons; to be left at the last advocating truths on Sue's behalf that the lovers had been barely able to acknowledge for themselves: that for all Sue's swearing to this or that cult or creed, she was no 'star', no 'phantasmal, bodiless creature', no 'sweet, saintly Christian' but a flesh and blood creature with womanly needs and a deeply passionate heart.

Widow Edlin has suggested that Sue has now found peace; but Arabella feels otherwise:

'She may swear that on her knees to the holy cross upon her necklace till she's hoarse, but it won't

be true!' said Arabella.

She's never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she's as he is now!' (JO p423)

Earlier in the novel, observing Jude and Sue walking together at the Wessex Agricultural Show, Arabella's jealousy gives way to an intense curiosity as she tries to determine the depth of the lovers' intimacy - the nature of their relationship. At first she is bitterly envious:

As far as they themselves are concerned they are the only two in the show. I should be ashamed of making myself so silly if I were he! (JOp302)

But with what Hardy here calls her 'sharpened vision' she progresses to a more analytical frame of mind, whereupon, in the form of an interior monologue spoken aloud, she communicates her thoughts as at the same time she watches the lovers from a distance. And the more she watches, the more convinced she is, for reasons entirely of her own, that the undemonstrative Sue of her first impressions is a woman of deeper feeling than she had suspected.

See how he looks round at her, and lets his eyes rest on her. I am inclined to think that she don't care for him quite so much as he does for her. She's not a particular warm-hearted creature to my thinking, though she cares for him pretty middling much - as much as she's able to; and he could make her heart ache a bit if he likes to try. (JOp302)

From feeling 'inclined to think that she don't care', to feeling that her heart could be made to 'ache a bit' is quite a progression. And an important one. Hardy is relying substantially upon Arabella here to report back her

findings with absolute accuracy to a reader to whom Sue is temporarily unobservable. Had he simply invited Arabella to make her final observation without preamble, whilst her insights into Sue's nature would still signify in their abbreviated form, they would nonetheless lose much of their impact and meaning in so far as the sense of there being a perceptive, analytical mind at work, would remain undisclosed.

The Sue that Arabella perceives is then a woman of deep feeling who does not however give an appearance of being deeply committed. But there is more in her face. Arabella declares, 'As for that body with him - she don't know what love is - at least what I call love! I can see in her face she don't' (JO p303). This more we then learn. That Sue is still sexually unawakened - or not yet orgasmic. As we have earlier gathered, Jude is susceptible enough to woman's 'unvoiced call' to man; and Arabella is quick to perceive that no such call is exerting its riveting or melting effect upon him now. In fact there is a singular lack of melting glances in the lovers' communications throughout this scene: the one major scene in the novel which offers the reader a glimpse of the halcyon days that intervened, for Jude and Sue, between the consummation of their relationship and its dissolution.

The scene of the Wessex Agricultural Show is one of those rare but significant occasions in Jude where Hardy 'watches' Sue in the company - as it were - of Arabella; co-ordinating his point of view with her own. Arabella has

spent a large part of the day tracking the lovers and watching them together, and as they enter the horticultural tent, she is still in their proximity. It is now Hardy's turn to speak:

In the meantime the more exceptional couple and the boy still lingered in the pavilion of flowers - an enchanted palace to their appreciative taste - Sue's usually pale cheeks reflecting the pink of the tinted roses at which she gazed; for the gay sights, the air, the music, and the excitement of a day's outing with Jude, had quickened her blood and made her eyes sparkle with vivacity. (JOp306)

As in the episode of the naked figurines, (Hardy's first alternative sighting of Sue), here is a picture of a young woman owning a decidedly physical presence. Responding in a highly sensuous manner to her surroundings, the immediacy and impact of her sensations is so strongly eidetic that it is evident that her author is perceiving her as closely as has been Arabella. And whilst he sees a vibrant, sensual woman, responding in a wholly physical way to the world of sound, sight, touch and smell - who must plunge her face into the rose blossoms and draw Jude close to her as she does so - so he also appears to sense her bodily rhythms - her breathings. They seem spontaneously to break through into the locutions of his narrative. Shifting from the mood of stillness and repose conveyed by such words as 'lingered' and 'reflecting', to the shorter, staccato notation of '...the tinted roses at which she gazed; for the gay sights, the air, the music...', the accelerated rhythmic pace approximates that catch-in-the-throat breathless excitement that emanates from his heroine. And

as these words alternately heave and cluster, from 'pavilion of flowers' to 'enchanted palace', from 'gaze' to 'eyes sparkling with vivacity', from the first lingering to the last 'quickenings', so the awareness of a palpitating, living, sexually aroused woman moves into Hardy's consciousness, stirs his vision, moulds his discourse.

This is not the Sue we usually see. Hardy has caught her as if unawares and unprepared; has drawn out her repressed soul from its self-confined interior spaces and released it back into the wider arena of the organic, biological world, where it surges into life. Arabella, who had accurately perceived in Sue a fractiousness, a 'fidgety' nervousness (JO p303), which to her had apparently signified sexual frustration, is now eaten away with curiosity to see how Jude will respond to his sensuously aroused companion. For as Hardy has observed:
what Arabella had witnessed was Sue detaining Jude almost against his will while she learnt the names of this variety and that, and put her face within an inch of their blooms to smell them. (JOp306)

From which we must infer that Jude has not completely given himself up to the moment; that unlike Hardy he is not fully engaged with the sensuous Sue at this point. Arabella on the other hand sees what Hardy sees, and although he now alters his discourse to accommodate her alternative point of view, there is no disjunction in terms of perception. Delivering Arabella's observations in the form of a single perfunctory phrase sandwiched between the dialogue which passes between the lovers, (a narrative

method which neatly approximates to Arabella's mood and quashed feelings), Hardy sets her perspective against his own: delivered as it has been in poetic effulgence. He retains with ease none-the-less, the simultaneity of their shared vantage points, as the following dialogue evidences. Sue, putting her face 'within an inch' of the rose blossoms tells Jude:

'I should like to push my face quite into them - the dears!' she had said. 'But I suppose it is against the rules to touch them - isn't it, Jude?'

'Yes, you baby,' said he: and then playfully gave her a little push, so that her nose went down among the petals.

'The policeman will be down on us, and I shall say it was my husband's fault!'

Then she looked up at him, and smiled in a way that told so much to Arabella.

'Happy?' he murmured. (JOp307)

What Arabella has perceived with her 'sharpened vision' and what Hardy has evoked so fully, is not however, so clear to Jude. Whether involuntarily or otherwise, he instinctively steers away from his hyper-sensitised Sue and propels her back into her dark interior spaces of mind - away from her warm, vibrant world and back to interrogatives:

'Happy?' he murmured.

She nodded.

'Why? Because you have come to the great Wessex Agricultural Show - or because we have come?' (JO p307)

The spell is broken. The woman who had shed her defensive armour just long enough to experience her body as a vehicle of rich and ecstatic sensation, is plummeted back into her old familiar role. She must explain herself again!

'You are always trying to make me confess to all sorts of absurdities. Because I am improving my

mind, of course, by seeing all these steam-ploughs, and threshing-machines, and chaff-cutters, and cows, and pigs, and sheep.' (JO p307)

Here as elsewhere Sue talks 'vaguely and indiscriminately to prevent his (Jude) talking pertinently' (JO p235); as the list of proliferating objects signifies. Not sufficiently composed to summon up her learned language just yet, she relies upon the phatic: upon mechanical objects and beasts far removed from her heightened sphere. With Jude's demand for verbal explanations she is once more back on the barricades, and for the moment any tactical defence will do. Detecting in her lover a resistance to her mood, to her physical excitement, which remains in want only of his reciprocal response, she falls back upon a barrier language as if in unconscious recognition of his need to invoke in her an intellectual response and to banish any physical response from his consciousness. And if her response seems more imbued with irony than with seriousness, her subsequent abstraction as she drifts into a discourse on 'Greek seriousness' and 'Christminster luminaries' soon dispels that impression. It is something of a paradox that the withdrawn and distanced Sue is now to Jude the more familiar, reassuring figure - her lover being, as Hardy says, 'content with a baffle from his ever evasive companion' (JO p307).

In this brief episode a remarkable amount is happening. Hardy 'sees' Sue, Arabella 'sees' Sue, and Jude 'sees' Sue. Yet it is ostensibly the person who loves her

the most who 'sees' the least. The Jude who had, on one isolated occasion and in a sexually alert frame of mind following a night with Arabella, actually registered Sue's attractions and rested his eyes and thoughts upon 'the delicate lines of her profile, and the small, tight, apple-like convexities of her bodice' (JO p196), has more customarily so great a need to shape Sue according to his imaginings that he frequently fails altogether, to register her physical, bodily, person. For example, on the night when Sue arrives with her river drenched clothes clinging, rather suggestively one might suppose, to her small body, Jude apprehends her in wholly abstract terms. Her hands, he perceives to be as 'clammy as a marine deity'; and her wet clothes cling to her 'like the robes upon the figures in the Parthenon frieze' (JO p151).

So too at the Wessex Agricultural Show. With 'Greek seriousness' upon Sue's lips and content upon Jude's face, the pattern is by now a familiar one. And as fast as Sue is discomposed - alienated from her 'self', reality, her lover - so Jude remains unaware that with her glide back on to the 'frieze' she has also slipped back into repression; Hardy confirming the fact of her emotional/sexual withering by reinvoking his hermeneutics of her 'blossoming'. For just as the roses whose pink blooms were earlier linked with Sue's flushed cheeks, (tumescence), so now, as she is drained of her 'quickened blood', those same blooms will wither; or in the words of little prophetic 'Time', all will be 'withered in a few days!' (JO p301)

In this episode Sue is shown less ethereal than elevated, less frigid than refrigerated, and less wanting in sexual responsiveness than in a sexually responsive lover. Hardy's and Arabella's vision of Sue conflicts quite openly with Jude's Alma Mater. Sexless she is not. Sexually frustrated she may be.

This much Hardy intimates elsewhere; notably in the post-nuptial scene where Jude and Sue are breakfasting after their first night as lovers. It is not in this instance, to the literal meaning of words, gestures, activities and events that Hardy addresses himself, but to their metonymic function. Were we to read this scene without an awareness of resemblances, as an evocation of a 'morning after' scene without interpreting what kind of 'morning after' Hardy is driving at, it would be one of the most pointless scenes in the novel. But as it happens it is one of the most revealing.

Most telling are moods; and Hardy's play upon them. Jude, we discover, is in a buoyant mood, 'gaily' making plans for marriage. Sue is on the other hand, subdued and preoccupied: 'A glow had passed away from her and depression sat on her features' (JOp276). This is hardly the manner of a woman rapt in post-orgasmic repose. Furthermore, Jude not only acts 'gaily' but also relaxes 'placidly' - clear symptoms of an easeful frame of mind and body. And whilst Sue returns Jude's kisses 'in a way she had never done before', this (ambiguous phrase) suggests more dutiful compliance than arousal - given her dull

depression. And it is in keeping with her chastened mood, that, contrite and meek, and bound upon a course of 'strange and unnecessary penance', she leaves Jude with the melancholy thought that she is a bird 'caught at last' who shows sadness in her smile (JO p277).

The pattern of behaviour that Hardy evokes, not only points to Sue's lack of sexual fulfilment with Jude, but enacts it. These morning gestures mimic the act of lovemaking itself - subtly, poetically, and convincingly. The active/passive conjunction of high/low temperature emotions as they are manifest in Jude's behaviour - his initial elevation and subsequent placidity - approximates to coital excitement and post-emission lassitude respectively. By the same token, where Jude's behaviour mimics the heightened emotion/low tension ease of sexual activity, so Sue's meekness, contriteness and wistful sadness - all non-kinetic emotions - mimic her repressed, inhibited response to Jude. For if we recall, Sue had been won the night before by coercion; by the needy Jude's frustration, irritation, and vociferous recriminations. But having been won, she is then denied physical release from her emotional tensions; for Jude's pledge of faith in his lover's absence of what he calls grossness, invites no free sexual expression but rather passivity and chaste decorum. She beds him therefore out of guilt and anxiety (Hardy does not suggest otherwise); the most powerful of all repressors upon the feminine sensibility.

In much the same mood of conflicting feelings, but now

secure in her mind that she has fully claimed Jude as her own, Sue sets off to visit Arabella, who had, on the previous day, intimated that it was she, as Jude's lawful wife, who had the prior claim upon him. Arabella had detected in Sue's troubled manner as they had stood talking at the door, a perceptible unease which she had rightly intuited as Sue's feeling at a disadvantage in this confrontation. Sue is presumably troubled that the more voluptuous woman has the stronger hold upon Jude. But the self-assurance which had yesterday been Arabella's is now diffused as Sue - newly in the ascendent - confronts her rival on equal terms. Comparing herself favourably with Arabella's frowsiness, playing the Lady Bountiful, rebuffing Arabella's open-hearted gesture as she proffers the telegram, Sue stands on her pride and dignity throughout; with just a touch of triumph about her. But it is her chagrin at Arabella's sharp perception of her which is significant (for our purposes), here. 'He is mine' says the heroine stiffly:

'He wasn't yesterday.'

Sue coloured roseate, and said 'How do you know?'

'From your manner when you talked to me at the door.' (JOp278)

For all her morning-bed frowsiness and having to accommodate Sue's superior attitude, Arabella is as astute now as always. Disadvantageous circumstances do not urge her to place an emotional colouration upon her observations; nor is she intimidated by her opponent's ascendancy over her.

As Sue's advocate then, Arabella is exemplary. Her clear unprejudiced judgement and observant reportage provides an alternative, and well authorised commentary in Jude. Her insight into the highly individual, spontaneous Sue as a passionate, sensual woman struggling to break from the curbing, uniform, 'ennobled' mould which imprisons, is Hardy's original heroine. Physically, intellectually, and emotionally she is well equipped for the modern world and liberation, but psychologically she has been shaped to a single pattern and circumscribed for bondage.

Autobiographically, and with no apparent intention of cross-linking his own beliefs with those of his heroine, Hardy does however, endorse her point of view in the following desideratum:

I consider a social system based on individual spontaneity to promise better for happiness than a curbed and uniform one under which all temperaments are bound to shape themselves to a single pattern of living. (Life p258)

NOTES

1. Frederick Engels
The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State
(London, 1972) p 44.
2. Mona Caird is so noticeably an exception to the more conventional late nineteenth century feminist, that she warrants a mention here. Author of The Wing of Azrael (London, 1889); The Daughters of Danaus (London, 1894); The Morality of Marriage and other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Woman (London, 1897), as well as a number of polemical articles, she shared Hardy's antipathy for the marriage convenances of the day - her critical attack being levelled at the Victorian marriage contract in particular. Understandably she suffered publication difficulties. She approached Hardy in January 1890 to enlist his help in the publication of her article entitled 'Evolution in Marriage', but despite his recommendation to Percy Bunting, editor of The Contemporary Review, the latter declined the article. See The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy Edited by R L. Purdy and Michael Millgate (Oxford, 1987) 1978) 2 vols. Volume 1. 1840-1892, pp207-8.
In March of the same year however The Fortnightly Review (Vol. CCLXXIX. March, 1890. pp310-330), did publish Caird's 'The Morality of Marriage' - which, given its judicious air, may well be a sanitised version of the earlier (inadmissible) product.
3. Olive Schreiner Women and Labour. Edited by A Van der Spuy and A Van der Spuy (Johannesburg, 1975) p 118.
4. Carol Bauer and Lawrence Ritt Free and Ennobled (Oxford, 1979) p290.
5. *ibid.*, p 292
6. Elaine Showalter A Literature of Their Own. British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing (London, 1978) p185.
7. J.S. Mill Three Essays (London, 1975) pp462-3
8. See S M. Elkins Slavery: a problem in American institutional and intellectual life. (Chicago and London, 1968) See also Frank Tannenbaum Slave and Citizen: the negro in the Americas (London, 1946)
9. By the turn of the century, the theories of Weismann had been widely discussed and variously amended or compounded. To the fore in this field was the leading Positivist of the day, Frederick Harrison - see 'The Emancipation of Women',

The Fortnightly Review 1891 Vol 56. pp443-4. See also Havelock Ellis Man and Woman: a Study of Secondary Sexual Character (London, 1894)

Feminist protests against this trend seem to have been ineffectual. Maria Grey had, in 1879, suggested that if woman were removed from her 'normal condition of subjection and confinement to the narrowest interests of life', it would soon enough become apparent that her proneness to 'that class of defects' so peculiar to her sex, would be eliminated: 'We shall find that it is in the condition, and not in the sex, that those defects are inherent'. See Maria Grey's 'Men and Women', The Fortnightly Review November 1. 1879 Vol.XXVI pp672-685.

Gaining strength from the organicists, the geneticists, and finally the eugenicists, the late nineteenth century scientist finds an apt spokesman in Professor Lombroso. For example, see his article entitled 'The Physical Insensibility of Woman', The Fortnightly Review March 1 1892. Vol LV11 pp354-7 Here Lombroso (having availed himself of the use of such technological devices as the algometer) offers some of the fruits of his research into the human brain. The female brain is not only smaller, but also, Lombroso claims, less able to exert neural controls, and to stimulate sensory sensitivity, than is the case with the male brain: woman's brain, it is suggested, is neurologically inferior to man's.

Hardy was familiar with Weismann's theories. See The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy Edited by Lennart Bjork 2 Vols. (Gothenburg, 1974) Vol.1 pp 95, 144-5, 153. He was also in correspondence with Ellis, (see Purdy and Millgate, op. cit., Vol 1.p 117; Vol 2. p83.) And with Frederick Harrison he was on visiting terms (see Purdy and Millgate, op. cit., Vol 1. pp 133,176,251; Vol 2. pp 294,296) He was therefore closely in touch, although not necessarily in sympathy with, the views of these influential men.

10. Sara Delamont and Lorna Duffin (Editors) The Nineteenth Century Woman (London, 1978) p76
11. Laurence Lerner shares this view. He suggests that the idealisation of the wife represented a kind of emancipation. See Love and Marriage. Literature and its Social Context (London, 1979) p 139.
12. 'Doll-madonna' is George Eliot's phrase. See Delamont and Duffin, op. cit., p 201
13. Lerner writes: 'The New Women of the 1890s - distinguishably different from the organized feminists - were certainly associated with a rejection of marriage, but it is not easy to discover the reality of these bloomed, bicycling, cigar-smoking creatures, the Sue Brideheads and

the Herminia Bartons.' (Lerner, op. cit., p170)

The problems that arise from applying a generalised catchphrase as if to clarify a typology is well illustrated by Lerner. The New Woman, who was born phoenix-like from the ashes of the 'Girl of the Period' of the late 1860s, is possibly Sue Bridehead's mother but not Sue. We recall that Sue's mother fled marriage, husband, and infant; and was thereafter vilified by Sue's father. In so acting, she displays precisely the 'flighty' behaviour and 'corrupted' modern morals which so outraged the 'Girl of the Period's most ferocious critic of the late 1860s - Mrs Lynn-Linton.

Constance Rover argues that the New Woman tended to be neo-Malthusian. This also seems to exclude Hardy's Sue. See Rover, Love, Morals and the Feminists (London, 1970) p 132. Sue is not then, Lerner's bloomed, bicycling, cigar-smoking creature; nor is she of Shaw's sandal-wearing 'village' set; nor is she a Fabian; nor is she of the Annie Besant league - propagandising contraception. Possibly the time has come to dispense with the 'New Woman' label in Sue's case.

14. Delamont and Duffin, op. cit., pp 12,16.
15. Delamont and Duffin, op. cit., p 16
16. See Fulford's Votes for Women, and D.Read's Edwardian England. Note also the Manchester Guardian's (1871) assertion that the admission of women to the franchise was only a question of time and that time was likely to be short! Note also the quiet optimism, and not a little complacency, of Millicent Garrett Fawcett in 1886: 'Woman's suffrage will come as a necessary corollary of other changes...it will be a political change...based on social and educational and economic changes which have already taken place...a public recognition by the State that the lot of woman in England is no longer what it was at the beginning of the century.'
17. A Dictionary of Modern History .1789-1945 Edited by A W.Palmer (Harmondsworth, 1962) p 316
18. J.S.Mill, op. cit., p520
19. The most extreme example given by Elkins is the 'closed' system of the Nazi Concentration Camp where it was observed that certain approval-seeking internees not only incited in-group hostilities and aggression, but were also capable of treating their peers with a brutality that exceeded, on occasion, that of their warder.
20. See also Chapter One.
21. Engels, op. cit., p134.
22. G.W.Sherman notes in Hardy, not only a 'startling comparison in ideas and imagery to Engels', but also an

affinity with Marxist thought as expressed in the preface to Capital. See G.W.Sherman The Pessimism of Thomas Hardy (New Jersey and London, 1976) pp 262, 291, 410, 420, 422, 425, 434.

23. Engels, op. cit., p 145
24. This is, as yet, a noticeably under-researched area. Sherman's useful study is by no means comprehensive. See also Lennart Bjork op. cit., Vol.1 pp 199-203 for brief references to Hardy's study of Fourier, as well as his forthcoming publication Psychological Vision in the novels of Thomas Hardy - in which Bjork discusses the influence of Fourier on Hardy.
25. Bauer and Ritt, op. cit., p266.
26. See Mrs Henry Fawcett's introduction to Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women (London, 1891)
27. See earlier discussions of Tess criticism in Chapter 111. See also Tess reviews published in Thomas Hardy. The Critical Heritage Edited by R.G.Cox (London, 1970) pp178-248
28. Blackwoods Magazine Jan.1896. clix, pp135-49. See also The Saturday Review Feb. 1896 lxxxi, pp153-46, which reads: 'The peculiar matrimonial difficulties of...Sue have been treated ad nauseam in the interests of purity...Her sexual pathology has roused the common reviewer to a pitch of malignant hatred'.
29. Lawrence Stone The Family Sex and Marriage. In England 1500-1800. (London, 1977) p 666.
30. ibid., p 667.
31. ibid., p 667.
32. ibid., p 664.
33. Engels, op. cit., p236.
34. I have drawn here upon Ivan Illych's discussion of institutions and the institutionalisation of values. See his Deschooling Society. (Middlesex, 1971) See also Harold Orel's forthcoming essay, 'Hardy's view on human law and human justice' to be published in ELT. Orel maps Hardy's close, continuing interest in contemporary legal processes; he also discusses Hardy's awareness of the problems caused by the institutionalisation of human values and behaviour.
35. Edward Shorter, 'Illegitimacy, Sexual Revolution and Social Change in Modern Europe', The Family in History. Interdisciplinary Essays. Edited by Theodore

- K.Rabb and Robert I.Rotberg (New York and London, 1971) p 67,68.
36. *ibid.*, p 68
 37. *ibid.*, p59
 38. S.B.Kitchin A History of Divorce (London, 1912) p 182.
 39. I quote here the 1857 Statute.
 40. The last recorded wife sale took place in Sheffield in 1881. See Bauer and Ritt, *op. cit.*, p166
 41. Ronald Pearsall The Worm in the Bud. The World of Victorian Sexuality (Middlesex, 1969) See Pearsall's chapter on Divorce, pp215-232.
 42. See O.R. McGregor. Divorce in England (London, 1957). McGregor discusses the 1857 Act in detail, including the fact that the provisions for decentralising (Divorce Courts were London based) did not really take effect till after the First World War; and concludes that one law for rich and one for poor (magistrates court separation - post 1878 Act) continued until the Legal Aid and Advice Act of 1949.
 43. Frances Power Cobbes, 'Wife-Torture in England', The Contemporary Review 1878. Vol.XXX11, pp55-87.
 44. Francis Peek, 'The Miscarriage of Justice', The Contemporary Review 1878. Vol.XXX11, pp100-115.
 45. With James Gibson's discovery of marginalia in Hardy's own copy of Jude, any doubts as to the appreciativeness of Hardy's eye, may be assuaged. For where Arabella's 'inflated bosom' rises and falls as she sings at her matutinal worships in Hardy's vision of her at Kennetbridge (JO p325); in the margin of his personal edition this has been amended to a phrase of Browning's which reads 'Breast's superb abundance' - a more luxuriant, less impoverished image, from a singularly unimpoverished imagination. Hardy was eighty years old at the time! See Gibson, 'Hardy and His Readers', Thomas Hardy Edited by Norman Page (London, 1980) p207
 46. Verismo is the term given to 'decadent' or 'realistic' opera - much in vogue in the 1890s (Puccini) - treating with low-life characters.

Conclusion

Many Victorian novelists dealt with the fortunes or misfortunes of young women growing to maturity. And many approached the subject with seeming sympathy. In what respects then does Hardy differ from his contemporaries in his treatment of women? The first point to consider is the question of typology. Hardy's heroines are endowed with unusually robust health and vigorous, rebounding spirits. But they are not simply physically fit and energetic, they are also emotionally and intellectually vigorous. They are, in fact, wholly unwilling to submit to male coercion, and are prepared to challenge the moral codes and practices of their essentially male-dominated world. Hardy created then, not only compelling but active, courageous heroines, none of whom gives up without a prolonged struggle. Each and every one is oppressed by subjection and fear and has due cause to wilt or fade, yet not one gives in to passive submission. This leads us on to conclude two important points about Hardy's treatment of women in the novels. First, there is the fact that for all his sympathies with the underprivileged male in his fiction, there is no doubt that for Hardy it is the feminine experience which is more intensely frustrating, anxious, anguished. And second, each and every major Hardy heroine is, so to speak, a fighter. Women are, in other words, the most appropriate candidates for heroism.

Leading on from this - Hardy's portrayal of unusually strong, heroic women - is his highly individual manner of treating with the moral watchdog. Where he, the author, takes pains to deny himself the right of standing in judgement on his women, so too he resolves to allow the male censor in his fiction - the pedagogical Knight, the spying Oak, the policing Venn - to emerge as less than noble in his role of moral overseer. This testifies to an implicit criticism in Hardy that levels itself at the puritanical moral bully and his highly questionable motivation. Not one male character engaged in such a role effectively benefits the community as a direct result of his moral coercion. On the contrary, such activity enforces so constraining a moral pressure upon the subject - the censoriously monitored woman - that her nerve, in fact, fails. Hitherto strong in her self-determination and open-hearted in conducting her affairs, she is eventually driven into corners so guilt-ridden and fearful that the chances of emerging morally strengthened are remote. Personal judgement then gives way to an undue concern with appearances and the trust essential to a healthy, productive community is wholly undermined. Hardy clearly cannot approve the socially approved method of subduing women. The inculcation of guilt may be an effective means of maintaining male dominance and female subordination, but in Hardy's book it constitutes both a tyranny and a destructive force. That Hardy then refuses to identify with such characters indicates an attitude to women in his fiction that does not usually characterise the Victorian

novelist.

Clearly, Hardy approves a bounding sexual nature in his heroines. His concern is to acknowledge the desire for sexual expression and sexual self-knowledge in women. This is not a notion that feminist theorists at the time - for whom Millicent Garrett Fawcett is plausibly the spokeswoman - were prepared to advance. Hardy was no Grundyist. He presented, not Victorian dolls, but modern, liberated heroines with sexual needs. Even the repressed Sue is shown to possess sexual needs; that these manifest themselves in the form of inhibition and fear says a good deal about Hardy's insight into female sexuality. This aspect of Hardy's treatment of women in the novels places him beyond the range of the nineteenth-century liberal feminist. His radicalism places him more fittingly in the twentieth century - and none too far from the modern sexual liberationist at that.

From the manifold diversity of Hardy's themes and characterisations then, it can be claimed that sexual liberation and the author's caring feeling for woman's plight constitute a major concern in the Wessex novels. The next point that follows on from this is that Hardy's characterisation of women springs not from a masculine-superior consciousness or from misogynistic leanings, but from a deeply empathetic, psychologically perceptive sensibility. From Elfride's struggle to confront her lover candidly on issues of sexual misunderstanding, to Sue's attempts to break free from what Hardy calls in the Life (p 258) the 'curbed and

uniform...shape' in which she has been moulded from birth, the feminine experience of frustration and pain is conveyed by Hardy with insight and sympathy. In full accord, in this instance, with John Stuart Mill's dictum that each and every individual should be granted the opportunity to prove his or her own capacities by trial, so that the world would have the benefit of the best faculties of all its inhabitants, Hardy proceeds to display his heroine's best faculties in the realistic context of their less than perfect natures. That the world they inhabit is not yet ready to embrace sexual equality - that it refuses to grant to women the opportunities it grants to men - is a fact of life for Hardy that becomes an increasingly dominant theme in his work. The 'prosaic reality' that underlies the 'pastoral idyll' in Far From the Madding Crowd, where two aspiring farmers rise to prosperity but only the female contender (Bathsheba) is denied the legal rights, social and economic benefits and privileges accorded to the male, is a singularly harsh reality. Similarly, in the darker world of Jude the Obscure, which finds one aspiring school teacher (Sue) suspended for (supposedly) unethical conduct while her male counterpart (Phyllotson) continues in office following an inquiry into his unethical conduct, the realities of the sexual double-standard are exposed by Hardy.

Parity between the sexes is Hardy's platform from first to last, although initially he was obliged, in the interests of propriety, to observe the orthodoxies. This leads on to a further conclusion - that of strategy changes

in Hardy. For reasons fully explored in Chapter Two, the opportunity for presenting a sexually aware, unconventional heroine at the outset of his career, raised uncomfortable questions for the author and his editor - not least the question of the former's suitability as a periodical writer. Despite his efforts to conform, Hardy's characterisation of Elfride Swancourt does 'grow' alarmingly unconventional and her author accordingly is driven to glaze his text with judicious overtones to satisfy Mrs Grundy. Hardy then enters the Victorian middle-class drawing room with some difficulty, and having gained access, and keeping one eye on the proprieties and the other on his own revolutionary fervour, he secures permanent tenure, so to speak.

Feigned conformity in A Pair of Blue Eyes is followed up with the more subversive texts of Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native. And by the time of the publication of Tess judicious overtones are entirely absent in Hardy's discourses. Openly supporting his less than orthodox creation, he takes his stand. What may be termed his oppositional stance is plainly in evidence, and his advocacy of Tess is undisguised. Hardy has by now developed a poetic prose mode of remarkable complexity and subtlety, and if Elfride's characterisation suffered at the behest of custom so Tess's benefits in the process. He has developed subversive literary techniques to a sufficiency and the question of standing in judgement upon woman has now become, in itself, questionable.

Hardy emerged from early stylistic difficulties to develop, as his novels proceeded, a poetic prose style of unquestionable literary skill. It seems reasonable to conclude that he gained certain psychic, as well as artistic, insights from his capacity to integrate the anguish he experienced at the hands of his harsher critics. Just as Tess, no less an 'outsider' than Hardy, owns a facility - 'long spells of power' - for keeping emotional tumult 'in hungry subjection' (TD pp236,237) as she struggles with the prospect of impending judgement, so Hardy, feeling from first to last a social outcast, suppressed his early revolutionary fervour and kept in hungry subjection his dark anxieties over public rejection. From a deep understanding of how it felt in reality to be subject to repeated checks, to be ridiculed and patronised, Hardy succeeded in conveying, through his characterisations of women, the feminine experience of psychical wounding and emotionally suppressed frustration and misery. And in liberating his heroines by returning to them the sexual nature so long denied to their sisters in life, he kept firmly before the Victorian reader a permanent reminder of the tyranny under which so many women lived.

The Internal Dating of 'Far From the Madding Crowd'

The internal dating of Far From The Madding Crowd has been set variously at 1840, the 1860s, and 1869-73. John Bayley writes in his introduction to the novel that 'Bathsheba is a young woman of the 1840s', whereas C J.Weber's dating, based on calendar evidence, sets the action in years 1869-73.

Bayley's dating becomes problematical if the Boldwood who features in The Mayor of Casterbridge, (set in the 1840s), - a 'silent, reserved young man', (MC p244)- is to be at the same time the middle-aged suitor of Far From the Madding Crowd. Hardy's optional placing of Boldwood suggests an intended temporal gap; approximately twenty to thirty years between the two novels, which would allow the young Boldwood to mature.

This then favours Weber's dating; which is also supported by information provided by F R.Pinion, who records (A Hardy Companion, [p504]) that Boldwood's farm in Far From the Madding Crowd is modelled upon a farm known to Hardy as Druce Farm. The house was built in 1867. This shows that Hardy imagined the action taking place in the late 1860s/early 1870s. (Pinion says early sixties [ibid p440]; but this is too early. Boldwood's house - of which he is tenant - has already been built before the novel's action

begins, and is in fact 'cobwebbed' [FFMC p137]; which suggests that the house is not new.)

Further evidence for a contemporary setting comes from Hardy himself; who shows every indication of having entered the here-and-now of his environs into the life of the novel:

While thus in the seclusion of Bockhamton, writing Far From the Madding Crowd, we find him on September 21, walking to Woodbury Hill Fair, approximately described in the novel as 'Green-Hill Fair'...(my italics)

In reference to the illustrations, I have sketched in my note-book during the last summer a few correct outlines of smockfrocks, gaiters, sheep-crooks, rick-staddler, a sheep-washing pool, one of those old-fashioned malt-houses, and some other out-of-the-way things that might have to be shown. (Life pp96,97)

I have decided to finish it here, which is within a walk of the district in which the incidents are supposed to occur. I find it a great advantage to be actually among the people described at the time of describing them. (Life p99)

The second extract refers of course to the serial publication illustrations - Hardy also volunteering the comment that he hoped...

the rustics, although quaint, may be made to appear intelligent, and not boorish at all. (Life p97)

Clearly Hardy would abolish the generic caricature of Hodge; and would create, down to the last crook and gaiter, a contemporary world. Even Bathsheba's flippancy in sending Boldwood a valentine is 'modern' in Hardy's book, who speaks of 'the regarding of valentines as things of serious import' as outdated. (Preface to FFMC) Impressionistically the novel reads, if only for its 'modern' concern with

marriage laws, as contemporary; a view endorsed by R J.White in Thomas Hardy and History who writes that 'the time and the events of the tale (was) almost contemporary'. (ibid p3)

Finally there is Hardy's 1895-1902 Preface to Far From the Madding Crowd, which also supports the

70's dating:

The village called Weatherbury, wherein the scenes of the present story are for the most part laid, would hardly be discernible to the explorer, without help, in any existing place nowadays; though at the time, comparatively recent, at which the tale was written, a sufficient reality to meet the descriptions, both of backgrounds and personages, might have been traced easily enough...the heroine's fine old Jacobean house would have been found in the story to have taken a witch's ride of a mile or more from its actual position.

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Note

The following titles are listed chronologically; and periodicals are abbreviated as follows:

<u>Westminster Review</u>	WR
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