

**Morality in Thomas Hardy's Fiction with
reference to His Major Novels**

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Doctor of Philosophy**



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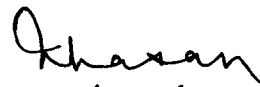
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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the thesis entitled **Morality in Thomas Hardy's Fiction with reference to His Major Novels** is the record of research work done by Joseph T. J under my supervision. The candidate has been duly registered as a Ph.D student under this university and his work or portion thereof has not been submitted for any research degree in this or any other university.

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(Prof. Noorul Hasan)

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INTRODUCTON

The fundamental content of Hardy's morality is the belief in the necessity of remaining true to one's authentic self. Closely linked to this is his intense recognition of the inscrutable, incomprehensible cosmic forces over which man has little or no control at all. Hence, the need for compromise and accommodation. When it comes to the inevitable interplay between the individual and society, Hardy seems to adopt a very balanced, common sense attitude, shifting his allegiance according to the intrinsic merit of the case.

Before we explore further into the essential moral vision of Hardy, we have to examine the morality of the novel as an art form and the divergent philosophical opinions about the moral quality of human action or conduct in social life. When does a work of art become moral or immoral from the artistic point of view? Should an artist become a moral preacher? Should he write with a moral purpose? Ever since the novel came into being as a particular literary genre in the eighteenth century, there have been polarising opinions about the morality of the novel. Speaking of morality in the novel, D.H. Lawrence observes:

Morality in the novel is the trembling instability of the Balance. When the novelist puts his thumb in the scale to pull down the balance to his own predilection that is immorality.¹

What Lawrence means is that a novelist should not use the medium of the novel to preach and propagate his own set of beliefs, dogmas and creeds. While every creative writer has the right to hold on to his personal convictions, he should resist the temptation to impose those views on the reader. In other words, a moral novel must be 'open-ended'. This is, however, not the view of majority of the eighteenth and nineteenth century novelists. They have all been invariably great moralists, writing with the moral purpose of instructing and educating the readers. Henry Fielding, Samuel Richardson, William Thackeray, Charles Dickens and even George Eliot were all moral preachers. George Bernard Shaw was a propagandist writer, using his plays as a vehicle for the transmission of his ideas to transform and convert his readers to his own set of beliefs. By and large, the novelists have been divided on the question of the morality of the novel.

Thomas Hardy as a novelist has, however, maintained a fine balance, not supporting any particular set of beliefs or structures of thought. It is this balance which gives ambivalence to his fictional

imagination, especially in the later novels. This ambivalence in its turn makes his novels artistically moral. Hardy has never been a moral preacher in the fashion of Samuel Richardson or Thackeray or George Bernard Shaw. He has repeatedly declared that his novels are only 'a series of seemings or impressions' about life. In a letter written to someone about December, 1920 Hardy wrote:

A friend of mine writes objecting to what he calls my "philosophy" (though I have no philosophy-merely what I have often explained to be only a confused heap of impressions, like those of a bewildered child at a conjuring show)²

Elsewhere, Hardy has acknowledged that his views are mere impressions that frequently change. And this change of impressions is acutely perceptible in his imaginative journey from *Far From the Madding Crowd* to *Jude the Obscure*.

For any great artist morality is first and foremost being true to one's own perception and vision of life at a given cultural and historical point. And Hardy is indisputably true to his perception of life, for his imaginative works are records of felt life. We should not forget the fact that Hardy's novels achieve their force and vitality in the context of doubt, skepticism and ambivalence of attitude. According to R.L.Stevenson, 'truth to the fact of life is morality'.³ In the opinion of Flaubert, even the obscene books

become immoral only if they are deficient in truth. It is the universal truth of Hardy's apprehension of life that elevates him to the rank of a great and true artist. The morality of the novel as a form of art must be judged by how far it is truthful to the existential conflicts and tensions of life. And Hardy shows this eternal conflict between man and the universe; and between man and his social environment. In this connection it is apt to recall the observation made by D. H. Lawrence: 'If a novel reveals true and vivid relationships, it is a moral work, no matter what the relationship may consist in.'⁴ No novelist is more deeply and persistently occupied than Hardy with man's cosmic and social relationships. His chief concern is with the total man in his relationship with the incomprehensible universal forces and the immediate socio-cultural context. Therefore, judged from the artistic point of view, Hardy's works remain truly moral.

The second kind of morality which is the chief focus of this dissertation is the moral quality of human action, behaviour and attitude in Hardy's novels. In this sphere, Hardy is simultaneously occupied with the morality of the individual self as well as that of society. Hardy resents socially disruptive tendencies of individualism as well as irrational social arrangements which destroy the authentic individual. Thus we may argue that his novels are a simultaneous celebration of the authentic individual's

autonomous 'subject position' and the natural communal ethos of a given society. But here, too, Hardy remains critical, and hence, artistically moral, for D.H. Lawrence argues that 'every work of art adheres to some system of morality. But if it be really a work of art, it must contain the essential criticism on the morality to which it adheres.'⁵ The morally aberrant or erratic individuals cannot evade poetic justice, for they receive reward or retribution in proportion to their capacity for harmonious social existence. Similarly, though writing within the rigid Victorian tradition, Hardy's fictional works are a sustained critique of the moral dogmatism of the Victorian Age. This criticism is best expressed in his last two novels – *Tess* and *Jude*.

In Hardy there is a deep tension, a perpetual conflict between his allegiance to the authentic individual and an inauthentic social world. On the one hand he shows his heroes and heroines exploding out of the established conventions of society to create themselves, to remain true to their own natural selves. And on the other hand, such genuine individuals are shown to be finally defeated by the artificial structures of society to which they do not conform. They are mercilessly punished for their intransigence. D.H. Lawrence makes a very pertinent observation about the general pattern of Hardy's novels:

In the long run, the state, the community, the established form of life remained, remained intact and impregnable, the individual trying to break forth from it, died of fear, of exhaustion, or of exposure to attacks from all sides, like men who have left the walled city to live outside in the precarious open.⁶

In short what kills Hardy's heroes and heroines is the judgement of men and not the judgement of their own souls or providential judgement.

Traditional Hardy criticism studies his fictional works fundamentally as a celebration of primitive, rural forms of living. According to Douglas Brown the central theme of Hardy's novels is 'the tension between the old rural world and the new urban one.'⁷ Similar is the view of Irving Howe who studies Hardy's novels as a lament at the loss of rural England which was 'traditional, fixed in old customary ways, rituals and speech.'⁸ No one denies Hardy's love of the old, his nostalgic yearning for old-fashioned rural simplicity and a deep hostility to the disruptive forces of urbanism. Noorul Hasan estimates Hardy's novels as 'inescapably an evocative cultural statement about the quality of life in a rural community.'⁹ But Hardy's powerful cultural imagination is persistently invaded by an intellectual force which is an undercurrent in his works. Though emotionally a traditionalist, intellectually Hardy was far advanced of the predominant thoughts of his time. Caught between his love for the antique mode of living and the intellectual currents of his time, Hardy's fictional works reflect and betray an inherent divisiveness which is capable

of revealing the deeper significance of his works. According to John Rabbetts, in Hardy's novels there is '... the crucial tone of ambivalence, a characteristic which permeates his work so consistently and profoundly that few critics fail to allude to it.'¹⁰

What does it imply then? Just exposing Hardy's novels as a mere record of characters placed in a traditional, rural locale, susceptible to traumatic social changes is only an incomplete understanding of the potential strength of his imagination. His works are not an explication of fixed ideas or impressions, rather they are informed by contrasting perspectives, a common attitude of ambivalence. They are intellectually more exploratory than expository in nature. There is an authorial ambivalence towards 'the rival claims of past and present, tradition and modernity, nature and society' which confront the inhabitants of his Wessex.'¹¹ Hardy criticisms have generally been swept away by the attractiveness of his cultural personality. It has not paid enough critical attention to the deeper implications and significance of his ambivalent attitude. The chief purpose of this dissertation is to delve deep into the nature of Hardy's divisiveness and his relevance to the postmodern situation.

It is the ambivalence in Hardy's works which compels us to enquire into the essence of his moral vision. There is no doubt that Hardy's novels have a unique, particular moral design. Rutland makes a pertinent observation about Hardy's works that 'Hardy's art, taken as a whole has an ethical significance..... no one except Hardy himself has even seriously denied.'¹² To highlight this particular body of moral principles we have to examine the very concept and meaning of morality. In philosophical discourses on morality we come across mainly two kinds of moral theories – social morality and psychological or individual morality. According to the former, 'morality consists in habitual, involuntary conformity to the conventions, from whatever motive or motives this conformity arises.'¹³ This is a social concept of morality which has a definite role in sustaining a harmonious, cohesive social existence. In short, it is a social enterprise. What constitutes the social moral principles is the sum total of the customs, traditions, cultures and code of conduct collectively recognized and practised by a particular society from generation to generation. 'Considered as a social system of regulation, morality is like law on the one hand and convention or etiquette on the other.'¹⁴ In short, the organized social character of man may be ascribed to morality. Judged from sociological point of view morality is a set of principles or rules that are meant to guide human actions and conduct in society so that there is harmonious existence

as well as an attempt to achieve maximum good for maximum people. Any action that detracts from the general happiness is wrong and immoral. One is said to have a morality only if one has something – a set of rules, principles and ideals that he takes as a guide to action, action that produces general happiness and welfare. One must act on rules which are meant for everybody. The sociological moral theory is based on the generally accepted notion that man is a social being. Consequently, it is a practical or external condition of his well being that he should be a useful member of a happy community and, more particularly, a community that does not blame him for any of the unhappiness it suffers. Thus, sociological morality demands conformity and surrender to the established norms and conventions of a community. Here society is placed above the individual.

On the other hand, the psychological or individual moral theory holds the view that ‘morality consists, not in what other people insist that I should do, but in what I insist that I should do.’¹⁵ Here morality is viewed as the content of one’s conscience. According to the psychological moralists, to accept a traditional, moral standard unreflectively is to fall short in human dignity. They hold the view that self respect and human dignity can be achieved only by individuals who accept certain standards that they consciously approve of for themselves and for others. The

traditionalist concept of morality emphasizes the positive or social concept, customs and tradition. It recommends that we should derive' our moral decisions from social morality. The anti-traditionalists emphasize the autonomous concept, private judgement and reflection in deciding the moral quality of an action. Neil Cooper, a moral philosopher, sums up the essence of these two types of morality:

Those who suppose that morality is or ought to be wholly or mainly a social concept may recommend submission to a tradition. Those on the other hand, who suppose morality to be primarily an individual or independent concept will recommend independent decisions.¹⁶

And Cooper concludes his discussion by suggesting that in a rational morality each should have its own place. Similar is the view expressed by Socrates in his *Crito*. According to Socrates society is, to some extent, justified in demanding from an individual a certain minimal subscription to the moral institutions of life. But at the same time society is required to respect the individual autonomy and liberty, and in general to treat him justly. It must also remember that morality is made to minister to the good lives of individual and not to interfere with them any more than is necessary.

If we closely examine Hardy's novels, we find that he values both the individual and society. There is a shifting of allegiance between the

sociological morality and the individual morality according to the intrinsic merit of the situation. For instance, Henchard, Eustacia, Tess and Jude have a system of inner morality that does not conform to the sociological morality. They are right because they are true to their own selves. They refuse to live in the 'they-self', society's created self. On the other hand, Troy, Wildeve, Fitzpiers, Alec and Mrs. Charmond are neither true to themselves nor true to the society. The inauthenticity of their existence is a threat to the preservation of the cultural fabric of the community. Hence, they are immoral and chastised.

There is another school of moral philosophers who lay stress on motive or intention of an act. In their opinion it is the motive of an action, not its results, which determines its moral quality. If the motive is not a concern for the other, then the act is immoral. According to David Hulme, 'it is on the Goodness or Badness of the Motives that the Virtue of the action depends.'¹⁷ That motive should be the fundamental determinant of right action was widely accepted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. John Stuart Mill sees 'the rightness of actions in terms of their tendency to augment the general happiness.'¹⁸ Aristotle emphasizes the importance of harmonization of desires and of practical reason in securing communal integrity and happiness. According to the Utilitarian ethics of Jeremy

Bentham and John Stuart Mill, any action which tends to promote maximum welfare and happiness for the greatest number is moral.

In all human communities there is a divergence between conscience and convention. What people in their hearts are devoted to may be something quite other than the conventionally moral. This divergence between conscience and convention is quite predominant in Hardy. He is on the side of sociological morality while castigating the inauthentic, self-deceiving individuals who disrupt the natural harmony of a community. But when society attempts to suppress the true, authentic individuals with its rigid and arbitrary moral principles and laws, Hardy rebels against society. That is why Hardy's imaginative works have universal appeal. They draw their sustenance and universal appeal by embodying real values that are humanly ennobling. To quote E.M. Forster: 'And what the story does is to narrate life in time. And what the entire novel does – if it is a good novel – is to include the life by values as well.'¹⁹ It is the presence of real human values – both individual and social – which make Hardy's novels both enduring and universally appealing. In the ultimate analysis, both the individual and society are vital to Hardy's cultural imagination. They fall out of his favour only when they tend to be inauthentic.

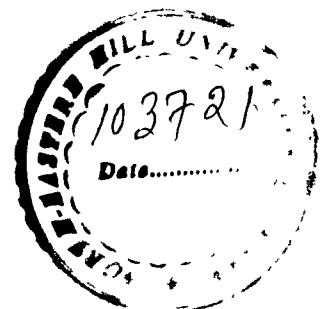
Authenticity and morality are inseparable for Hardy. They are inextricably interwoven in any ethical judgement of either the individual or society. His fictional works are essentially an exploration of the perennial confrontation between the authentic individual self and the inauthentic self of society and vice versa. Philosophical discourses always draw an affinity between authenticity and morality. 'Authenticity' is a moral concept in the sense that at least it lures us to live for the realization of something naturally good. It is a value which ought to be sought and 'inauthenticity' is a dis-value which ought to be rejected. In existentialist ethics, authenticity refers to an 'individual's autonomy in making moral choices that are not bound by society's norms.....it replaces conformity and shifts moral choices from the society to the individual..... Authentic person acts from a sense of innate principles and does not depend on social acceptance for his or her standards of ethics.'²⁰ An authentic life is one in which an individual owns up his being, his true self. We must note here that authenticity is neither ethical nihilism nor irrational iconoclasm. It is the struggle into being. It is a manifestation of the soul's relentless desire to remain loyal to itself. It is not going against all conventions of society. In fact, most of the existentialist philosophers stress the inevitable link between the individual and the community. Authenticity, in short, is being true to one's natural self that should not in any way interfere with the

happiness and welfare of others. It is the 'recognition that one's life and choices are one's own responsibility.'²¹ And inauthenticity is the suppression of responsibility for one's life. The ultimate tragedy of Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure* springs from her inauthenticity. She does not own up to her created self and responsibility for her actions unlike Henchard or Jude.

In Hardy authenticity may also be identified with instinctive, natural responses to life. The terms, 'instinctive' and 'natural' do not, however, mean animal drives without the recognition of reason. Anything that has historical and cultural durability is natural. Features, traits or characteristics that are historically and culturally durable are generally regarded as natural. However, all that is natural does not promote virtue. For example, cruelty, vengeance and hypocrisy are natural features. If not tempered by reason, these natural traits can be detrimental to society. According to Hardy, irrational instincts must be suppressed or tempered if they obstruct the cultivation and continuation of general happiness of the community. While authenticity is remaining true to one's own inner self, inner value system, sometimes an authentic individual may consciously slide into inauthenticity in order to bring happiness to others. This is exactly what happens to Tess when she voluntarily returns to Alec in order to save her

impoverished and destitute family. Very often inauthenticity provides security and safety because it is conformity to the larger external world. It is this occasional lapse of his major characters into inauthenticity which often obscures the otherwise forceful advanced tendencies in Hardy. His major objection comes when the inauthentic society tries to destroy the authentic individual whose authenticity is not a threat to society or its happiness. It is this balanced approach to life which compels some critics to allude to his ambivalence or ambiguity. Hardy's imagination is caught between the natural man and the unnatural social arrangements.

The essence of Hardy's moral vision is nowhere expressed with more clarity and precision than when he studies his major characters in relation to society and the universe. Traditional criticism of Hardy is tempted to acclaim him as a societal man who prefers the expulsion of the autonomous, authentic individual in his passion for the preservation of conventional society. This is actually not the ultimate impression that his fictional works leave upon the postmodern readers. His works are not a mere endorsement of Victorian moral universalism and social arrangements. Rather they are a sustained critique of the Victorian moral dogmatism. The readers must guard themselves against being carried away by the conventional superstructure of his novels. For, beneath it remains



hidden the intellectual skeptic who questions and ridicules the established moral paradigms of his time.

When we approach Hardy's works with the help of the postmodern theoretical apparatus, they acquire a new significance. Through the dynamics of reading, so popular in the present day, we may explore the unwritten or implicit in Hardy's works. He is 'more alive today than at any time since his death.'²² His full greatness has been obscured, to some extent, by the clouds of orthodox criticism which concentrates only on his acute sensitivity to the appeal of rural life. True, Hardy is an ardent celebrant of rural life. But limiting his fictional works to an expression of his cultural imagination will severely restrict an adequate response to his great imagination. In all his major novels, there is a conflict between the individual and society. While dramatizing this conflict Hardy does not conceal his intellectual and emotional resentment at the arbitrarily constructed social laws and institutions. He does not hesitate to articulate his skepticism to the claims of universal truth. The ultimate focus of his major novels is on the merciless destruction of the authentic individual by the inauthentic society. Majority of Hardy's heroes and heroines are victims of societal attempt to obliterate their 'subject position' as autonomous individuals. They are defeated or killed for their uniqueness.

Taken together Hardy's novels engage into a persistent questioning of the validity of the social institutions, considered against the touchstone of the natural and the instinctive communal life of the countryside.

What is remarkable about Hardy is his capacity and skill to accommodate multiple perspectives within his much acclaimed cultural personality. The divergent, often opposing perspectives, offered with a detached authorial voice, do point to the greatness of a fecund imagination. Virginia Woolf makes a very perceptive observation about Hardy's works:

It is as if Hardy himself were not quite aware of what he did, as if his consciousness held more than he could produce, and he left it for his readers to make out his full meaning and to supplement it from their own experience.²³

In this dissertation we are trying to explore Hardy's moral vision by penetrating into the inexhaustible possibility that a text offers. Today it is generally accepted among literary circles that 'the potential text is infinitely richer than any of its individual realizations.'²⁴ Hardy's novels are porous in nature and are open to a variety of interpretations. This is not falling into 'intentional fallacy'. A long-standing contention in literary theory today is that

the meaning of a work is not what the writer had in mind at some moment during composition of the work, or what the writer thinks the

work means after it is finished, but rather, what he or she succeeded in embodying in the work.²⁵

A clinical examination of Hardy's works would reveal that his primary imagination has had the seeds of many of the postmodern tendencies. They were in their embryo. One of the chief characteristics of postmodernism is the rejection of fixity, immutability and the possibility of an eternal world order. Postmodernism undertakes a radical critique of philosophical and ethical systematization of grand theories or meta-narratives, paving the way for pluralism in all spheres of life. Steven Connor observes that one of the striking features of the postmodernist discourse is 'the authoritative announcements of the disappearance of final authority and the promotion and recirculation of a total and comprehensive narrative of a cultural condition in which totality is no longer thinkable.'²⁶ Postmodern discourses have an inherent tendency to be centrifugal rather than centripetal. That is, they refuse to believe in any fixed centre. They move away from any established centre towards multiple centres all of which are true in their own rights. Was not Hardy centrifugal when he called Henchard 'a man of character' and Tess 'a pure woman'? Was he not rebelling against the Victorian moral universalism? Yes, he was. He refused to surrender to the Victorian world view of fixities and the myth of unified destiny of man based on irrational paradigms of thought. If he

could not be as radical and revolutionary as D.H. Lawrence, it was because of his inescapable conditioning by the conventions of the Victorian society. By and large he wrote for the general Victorian public. Whenever, he deviated from the general expectations of his readers as in *Tess* and *Jude*, he confronted vitriolic criticism which compelled him to give up novel writing altogether. After the hostile reception of his last novel, *Jude* Hardy said:

Well, if this sort of thing continues no more novel-writing for me. A man must be a fool to deliberately stand up to be shot at.²⁷

The nineteenth century rigid social and moral conventions are partly responsible for Hardy's reluctance in exploring the full potentialities of the individual – a serious allegation made against Hardy by D.H. Lawrence in his '*Study of Thomas Hardy*.'

As mentioned earlier, Hardy's moral vision is informed by his remarkable understanding of the pluralistic nature of man. The hope of a universal ethical system for mankind is beyond his system of thought. He does not seem to believe in any universal principles or totalisation. George Panthanmackel in his short survey of postmodern map makers observes:

Shattering the inherent tendency of modernity and enlightenment tradition to universalize everything, postmodernity opened the door for the possibility of pluralism and contextuality.²⁸

Didn't Hardy plead, long ago, for a contextual judgement of Henchard, Eustacia, Tess and Jude? Just as postmodernism rejects any form of absolutes, Hardy too had rejected them, especially the moral absolutes. In *Tess* and *Jude* Hardy calls for dissolution of the universal perspectives and an acceptance of specificities in judging the moral behaviour of individuals. In these two novels Hardy has shown that the language of the universal is the language of control, hegemony and domination. In his view, as also for the postmodernists, it is the instrument for the suppression of the native qualities of an authentic individual.

The Victorian world was intolerant of multiplicities. It craved for universality and tried to eliminate the 'other'. Speaking of the Pre-modern world Jim Powell observes:

If they should encounter an individual or a society that was different, then the strategy was to conquer it militarily, economically and sexually; to convert it to one's own religion, or to kill it. The very existence of the other, posed a threat to the supposed universality of one's own beliefs.²⁹

The Victorian Age, and to some extent, even modernism tried to repress the atavistic nature of man. That was why Hardy could not write any more fiction after 1895. His thoughts were far in advance of his time. In this connection Arnold Kettle's remark about Hardy is worth quoting:

On the one hand there is the rather conservative and conventional literary man.....and on the other hand the curiously lovely and uncompromising figure who terrified the publishers and shocked the bishops and maintained throughout his life attitude so radical and unpopular that even nearly forty years after his death we cannot always persuade ourselves that he really believed what he wrote.³⁰

In fact this conflict between the conservative and the radical informs Hardy's art just as persistently as it divided his life. Though Hardy had declared that 'a novel is an impression, not an argument', today his "impressions" relate to postmodern intellectual discourses. That is how Hardy has become more alive and relevant today, no matter what the traditional critics feel about it. Katherine Anne Porter, a critic of Hardy stands vindicated today: 'A novel by Thomas Hardy can be a chastening experience, an appalling one, there is great and sober pleasure to be got out of those novels, the mind can be disturbed and the heart made extremely uneasy.'³¹ This uneasiness is caused by the very nature of confrontation between the individual and the society.

In all of Hardy's major novels the ultimate tragedy of his heroes and heroines is caused by the social laws and conventions which refuse to make allowances for the authentic individual. Henchard, Eustacia, Tess and Jude are highly particularized individuals with undoubted authenticity. However, in a society organized on rational principles alone, such individuals are doomed to failure. They do not, and cannot, conform.

Therefore, they are ruined. Moral systems, Hardy seems to argue, should not be a mere academic creation or philosophical abstractions. They ought to be inspired by a deeper understanding of the real nature of man. Hardy is very distrustful of rational culture like D.H. Lawrence. His imagination refuses to validate the prevalence of dogmatic doctrines. His novels are faithful pictures of the pluralistic nature of man. They are pictures of high realism; they are a tribute to his keen sense of reality and humanism. Having comprehended the seemingly intractable mysteries of the universe, Hardy suggests that no singularity of moral perception is true or valid. Like Jacques Derrida, a postmodern thinker, Hardy does not believe in the ‘metaphysics of presence’ – that there is a world of essence or ideas with independent existence. In the absence of any such objective truth, no codified rules or laws can be accepted as the ultimate. Hardy vehemently resents the obstinate adherence to an artificially constructed code of conduct. This is best expressed, apart from his novels, in his short story, *On the Western Circuit* (1891).

Martin Heidegger – an existentialist Philosopher – in his renowned book *Being and Time* shows that the human being is forced into an inauthentic life by the social systems into which he is merged. The uniqueness and individuality of human beings is often submerged in the

social demands to conform. Only the exceptional few, the courageous can remain true to themselves because of insurmountable social pressures. In Hardy's novels the major characters are shown to be forced to lead a life in a borrowed self, the self of the society. Hardy himself once remarked:

The irritating necessity of conforming to rules which in themselves have no virtue.³²

Those who do not conform are eventually destroyed. D.H.Lawrence is perplexed at Hardy's motive in making his blameless, naturally authentic individuals succumb to the formidable pressures of man made laws. Why does Hardy do so? We may argue that this pattern is an ironic device to ridicule and awaken the society to an awareness of its irrational social institutions and ethical formulations which are against the greater natural laws. Moreover, through this device Hardy shows the powerful hold of society over the individual. He seems to see culture as 'an expression of the people and culture as imposition on the people....'³³. It is a natural expression of the people as well as an oppressive ideological formation. People are both shaped and manipulated by cultural forces. No other novelist has perceived acutely this dual role of culture as Hardy has done. Hence, his apparent ambivalence, for he supports the shaping aspects of a culture and criticizes those aspects which try to manipulate the individual

and deny the possibility of authentic existence. In this Hardy seems to share the view of Roland Barthes who is

especially interested in demystifying what in culture comes to seem natural by showing that it is based on contingent historical constructions.³⁴

In Hardy's novels society rejects and even frustrates authentic individuals when they refuse to conform. He shows that it is a rather difficult task to remain authentic and continue to enjoy social acceptance. Hence, the oppression of the authentic might lead to extreme reactions and even to madness. This is what happens to Hardy's authentic heroines like Eustacia and Tess. In death Tess escapes to her authentic self from the inauthenticities of her social world. A similar situation can be found in the way Ivan welcomes death in Tolstoy's short story, *The Death of Ivan Illyitch*. In Hardy's sympathetic allegiance towards his authentic characters we can find echoes of modern existentialists like Nietzsche, Sartre and Camus who believe in the need for creation of one's own selfhood, which in short, is authenticity. The notion of a universal essence is abhorred by the existentialists and later by postmodernists. During his lifetime Hardy was influenced by thinkers like Darwin, Spencer, Huxley and J.S. Mill, to name a few. Darwin's thoughts compelled Hardy to rethink the very concept of an external Being. Spencer taught him that the power beyond the phenomenon is utterly inscrutable. Huxley and Mill nudged him toward

open disbelief; the universe being unsponsored, it contains neither inherent purpose nor moral quality.³⁵

Living among such flurry of radical thoughts, Hardy began to be skeptical about social laws and conventions which claim to have objective validity. Consequently, there was a gradual leaning towards the authentic individual who was oppressed by the established social structures. It is in this intellectual shift of Hardy we that we may trace many of the inherent tendencies of postmodernism. As a cultural and intellectual movement, postmodernism questions all attitudes of certainty and definiteness by pointing to the indefiniteness and ambiguity in our knowledge. It represents the triumph of the subjective, the ephemeral and the fragmentary over the unchanging and the universal. It does not believe in any one centre. Western intellectuals like Jean Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, to mention only a few, stand for multiplicity and diversity in every sphere of life Foucault is a champion of anti-totalisation. For him there is no such thing as objective knowledge. Similar is the view of Lyotard who expresses the postmodern skepticism on the possibility of truth. Jacques Derrida – a proponent of ‘Deconstruction’ – shows that what are customarily accepted as ‘centres’ and ‘origins’ have no basis in reality. He does not believe in the ‘metaphysics of presence.’ The Victorians and

even the moderns had succumbed to what Derrida calls 'the metaphysics of presence' - that things or truth have independent existence. Majority of postmodern thinkers reject this notion. According to them, nothing is certain. We cannot be certain about anything. Thomas Hardy was deeply skeptical about the finality of Victorian thoughts especially with regard to moral principles. He questioned the validity of the metaphysical authority which is believed to be the basis of social and moral laws. He always displayed his incredulity towards the 'meta-narratives.' The Victorian 'text' of morality is continuously under censure, especially in *Tess* and *Jude*.

According to Hardy, the traditional morality of the Victorian Age had failed to take into account the pluralistic nature of man. Such a moral system was founded on pure rationality which 'knows not of heart's passions', to use the words of Blaise Pascal. In Hardy there is an intense respect for the individual and a belief in the value of the individual consciousness as the source of all perceptions and knowledge. He recognizes the dignity and individuality of every human being. Hence, one must be prepared to respect pluralism. But paradoxically, in his novels, the individual is without any significance when viewed against the immensity of the Universe and the oppressive social systems. In the process of living

one's own authentic self, all of Hardy's major characters are destroyed by man made social laws. The demands of society restrict individual possibilities. To some extent this pattern is the very essence of western tradition. Jonathan Culler observes that 'novels in the Western tradition show how aspirations are tamed and desires adjusted to social reality.'³⁶ Being a Victorian novelist Hardy had many compulsions not to subvert the established structures of society. That is why D.H.Lawrence accuses Hardy of a 'lack of sterness.' But in spirit Hardy remained an uncompromising intellectual skeptic. In this connection David Cecil makes a pertinent observation about Hardy:

Intellectually Hardy was a man of the new age – the so called advanced thinker, in open rebellion against traditional, orthodox views about religion, sex and so on and he used his novels to preach these heretical opinions.³⁷

In all of Hardy's major novels, there is an ironic sense of what man deserves and what he actually manages to get from life. His heroes and heroines suffer not so much for the infringement of the immutable, incomprehensible natural laws as the infringement of man made laws. In *Tess* and *Jude*, Hardy tries to show the irrationality of following one dominant narrative. For instance, the sufferings and the ultimate tragic death of Tess vividly reveal the inadequacy of convention to provide a sound foundation for judgement in personal matters. The Victorian society

never cared for the individual. And Hardy protested against this callous attitude in his own way. His novels are a critique of the monolithic structures of western thoughts and ethical system. It is here Hardy anticipated many of the postmodernist concerns:

In postmodern societies many micro-narratives are jammed together. And this carnival of narratives replaces the monolithic presence of one metanarrative.³⁸

Hardy's plea was to 'think otherwise' as the postmodernists do. He tried to break away from certain accepted rules in the realm of moral thinking. But he never tried to systematize his thoughts into a philosophy as Michel Foucault and Derrida have done. However, he has registered his protest against the totalising views for their inhibiting effect on the individual. Like the postmodernists, Hardy believes that the meaning is never final; therefore, differences have to be respected and approached sympathetically. Hardy is apprehensive about any single system because it always tries to silence or alienate the minority voices. The postmodern critique of universality demonstrates that totality and universality are claimed dishonestly in the name of structures of power that are neither total nor universal. These are concepts which were not alien to Hardy. Rather, his implied meanings in different novels are potentially capable of constituting a thesis not quite different from postmodern discourses. It becomes more convincing especially in the light of the postmodern

contention that '..... one text is potentially capable of several difficult realizations and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential.'³⁹ Hardy as a novelist is multifaceted. His imaginative works, taken together, constitute an eloquent statement of his anti-totalizing attitude. They register his intellectual protest against all forms of foundationalism. Hardy's occasional or even consistent retreat into the innocence of rural simplicity is not a token of the blind acceptance of all that passes off as natural. He is apprehensive of anything that does not respect the authenticity of the individual. Crudely put, what Hardy objects to is the exploitation of the individual in the name of universal truth, something that is non-existent. In the absence of such truth multiplicity should receive its own share of recognition.

Apart from the interplay of relationship between the individual and society, another vital aspect of Hardy's moral vision is the necessity to surrender unconditionally to the inscrutable universal forces. Mystery is an integral part of the cosmic design of human existence. Hence, it is futile and unreasonable to indulge in promethean rebellion against a power that is neither comprehensible nor intelligible. D.H.Lawrence in his *Study of Thomas Hardy* cites two types of morality in Hardy's novels – morality of the unfathomable Nature, and the social, human morality. Hardy's quarrel

is with the nature of social laws and not with the natural scheme of things. Violation of natural laws is not tolerated in Hardy. Given the mysterious, incomprehensible nature of the cosmic scheme, Hardy suggests a morality of accommodation and compromise. It is incumbent upon the individual 'to control the impulses which put one in opposition to the forces of the universe.'⁴⁰ In *Far From the Madding Crowd* Troy's fault lies in the negligence and betrayal of the natural principle of love. He desecrates the very principle of love both in his relations to Fancy and Bathsheba. On the other hand, it is Gabriel Oak's intuitive understanding of nature's ways which sustains him through his ordeals and brings him ultimate happiness. In *The Return of the Native*, Eustacia rebels against her own true self and her natural situation, and meets with irrevocable tragic end. Even Clym initially disowns his true self, but ultimately he is able to achieve some kind of self realization and return to his original self, to the heath. Michael Henchard's adversities in *The Mayor* spring from the sale of his wife – a violation of the natural moral law. It drags Henchard to his tragic death although his inner value system, his authenticity, triumphs not only in his life but also in his death. In *The Woodlanders* Grace Melbury's tragedy is brought about by the surrender of her natural self to the demands of the inauthentic social world, patronised by her father. Giles Winterborne, on the other hand, fails to discern between the authenticity of Marty and the

inauthenticity of Grace Melbury. Hence, his tragedy. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, we find Hardy exploring deeply the dialectic of authenticity and inauthenticity. Tess's natural, authentic self is assailed by the inauthentic social world represented by both Alec and Angel Clare. In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy is simultaneously concerned with the tragedy of inauthentic self as represented by Sue and the absurdity of an artificially structured social world. Sue's ultimate failure lies in her voluntary refusal to own up to her own created self. Her return to Phillotson is an eloquent statement of that failure. Jude, on the other hand, is a victim of both his own impulses and the stratified social world. But what is redeeming about his character is that he remains true to his own natural, authentic self till his death.

The peasants in Hardy's novels live in harmony with Nature; they have an ineffable sense of belonging to their natural world unlike the modernists. The cheerful acceptance of life on its own terms characterizes their way of life, of which Gabriel Oak, Diggory Venn, and Giles Winterborne are the most representative. William Golding's Neanderthal world is identical with Hardy's rural community where innocence exists in its primeval state. Hardy saw rural England in danger of total extinction along with its antique simplicity and the sense of oneness with nature. He

regretted the disappearance of such pristine existence. The concept of man's fall from innocence is aptly illustrated by Golding in his novel, *The Inheritors*. Golding here presents, in contrasting light, the world of the Neanderthals and the Homosapiens. On the rational level, the modern man may be superior to the rural folk, but on the moral level, he is inferior to them. Hardy shows that Wessex is a microcosm of the universal order and that it contains a great morality for mankind. Hardy anticipated what Golding was to explore later that man must learn to live with the natural chaos of existence without forcing artificial patterns on it. He questioned the primacy of thought over feeling, reason over instinct. We must not forget the fact Hardy does not consider all conventions as manifestations of the natural. Many are simply historical, cultural products. He accepts conventions only when they remain as expressions of all that is natural and instinctive. What he regrets most is the intrusion of radical rationalism into the fabric of a stable social order.

In the postmodern world there is a realization that our ideas about truth are not eternal, but made; realities are social, relative perspectives. Hardy's novels can be read as a sustained and consistent critique of cultural and social inventions which try to suppress the natural, authentic self of man. They question the Victorian pretensions to truth and universality.

They are an intellectual protest against the Victorian attempt to expunge the local or the particular. Hardy had resented the persisting Victorian refusal to recognize the pluralistic nature of man. His objection to universalism or totalisation can be best observed in his own remark:

I consider a social system based on individual spontaneity to promise better for happiness than curbed and uniform one under which all temperaments are bound to shape themselves to a single pattern of living.⁴¹

Here 'spontaneity' definitely refers to the natural self, the authenticity of the individual. Hardy places instinct and spontaneity above the intellectual and rational patterning of life. In the dialectic of individual specificity and social foundationalism, Hardy is undoubtedly on the side of the individual. Any criticism which tends to study Hardy as a mere traditionalist or conformist is a reductive one. The Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin describes the novel as fundamentally polyphonic (multi-voiced) or dialogical rather than monological (single voiced). According to him 'the essence of the novel is its staging of different voices or discourses and, thus, of the clash of social perspectives and points of view.'⁴² Hardy's fictional works are multi-voiced, with opposing and divergent points of view. Without giving the impression of a moral preacher or advocate of any particular set of beliefs or creeds, Hardy has given expression to his

varied, often conflicting points of view. In this context it is apt to recall the comment of Ian Gregor on Hardy:

*With *The Return of the Native* the Wessex world is fractured and it is the successive imaginings of the nature of that divisiveness that constitute the shaping spirit of the remainder of the Wessex novels.⁴³*

This shaping spirit has, as we have already argued, affinity with the fundamental assumptions and beliefs of postmodernist discourses about the very nature of human life. Postmodernism presents a vision of cultural as well as intellectual pluralism which has neither hierarchies nor any centre. There is a greater acceptance of cultural and individual differences with deeper understanding and sympathy hitherto unknown to mankind.

Thomas Hardy had anticipated the essential postmodern plea to embrace every form of diversity without recourse to any universal principles which in themselves are not true. Like postmodernists Hardy does not believe that the phenomenon conceals secret and universal principles of truth. His chief concern in his novels is ontological and not epistemological – that is, attempting to know what the world is and not how the world is to be known. This today is the focus of postmodern discourses as well. In trying to explore what the world is, what human life is, Hardy has shown himself a humanist par excellence. And it is his inalienable humanist concerns which make his novels what they are.

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Chapter I

Far from the Madding Crowd (1874)

Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* is fundamentally a fictional celebration of his passionate love for and faith in the pristine forms of human existence, embodied in a traditional, rural society. Judging from the totality of his major fictional works, *Far from the Madding Crowd* is a uniquely eloquent statement of Hardy's cultural imagination. It is informed by a unique vision of the necessity of establishing a harmonious relationship with nature and society—a vision that would be disrupted as he continues his imaginative journey. Hardy's novels may be studied as a transition from a state of innocence to that of experience, encountering the universe and society in their multifarious facets. In *Far from the Madding Crowd* there is no disturbing tension between man and universe or between man and society. However, echoes of Hardy's unsettled fictional concerns with which his later novels are so occupied, can be heard in the partly pathetic tale of Gabriel Oak and in the self-indulgent life of Sergeant Troy. Despite Oak's unrelenting loyalty to the laws of nature and society, his share of happiness in life is disproportionate to his moral integrity. Troy's

Page references to *Far from the Madding Crowd* are to the Penguin edition (1978).

life and character may be seen as Hardy's apocalyptic vision of the dawn of a new civilization that would endanger the serenity and integrity of a traditional society. Bathsheba Everdene, though endowed with traditional virtues, does display tendencies of individualistic assertiveness which will find its full flowering in Eustacia Vye and later in Sue Bridehead. As in Hardy's other novels in *Far from the Madding Crowd* too, we find untamed human impulses driving man to irrevocable adversities. For instance, Farmer Boldwood's unsymmetrical personality eventually drives him to madness after the murder of Troy. These are the unfocussed, yet potential tragic elements which compel critics like Ian Gregor to observe that the novel contains 'the tensions which are later to characterize and define Hardy's whole fictional world.'¹

While *Far From the Madding Crowd* is an early elucidation of Hardy's primary cultural and moral imagination, it contains the seeds of tension that will find more subtle expression in his later novels. Though pastoral in feeling, many critics and reviewers have recognized the novel's underlying difference from the conventional pastoral. The essential passions of the human heart find uninhibited expression in the first major fictional work of Hardy. Like William Wordsworth Hardy idolizes the authenticity of rustic existence for its truthfulness to all that is natural

.Though set away from the urban ambience, the novel is an exploration of the deterministic nature of human existence. Within such deterministic scheme human happiness can be achieved, limited though it is, only through recognition of the mystery of the universe. That is why many critics refuse to see *Far from the Madding* as a traditional pastoral novel. Merryn Williams, for instance, observes that 'it is not a rustic idyll—although most people thought it was or a simple romance about three men and a girl.'² Modifying the conventional pastoral, Hardy is trying to explore more particularly the inevitable tragedy of the individual who lacks the capacity to control the destructive, egoistic impulses that are in opposition to the moral and cultural fabric of the community. While acknowledging Hardy as a celebrant of rural life, Noorul Hasan contends that 'the use of the term "pastoral" calls up somewhat alien associations, that is, alien to the true shape of experience in this novel.'³

Free from any contrasting, ambivalent attitude *Far from the Madding Crowd* is an eloquent statement of Hardy's inalienable early belief in the strength and values of traditional mode of living. The Weatherbury community is a fictional recreation of the ancient, isolated, primitive world before the experience of the poignancy and bitterness of modern civilization. It is still free from the traumatic experiences of socio-economic changes that would intrude upon Hardy's Wessex relentlessly

with the dawn of modernism. The “ache of modernism” experienced by Tess is still alien to the central cultural sensibilities of Weatherbury. By and large it is still a stable, agrarian community. However, within the cultural, pastoral ambience of the novel lie some vital and consistent fictional concerns of Hardy—the conflict between man and nature; between man and the universal forces; and the tension between the warring impulses within the individual self. The Weatherbury community’s Arcadian existence is marred by the turbulent passions, tragedies and injustices of human condition. Unlike Hardy’s later novels in *Far from the Madding Crowd* there is no tangible tension between the individual and society. However, there are signs of the tension ‘between rural and urban, traditional and modern, customary and educated life.’⁴ Though both Bathsheba and Troy offend the cultural sensibilities of Weatherbury community in their own ways, Bathsheba’s essential nature remains intact. But Troy is an example of both the corruptive influences of the emerging new world as well as a victim of his own natural impulses. Through Troy’s character Hardy seems to prophesy the gradual disintegration and decline of traditional values. To some extent Troy may be studied as a destructive urban figure invading a peaceful agrarian community. Yet, apart from his own dissipated life, Troy does not pose any serious threat to the social fabric of Weatherbury. For instance, he makes no efforts to modernize the

agricultural sector as Farfrae does. He is more a representative of untrammled sensuality than an authentic modern voice. He is an embodiment of expediency, intemperance and recklessness that can, however, destroy the moral structure of a community. By and large, Weatherbury is 'not threatened from outside by the growth of urbanism as confronted with a series of internal crisis which grow out of man's perpetual struggle with nature.'⁵ When we speak of the term, "nature" in Hardy's fictional world, it refers to two things- "nature" as the incomprehensible, mysterious, external force, and "nature" as the expression of the "self" in its unfragmented, uninhibited state. While the former implies a "metaphysics of presence", to quote Jacques Derrida, the latter refers to spontaneity of living. Hardy has not been able to discover any intrinsic relationship between the two. Hence, the conflict between the natural and nature in his novels. Nature as an external impersonal force has been more often than not, opposed to the natural in man.

What then is the moral vision embodied in *Far from the Madding Crowd*? One may agree with Dale Kramer and say that it is the 'necessity to control the impulses which put one in opposition to the forces of the universe.'⁶ Unconscious and callous as they are, it is of no avail for man to fight against them. Besides, in *Far from the Madding Crowd* Hardy seems

to regard social laws as a manifestation of the laws of nature, no matter how indifferent nature is. But in his last two novels- *Tess* and *Jude*- Hardy reveals his skepticism with regard to the relationship between the laws of nature and those of society. Given the enigmatic cosmic design, Hardy's approach in this novel is one of balance and practicality. Dale Kramer, perhaps, sums up the true essence of the novel:

Taken as a whole, however, *Far from the Madding Crowd* offers a mature view of life. The themes of Hardy's later novels are extensions of this early schematic expression in this novel.⁷

What qualifies Hardy's views as mature is his deep insight into the very mystery of human life. Within this mysterious scheme Hardy suggests a mode of living that is more conformist than individualistic. The primary concern of Hardy is 'the relation between man and his circumambient universe at the living moment.'⁸

Hardy's fundamental moral vision is given expression in *Far from the Madding Crowd* with an illustration of the diametrically opposing communal responses of the four major characters-Gabriel Oak, Bathsheba Everdene, Farmer Boldwood and Francis Troy. Hardy's perception of the complexity of human living rejects culturally disoriented sensibilities and social behaviour. Such tendencies are shown to be potentially capable of

causing individual as well as social tragic possibilities. In spite of the multiple, often apparently ambivalent perspectives he presents in his novels, the conventional endings of his works point to his inexorable cultural imagination. While sympathizing with the self righteousness of the protesting individual, he does not reject the sanity of the collective wisdom of a long established traditional community. His keen perception of the external universe and an equally acute understanding of human life call for accommodation to the general, proven patterns of social living. His imaginative journey as a novelist has been a relentless attempt to show the futility of revolting against the universal as well as social forces which remain intransigently immutable. Though Hardy does not approve of the societal attempts to obliterate the essential individual self, yet he tries to show the futility and tragedy of vacuous individualistic resistance to age old cultural ethos. And in *Far from the Madding Crowd* this vision unveils itself with brilliant clarity through the varying, often opposing communal responses of the major characters that play out their lives in the predominantly agrarian Weatherbury community.

The structural design and the simple pastoral plot of the novel are conceived so skillfully and executed with meticulous care to present Hardy's deep rooted faith in the traditional forms of living. Any ego-centric deviation, Hardy cautions, is potentially detrimental to the

individual himself and the community of which he is an integral part. The chief protagonists of the novel, with more or less similar social roles, Troy being an exception, respond variously to their immediate surroundings and receive in turn reward or reprisal in accordance with the measure of their capacity to accommodate themselves to the cultural matrices of their own natural community. According to Irving Howe, like *The Woodlanders* the world of *Far from the Madding Crowd* represents for Hardy, 'the seemliness of an ordered existence, of all that is natural, rooted and tried.'⁹ And tragedy is imminent for those who ignore society's collective wisdom and code of conduct.

In *Far from the Madding Crowd* Hardy's primary imagination focuses the danger of indulgent egoistic pursuits in a conventional society where silly individualism is destined to tragic failure. Young Bathsheba's early escapades and audaciously unorthodox mode of social behaviour involve her in a series of physical and mental ordeals before she is schooled in the grim realities of life. When the novel ends we encounter a Bathsheba who is educated through bitter experiences to gain insight into the affairs of common life and collaborative existence. We encounter with much relief and delight 'a subdued female anxious for the protective strength of a Gabriel Oak.'¹⁰ She has, indeed, gone through chastening experiences before being able to attain self realisation. Driven by the

vagaries of her whimsical private self and the invincible forces of the mysterious universe, she is humbled to say:

I don't want much; bare justice- that's all! Ah! Once I felt I could be content with nothing less than the highest homage from the husband I should choose. Now anything short of cruelty will content me. Yes! The independent and spirited Bathsheba is come to this! (p.333)

This disillusionment is the outcome of her bitter experience with life. She realises that there is an unbridgeable gap between what one desires and what one actually gets from life. And it is her moral education. At Bathsheba's passionately jealous plea to Troy to kiss her after he had kissed the dead Fanny and her child, Hardy makes a pertinent authorial comment on her:

There was something so abnormal and startling in the childlike pain and simplicity of this appeal from a woman of Bathsheba's calibre and independence that Troy, loosening her tightly clasped arms from his neck, looked at her in bewilderment. It was such an expected revelation of all women being alike at heart, even those so different in their accessories as Fanny and this one beside him, that Troy hardly seem to believe her to be his proud wife Bathsheba. (p.360)

In this connection Ian Gregor's observation is worth quoting:

The novel then emerges as the moral education of Bathsheba in which she learns to reject the illusory world of Troy and accept the prosaic world of Oak. It becomes the story of the humbling of a spirited, vain and self-willed woman, and we are well on the way to seeing Bathsheba Everdene as a latter-day Emma Woodhouse.¹¹

Early Bathsheba's idiosyncrasy, independent spirit, and unthinking behaviour are vindictive in a traditional, rural community. Inordinate individualism is impermissible in Hardy's moral imagination. Bathsheba in her characteristically flirtatious ways shatters conventions, threatening the conventional stability of the community. One is at first shocked to hear a young lady say: "I hate to be thought men's property in that way, though possibly I shall be had someday."(p.78) And again, "well, what I mean is that I shouldn't mind being a bride at a wedding, if it could be one without a husband."(p.80) Though these utterances are only the fleeting fancies of an inexperienced girl, yet they are invested with serious implications in her personal and social life. However, with the accumulation of painful experiences, her youthful tomfooleries vanish, giving place to a mature understanding of social living.

From the very outset Hardy exercises utmost restraint in projecting Bathsheba as an incorrigible individual. On the contrary, she is the only amenable character in the novel apart from Gabriel Oak. She is more than the emotional and intellectual equal of the three men who court her. Moreover, as the narrative trajectory of the novel reveals, Bathsheba is intensely receptive to experience unlike the incorrigible Troy or immoderate Boldwood. Even in her occasionally unconventional behaviour Hardy is anxious to dote on her habitual awareness of the ingrained ethical

code of the rural community which is her naturally assigned station in life. However, she gets the right retribution for her dashing, reckless behaviour in the community. Her sufferings are the right nemesis she deserves; they are the corollaries to her unthinking, uncritical impulsive life. Bathsheba's early life has been guided by impulses:

---- She felt her impulses to be pleasanter guides than her discretion ----
Her culpability lay in her making no attempt to control feeling by subtle and careful enquiry into consequences. She could show others the steep and thorny way, but 'reck'd not her own rede. (p.244)

Bathsheba's display of independent spirit must not be mistaken as an antecedence of postmodern feminist tendencies as those of Sue, for they are not informed by any radical thoughts or intellectual vigour; nor do they have the socially and individually elevating feminine concerns of Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth Bennett – a powerfully appealing character – may be viewed as reacting moderately and rightly so, to the male text of nineteenth century female status. But Bathsheba's thoughts and actions are not kindled by any such intellectual or moral motives to enhance her own social position or that of her own species. Rather, her anomalous, culturally offensive behaviour is something that surfaces temporarily for want of proper experience in life. Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennett is solidly anchored in her cultural milieu

while protesting against the social mode of existence imposed upon the women of her time. Unlike her, Bathsheba does not protest against anything, but drifts aimlessly. It is this urgency which she openly confesses to Oak: "I want somebody to tame me; I am too independent; and you would never be able to, I know." (p.80) And it is this amenability of Bathsheba that her creator wants to focus as a redeeming trait of her animated personality, especially when she is contrasted with Boldwood and Troy. Redeemed, indeed, she is in the end with the unfailing devotion of Gabriel Oak— the Community's moral conscience. Speaking of Bathsheba's character Andrew Enstice observes:

In many ways, she is the perfect counterpart to Oak. Her emotional uncertainty, her forwardness, her apparent recklessness, are all tempered by an inborn respect for the way of life she leads, and an instinctive knowledge of how far she can bend the day-to-day rules of the farm.¹²

Hardy refuses to endorse neglect of the collective wisdom of a traditional community for mere unthinking, and self destructive fancies of the individual. While one loves Elizabeth Bennett from beginning to the end, the early unchastened Bathsheba has to wait for the lessons of life to prepare her for a happy, meaningful communal life. The essence of Hardyan moral vision pre-supposes that ideologies, unconventional thoughts, radical thinking and actions should not be opposed to the collective wisdom of society. He seems to opt for the known certainties of

the present rather than the unknown probabilities of the future. This is the fundamental, consistent vision of Hardy's morality.

The tragic aspect of Bathsheba is that it is her irrationalities which more often than not grow into deeds:

Bathsheba's was an impulsive nature under a deliberative aspect. An Elizabeth in brain and a Mary Stuart in spirit, she often performed actions of the greatest temerity with a manner of extreme discretion. Many of her thoughts were perfect syllogisms; unluckily they always remained thoughts. Only a few were irrational assumptions; but, unfortunately, they were the ones which most frequently grew into deeds.
(p.182)

Vanity is an essential part of Bathsheba's total make up. In the opening Chapter of the novel Oak discovers this predominant element of her character. When the Waggoner goes searching for the Tailboard of the Wagon, Bathsheba indulges in a spontaneous display of her vanity. Looking into the mirror without doing any adjustment on her hat or hair or face she simply "parted her lips and smiled." (p.54) Gabriel then inferred a strong vein of vanity in her character:

She simply observed herself as a fair product of Nature in the feminine kind, her thoughts seeming to slide into far-off though likely dramas in which men would play a part – Vistas of probable triumphs – the smiles being of a phase suggesting that hearts were imagined as lost and won.
(p.55)

And again, as Oak is travelling to Weatherbury he overhears a conversation about Bathsheba by a group of Weatherbury rustics: "Yes – she's very

vain. 'Tis said that every night at going to bed she looks in the glass to put on her right cap properly." (p.92) Bathsheba is motivated to send the valentine to Boldwood by her own vanity and false pride. Her false ego has been hurt when the dignified, old bachelor refused "to afford her the official glance of admiration which cost nothing at all," and it was too much to think that "the most dignified and valuable man in the Parish should withhold his eyes, and that a girl like Liddy should talk about it."(p.147) But at the second market day, Bathsheba attracts Boldwood's attention and her vanity finds full gratification in his interest in her. And the authorial voice captures Bathsheba's psychic state:

This was a triumph; and had it come naturally, such a triumph would have been the sweeter to her for this piquing delay. But it had been brought about by misdirected ingenuity, and she valued it only as she valued an artificial flower or a wax fruit. (p.169)

True to her flippant nature, when her whimsicalities are fulfilled, she withdraws after disturbing the placidity of a highly respected and sober man. This act, though carried out playfully, is the turning point of her life and of the narrative.

When Bathsheba frivolously sends Boldwood a Valentine with the inscription, "Marry Me", she sets in motion a series of repercussions which prove disastrous not only for Boldwood but also for her own very existence. Her action is immoral for 'the moral character of an action is

necessarily bound up with its effect in the way of harm or injury to others.¹³ Her coquetry becomes a lethal blow to the serene life of Boldwood. This inane act of sending the valentine is simply a humorous frolic on her part. Hardy comments on this idle action:

So very idly and unreflectingly was this deed done? Of love as a spectacle Bathsheba had a fair knowledge; but of love subjectively she knew nothing. (p.148)

But unintentionally she has triggered off a chain of events over which she would have no control. In her singularly mindless act of playing pranks upon Boldwood, Bathsheba has betrayed her own immaturity and a pitiful lack of understanding of a bereaved man whose life would change irretrievably henceforth. Speaking about the effect of Bathsheba's antics on Boldwood, Hardy remarks:

Since the receipt of the missive in the morning, Boldwood had felt the symmetry of his existence to be slowly getting distorted in the direction of an ideal passion. (p.149)

Bathsheba's frivolous nature is observed even by the ordinary rustics like Henry: "A headstrong maid, that's what she is – and won't listen to no advice at all." (p.154) Much of the personal sufferings of Bathsheba, and especially of Boldwood, originate from this puerile act of the heroine. What Hardy stresses in this episode is the disparity between the intention and the consequences of that intention enacted imprudently; Boldwood

read illusory motives into her playfulness. However, Hardy emphasizes the inescapability of the consequences of one's action. It is further evident and morally admirable as well, when Bathsheba maintains a sense of justice in her decision to accept Boldwood that "having been the one who began the game, she ought in honesty to accept the consequences." (p.182) Hardy further echoes the anguished mind of his heroine that "it would be ungenerous not to marry Boldwood, and that she couldn't do it to save her life." (p.182) It is this instinctive awareness of natural justice in her personality which makes her a redeemable individual.

Even in Bathsheba's early association with Gabriel Oak her attitude and behaviour have been characterized by vanity and pride. In her desire to be continually loved by Oak, although his love would remain unrequited, Hardy reveals the kind of feminine capriciousness and selfishness she is infected with. To Oak's opinion of her conduct with Boldwood she retorts:

'I may ask, I suppose, wherein in particular my unworthiness lies? In my not marrying you, perhaps!' 'Not by any means,' said Gabriel quietly. 'I have long given up thinking of that matter.' 'Or wishing it, I suppose,' she said, and it was apparent that she expected an unhesitating denial of this supposition. Whatever Gabriel felt, he coolly echoed her words – 'or wishing it either' (p.185)

This is not what she wished to hear; she wants the constancy of Oak's love and loyalty for the gratification of her own ego. Oak's outright denial of any further interest in her makes her very angry. Hardy shows Bathsheba as one who wants to be praised very often and who is not to be mastered, and one with more nonsense than common sense. Both Gabriel and Boldwood have failed in their romantic advances towards her, for they have lacked tactfulness and an understanding of female psyche. Neither of them has ever told her that she is beautiful. Oak, when he proposes to her, is only eager to provide her all possible material goods, but forgets to admire her beauty. It is Sergeant Troy who manages to win her over by pandering to her vanity through flattery and cunning; she gets what she wants from the deceitful soldier; and she becomes a victim to his aggressive sexual appeal. "Oh! Why did you come and disturb me so" is the reply of Bathsheba after the second long meeting between them.(p.224) The tragedy of Bathsheba's relationship with Troy lies in her "believing cajoleries that she knows to be false" (p.243) In this connection Hardy further remarks that

Bathsheba, though she had too much understanding to be entirely governed by her womanliness, had too much womanliness to use her understanding to the best of her advantage. (p.243)

In spite of discovering that “it was all pretence”, Bathsheba succumbs to Troy’s superior, overpowering personality. (p.224) And when she marries him at Bath, it is “between jealousy and distraction.” (p.311)

Ever since Bathsheba’s marriage with Troy, her life undergoes a radical change. Her real taming begins and ends with Troy. Her transition from an independent, vivacious girl into a married woman does not bring with it fulfilment or the real happiness of marriage; rather she is disillusioned by her romantic husband:

She was conquered; but she would never own it as long as she lived. His pride was indeed brought low by despairing discoveries of her spoliation by marriage with a less pure nature than her own. (p.333)

Troy’s apathy towards agricultural works, his gambling habit, and finally Bathsheba’s painful discovery of his relationship with Fanny shatter all her romantic feelings about her husband and life in general. To her utter despair she learns about the treachery and hollowness of Troy’s pretentious love for her: “you are nothing to me – nothing”, said Troy heartlessly: “A ceremony before a priest doesn’t make a marriage. I am not morally yours.” (p.361) This blunt confession of Troy’s hatred for her is the final blow to her prospect of finding even a modicum of happiness with him. From this moment nothing goes well with Bathsheba: Troy’s supposed death drives her again to agree to a forced long six years’ engagement with

Boldwood; his abrupt appearance and the consequent murder by Boldwood; and the latter's insanity— all weigh too heavily upon Bathsheba's already afflicted personality. However, Bathsheba is amenable and receptive to experience. She is able to retrieve herself and learn from the mistakes of her tumultuous past life. She is gradually prepared to begin a new life with the constant help and guidance of Gabriel Oak – the moral touchstone of the community. And eventually she remains an epitome of susceptibility to experience.

Of all the protagonists it is through the character of Oak, who has an enviably symmetrical personality, that Hardy communicates his moral and cultural vision more vividly and concretely. He is an antithesis of untamed Bathsheba, devious Troy and ungovernable Boldwood; he is a negation of all that they stand for; he is the embodiment of happiness derived from close proximity with his immediate surroundings; and he is the country's best product, a personification of its ancient wisdom. His life is evocative of the memory of a time in which man and nature were at peace. 'Oak is a focus for all that is best and most skilled in man's effort to achieve a perfect harmony in life.'¹⁴ Throughout the novel Oak displays a deeper understanding of and love for nature, and an undiminishing respect for the existing cultural paradigms – the governing structures of traditional thoughts and practices. Hardy seems to communicate that 'those who are

most likely to make a success of their lives are the resourceful and preserving, whose qualities are based on a real love and understanding of nature.’¹⁵ In the midst of the violators of natural law, Oak stands apart as the good angel of God. He has an intuitive understanding of his natural world and an enviably powerful hold over his existential situation. His awareness of the mysteries of the universe and the place of man in the cosmic design is the sustaining force of his character. Like his creator Oak is aware of nature as a force; he feels in it a spirit that can sympathize or mock or remain an indifferent spectator of human fortunes. It is in this frame of mind that Oak is able to overcome the adversities of immensely depressing circumstances. For instance, his early failure in his romance with Bathsheba does not frustrate him to the point of self annihilation as it does to Boldwood; and again his strength of character is tested when he remains composed and cool with the spirit of a stoic after the destruction of his sheep by a malicious combination of events. In spite of huge financial losses and the prospect of a bleak future, he continues to put up an amazing show of absolute placidity. This tragic event vividly illustrates his exceptional capacity for ‘open-eyed endurance without flinching.’¹⁶ Though the death of his two hundred ewes is a devastating event he remains unnerved and imperturbable. Rather it transforms him into a stronger personality. His “ordeal of wretchedness had given him

more than it had taken away.” (p.88) For him this unprecedented calamity has been a positive contribution to his personality and character. He was left with

a dignified calm he had never before known, and that indifference to fate which, though it often makes a villain of a man, is the basis of his sublimity when it does not. And thus the abasement had been exaltation, and the loss gain (p.88)

Driven by this tragic incident, Oak goes to Casterbridge, looking for a job. While waiting at the market to be hired by prospective employers he plays his flute “in the style of a man who had never known a moment of sorrow.” (p.90) What is eloquently manifested in Oak’s character is ‘the dignity, heroism, nobility, stoicism and simple humanity with which man confronts an omnipotent and indifferent Fate.’¹⁷. In all this excruciating experiences of life, Oak is assisted by his phenomenal understanding of nature, combined with ‘a larger tragic awareness which makes personal losses bearable and less completely destructive of human integrity.’¹⁸. Like his creator he seems to hold the view that:

Let me enjoy the earth no less
Because the all-enacting might
That fashioned forth its loveliness
Had other aims than my delight.

Gabriel Oak is the personification of self-possession and sobriety. Whether it is frustration in love or personal financial losses, he has an incredibly tenacious hold over himself, never letting circumstances to drive him to despair or hopelessness. In Oak emotion 'is calmed, restrained and tempered by the reason which is the real ruling power of his being.'¹⁹ To have outlived with exemplary fortitude his unhappy romance with Bathsheba as well as the loss of his sheep is the early indication of Oak's incontrovertible personal integrity, for he "belonged to the even – tempered order of humanity" (p.120) One of the chief experiences of the novel is the expression of emotions. All characters including Oak are subject to this overwhelming force of feelings and emotions. However, what differentiates Oak from the rest of the protagonists is that whereas they become subservient to their passions, Oak withstands them with a singular equanimity, summoning to his aid the exercise of his disciplined mental power. Though without any formal education, Oak has never given up the pursuit of knowledge. He has "acquired more sound information by diligent perusal than many a man of opportunities has done from a furlong of laden shelves." (p.120) Even a rustic like Joseph Poorgrass is able to discern the learning of Gabriel: "Oak is a very understanding shepherd, and learned in books." (p.338)

The incipient failure of Oak to win over Bathsheba is caused by his tactlessness and Bathsheba's spirit of over independence, coupled with her lack of experience in life. Oak's inadequacy of the understanding of feminine psyche is a barrier to any romantic relationship with her. From his first encounter with Bathsheba he reveals a pathetic want of tact in dealing with women. An early example is his frank admission of seeing Bathsheba's scabrous antics on her pony during her journey to Tewnell Mill: "His 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." (p.69) And again, after being saved by Bathsheba from being suffocated in his hut, he misses the best opportunity of displaying his love for her. He fails miserably as a prospective lover of Bathsheba:

'I am sorry,' he said the instant after.

'What for?'

'Letting your hand go so quick.'

'you may have it again if you like; there it is.' She gave him her hand again. Oak held it longer this time – indeed, curiously long. 'How soft it is – being winter time, too – not chapped or rough, or anything!' he said.

'There – that's long enough,' said she, though without pulling it away.

'But I suppose you are thinking you would like to kiss it? You may if you want to.' 'I wasn't thinking of any such thing,' said Gabriel simply;

'but I will _' "That you won't!" she snatched back her hand. Gabriel felt

himself guilty of another want of tact. (Pp.71-72)

During Oak's proposal to Bathsheba, she suggests to him to marry a rich woman, and he bluntly replies: "That's the very thing I had been thinking myself!" And Hardy's authorial comment is worth noting: "Farmer Oak

had one-and-a-half Christian characteristics too many to succeed with Bathsheba: his humility, and a superfluous moiety of honesty. Bathsheba was decidedly disconcerted.” (p.81) However, Oak is not a mere object of ridicule as he may appear in the opening chapters of the novel. As the narrative unfolds itself he gets more significant opportunities to prove the strength of his personality. He remains true to his natural self without pretensions or hypocrisy. It is in contrast with the communal as well as personal responses of other characters that he stands out distinctly as a man of principles and moral integrity. That Oak’s prosaic attitude and unconventional romantic advances to Bathsheba are the chief barriers to his building of a mutually satisfying relationship with her is only partially true. Equally responsible is Bathsheba’s quaint romantic fancies and lack of worldly wisdom for which she would pay a dear price.

Though initially unobtrusive, the Oak-Bathsheba relationship is at the imaginative centre of the novel. It is essentially a celebration of the rural way of life. Gabriel Oak is already in possession, by design or by nature, of such a communal bond; and Bathsheba is potentially capable of being restored into the orbit of communal ethos. Quite early in the novel, the natural interdependence of Oak and Bathsheba is suggested. Oak’s timely rescue of Bathsheba’s farm yard from devastating fire recalls Bathsheba’s rescue of him from being suffocated at Norcombe. Theirs is an

intuitive bond which no power can thwart. In spite of the apparent physical estrangement, both Oak and Bathsheba respect and care for each other.

Bathsheba has no doubt about the honesty and devotion of Oak:

And the outspoken honesty of his character was such that on any subject, even that of her love for, or marriage with another man, the same disinterestedness of opinion might be calculated on, and be had for the asking. (p.184)

According to Bernard Williams, the man with ‘ the extended sympathies, the ability to think about the needs of people beyond his own immediate environment, is recognizably in the world of morality.’²⁰ That Bathsheba always turns to Oak in times of crisis – whether in sheep farming or mental crisis – is an index of her initiation into the community’s ethos. At all crucial stages of her life she consults Oak and takes him into full confidence. The probity of his character is the greatest strength in him, and he never let it go even in times of most oppressive circumstances. He finds safety, identity and even happiness in his almost religious self denial. The happiness of the one he loves becomes a constitutive part of his own happiness. And his undeviating effort at it is a deeper and rare kind of morality. He practises Christ’s message: “Love your neighbour as you love yourself,” even if he is your enemy. He refrains from harming others even if that means harm to himself. This is morality in its purest form. The most eloquent example of the intuitive rapport that exists between Oak

and Bathsheba is the great storm scene in chapter 37. It is their instinctive allegiance to the agrarian community which spontaneously brings them together to salvage the grains from storm and rain. It is emblematic of their deeply ingrained cultural values. This superb effort suggests how naturally these two central characters are bound together in feeling and communal allegiance. Their intuitive sense of camaraderie is the loveliest and the most striking feature of their personalities. Both are animated by a sense of communal responsibilities.

Gabriel Oak seems to embody the eighteenth century protestant belief of man as the steward of God's creation. The individual and the society are, Hardy believes strongly, inalienable constituents of the cosmic design – one enhancing the stature of the other rather than standing in opposition to each other. Oak finds delight and meaning in work. He is capable of discovering a peculiar power in the activity of simple, creative agricultural work, signifying the possibility of integration between individual and landscape, spirit and body. In contrast neither Boldwood nor Troy can find such delight in work. Boldwood neglects his entire farm works while frustrated in love whereas Oak finds refuge in it; Troy is totally indifferent to the agricultural works. What is striking about Bathsheba is that she never ignores her agricultural responsibilities even in the midst of most afflicting circumstances. According to Roger Ebbatson,

‘the emphasis on work and custom is vital to Hardy.’²¹ Oak is animated by the vitality of the living, rural ideal. The thought of Bathsheba’s grains being destroyed by storm and rain is beyond his cultural imagination.

Seven Hundred and fifty pounds in the divinest form that money can swear – that of necessary food for men and beast: should the risk being run of deteriorating this bulk of corn to less than half of its value, because of the instability of a woman? Never, if I can prevent it (p.301)

Far from the Madding Crowd is fundamentally a fictional celebration of ‘the triumph of sobriety over passion, moderation over excess, work over play.’²² This theme is fully developed in the character of Oak. It is the victory of oak and the traditional, rural community over the disruptive, aberrant forces represented by Troy and Boldwood. The novel tries to show ‘the rural community as a mainstay against the chaos of an absurd universe and the warring impulses within the human personality.’²³ It is only Gabriel Oak who recognizes this truth along with an awareness of his own vulnerability. Hardy’s experience of life impels him to see man as an entity constituted of dichotomous impulses. Consequently, the individual is called upon to abandon socially detrimental impulses. In the novel only Gabriel Oak has any mastery over the opposing tendencies of his personality. What Bathsheba, Troy and Boldwood lack is the social and personal equilibrium. And the ultimate triumph of the novel lies in the moral education of Bathsheba to comprehend and appreciate the strength of

Oak's prosaic world. It is exhilarating to learn that Bathsheba has eventually found her source of strength in a prosaic man like Oak who rescues her 'from the destructive desolation of her physical and spiritual weakness.'²⁴

Apart from the moral education of Bathsheba – which is one of the chief concerns of the novel – Hardy demonstrates the ceaseless conflict between man and his circumstances, between the individual and the inscrutable impersonal forces. No power on earth can deflect the malicious workings of the mysterious, omnipotent Fate. Nevertheless, human resilience, adaptability, patience and stoicism are the effective armours to shield oneself against the onslaught of the unknown. Whereas characters like Troy, Boldwood, Eustacia, Fitzpiers and Arabella strive with selfish passion, Gabriel, Tess, Venn and Giles Winterborne are prepared 'to sacrifice their own happiness to ensure that of other people.'²⁵ And ultimately they enjoy at least limited possibilities of happiness and create an environment for harmonious social living. Conventions of society are seen by Hardy as a means of keeping its members from falling into chaotic disorder. Those who attempt to violate them for their own selfish motives always meet with tragic sufferings. D. H. Lawrence in an unfinished essay on Hardy's novels observes that 'transgression against the social code is made to bring destruction as though the social code worked our irrevocable

fate.’²⁶ Though Hardy had lost his faith in God and religion at the age of twenty-seven, he continued to cherish the simple values of that faith. It was the faith of an innocent rustic in the simplicity of rural life. Except Oak no character in the novel displays the Hardyian awareness of the dark, incomprehensible forces of the universe. And in the final union of Oak and Bathsheba, Hardy reinforces the moral aspect of the novel: Oak has deserved Bathsheba; he has patiently served his apprenticeship and merits the reward he gets. He has preserved with unflinching loyalty his incipient love for Bathsheba till the end: “I shall do one thing in this life – one thing certain – that is, love you, and long for you, and keep wanting you till I die.” (p.180) This honest, sincere passion of Oak remains undiminished throughout his life. Their union is an illustration of how patience and work can be more meaningful and rewarding than irrational passions. Ian Gregor observes that ‘work as learning, this is a counterpoise that Hardy offers to the demands of passion----- to the isolating self-absorption of passion.’²⁷ Bathsheba’s eventual recognition of the blessings of unambitious existence vividly reiterates and revalidates the sustaining properties of Oak’s prosaic world.

Far from the Madding Crowd contains the core of Hardy’s cultural and moral vision – the inevitability of constructing a communal and cultural personality within a seemingly indifferent, if not hostile, universe.

Socially deviant behaviour and attitudes cannot go unpunished. Hardy's sense of morality is inextricably linked with the individual's relationship with his social world. For him morality is the instinctive behaviour that ought to be guided by the cultural paradigms of the given society. It is not a universal, timeless one; it is particular, local or contextual. For Hardy it is accommodation to and compromise with the cultural forces of the given time which can guarantee at least limited success and happiness. If one looks for an authentic way of life in Hardy's imaginative works, it is certainly traceable in rural community where life is primitive and elemental, uncorrupted by the sophisticated ways of the modern world. The agrarian Weatherbury community is deeply rooted in age old traditions and superstitions. Bathsheba, Troy and Boldwood act in opposition to the inherent ideals enshrined in their cultural community. Hardy's acute perception of the individual as an integral part of his immediate society compels him to withdraw sympathy from anyone who turns irrationally individualistic. Instinct for Hardy does not imply the absence of reason; it is spontaneity uncorrupted by egoistic indulgence. Irresponsible behaviour of Bathsheba and Troy can find no toleration in a traditional society. Troy alienates himself irrevocably from his natural environment. He never tries to become part of the consciousness of the community around him. We learn that Troy was a native of the Weatherbury community, but was

alienated from it by the circumstances of his life. His mysterious birth, his early exposure to the outside world, and his own peculiar nature have conspired to make him what he is:

IDIOSYNCRASY and vicissitude had combined to stamp Sergeant Troy as an exceptional being----- He was a man to whom memories were incumbrance, and anticipation a superfluity. Simply feeling, considering, and caring for what was before his eyes, he was vulnerable only in the present. (p.219)

Though the circumstances of his peculiar birth and his early exposure to the outside world may be partly responsible for his unprincipled life, yet he can't be absolved of his offensive behaviour in a community like Weatherbury. He does not make any effort to correct and improve his character. He does not respect the cultural values and moral tenets which are the chief guiding forces of Oak and the ordinary peasants. For him "the past was yesterday; the future tomorrow; never the day after." (p.219) Whereas Oak's emotions and feelings are swayed by reason; Troy's is governed by the sole consideration of sensual gratification: "His reason and his propensities had seldom any reciprocating influence, having separated by mutual consent long ago." (p.220) Consequently, and tragically too, there is no symmetry of reason and emotion, rationality and impulse in his predominantly epicurean mode of living. Troy indulges in physical pleasures recklessly. His life is characterized by recklessness; and he is a menace to the otherwise tranquil and immutable rural landscape.

Troy's entire course of life is marked by extreme contradictory absolutes:

He spoke fluently and unceasingly. He could in this way be one thing and seem another; for instance, he could speak of love and think of dinner; call on the husband to look at the wife; be eager to pay and indeed to owe" (pp.220-21)

And this fidgety, unsettled personality of Troy wrecks havoc on the life of the community. His refusal to integrate himself with Weatherbury community is both socially and morally offensive. His indifference to the community ethos is an irresponsible act as a social being. Unlike Oak who maintains a burning passion to preserve the communal values and nature's bounty, Troy is completely unmindful of his communal responsibility as an individual. For instance, Oak's warning of storm and rain during Troy's infectious revelry with the labourers is dismissed in an idle manner. His supercilious reaction that he "can't stop to talk to you about such fidgets" (p.299) is suggestive of the grim threat he poses to a community that is chiefly dependent upon agriculture.

Though not in the same fashion as Troy, Boldwood, too, is incapacitated for harmonious social living by virtue of his extremities. His intrinsic nature is marked by extreme absolutes like that of Troy:

The phases of Boldwood's life were ordinary enough, but his was not an ordinary nature. That stillness, which struck casual observers more than anything else in his character and habit, and seemed so precisely like the

rest of inaction, may have been the perfect balance of enormous antagonistic forces – positives and negatives in fine adjustment. His equilibrium disturbed, he was in extremity at once. If an emotion possessed him at all, it ruled him; a feeling not mastering him was entirely latent. Stagnant or rapid, it was never slow. He was always hit mortally, or he was missed. (p.171)

This dignified, sober looking old bachelor is stirred out of his hitherto repressed emotional life after being provoked by Bathsheba's unintentional romantic advances. Once his dormant passions are kindled they enslave him to the extent of throwing to the wind all his concerns for social propriety. He lacks the capacity for temperate, refined emotion. "Bathsheba was far from dreaming that the dark and silent shape upon which she had so carelessly thrown a seed was a hotbed of tropic intensity." (p.171) In the words of John Bayley 'Boldwood has his own natural and absolute kind of being, which is not that of a lover.'²⁸ It is an insane obsession with a passion that is inexplicable in the ordinary world of romantic relationship. Benevolence, altruism or a concern for the happiness of the one he professes to love occupies a secondary or no place at all in him. It is an example of immorality in human relationships. It is more in the nature of a devilish infatuation than pure love; it is emotion infused with a strong element of egoism, rather than the self-sacrifice of pure love as embodied in Oak:

Boldwood, who seemed so much deeper and higher and stronger in feeling than Gabriel, had not yet learnt, any more than she herself, the

simple lesson which Oak showed a mastery of by every turn and look he gave – that among the multitude of interests by which he was surrounded, those which affected his personal well-being were not the most absorbing and important in his eyes. Oak meditatively looked upon the horizon of circumstances without any special regard to his own standpoint in the midst. (Pp.354-55)

Boldwood's want of emotional equilibrium has made his life a theatre of calamities. His hitherto well governed 'Super ego', to use the Freudian terminology, suddenly yields to his 'Id' which knows no moral restraint. He has succumbed to his own unbridled passions. So like Troy he too is a formidably aberrant element in a culturally cohesive community. His murder of Troy and consequent insanity is the outcome of his unbalanced life. What Hardy advocates is the cultivation of a balanced approach in our response to life. It is this pattern that is consistently developed in the novel through the personal drama of Troy, Boldwood and Bathsheba.

In Hardy's fictional world, it is the ordinary peasants – who lack ambition, and are humorous, cheerful, accept things as they occur without any predetermined disposition – who are blessed with a comparatively serene existence, for they work 'in partnership with nature.'²⁹ The ordinary peasants like Joseph Poorgrass, Coggan, Mathew Moon and others in *Far from the Madding Crowd* find their wisdom, guidance and happiness in the ancient peasant culture with all its limitations. The comforting gregariousness and communal allegiance of the simple rustics is a source

of strength and happiness for them; their particularly scintillating conversations in the country inns are not a deliberate veneer of any suppressed sadness or melancholy, rather they are natural expressions of their blissful existence; their banality is their bliss. The rustics are a real epitome of enduring cultural wisdom. They are naturally endowed with the capacity for maintaining a façade of indifference to the incomprehensible cataclysmic events in their lives. They ‘embody a morality, a fund of immemorial wisdom and experience.’³⁰ They have, like Oak and later Bathsheba, learnt to grow up “in the interstices of a mass of hard prosaic reality.” (p.458) And it is this knowledge of life which is central to Hardy’s cultural and moral imagination.

As a novelist, Hardy was a deeply divided man: on the one hand he presents the universe as a hostile force over which man has no control; and on the other, he holds man responsible for his own actions. This conflict between man and nature is illustrated through the tragic circumstances of the major characters in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Gabriel Oak’s loss of two hundred sheep, Boldwood’s sudden awakening into unbridled passion for no fault of his own, Fanny’s mistaking the church on the day of her marriage with Troy – all these are a few instances over which the individuals have little or no control at all. The important question then to be asked is to what extent is man held responsible for his life? Though

Hardy has not completely solved the problem of pre-determination and individual freedom, the characters of Troy, Boldwood and Bathsheba, in contrast with Oak, reveal that man's fate, to a great extent, is dependent upon the individual's capacity for patience and self control. An awareness of the mysterious universe and a sense of social responsibility can ameliorate much of human sufferings. That each individual has to learn to adjust to the collective ethos of the given society is the ennobling lesson exemplified by Oak's personality and incontrovertible life. If Bathsheba is rehabilitated into the fold of Weatherbury community, it is both because of her susceptibility to the transforming power of experience, and her flexibility to outlive the gloomy events of her past life. She does not evade the issues of life in their brutal manifestations. Of all Hardy's novels, perhaps *Far from the Madding Crowd* is the most Hardy-esque in its unequivocal, single-minded expression of his central moral perspective which would seek more subtle and intricate modes of expression in his later novels. Ultimately the novel proclaims that success belongs to those 'whose life is in harmony with their world.'³¹ The renegades have been eliminated or won over, and the traditional, rural community of Weatherbury has triumphed. And Gabriel Oak, the community's moral conscience, clearly reveals that 'the general happiness is to some extent a constituent and to some extent a casually necessary condition of individual

happiness.³² His actions aimed at the general happiness of his community and its people indirectly realize his own happiness. Such uneducated, unformulated, instinctive response to life is the highest form of morality, and it is the essence of the Hardyian moral vision.

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Chapter 2

The Return of the Native (1878)

Ian Gregor in his book, *The Great Web* opens his discussion on *The Return of the Native* by remarking that 'there are not many things which can be said with safety about *The Return of the Native*....'¹ What does it signify? It signifies that the novel is open to more than one interpretation. The postmodern uncertainty about the ultimate meaning of a text informs the novel just as intensely as the evocation of the pagan, pre-Christian forms of life. John Paterson in his essay, *Hardy's Anti-Christian Document* observes:

In its central action in the suffering and death of Eustacia Vye, in other words, *The Return of the Native* dramatizes the tragic humiliation, in the diminished world of the modern consciousness, of an heroic, pre-Christian understanding of life.²

The pre-Christian understanding of life is now challenged and shaken by the new forms of life outside Egdon Heath, symbol of a traditional community. In the postmodern world all the established notions of meaning and truth are viewed skeptically. In *The Return of the Native* Hardy seems to be ambivalent towards the ancient stable culture and the emerging new one. He is sure of the strength of ancient culture. However, there are enough tensions in the novel between these two forms of life.

Page references to *The Return of the Native* are to the Penguin edition (1978)

This tension finds expression in Clym's modernist tendencies and Eustacia's craving for the same. But unlike the postmodernists, Hardy seems to remain certain about the values embodied in Egdon community. However, he is not blind to the crisis of culture which is the central focus of the novel. While his cultural imagination remains intact, his major characters are caught in a web of tension and conflict between the two worlds. The two worlds are presented antithetically.

Hardy has always been irresistibly drawn to the primitive vitality embodied in a rural community. However, his increasing awareness of changes around him compels him to examine the possibilities of the new world in the context of the new scenario. In *The Return of the Native* Hardy closely analyses the traditional and the modern worlds. There is a marked tendency in recent critical discourses to cite this novel as an example of Hardy's inconsistency. What appears to be inconsistency is, in fact, the mark of his greatness as an artist, for he is a relentless searcher of truth without any totalizing tendency. He is not a didactic writer.

In the creation of the character of Eustacia Vye, Hardy is celebrating the vitality of natural forms of living. And in Clym Yeobright's alternation between the traditional and the modern, and in his final return to the traditional community of Egdon Heath, Hardy is subjecting the new

civilisation to a critical scrutiny. So the novel is full of tension between the old and the new. It is Eustacia who embodies most intensely the tension between the two worlds. The heath, against which Eustacia rebels, is metaphorically a microcosm of the invincible universe as well as the traditional human society. In this connection Dale Kramer observes:

The heath may in a large sense serve as a symbol of the circumstances of life which destroy the rebel; but it is simultaneously a manifestation of universal nature with which Eustacia is capable of being in full accord.³

Though Hardy is on the side of the heroine in her tragic battle against the universal forces, he does not support her in her irrational rebellion against the Egdon community. Eustacia is craving for a world that Clym is disillusioned with. She is looking for fulfilment outside her natural station in life.

With characteristic Hardyian empathy for his tragic heroes and heroines, Hardy explores the predicament of Clym and Eustacia. The structure of the plot creates a world of conflicts between dream and reality, balance and imbalance, moderation and immoderation, acceptance and rebellion. Whereas Clym is a representative of moderation and balance, Eustacia is a negation of both. In dramatizing the tragic life of these two major characters, and of Damon Wildeve, Hardy is once again engaged

into a critical enquiry into the problematic of human life. The ultimate impression that the novel leaves upon us is Hardy's belief in the enduring values of ancient culture. As in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy creates two groups of characters opposed to each other in their responses to life. Ian Gregor observes that the 'novel is similar in substance if not in mood to *Far from the Madding Crowd*.' ⁴ It is this mood which makes some critics to become uneasy about Hardy's position. And, of course, this variation of mood is quite central to his imagination, especially in his later novels. Once replying to a friend's objection to his philosophy of life, Hardy replied:

A friend of mine writes objecting to what he calls my "philosophy" (though I have no philosophy-merely what I have often explained to be only confused heap of impressions, like those of a bewildered child at a conjuring show)⁵

What Hardy is trying to do in *The Return of the Native* is a detached evaluation of both kinds of life. It is through the character of Eustacia Vye that he brings out the disturbances caused by the gaudy new civilization. She is the most powerful, almost mythical character in the novel. Hardy's sympathises with both Clym and Eustacia when they suffer for the spontaneous expression of what they deeply believe in. Noorul Hasan makes a very perceptive observation in this connection:

To say that *The Return of the Native* is written to justify Eustacia or Clym is to go against the grain of the narrative. But it might be said with justice that the novel is an examination of the moral quality of their life

and action, subordinating their individual lives to certain primordial rhythms and rightness in which it instinctively believes.⁶

Hardy does not defend Eustacia entirely. His allegiance to her is a divided one. What he admires in her is her capacity for instinctive feeling. Her tragedy lies in her pathetic inadequacy to reconcile herself to her natural community. Hers is a fragmented consciousness. Eustacia struggles in vain to transcend herself, to run away from her own authentic being to an illusory world of fancies which would certainly delude her as Clym has been deluded. Her tragedy is partly due to her relentless attempt 'to change her situation or her surroundings in the search for a nebulous ideal.'⁷

Man in Hardy's fictional world is a part of the unity of nature, and there is an inherent equilibrium on such a landscape that cannot be disturbed by individual action. Clym is able to achieve such equilibrium in the novel. But Clym is not Hardy as he himself said though he is 'the nicest of all my heroes, and not a bit like me.'⁸ What does it mean? It might mean that Clym lacks Hardy's critical approach to the problems of life. 'Hardy romantically conceived of nature as a symbol of human freedom, a condition of the liberated spirit, but at the same he viewed with mistrust its threat to the precarious stability of society.'⁹ In the novel Eustacia represents this threat. *The Return of the Native* is the most pagan of all

Hardy's works. And Eustacia, the heroine, and the heath are the external expressions of that paganism. Eustacia has a natural affinity with the heath. Her affinity with the Heath is best expressed in Chapter VI-'The Figure against the Sky.'

Suddenly, on the barrow, 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 the 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. (p.62)

Paradoxically, it is the same heath which Eustacia is not able to reconcile to and which ultimately destroys her. With her primitive passion she rebels against a community which is beyond human control. In her passion for a modern life, she tries to disengage herself from her natural environment. It is a denial of her own very self. Eustacia's futile struggle and ultimate tragic death is a stark reminder of the futility of human attempt to alter one's lot. 'The heath is' observes Dale Kramer, 'both a moral absolute and a universal solvent.'¹⁰ In Eustacia's struggle against the rigidity of the heath, Hardy is presenting the hopeless battle between the individual and society. If we take the heath as a metaphor for the conventional society, Eustacia is a victim of its oppression. It does not tolerate her difference, her specificity. It is 'this tension between land and character that Hardy takes up at the outset of the novel....'¹¹

Man's effort to impose a rationalistic pattern on the natural world is resisted by the more powerful, enigmatic forces. Material changes may be made possible by sheer will and hard labour. But no such improvements can alter the fundamental, intrinsic character of the universe. The cosmic design is beyond man's comprehension. It takes him by surprise, often ruthlessly shattering his earthly aspirations to the point of grotesque tragedy. Clym's philanthropic ventures on the heath to educate its primitive dwellers into a rational life do not have any significant effect on the natives. Nor does Eustacia's Promethean rebellion lead her anywhere except to her tragic end. The heath resists changes relentlessly:

The sea changed, the fields changed, the rivers, the villages, and the people changed, yet Egdon remained. (p.14)

Man's dream of a rational, well structured universe and the poignant awareness of the threats to the dream are well expressed in Clym's failure to improve the conditions of the natives of Egdon heath through modern education. Rational consciousness and individualistic assertions are defeated by the universal forces. This is what the heath illustrates so powerfully. The novel is evocative of a time when man lived in perfect harmony with the universe, with an unfragmented consciousness. Eustacia's rebellion is symbolic of man's attempt to sever himself from his

natural community. Her life is a glaring example of the tragedy of not accepting the limitations of finite existence. Roger Ebbatson observes that 'while the heath embodies certain ancient ways of life, it also acts as a barrier to new thought; its life and ways are primeval, its rituals derive their sanction from Nature....'¹²

Eustacia's character is devised in such a way as to project two central themes of the novel: the forcefulness of primitive, instinctual life, and the inevitable tragedy of rebellion against one's cultural community and the universal forces. Her tragedy is multiplied by her resistance to these two forces. Leonard W. Deen sees Eustacia grandly heroic: 'Eustacia Vye, more than any other of Hardy's protagonists, seems intended to be grandly heroic, to exist on a higher level of significance than the other characters in the novel.'¹³ She is either above or below the average humanity like Dickens's Sydney Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Her utter failure to integrate herself with the native culture, which is the central focus of the novel, points to a total paralysis of her moral imagination. She is 'at odds with her environment without having a moral alternative to it.'¹⁴ She is averse to the finer aspects of communal living. She refuses to be identified with her natural community. However, in the creation of Eustacia's character, Hardy seems to be more interested in her primordial

self than the moral complexity of her character and the cultural issues at stake.

Eustacia's ethical failure lies in her inability to strike equilibrium between the demands of her society and those of her individual impulses. The cleavage between her authentic self and society creates an irresolvable dichotomy which characterizes her whole life. Her extremities of feeling and fanciful life extinguish all other possibilities of reason in her. Hardy has an intense respect for her natural self. And in her relentless battle against the mute, indifferent cosmic forces that thwart her aspirations Hardy is on her side, crying out:

O, the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond any control! O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all! (p.361)

It is the archetypal reaction of Hardy's tragic heroes and heroines. What Eustacia forgets is that she is waging a war against forces beyond her control. To add to this, her relation with the heath lacks the communal insight and social flexibility. Hence, her tragedy. What she has not realized is that 'to model our conduct on Nature's apparent conduct, as Nietzsche would have taught, can only bring disaster to humanity.'¹⁵ Within the cultural community of the heath, Eustacia's rebellion is self destructive. Her life places her in dialectical opposition to the inherent

ethos of the heath. Nor does she care to acquire any knowledge of the heath. Consequently, the cultural chasm between her and the community tends to increase at an alarming pace beyond reconciliation:

To dwell on a heath without studying its meanings was like wedding a foreigner without learning his tongue. The subtle beauties of the heath were lost to Eustacia; she only caught its vapors. An environment which would have made a contented woman a poet, a suffering woman a devotee, a pious woman a psalmist, even a giddy woman thoughtful, made a rebellious woman saturnine. (p.79)

Ever since her arrival on the heath, Eustacia treats it with supercilious contempt, alienating herself in the process from its centre. She refuses to bring herself into its fold and collective wisdom. She prefers a reclusive, isolated existence except for her trouble-ridden romance with Damon Wildeve, not because she finds him worthy of herself, but for “want of better object” to love and to be loved to madness.(p.79) In her egoistic world she places her own self above the interests of the people and community that surround her. No one understands the otherness of Eustacia more keenly than Mrs. Yeobright: “Miss Vye is to my mind too idle to be charming. I have never heard that she is of any use to herself or to other people” (p.186) It is an echo of Eustacia’s own estimate of her afflicted self: “I have not much love for my fellow creatures. Sometimes I quite hate them.”(p.193) Such deep rooted hatred is culturally offensive and contains catastrophic implications for her own life. According to David

Lyon, individualism 'proceeds to confine us to the solitude of our own heart.'¹⁶

From the time of her first appearance on the heath till her tragic, almost self willed death, Eustacia has chosen a gloomy course of confrontation with her milieu. To some extent her rebellious tendencies may be traced back to "her instinct towards social non-conformity." (p.78) It is a trait produced by frustration in social ambition. It is the general eccentric feature of her character to think and act contrary to what is practised by common humanity. For instance, on holidays, she would long for work; on working days she would prefer to rest; Sundays are hated by her, and on Saturdays she would sing psalms. "A blaze of love, and extinction, was better than a lantern glimmer of the same which should last long years." (p.77) And "fidelity in love for fidelity's sake had less attraction for her than for most women; fidelity because of love's grip had much." (p.77) Eustacia's life is characterized by extremities; she never strikes a balance in life. Hence, her tragic incompatibility with life. The co-existence of diverse and disparate elements in her personality is amply expressed by Hardy in the chapter, "Queen of Night"

Eustacia stands outside the conventional definitions of good and evil. In understanding her character Hardy seems to have anticipated the postmodern emphasis on individual specificity and particularity. Like Henchard she possesses a unique inner life which is in disharmony with the socially constructed external world. John Paterson sees the novel as a repudiation of the Christian, that is, modern and a celebration of the pagan:

For as a symbolic character, Eustacia belongs to a world that has not yet been touched by the spectral hand of Christianity: she reincarnates on the withered parish of Egdon Heath the larger and braver vision of the ancient Greeks.¹⁷

What Paterson tries to refer to is Hardy's evocation of the unalloyed, unfragmented form of ancient, pre-modern existence. Modernism with its trinity of enlightenment ideals - reason, science and progress - could not bring about the desired result of human happiness. In celebrating the ancient form of life and its traditional ethical system, Hardy is sharing the postmodern disillusionment with modernism. Alasdair Macintyre's *After Virtue* appeals to a pre-modern position following the failure of the Enlightenment project. In a famous passage he offers the stark alternatives:

Either one must follow through the aspirations and the collapse of the different versions of the Enlightenment project until there remains only the Nietzschean diagnosis and the Nietzschean problematic *or* one must hold that the Enlightenment project was not only mistaken, but should never have been commenced in the first place. There is no third alternative.¹⁸

In Clym's return from the centre of modern civilization, Hardy is suggesting the hollowness of a life of reason and rationality. In the

primitive world of Egdon Heath, Hardy finds enough strength to lead a healthy life - both morally and socially. Interestingly enough, some postmodern thinkers also look back to the pre-modern culture for a remedy to the contemporary malaise. Lyotard, for instance, thinks that we are 'in the position of Aristotle's prudent individual, who makes judgments about the just and unjust without the least criterion.'¹⁹ Foucault and Derrida, in spite of all their discord, could be said to agree in the end on ethics, deriving from the Greeks. Lyotard sees the postmodern condition as one of 'pluralistic paganism.' All these great thinkers hark back to the pre-modern. That is why we argue that Hardy's inalienable belief in the ancient form of living and its ethical values have a contemporary relevance. The British social theologian, John Milbank highlights 'the radicality and vitality of what could be thought of as a pre-modern position and its relevance to postmodern conditions.'²⁰ In other words, what all these thinkers try to say is that the pre-modern still has much to offer in the debate over postmodernity. It was an age when people lived a natural life without attempting to construct a rational system of ethics. And what we find in the postmodern condition is a rejection of all forms of rationalistic certainties. It is the individual and the local which assume significance in the postmodern world. That is exactly what Hardy believed and espoused in his novels.

Eustacia's violent death in *The Return of the Native* suggests the tragedy of resistance to age old forms of living. It illustrates the invincibility of cultural wisdom. It is a triumph of nature over culture; it is a triumph of the traditional over the modern. But at the same time, her death points to the fatally discordant elements that exist even in a natural being. She is Hardy's first victim of modernist cravings. She is a precursor of Grace Melbury, Tess and Sue. What goes wrong with her is her egoism and vanity which do not correlate with the community ethics or with her inner self. That she remains defiant to the influences of the ethos of the heath, and refuses to share the communal perception of life is an expression of her inner rigidity. She is so much divorced from the community that no moral exoneration is permissible for her. What she does not realize is that 'society not only limits aspirations, it also creates opportunities for them...'²¹

At one level Eustacia demonstrates the tragedy of the romantic ideal. All her romantic ideals are potentially self defeating because she is searching for purpose and meaning outside herself, outside her natural world. She does not respect her cultural specificity. She fails to define herself in relation to her cultural identity. She wants to leave her native,

cultural environment for a world elsewhere. But as we have already seen Hardy does not believe in the supremacy of any centre over the other. But as an artist 'Hardy, though possessing the old romantic feeling for personality, shared the Victorian burden of society.'²² Like Conrad he knew that though society is corrupting, it is inevitable. What Eustacia fails to realize is the futility of rebelling against the universal forces over which man has no control. Hardy seems 'to prefer the contentment of limiting aspirations to the strain of defiant greatness.'²³ Eustacia's flirtation with a precarious Prometheanism is not informed by an awareness of what damage it can cause. In her proud, intransigent rebellion she is a romantic, and 'emblematic of the feeling and infinite desire which rebel against inevitable limitation, and thus is the supremely tragic figure of the novel.'²⁴ She tries to undo the almost immutable, incalculable circumstances of her limited existence, and becomes frustrated. The flaw in her is the 'discrepancy between personality and environment, sensibility and circumstances.'²⁵

One self-defeating trait of Eustacia is her inability to own up to the responsibility of her actions. It is a blatant violation of the basic principle of morality. It is, in fact, the fundamental component of morality. The chapter, 'The Closed Door' demonstrates this weakness in Eustacia's

character. When Mrs. Yeobright knocks at the door, Eustacia peeps through the window and sees her mother-in-law. But an inexplicable sense of pride and arrogance prevents her from opening the door, shutting out the old woman who imagines even Clym's contrivance in it. It is the turning point in the novel after which tragedy would visit all the major characters in this human drama. Mrs. Yeobright, a true representative of traditional wisdom and insight, is killed by the callousness of her daughter-in-law. Eustacia neither lets Clym know the peculiar circumstances of her crude behaviour nor accepts responsibility on her own: "Yet instead of blaming herself for the issue she laid the fault upon the shoulders of some indistinct, colossal prince of the world, who had framed her situation and ruled her lot."(p.304) Hardy does not exonerate the individual of his personal and social responsibilities. It is central to his cultural imagination. Even in Eustacia's romantic relationship with Wildeve and Clym, there is a perverse, if not repugnant, tone of selfishness, intensified by jealousy and feminine capriciousness. Her renewed passion for Wildeve after his cruel desertion of her in pursuit of Thomasin is prompted more by a bruised ego than any genuine love for him. She is well aware of her incompatibility with Wildeve: "Damon, you are not worthy of me: I see it, and yet I love you."(p.70) Even Hardy is aware of this incongruity in her puzzling personality: "She seemed to long for the abstraction called passionate love

more than for any particular lover.”(p.77) And later on she confesses to Diggory Venn: “I should have cared nothing for him had there been a better person near.”(p.110)These shattered reflections are only an anticipation of her final estimate of Wildeve. As she is contemplating a possible elopement with him, Hardy captures her inner mood:

“Can I go, can I go?” she moaned. “He is not great enough for me to give myself to – he does not suffice my desire!.....If he had been a Saul or Bonaparte- ah! But to break my marriage vow for him- it is too poor a luxury!”(p.360)

In spite of her knowledge that her relationship with Wildeve will be disastrous, Eustacia decides to go ahead with it. It is an instance of Bad Faith. It is a conscious betrayal of her own self. She slips into inauthenticity and destroys herself in the process.

Clym Yeobright, the hero of *The Return of the Native*, is an epitome of moderation in social life. He represents Hardy’s deep faith in the wisdom of a traditional community. His fundamental values are derived from the cultural heritage of the heath. He is scarcely distinguishable from the natural forms of life on the heath:

If any one knew the heath it was Clym. He was permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odours. He might be said to be its product. (p.180)

In Clym's return to the heath Hardy seems to prophesy the ultimate triumph of the traditional over the modern, of the native over the alien. Noorul Hasan has rightly perceived the character of Clym: 'The history of Clym's character is the history of the triumph of the Dorset peasant over the Darwinian philosopher.'²⁶

About the peasant heart of Clym Hardy observes: "Take all the varying hates felt by Eustacia Vye towards the heath, and translate them into loves, and you have the heart of Clym. (p.180) His taking up the job of a furze cutter, after his blindness, is a convincing display of his capacity to submerge himself in the vibrant life of the heath. It would be going against the felt particularities of the novel if we view Clym's philanthropic effort on the heath as an attempt to modernize the inhabitants of this rigidly primitive community. It may be viewed as a selfless effort at the amelioration of the condition of the natives within their limited socio-cultural context.

I

When we speak of Hardy's cultural imagination, what we mean is a form of thinking that values primitive way of living and feeling. It simply points to a natural form of life without rationalistic interventions. Clym's educational efforts on the heath are nothing but a more humanizing attempt whereby the natives can enjoy a fuller existence within their instinctual

way of life. His sole motive is only an enlightening mission, "to do some worthy thing before I die. As a schoolmaster I think to do it- a schoolmaster to the poor and ignorant, to teach them what nobody else will."(p.182) The co-existence of double consciousness in Clym - the ancient and the modern- makes him better equipped to approach life, judging the strengths and weaknesses of both the cultures to educate the native citizens into a life of social progress. The native returned is not one who transports ideas indiscreetly from a civilization he himself has been tired of. His mission is one of an exclusively humanistic one, for he has learnt that "thought is a disease of the flesh..." (p.195) The heath is even physically salubrious for Clym:

On the young man's part, the paleness of face which he had brought with him from Paris, and the incipient marks of time and thought, were less perceptible than when he returned, the healthful and energetic sturdiness which was his by nature having particularly recovered its original proportions.(p.214)

This is not to contend that Clym is totally immune to the influence of his modern consciousness "In Clym Yeobright's face could be dimly seen the typical countenance of the future", and an "observer's eye was arrested, not by what it was, but by what it recorded."(p.174) Nevertheless, what is remarkable is that Clym remains unperturbed by the factious claims of two opposing modes of consciousness which co-exist in him. Whatever idealism he is believed to have assimilated is safely crafted on his

incorruptible cultural personality. He has known both the cultures and he respects the particular merit of each. In his outburst to Eustacia, Hardy's own postmodern tendencies are revealed with particular clarity:

Now, don't you suppose, my inexperienced girl, that I cannot rebel, in high Promethean fashion, against gods and fate as well as you? I have felt more steam and smoke of that sort than you have ever heard of. But the more I see of life the more I do perceive that there is nothing particularly great in its greatest walks, and therefore, nothing particularly small in mine of furze cutting. (p.261)

Clym's attempt to educate the natives must not be viewed as an inconsistency in Hardy's cultural vision. Rather, it shows his awareness of what is happening in the world. That Clym does not succeed in his mission is itself proof of Hardy's reservation about modern values. With all the alleged modernity of Clym's ideals, he remains firmly committed to his cultural inheritance. It is in his native resourcefulness that his identity is articulated, and not in his scholarship or supposed modernist tendencies which hardly have any discernible effect on the traditional Egdon community. In Clym's final return to the heath, we can find Hardy looking for some value that is beyond all the chaos, among all fragmentation, and amidst everything falling apart.²⁷ Clym's tragedy is that he is totally misunderstood by the community in his humanist enterprises. In the end 'he is a lovely and misunderstood preacher- perhaps like Hardy himself.'²⁸ Clym may be said to have an affinity with Simon in Golding's *Lord of the*

Flies, utterly misunderstood or 'ununderstood.' He is a refined pagan unlike Eustacia. Hence he survives all as a social hero, though pathetically. His tragic realization at the end is an ironic pointer to the deficiency of his acquired modern consciousness:

I who was going to teach people the higher secrets of happiness did not know how to keep out of that gross misery which the most untaught are wise enough to avoid.(p.318)

Perhaps, the chief error of Clym is that he "wished to raise the class at the expense of individuals rather than the individuals at the expense of the class."(p.179)

The marriage of Clym and Eustacia is from the very outset fated to be catastrophic because they inhabit totally opposing psychic worlds. One prefers the extinction of the self whereas the other asserts it forcefully. Neither can achieve any meaningful selfhood in the secluded world of the other. Clym's identification with the heath is 'antithetical to Eustacia's distaste for Egdon Heath.'²⁹ There is a radical polarity in their world views and it is the fundamental dialectic of the novel. Whereas Eustacia sees the heath as her cross, her shame and her death, Clym finds in it the source of sustenance. She is irrevocably trapped in a web of romantic illusions. Neither Clym nor Eustacia is able to comprehend and tolerate the otherness of the other. That is the tragedy of their life.

It is the humble characters, patient and unquestioning, who are excluded from unhappiness on the heath. Only those who succeed in forming the right relationship with the heath survive and enjoy their share of bliss. Merryn Williams observes that 'the heath can be humanized by those who respond to it fully; the eventual survivors are those who have been slighted and yet have the strength to endure.'³⁰ Diggory Venn and Thomasin Yeobright are the truest citizens of the heath. The likes of Venn are the supporting pillars of a communal society. He reminds us of Gabriel Oak in his selfless love: "I would sooner have married her myself", he said in a low voice. "But what I feel is that if she cannot be happy without him I will do my duty in helping her to get him, as a man ought."(p.159) And Eustacia is startled to discover the absolute lack of selfishness in Venn's love which is alien to her world. Venn's astuteness, fortitude, honesty, and above all, patience win him his old sweetheart, Thomasin. He is understanding and selfless in his relation to the heath and the people on it. His union with Thomasin is a great moral victory of the novel. They are not victims of modern alienation and fragmentation as Eustacia is. In her rebellion we can trace the crumbling of many values in the wake of modernism:



Traditional ties of family, kin and neighborhood, torn by new mobility and lack of conventional regulation, were replaced only by a sense of uncertainty, loss of direction and a feeling that the individuals were somehow on their own.³¹

Like Venn, Thomasin is also a real product of the heath. Her total personality and perspective of life stand in sharp contrast with that of Eustacia. Thomasin has inherited the virtues of humility, forbearance, patience and stoicism. "To her there were not, as to Eustacia, demons in the air, and malice in every bush and bough."(p.369} Both Venn and Thomasin are representatives of a particular cultural rhythm. They remind us of Giles Winterborne and Marty South of *The Woodlanders*. The central moral hypothesis of the novel is the achieving of self mastery through the repression of communally discordant natural appetites. Venn and Thomasin embody this communal virtue.

Hardy's ultimate moral vision is given expression in the Venn-Thomasin union as well as in Clym's eventual self awareness:

He left alone creeds and systems of philosophy, finding enough and more than enough to occupy his tongue in the opinions and actions common to all good men. (p.412)

In a subtle manner *The Return of the Native* reasserts Hardy's consistently held belief in the urgency of controlling communally disruptive behaviour.

His allegiance to the ancient forms of living never falters in this exquisitely wrought novel. And it is only appropriate to end this discussion by quoting the observation of John Holloway:

In *The Return of the Native* the stress falls on the revitalizing power of rural life, and how its vitality is intrinsically greater than that of modernity.³²

And in *The Return of the Native* Hardy retrieves the ancient wisdom as a constructive means for human living.

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Chapter 3

The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886)

Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is a fictional study of the authentic life of a powerful individual whose character cannot be judged by traditional ethical principles. His particular life is beyond the conventional moral paradigms. It is an exploration of the morality of an individual's inner self, his inner value system. Michael Henchard, the chief protagonist of the novel, possesses a unique moral personality. He luxuriates in his own specificity. In his essential self Henchard represents the postmodern worldview of the 'triumph of the subjective, the ephemeral, and the fragmentary over the unchanging and the universal.'¹ When Hardy called him "A Man of Character" he was referring to the morality of his enviable inner self and the totality of his authentic existence. In the creation of Henchard's character Hardy is anticipating the postmodern move towards the other, towards what is different. Hardy seems to emphasise that reality must be approached not through 'a centripetal movement of homogenization, but by centrifugal movement towards¹ the other....² It is Henchard's 'otherness' that kills him in a world which is intolerant of pluralism. Within his unique inner world, Henchard practises a morality of authenticity. For instance, in all his adversities, Henchard remains true to

Page references to *The Mayor of Casterbridge* are to the Penguin edition(1978)

himself, always owning up to the responsibility for his actions and confronting the consequences with equanimity and courage. Henchard's existence is incredibly unique. He is not just a specimen of a class, but a highly particularized individual, credited with a set of moral principles that are only his own.

The Mayor of Casterbridge can be seen as a turning point in the development of the English novel. Hardy shows that the novel is no longer a mere social document, but a significant psychological history as well. Hardy is aiming at a different kind of realism in the novel. It is an individual centred novel. It is, perhaps, the only novel where one character dominates the entire course of action. It is a novel that delves into the psychic life of an individual. For the first time, Hardy turns intensely towards the inner life of an individual to estimate the moral quality of that life. The autonomy of the self is recognized. In Henchard's character we come to know the 'naked face of the other', to borrow the phrase of Emmanuel Levinas. And trying to understand the Other is an ethical responsibility. In essence *The Mayor* is a celebration of the Other and a repudiation of totalizing moral principles. Majority of nineteenth century novels do not present characters as having interior life or subjective existence. But in the modern and postmodern fiction the subjective experience of the protagonist comes to the fore. Modern novels are not

social documents, but psychological histories of individual human beings. It is this concern with the subjective life of Hardy's characters which compels some critics to link Hardy with the modern world. The inner life of the hero, the autonomy of the individual is the focus of modern fiction.

In *The Mayor* Hardy tries to show that man's fate is not the product of any universal will, but it flows directly from his complex relations with the social world. Hardy sees the individual and his fate as indissolubly bound to a constantly evolving society. Henchard tries to define his identity within a mundane world which denies his specificity and frustrates him. He struggles hopelessly to find a rapport between his own inner self and the self of the fast evolving social world. His tragedy is caused by the new economic and social forces. Hardy tries to affirm the individual's freedom and autonomy.

Viewed from the conventional ethical standards, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* may be read as a moral tale of the fall of an individual who violates the natural principle of marriage. Many critics and readers try to interpret Henchard's adversities originating directly from the reckless sale of his wife. Albert J. Guerard in his essay on *The Mayor of Casterbridge* makes the observation that 'Hardy recognized, intuitively at least, that the guilty may also punish themselves unconsciously and cause their own bad

luck.’³ In his opinion, Henchard’s disasters are a retribution for his moral violation. This raises a philosophical question whether one’s present actions can determine his future destiny. True, Henchard has committed a crime against nature by selling his wife. And this violation of the sanctity of the natural human bond remains inextricably interwoven in his consciousness, and even precipitates his final fall when the firmity woman divulges his past recklessness. He cannot escape the consequences of his past action which is a violation of natural morality. However, the focus of the novel is not on his morally and culturally offensive behaviour, but on his authentic self which is in conflict with the emerging modern world. Both the pre-modern and the modern world were intolerant of multiplicities; they craved for universality and tried to suppress the other. Postmodernism is an era of multiplicity and specificity; it is tolerant of the ‘other.’ That is why we argue that Hardy anticipated many of the postmodern tendencies in his major fictional works. In this novel he is pleading for the need to understand the ‘otherness’ of the other. Though there is a conflict in the novel between two modes of feeling – traditional and modern - Henchard is beyond both the worlds. The novel concentrates on the individuality and inherent moral quality of his authentic self, invaded by the new civilization which cannot tolerate his specificity. It is the force of Henchard’s elemental nature and the emerging new social structure which set him on a downward

course, rather than his moral offense. Therefore, it is erroneous to view the sale of Susan as the major cause of Henchard's ultimate ruin. Such a view is simply an uncritical instance of highlighting one issue among the more significant conflicts inherent in the novel. While the auctioning of Susan is heinously unethical – no one would contradict it and Hardy wants us to consider it as such – there are other inexorable, vital forces which combine to destroy the Mayor. Any attempt to reduce this superbly executed work to a mere criticism of the violation of established ethical formula would be ignoring the centrality of Hardy's imagination. According to Rutland '*The Mayor of Casterbridge* exemplified what had become Hardy's personal philosophy of life with a starkness to be found in none of his previous books.'⁴ More than anything else, here Hardy aims at a different kind of realism, the realism of an individual's inner life. It is the psychological history of a unique character.

In spite of the moral offence committed by Henchard in the sale of his wife, Hardy convincingly displays the unique moral force of his character. Beneath Henchard's coarse external nature lie fine human qualities that make him stand out distinctly from the rest of the characters in the novel. He is an elementary character. The scene of the sale of Susan, macabre as it is, vividly expresses Henchard's amazing capacity for instinctive responses though it is detrimental to his own future happiness.

Living the given moment with an incredible emotional intensity is both a weakness and strength of his character. If frustration forces him to auction his wife, the repentance drives him to a life of austerity for twenty one years to expiate his sin. Henchard's intrinsic goodness is manifested in his sincere repentance of the wrongs towards his wife just as his primitive nature is revealed in her sale. Except this isolated event, the narrative of the novel has no other event that can discredit the force of his inner moral strength. Once Susan returns to him, he tries to make reparation for his past wrongs by marrying her second time. It is not simply a formality; it is the act of a repentant sinner. It shows that he never hated his wife. What he detested was his married situation which was an obstruction to his youthful ambition. In his intention and motive Henchard always remains moral.

The essential content of morality is an altruistic concern for others, and Henchard possesses it in abundance beneath the facade of his exterior crudities. Benevolence is as much a part of his character as his coarseness. Everyone who comes into contact with Henchard experiences both the rough and mild aspects of his personality. What ought to be considered is the quality of his inner self which contains a fund of generous impulses that are more moral than the educated refinements of Farfrae. There are numerous incidents in the novel to substantiate this quality of Henchard. One such instance is his generosity towards Abel's mother. Henchard's

concern for others is exemplary. Though Lucetta is threatened with the divulgence of Henchard's past affair with her, his natural integrity does not permit him to ruin her marriage with Farfrac. Rather, he despatches to her all the letters written by her during their courtship though they are misused by Joshua Jopp to take revenge upon Lucetta. When Lucetta is on the verge of death after the skimmity ride, Henchard runs for Farfrae who, however, fails to comprehend the honesty of his intention and dismisses his pleas as another trap to kill him. Even if his public image is tarnished by the standards of the social world, his personal integrity remains intact under all circumstances. Though he declines in social position, an Oedipus-like tragic status, he rises in personal stature and insight. It is in this tenacity of Henchard's inner integrity that his moral character outshines that of all other characters in the novel. Henchard is guided by a set of moral principles which belong more to the ancient culture. He is Hardy's most instinctual hero. Henchard's character cannot be judged against any fixed formulas. His character asserts the pluralistic nature of man. What Hardy is trying to do is to highlight the basic human qualities in Henchard. According to Terry Eagleton, in some postmodernist theory 'the injunction to glimpse the good in the bad has been pursued with a vengeance.'⁵ This is the outcome of the rejection of universalizing 'metanarratives' which have dominated the western philosophy and metaphysics for many centuries. In

applauding Henchard's character Hardy is celebrating the specificity and radical difference which are the cornerstones of postmodern thought. Henchard's difference can be best understood in relation with Farfrae. He knows no formal refinements or etiquette to conceal his true emotions. For the sake of social decorum, he cannot suppress his natural self.

All the major characters in the novel - Elizabeth Jane, Susan, Lucetta and Farfrae - are recipients of Henchard's unconditional love and concern on different occasions. Elizabeth-Jane is no less than an over-protected pet until her true identity is known to Henchard through his immoderate, inquisitive nature when he opens the half-sealed letter of his dead wife. But once his emotional world is disturbed he becomes totally imbalanced. In his abrupt change of attitude towards his step-daughter, there is a terrible poignancy of the bitter wretchedness of his situation. A whole new world of prospective happiness is shattered with one deadly blow of this discovery. For any other man, the shocking discovery of his supposed daughter's true parentage would have been unbearable. However, Henchard holds on with incredible strength, and he would have even survived had he not lost Elizabeth-Jane to Newson. Towards the end of the novel, there is a moral growth in Henchard. He becomes more aware of the need to love and to be loved. Henchard's moral strength lies not so much in his acts or deeds as in the intensity of his startling integrity while responding to the irrevocable

circumstances of his tragic existence. What drives him to his death is the extremity of his unique nature. Once an emotion seizes him he is under its overpowering influence. The loss of Elizabeth Jane becomes unbearable and it drives him to death - almost a self-willed death. Henchard has always functioned between extremities; no middle course is known to his nature. This attitude to life is generally absent in Hardy. But as far as Henchard's personality is concerned there is a terrible beauty in his extremities of living; there is a strong resonance of the common, uneducated natural humanity of which Wordsworth speaks about in his *Preface*. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy concentrates on the morality of an authentically natural self, rather than on the relationship between the personal self and the social self as is the case in his later novels.

For Hardy morality is not conformity to social or philosophical creeds, but an allegiance to one's authentic self. It is a total, unconditional response to life- a response which is elemental, instinctual and primitive. Morality and instinctive behaviour are indistinguishable for Hardy, argues Noorul Hasan while talking about the character of Henchard.⁶ This is not to argue that the sale of Susan is not vicious or abominable. Indeed, it is. It is a blatant violation of a natural law. Nevertheless, what need to be examined closely are the circumstances that lead to this morally offensive act by Henchard who possesses many indisputable moral qualities. What Hardy

attempts in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is to show the 'instinct for life, if you will, instead of a theory of right and wrong, good and bad'.⁷

Before charging Henchard with moral violation one has to examine closely the interrelationship of social circumstances and the psychic state of the offender in which the sale of his wife has been carried out. Henchard's act is motivated neither by the hatred for his wife nor is it a per-meditated act, at least the narrative does not offer any such hint; what he detests is a particular situation in which he is enmeshed through unthinking, premature decision of an early marriage while remaining completely insolvent. The external circumstances of his life are responsible for his unnatural behaviour.

Henchard is frustrated and dejected not so much with his marital status, although it is the apparent reason, as with the impossibility of finding a suitable job to realize his youthful ambition. Rutland makes a pertinent observation that '*The Mayor of Casterbridge* is the only novel among the rest in which, not love, but ambition, is the dominant tragic theme.'⁸ Ambition, of course, is one of the themes, but to see it as the dominant one is trying to shift the focus of the novel from its central preoccupation. Henchard's ambition is only an 'objective correlative', to

borrow the phrase from T. S Eliot, to expose the more vital, more elemental forces of his character.

The opening chapters of the novel reveal how temperamental and dejected Henchard is. Meticulous care has been taken to maintain a proper equilibrium while narrating the auction scene and the events that follow so that our sympathy remains with Henchard, the man of character. When the customers in the tent become drunk, the conversation revolves round “the ruin of good men by bad wives, and, more particularly, the frustration of many a promising youth’s high aims and hopes and the extinction of his energies by an early imprudent marriage”(p.74). For a desperate man who has already deluded himself into believing that his early marriage has been a stumbling block to material success, such a discussion is an externalisation and revalidation of his already settled belief. And Henchard’s assertion that “.... if I were a free man again I’d be worth a thousand pound before I’d done o’t” (p.74) has both ironic and tragic consequences, for paradoxically his escape is from isolation to deeper isolation. Henchard experiences both loneliness and isolation chiefly due to the authenticity of his character. His ‘otherness’ will not be tolerated in a world that does not believe in pluralism. But Hardy does not believe in any form of totalisation. In this Hardy bears an affinity with postmodernism which repudiates all forms of totalizing attitude. But Henchard is a victim

of ethical generalisation. His way of life can never be understood by a world that has fashioned itself on the principle of universalism

What is striking about Henchard even in his drunken stupor is his natural concern and inherent goodness. For instance, read closely the condition he demands for the sale of Susan: “I’ll sell her for five guineas to any man that will pay me the money, and treat her well” (p.77) “Treat her well” – even though his own treatment of her now is grotesquely despicable – is an expression of his deeply ingrained sense of fair play. It is the same sense of justice he would exercise while fighting Farfare with one hand tied behind, for his opponent is weaker than himself (Chapt.38) During the entire process of Henchard’s violent, morally offensive behaviour in the tent, all the spectators had assumed that “being out of work, he was, as a consequence, out of temper with the world, and society, and his nearest kin” (p.78). What emerges clearly from this observation is that it is this desperate personal condition generated by the social world which is the ultimate cause of Henchard’s momentary act of moral violation, and not any fundamental moral debasement in him. So Merryn Williams’s observation that ‘the social and the personal are so interlocked in the novel that we can’t comprehend it in isolation’ remains fully vindicated⁹

After Susan leaves the tent with Newson, Henchard is not the same person in spite of his drunken stupor, and the author’s voice lends him

support to disclose his inner feelings: “A stolid look of concern filled the husband’s face, as if, after all, he had not quite anticipated this ending” (p.79). If we examine Henchard in this unfortunate scene, what becomes evident is the natural morality of Henchard. For instance, he tells the stunned spectators after Susan’s departure: “Mark me- I’ll not go after her! If she’s up to such vagaries she must suffer for ‘em.” (p.80) But the following events prove otherwise; he regrets his ignominious act the following morning and searches for his wronged family, not for weeks but for months. All this reveals that Henchard’s repugnant act has not been a pre-meditated one: it has been the act of an incredibly instinctive and socially frustrated man. Susan has been too prosaic, too abjectly fatalistic not to understand the genuineness of his character.

Henchard was “surprised and nettled that his wife had taken him so literally” in spite of the fact that “yet she knows I am not in my senses when I do that”. (p.83) Even if Susan has failed to understand him, neither his creator, nor his serious readers have failed to comprehend his unique character. No one is more perceptive than Walter Allen when he observes that ‘much of Henchard’s tragic greatness comes from his impercipience. He contains all nature within himself.’¹⁰ Like the characters of Wordsworth and Lawrence, Henchard cannot be separated from the earth. He is a dominating figure inexplicable by human reason.. Like Jude, Eustacia and,

to some extent, Clym, Henchard is destroyed by a singular mode of behaviour. Through Henchard's character Hardy delves into the mysterious nature of the human psyche in which reside forces that are beyond individual comprehension or control. Henchard's solemn oath in a country Church after the sale of his wife and the consistency with which he preserves it prove his inner strength. This is the strength, patience and determination of a man of character. And after nineteen years when Henchard and Susan meet at the Roman Amphitheatre, his first words are: "I don't drink, you hear, Susan? I don't drink now – I haven't since that night." (p.142) These are the words of sincere regret.

The central focus of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is not on the infringement of a natural law but on the hitherto unexplored vitality of man's inner life that constitutes the subject matter of both modern and postmodern fiction. Though Henchard's sale of his wife is a serious violation of natural law, the novel is concerned with the life and character of an exceptional individual. We do not justify Henchard's act, nor can he escape the consequences of this gruesome cultural offense. But we must not forget that he is a victim of social and cosmic conspiracies. Henchard's suffering on account of the sale of his wife is only one dimension of his life. He is a solitary being whose individual self is in disharmony with the

social world. With *The Mayor* Hardy proves that great literature is necessarily transgressive.

When Hardy calls Henchard 'A Man of Character' in spite of the sale of his own wife, he is subverting the traditional notion of morality. The fundamental discrepancy between intention and act is vividly stated in this scene, gruesome as it is. The sale of Susan may be viewed as a symbolic, anticipatory gesture of the destruction of all that is natural, elemental, and native in Henchard's farming world. Of course, it is Henchard's delusion to fancy his wife to be a barrier to his worldly success, for whatever success he makes in Casterbridge without her is too temporary to endure, too fragile to withstand the overwhelming changes that overcome the agricultural society of Casterbridge. Hardy always deplored the vanishing of the traditional ways of life with the onslaught of modernity Hardy does not conceal his agony at the predicament and vulnerability of a traditional individual who hopelessly struggles to cling on to a culture that is gradually invaded by alien forces. In this connection Douglas Brown observes:

The Mayor of Casterbridge is the tale of the struggle between the native countryman and the alien invader, of defeat of dull courage and traditional attitudes by insight, craft, and the vicissitudes of nature....¹¹

When at the Town Hall Henchard roars “if anybody will tell me how to turn grown wheat into wholesome wheat I’ll take it back with pleasure, but it can’t be done, “Farfrae, the newly arrived migrant “smiled impulsively”(pp.105-06) It is the sardonic smile of a superior force emerging slowly, but surely, in Henchard’s traditional world of farming. Farfrae is a modern force who will eventually banish Henchard from his natural environment as he lacks the capacity to adapt to the inevitable transition witnessed by Casterbridge. Whenever his old way of life meets the new, it is defeated. But Henchard is not so much ruined by Farfrae’s superior modern skills as by his own idiosyncratic personality.

The old world is gradually disappearing; and Henchard is alien in the new one. After nineteen years when Susan arrives at Weydon Priors accompanied by Elizabeth Jane, She observes great changes:

Reaching the outskirts of the village they pursued the same track as formerly, and ascended to the fair. Here, too, it was evident that the years had told. Certain mechanical improvements might have been noticed in the roundabouts and high-fliers, machines for testing rustic strength and weight, and in the erections devoted to shooting for nuts. But the real business of the fair had considerably dwindled. The new periodical great markets of neighboring towns were beginning to interfere seriously with the trade carried on here for centuries. (p.87)

And towards the end of the novel we are told that “the railway had stretched out an arm towards Casterbridge at this time, but had not reached

it by several miles as yet". (p.339) Even if held in check for a while, Henchard's tragedy in such a world is inevitable, for the new world would be intolerant of his primitive, instinctive responses to life.

By introducing modern devices Farfrae has scientifically revolutionized Henchard's business in the fashion of a capitalist industrial society. The arrival of horse-drill- an agricultural machine which can be used to sow grains with economy and precision is a radical improvement in the agricultural sector. And Elizabeth Jane's reaction, "then the romance of the sower is gone for good" (p.240) is perhaps the most intelligent and nostalgic apprehension of emotional changes that the modernization can trigger off in the lives of the traditional farmers. When Farfrae buys Henchard's hay-barns and corn-stores "the scales and steel yards began to be busy where guess-work had formerly been the rule."(p.295) The catastrophically dismal response to Henchard's public entertainment organized in Casterbridge vividly illustrates how the greater tact and resourcefulness of his rival can crush his older world.

The central focus in the novel is on a morality that is not separable from instinctive behaviour. Henchard's intrinsic personality and character, marked by a life of impulse and instinct, vividly validate how unsusceptible he is to orthodox moral categories; his unique personality calls for sympathy and understanding; he is beyond the customary moral paradigms

even though he appears as ordinary as anyone else in Casterbridge. That Hardy's main concern in the novel is not with a vindictive campaign against Henchard for his offence in selling his wife in a drunken stupor is evident from his sub-title to the novel – 'A story of a Man of character'. The justification of this apparently outrageous sub-title is keenly perceived by Noorul Hasan in his insightful observation of the character of Henchard:

What needs equal consideration, however, is the unhampered flow of moral feeling in this apparently disreputable character-his instinctive kindness, his craving for love, his primitive sense of justice, and his titanic capacity for endurance.¹²

To be able to comprehend the vitality and deeper significance underlying the novel is to capture the real strength of Hardy's imaginative art- a strength that inhabits all his works. What Henchard embodies is not only any individual greatness or weakness, but a collective vitality and solidity of a whole culture on the threshold of extinction. Perhaps, Henchard is a less refined Gabriel Oak, but more elemental, and therefore, more tragic in a fast changing world where his values remain out-dated. Henchard's morality has more affinity with the pre-modern and the postmodern culture than with the modern. The events of Henchard's life vividly point to a universe which is hostile to man. Dale Kramer argues that 'the plot of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* derives from the vision that places man against

man, an individual man against the universe, with nothing for him to rely upon, finally, whatever he has inside himself'.¹³

Henchard's struggle is against his own unique, idiosyncratic self which is defeated in the emerging new world represented by Farfrae. It is in this interplay of two opposing forces of life that Hardy tries to dramatise the authentic life of Henchard. More than a statement of the invasion of the traditional forms of life, the novel brings into sharp focus the nature of morality by dramatizing the responses of two chief characters to life. Henchard, senior in age and experience, is irretrievably conditioned by his inalienable cultural consciousness whereas Farfrae is the product of a new civilization. Yet, it is not Farfrae who is the cause of Henchard's decline; rather, it is his own truculent self. Hardy tries to foreground the natural morality practiced by an instinctual self: 'Within a determinist and frightening universe the human being may communicate personal values which, though as ephemeral as human life, bring some meaning to sublunary existence'.¹⁴ Henchard's personal life is authentic in its own terms, in its relation to an intensely claustrophobic culture of which he is an integral part. His fatal flaw is a lack of awareness that 'those who seek to impress themselves on the universe, to lay violent hands on time, to forget that man is the slave of limit-such men can only succeed in destroying themselves'.¹⁵

Michael Henchard is a man who is not restrained by the demands of equanimity, whether in love or in hatred. Once seized by a particular idea or emotion he works it out to the end quite oblivious of its consequences. He is never alert to the immediate, not to speak of long term, consequences of his actions. And Farfrae, sharp and percipient as he is, saw that "his friend and employer was a man who knew no moderation in his requests and impulses." (p.146) For instance, when his fancy is stirred by the note sent to him to the Town Hall by Farfrae, he does not show patience to wait, but goes personally to the Three Mariners (Chapt.7) His frank admission of his own deficiencies to a stranger, "in my business, it's true that strength and bustle build up a form. But judgment and knowledge are what keep it established.....I am bad at science, Farfrae...you are just the reverse- I can see that. I have been looking for such as you these two years....." (p.117) is an honest confession of his limitations as well as his own unceremonious attitude in human relationships, something that Farfrae observes with scrupulous correctness. In this connection George Wing makes a very pertinent observation about Henchard that he was 'unceremonious in behaviour, scorned subtlety, and emotionally a bull in a China shop.'¹⁶ About Henchard's natural, impulsive liking for Farfrae, Susan remarks: "...I am thinking of Mr. Henchard's sudden liking for that young man. He was always so" (p.127) In the face of his startling impulsiveness all

decorous formalities become insignificant. After being fascinated with Farfrae, Henchard does not even bother to interview Joshua Jopp who has applied for the post of corn manager. It is something he would look at with scorn and indifference if his fancy is gripped by an impulse.

The most eloquent example of Henchard's informality is his candid sharing of his disreputable past with Farfrae on the first day of the latter's appointment as the corn manager. He tells Farfrae something that he would regret later: "...and yet, whenever he thought of Farfrae, it was with a dim dread; and he often regretted that he had told the young man his whole heart, and confided to him the secrets of his life."(p.172) But this regret is unwarranted; it is a subjective apprehension with no external evidence to discredit his rival's integrity , for Farfrae never betrayed Henchard in this regard in spite of all their rivalries. And it is noteworthy that Hardy exercises maximum caution while building the character of Farfrae, for he is not a force to be rejected outright; it will be his kind who will dominate and be successful in the materialistic, modern world, no matter how critical Hardy is of such a civilization.

Henchard's private world is beyond any artificial social finesse. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is 'a novel of temperament in action, in minute action even; its distinction derives from a severe concentration on the self-destructive aspects of that temperament.'¹⁷

It is self-destructive in the most natural way. Henchard's tragic life is a natural concomitant of his authentic existence – an existence which ignores the demands of social pragmatism, but remains committed to the dictates of his own self which refuses to be educated into the subtleties of the new world to which he is a stranger. For 'Hardy tragedy lies in man's puzzling incapacity to avoid defeat despite his limited but certainly existent freedom of choice.'¹⁸

Even in love Henchard exhibits the same temperament. One peculiar trait of Henchard is that he grows jealous or possessive of a person or thing when he is threatened by a rival claim upon them. When Lucetta is in the town he does not care for her, but when Farfrae courts her he becomes jealous. Discovering Elizabeth-Jane's true paternity Henchard is emotionally shattered. But he is capable of overcoming the initial shock. However, Henchard is swayed by moods and emotions and in the process alienates himself from everyone around. 'Henchard is more and more alienated from the social context as the novel builds up a cumulative suggestion of his natural propensities.'¹⁹ And the actual human society in the novel cannot comprehend Henchard. Eventually, defeated by circumstances, he looks up to Elizabeth-Jane for love and care. He seems to have achieved some kind of self-realization through the bitter experiences of his life. What is admirable in Henchard is his deep sense of self respect

and dignity even in the midst of utter hopelessness. For the first time Henchard realizes fully the value of love – to love and to be loved in turn. As Henchard leaves Casterbridge with his only possession – the basket – we are reminded of his entry into it twenty five years ago. Even now there is nothing that can prevent him from a new start. But now he longs for love, something which he had ignored twenty five years ago:

If I had only got her with me – if I only had!” he said, “Hard work would be nothing to me then! But that was not to be. I – Cain – go alone as I deserve – an outcast and a vagabond. But my punishment is not greater than I can bear (p.388)

These are the reflections of a man of character who does not evade responsibilities. His self identification with Cain – the sinner, an outcast and vagabond – is a proof of his belated self realization, a self knowledge that accepts his fate in totality. The elemental force of his personality is best expressed when he asserts to himself that “my punishment is not greater than I can bear.” The present intensity of his love for Elizabeth-Jane reveals a new awakening in him.

Having returned to Weydon-priors, where once he sold his wife years ago, Henchard reflects on the vicissitudes of life with Hardy’s approval:

Externally there was nothing to hinder his making another start on the upward slope, and by his new lights achieving higher things than his soul in its half-formed state had been able to accomplish. But the ingenious machinery contrived by the Gods for reducing human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum – which arranges that wisdom to do shall come pari passu with the departure of zest for doing – stood in the way of all that. He had no wish to make an arena a second time of a world that became a mere painted scene to him. (p.395)

In Henchard's understanding of the cosmic design Hardy's impression of life is evidently expressed:

Hardy was dogged by a view of life which could afford him no illusory comforts. His interest in humanity was great and lasting. He was a humane, sensitive man who could not entertain any suggestion of a Deity other than an indifferent or malevolent one, and who did not believe in any form of personal survival as it is usually understood 20

It is this awareness which deters Henchard from making a new start.

Like any traditional man Henchard too has been superstitious and ritualistic. His early oath in a country church reveals his allegiance to ancestral forms of expiation. In Chapter Twenty Six, Henchard goes to the weather prophet and fills his granaries with the expectation of a bad weather and consequent high prices for the grains. But the weather abruptly changes into a bright one, giving an excellent harvest, thereby bringing great financial loss to the Mayor. But even here, it is the impatience and impulsive nature of Henchard that cause his ruin. Had he shown patience, he should at least have avoided losses even if no profit was made, but “the

momentum of his character knew no patience.” (p.263) When Henchard encounters defeat after defeat he is driven to believe that someone was working against him, and it might be Farfrae: “these isolated hours of superstition came to Henchard in time of moody depression, when all his practical largeness of view had oozed out of him.” (p.264) In his last attempt to keep away Farfrae from wooing Elizabeth-Jane of whom Henchard has become very possessive, he thinks of divulging her true parentage. As soon as this thought enters his mind, he exclaims with a shudder: “God forbid such a thing! Why should I still be subject to these visitations of the devil, when I try so hard to keep him away.” (p.382) All this demonstrates how strongly he remains part of a culture which is fundamentally primitive and superstitious. Living within such cultural paradigms, Henchard is unable to absorb the values and mores of a new civilization, no matter how hard he tries. What Hardy tries to portray is the honesty, sincerity and native morality that is inherent in such a culture as exemplified by Henchard. By nature Henchard is incapable of living in a social world that does not tolerate individual difference. Henchardian morality resists categorization. Henchard is moral in a savage, primitive fashion. His moral being has a force and fecundity that is evocative of the primitive, elemental justice of our ancestral world. Henchard always accepts the consequences of his action. At no time does he make an attempt

to rationalize his behaviour. After the sale of Susan he decides to face the consequences of his gruesome deed: "When he was calmer he turned to his original conviction that he must somehow find her and his little Elizabeth – Jane, and put up with the shame as best as he could. It was of his own making, and he ought to bear it". (p.84) He has an almost mythical power of bearing anguish in silence. He is a model of tranquil stoicism. Solomon Longways once refers to this quality of Henchard: "He has a powerful mind to hold out so long." (p.102) It is an allusion to Henchard's oath and subsequently abstemious life for twenty-one years. After the discovery of Elizabeth-Jane's true parentage, Henchard is once again abandoned by Fate; yet he remains unnerved, for "misery taught him nothing more than defiant endurance."(p.192) To Elizabeth-Jane's allegation that Henchard had deliberately kept her away from her father, he chooses to remain silent over the facts that "he had himself been deceived in her identity at first, till informed by her mother's letter that his own child had died; that in the second accusation, his lie had been the last desperate throw of a gamester who loved her affection better than his own honour", and that "he did not sufficiently value himself to lessen his suffering by strenuous appeal or elaborate argument." (p.402) Henchard's lie to Newson about Elizabeth should not be viewed as a sign of his lack of integrity, but as an expression of his need to love and being loved.

In choosing between Lucetta and Susan, Henchard's moral priority is unshakably clear-it is Susan: "My first duty is to Susan-there is no doubt about that."(p.150.) But at the same his sense of moral justice yearns to treat the other woman with equal concern. More evidences of Henchard's integrity are revealed throughout the novel. When the firmity woman discloses the sale of Susan, Henchard accepts the charge. It is the most impressive instance of the integrity of his character. And it is also the turning point of his life. From this moment his life is reduced to that of an exile. The process of disintegration which started with the discovery Elizabeth-Jane's paternity is now completed. And this is Hardy's most tragic vision of life that 'man has made such a mighty struggle to feel at home on the face of the earth, without even yet succeeding.'²¹ Henchard can't succeed just as Tess can't succeed since both are animated by the vitality of natural impulses and hunted by rigid moral laws.

With all his faults Henchard is a superior moral force in the novel. 'Henchard still stands above the others in what might be called psychic virtue. In the conventional sense, he is both less moral than they and more so.'²² He is a prototype of the postmodern isolated hero. He is a dominating and perplexing figure who is inexplicable by human reason. His character is evocative of the self isolated, socially alienated heroes of existential fiction in the tradition of Camus and Kafka. He is destroyed by both the universal

and social forces. First he severs himself from his wife, then he estranges himself from Farfrae, and finally from Elizabeth-Jane. Even the community of Casterbridge rejects him as the mayor. In spite of everything, he never loses his personal stature and integrity.

It is in contrast with Farfrae that Henchard's moral qualities gain both clarity and distinction. True, neither of the men displays the capacity for strong, consistent emotional attachment. But by the end of the novel Henchard undergoes a deep inner change. Henchard's passionately obsessive love for Elizabeth-Jane is an indication of his moral as well as emotional education. A chastened Michael Henchard of his last days can be a great threat to Farfrae's new world. When Henchard requests Farfrae to stay back in Casterbridge as his manager, there is genuine affection in his request. But Farfrae, on the other hand, agrees mainly because he seizes the opportunity. In all his dealings Farfrae keeps his own interests above all other considerations. For instance, when he is offered mayoralty, he decides to stay on in Casterbridge against the anxiety of Lucetta. Still more, he comes to court Elizabeth-Jane and then becomes immediately infatuated with Lucetta's sophistication. On his first, highly romantic meeting with Lucetta, he is able to keep in abeyance his burning sentiments for her when he remembers a business engagement; and on his wedding day he delays his return to Casterbridge for a few hours because he "had been detained by

important customers, whom, even in the exceptional circumstances, he was not the man to neglect.”(p.286) He feels no grief for the unborn child that dies with Lucetta. Farfrae is mechanical, shallow and incorrigibly materialistic. John Rabbets makes a pertinent observation about the characters of Henchard and Farfrae:

The dissension and rivalry between Henchard and Farfrae dramatizes the clash of traditional and modern consciousness—the one crude, anachronistic, excessively personal, over emotional and yet redolent of certain rough grandeur; the other innovatory, impersonal, dispassionate, sensible, but somewhat mean-spirited.²³

The ethical triumph of Henchard is that he has been able to achieve some kind of moral growth towards the end of the novel. As the novel develops, Henchard grows into a formidable moral character. He has learnt to accept things, which he would have scorned earlier, with astonishing understanding and patience. No one in the novel displays a better understanding of Henchard than Elizabeth-Jane. While considering the Will of Henchard, she rightly contemplates that

the man who wrote them meant what he said. She knew the directions to be a piece of the same stuff that his whole life was made of, and hence were not to be tampered with to give herself a mournful pleasure, or her husband credit for large-heartedness(p.410)

As we have argued, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is a celebration of individual uniqueness and authenticity. Henchard, the archetypal hero, takes on an epic stature before his death. His amazing energy, capacity for

heroic endurance coupled with a robust acceptance of his existential situation has gone into the making of a classical hero. He is, indeed, a masterpiece of superbly detailed character that inhabits and haunts not only Hardy's moral imagination but the reader's as well. With *The Mayor* Hardy has proved that he is opposed to the central tendencies of his age. He points to a different kind of inner morality that lies beyond the conventional. When Henchard is finally defeated, Hardy shows the destruction of a natural self by the social order. In the creation of this irresistible character Hardy has remained true to his vision of art: "The business of the poet and novelist is to show the sorriest underlying the grandest things, and the grandeur underlying the sorriest things."²⁴ And Michael Henchard is a fictional incarnation of this vision of Hardy. Grand and sorry alternately or simultaneously, he is the most moral of all characters in the novel in a natural way.

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Chapter 4

The Woodlanders (1887)

The Woodlanders, like *Far from the Madding Crowd* is chiefly a celebration of the traditional, rural forms of living. At the same time it contains Hardy's sense of cultural crisis—a theme that dominates postmodern discourses. It is a study of the conflict between the rural and the urban, between culture and nature. Though set in an Arcadian, pastoral ambience, the novel explores the crisis experienced by a traditional community in a transitional state. In this connection Ian Gregor observes:

Recollections, the remembrance of things past, a concern to render a consciousness increasingly susceptible to the tensions of the present, and these elements give the peculiar colour to *The Woodlanders*¹

It is the tragedy of fragmented consciousness; it is the tragedy of combining “modern nerves with primitive feelings.....”(p.306) Grace Melbury, initiated into modern³ education by her father is shown to be “doomed by such co-existence to be numbered among the distressed and to take her scourgings to their exquisite extremity.”(p.306) The personal history of Grace vividly illustrates the catastrophic consequences of adopting a way of life that in itself lacks any stable centre. William Butler Yeats sums up the malaise of the modern age:

Page references to *The Woodlanders* are to the Macmillan edition (1967)

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.

Grace Melbury abandons her native culture, like Clym, to embrace a culture which is only socially attractive, but lacks any enduring human values. In Winterborne's self reflection Hardy makes Grace's plights evidently clear in the novel:

He questioned if her father's ambition, which had purchased for her the means of intellectual light and culture far beyond those of any other native of the village, would not operate to the flight of her future interests above and away from the local life which was once to her the movement of the world. (p.67)

Neither George Melbury nor Grace realises that 'all giverns, or what Lyotard calls the "metanarratives" offer no final answers or resolutions.'² Melbury's error is the rejection of his native culture for the emerging new one that he falsely believes to be superior and more universal. He is a victim of the totalizing attitude of modernism. But towards the end of the novel there is a kind of moral growth in Melbury. He becomes apprehensive about the real worth of modern education and its positive impact on actual living. Grace's reunion with Fitzpiers, her return to modern ways, is viewed by Melbury with apprehension: "It's a forlorn hope for her; and God knows how it will end!"(p.376) Melbury is deceived by the modern ideal of self realization of mankind through the instrumentality of reason. He is a victim of the transformational myth of culture. It is a notion

repudiated by the postmodern critique of modernism. Apart from Melbury, Dr. Fitzpiers and Mrs. Charmond are also victims of this false notion. Though Hardy never wrote against any theoretical framework, his novels contain much of the postmodern debate on the question of truth and universality. The profound ontological uncertainty of the postmodern is shared by Hardy in *The Woodlanders*. There is a crisis of culture, a crisis of centre. When Grace is asked to leave the 'centre' of Little Hintock for the modern, urban 'centre', Mr. Melbury blindly believes in the superiority of the latter. This is totally negated by postmodernism. All centres have their intrinsic worth. And it is in this belief that Hardy relates to postmodern thought.

Grace Melbury's plight is the result of the capriciousness of her father: "To sow in her heart cravings for social position was obviously his strong desire..... (p.93.) But being brought up in the Sylvan surroundings in Little Hintock, she has imbibed its fundamental values and cultural sensibilities. The newly accomplished refinements are only external to her essential nature. She remains false to her authentic self when she rejects Giles Winterborne as her life partner. When she suppresses her native cultural consciousness, she is inviting her own damnation in her psychic world. She remains divided between her social self and the private self. If

Tess is ruined by her traditional consciousness, Grace is ruined by the traditional and the modern consciousness. About the character of Grace Ian Gregor makes a keen observation:

If then I make a claim that the creation of Grace is of striking significance in Hardy's development as a novelist, it is not based on her intrinsic worth, but rather on the fact that she is a creation who has released in him a new complexity of insight into aspects of the contemporary consciousness.³

To some extent Grace is a fore-runner of Sue Bridehead. In her we can trace the beginning of modern consciousness which will find its culmination in Sue. Grace's rural consciousness is invaded by modern education and urban values. She is a victim of man made social hierarchies.

Dale Kramer's observation in this regard is worth quoting:

The Woodlanders expresses some of the most important elements of Hardy's analysis of the role of social pressures on man's chances for happiness.⁴

When natural human sentiments and affinities are rejected in the name of education and learning, one is falling victim to a world of binary opposition which has no real value in reality. The new world assumes a centralist role and the old is marginalized or pushed to the periphery. Hardy seems to doubt the efficacy of education to bring about lasting happiness to the individual. He is not against education or its humanizing role. What he resents is the rejection of natural life in the name of modern accomplishments. Mr. Melbury, in his inordinate passion for the social

status of his daughter, fails to recognise the truth that one cannot escape one's essential self. Besides, what is important in life is happiness, not mere social glory without happiness. Both Fitzpiers and Mrs. Charmond have enough social distinction, but not happiness. They are hungry for the basic human needs-love and happiness. It is here their mode of living is contrasted with the simple life of Little Hintock. They fail to practise the most important Hardyian virtue-the virtue of communal living. If Grace remains morally and socially virtuous throughout her life, it is not due to her accomplished learning, but due to her cultural values.

In Grace's tragic love-affair with Fitzpiers, Hardy sees the tragedy of human relationship in a world that does not respect the individuality of the other. The emerging new culture is devoid of morality though it may be intellectually illuminating. It is more self-centered than altruistic. The likes of Giles and Marty South are alien to it. It betrays an inherent moral hollowness where human relationships are concerned. Grace Melbury accepts Fitzpiers instead of Giles partly because of her father's insistence and partly because of her illusory notion of her social superiority over Giles. Her natural affinity is with Giles. This is best understood by a rustic woman like Grammer Oliver:

But though she's a lady in herself, and worthy of any such as he, it do seem to me that he ought to marry somebody more of the sort of Mrs.Charmond, and that Miss Grace should make the best of Winterborne.(p.151)

There is no compatibility between Grace and Fitzpiers. Theirs is not a relationship born out of any natural affinity like that of Jude and Sue. They forge a relationship based on cultivated social affinity which cannot last without the fundamental spiritual affinity. Their incompatibility is hinted at by Hardy early in the novel:

As he receded and was clasped out of sight by the filmy shades he impressed Grace as a man who hardly appertained to her existence at all. Cleverer, greater than herself, one outside her mental orbit, as she considered him, he seemed to be her ruler rather than her equal, protector, and dear familiar friend. (p.172)

It is the "poor unpractical lofty-minded dreamer", Mr. Melbury who drags Grace into her tragic situation. The events after Grace's marriage with Fitzpiers prove that it is neither education nor social status that brings happiness, but the ability to accept one's own self. In *The Woodlanders*, Hardy places side by side the ethos of two ways of living- the traditional and the modern. Mr. Melbury's passion for modern education is suggestive of the change of attitude in people brought about by the new civilization. In spite of its apparent deficiency in the more enduring values of humanism as embodied in Giles and Marty, it makes its presence felt even in a traditional community like Little Hintock. It is 'vulnerable to forces

beyond its control.’⁵ It is invaded by new thoughts and ideas. Hardy is acutely conscious of a life that is dying fast. Modernism has already made its inroads into the rural community. Mr. Melbury’s error is that he perceives only one aspect of it—its guarantee for ever greater social mobility and fails to comprehend its ugly side. He fails to see that ‘the process has altered the entire social structure.’⁶ Along with learning there occur changes not only in the individual, but also in the social structure—some positive and some negative. The French thinker Rousseau argued that ‘civilization and learning corrupt human nature.’⁷ This is exactly what we encounter in the characters of Fitzpiers and Mrs. Charmond. Rousseau celebrated the “original”, “natural”, uncivilized man, the “noble savage” who was free of the powerful institutions of the state.

In *The Woodlanders* as in *Tess* and *Jude*, ‘Hardy examines a countryside seriously ravaged by dispossession, migration and consequent alienation.’⁸ The traditional Hintock life begins to be disturbed in its very roots. Fitzpiers and Felice Charmond are the agents of this process. The theme of modernist alienation is so powerfully present in *The Woodlanders*. Giles’s love-suit is defeated in the face of a false ethic of social superiority. He is alienated from Grace by the artificially constructed social distinctions which have no real value in actual living. Like Michael

Henchard, Giles Winterborne is a misfit in the new world. But unlike Henchard, he retreats to his cloistered world of Little Hintock without a murmur of protest or any attempt to fight back. Though there is resolute endurance in his character, there is no sign of struggle. He accepts his condition stoically. The irony is that he allows himself to be annihilated by both the traditional and the modern forces. For instance, his death is caused by his adherence to the traditional Hintock morality. He offers his little hut to Grace and sleeps outside in the rain for days to honour the moral propriety of his community:

He had immolated himself for her comfort, cared more for her self respect than she had thought of caring. (p.328)

Giles sacrifices himself not simply for the sake of Grace, but also for a worn out, traditional moral system. Here Hardy is trying to make a distinction between morality and moral dogmatism. The only fault that he finds with traditional society is its uncritical conformity to a moral code that doesn't take into account the context of a situation while passing moral judgments. In this connection Dale Kramer makes a pertinent observation:

Rather than dying for a besieged and doomed traditional system of ethics, in which emotional relationships are based on affinities and on an acceptance of sexual instincts and drives, Giles is forced into the position of sacrificing himself for a precept in a temporal value system.⁹

And temporal value system is called in question by the postmodern critique of western epistemology for its tendency to universalize. And on

the other hand, Giles loses Grace because she is trained in modern refinements whereas he is not. In the ultimate analysis, *The Woodlanders* may be seen as a conflict between natural love and the restraints imposed upon it by a social code which denies the possibility of giving expression to one's natural self. The Woodlanders are invaded by a new form of life which is alien to their cultural ethos. But still they remain rooted in the conventional mode of thinking and living although they are exposed to the outside world. The heroine, if Grace can be called a heroine at all, simply stands for a modern sensibility that will find its full flowering in Sue.

Grace Melbury represents the dilemma of the modern fragmented consciousness. She is torn between two dialectically opposed worlds. The experience of cultural schizophrenia is more acutely felt by Grace than any other characters in the novel. It is 'the character of Grace Melbury that is most involved in the conflicts between pastoral and anti pastoral, traditionalism and modernism.'¹⁰ When Hardy presents the two dialectically opposing worlds, he is trying to reveal, in contrasting light, the traits of both the worlds. However the finality of Hardy's vision in this novel favours the traditional over the modern. In this he is not succumbing to any kind of universalism. Rather he refuses to recognize the cultural superiority of modernism. His intuitive understanding of life does not give

any centralist status to that which is neither proved nor tested. He questions the validity of modernism in its epistemological claim. When transcendental knowledge is negated and the “metaphysics of presence” is a mere illusion, what ultimately matters is acceptance of the given socio-cultural context. Grace’s tragedy, to some extent, lies in her inability to detach herself from her inherited heritage or to accept the new one unconditionally. In this connection Dale Kramer’s observation is worth quoting:

Grace not only contains within herself the Hardyian division between sophistication and rustic simplicity but her struggles to reconcile that division also give the various subplots their essential relevance.¹¹

With *The Woodlanders*, Hardy ventures into a different kind of fiction, a fiction that engages into unsettled, uncertain cultural issues. He critically examines the possibilities of a different kind of living. To quote Ian Gregor:

There is the community of Little Hintock sustained by memory and its routine of work, but it is a community which can no longer cohere; in the sense that it is vulnerable to forces beyond its control, it is devoured by its isolation.¹²

Hardy gradually begins to recognize the existence of a world beyond his cultural imagination. But the question is whether he approves of the values

of such a world. At the end of the novel, Grace moves into that world with Fitzpiers, though unwillingly. In her plight Hardy seems to see the inevitability of change, no matter how one takes it. On the other hand, Marty South's promise to the soul of Giles that she would cherish his memory is suggestive of her commitment to the native values of Little Hintock. So the novel places side by side two opposing modes of living. Both have their own peculiar advantages and disadvantages. But Hardy clearly reveals the moral hollowness of the new civilization which is only materially beneficial, but spiritually empty. *The Woodlanders* is, perhaps, Hardy's only novel that shows the crisis of culture in the most intense fashion. He seems to have accepted, though painfully, the inevitability of change:

Grace and Fitzpiers have to go forward to a world elsewhere, a world beyond the woodlands and the orchards, along the deserted highway and out into life- the author's life and our own.¹³

Though it is true that there is no 'strongly defined inner life' in Grace, she is an apt embodiment of the conflict between cultures and its impact on the individual.¹⁴ She assumes significance not in any intense articulation of her inner life, but in the dilemma encountered in her social existence. It is the duality of consciousness in her that becomes the focus

of the novel. Noorul Hasan observes that the 'old cultural symbols are still active beneath her conscious estrangement from them.'¹⁵ There is an intense discord in her between tradition and modernity. She ultimately becomes an 'embodiment of conflicting modes of existence.'¹⁶ So the postmodern crisis of culture finds eloquent expression in Grace's existential plight. What ultimately triumphs in Grace is not the cultivated self, but the natural one. If she is reunited with Fitzpiers in the end, it is due to her traditional respect for a marriage contract. Throughout the novel Grace makes reference to her natural affinity with Hintock and its people. To Fitzpiers's scornful assertion of his difference from the Hintock folk, Grace replies: "And from me, too, then. For my blood is no better than theirs."(p.185) It is this blood that dominates in her. And ironically, it is the same blood that kills Giles. While keeping Giles away from the hut for propriety's sake, Grace is succumbing to the conventional morality of her community. She sacrifices natural love for unnatural moral laws. In Giles's reverence for propriety and Grace's acceptance of it, there is an authorial irony at the traditional morality. To quote Ian Gregor:

There is in *The Woodlanders* the sterility of self abnegation- an abnegation which can never be confined to the self but is common to the whole way of life. This finds its clearest expression in the characters of Marty and Giles.¹⁷

What is the real basis of sex? Love or contract? After the estrangement of Grace from Fitzpiers she still honours the contract, while her heart is with Giles:

Not that I feel morally bound to any one else after what has taken place- no woman of spirit could- now, too, that several months have passed. But I wish to keep the proprieties as well as I can. (p.290)

The absurdity of such proprieties is vividly stated when Giles dies outside his own hut for a morality that has no foundation outside the boundaries of this rigid social world. It is moral convention, not moral decorum that Hardy is anxious to put to critical scrutiny. Grace lives most intensely for Giles at a distance. She suppresses her natural inclinations for a moral system that does not care for the authenticity of feeling. But as the novel progresses there is a personal and moral growth in her. She gradually realizes the mistake of her marriage with Fitzpiers.

George Melbury is the only character from the traditional Little Hintock to become deeply aware of the presence of a different world around him. 'He has learnt the nature of social change, the importance of adaptation, and that what was good enough for him is no longer good enough for his daughter.'¹⁸ The central crisis of *The Woodlanders* originates from Melbury's ambition for social status. Like Hardy's short story, 'The Son's Veto' this novel is a story of the cruelty of social

ambition. Randolph in the short story is spoiled by his notions of gentility. Similarly, Mr. Melbury looks upon everything from the point of view of social decorum. Hardy sees the advancing civilization of the city as trivial and dehumanizing. It is evident in the characters of Mrs. Charmond and Dr. Fitzpiers. Mr. Melbury sends his daughter to school out of a desire to give her social advantages which he has been denied. He falls prey to a false system of values. In the name of learning and education he can humiliate, even annihilate his own identity in front of her educated daughter:

If you should ever meet me then, Grace, you can drive past me, looking the other way. I shouldn't expect you to speak to me, or wish such a thing- unless it happened to be in some lonely private place where 'twouldn't lower 'ee at all. (p.166)

Such a self degrading attitude is a blind acceptance of a culture that he is yet to be acquainted with more intimately. In his ambitions for his daughter, he betrays the values of his own native culture. He blindly accepts the centrality of culture over nature. He acknowledges the validity of binary opposition. It is a notion that postmodern thought repudiates. And it is exactly what Hardy rejected as absurd. Mr. Melbury's utilitarian attitude is a negation of the identity of Grace as an individual. He uses her as a means to gain greater returns. The conversation between them as they

go through the cheque book and counterfoils reveals Melbury's utilitarian mentality:

'I, too, cost a good deal, like the horses and wagons and corn!' she said, looking up sorrily. 'I don't want you to look at those; I merely meant to give you an idea of my investment transactions. But if you do cost as much as they, never mind. You'll yield a better return.' (p.94)

He accepts the modern culture as central and his own as the marginal. Such totalizing attitude is not acceptable to Hardy as it is with the postmodern critique of hierarchies. Melbury's attitude reveals 'the tendency of the self to exaggerate the other's difference, an exaggeration which arises out of self's anxiety and uncertainty regarding its own identity.'¹⁹ The new civilization with its social glitter and economic advantages has shaken the foundations of an established form of living. Melbury is too quick to decide upon the superiority of the new culture, and pays for it dearly. To quote Noorul Hasan: '....the action of the novel is designed to confront him with the consequences of his overreaching ambition and snobbishness and finally to reconcile him to the community.'²⁰ Melbury goes through a lot of tension, more than any other character in the novel. It is not before an agonizing conflict that he breaks his promise with Giles. There is a deep tension in him between his past promise to Giles and his new decision to marry Grace to Fitzpiers. And

when he settles for Fitzpiers, he is guilty of moral breach on two grounds: first of all, his decision does not bring the desired happiness to Grace; and secondly, he has broken a promise to his fellow being. Grace's disillusionment with her new social condition is best expressed in her reproach to her father:

I don't see that I ought. I wish I had never got into it. I wish you had never, never thought of educating me. I wish I worked in the woods like Marty South! I hate genteel life, and I want to be no better than she!
(p.229)

As far as Grace is concerned, her social cultivation has brought her only troubles. She regrets her father's whimsical fancies about social standings: "Yes I have never got any happiness outside Hintock that I know of, and I have suffered many a headache at being sent away." (p.230) She attains authentic existence in this moment of her self-knowledge. Melbury is guilty of turning his daughter into a mere instrument for fulfilling his own unrealized dreams. He does not respect the individuality of the other. Grace's subjectivity is never respected by Melbury. He is a mere manipulator of her thoughts and feelings. He wants to submerge her essential self into the self of the larger world that does not offer any enduring human values as represented by Giles and Marty South. And eventually her natural world is irrevocably lost to her. Learning and education are not undermined by Hardy. But 'it is only when education is

flaunted as a kind of wealth, a material possession leading to social enhancement that it becomes suspect.'²¹

Mr. George Melbury represents a traditional society's 'suicidal pandering to false values.'²² He does not seem to be aware of what is lost to Grace as an individual in his overreaching ambition for social distinction. Through Melbury's ultimate disillusionment with his dream world, Hardy shows the undecidability, the uncertainty of any system constructed by man as a universal pattern. Michael Riffaterre observes:

One of the most striking developments in recent literary criticism, especially deconstructive criticism, has been the growing popularity of the concept of undecidability.²³

Melbury fails to realize that everything is meaningful and right in its own context. His tragedy is a denial of this significant postmodern concept. He is obsessed with a singularity of perception. He is unable to recognize the plurality of social living. By attributing a greater significance to nurture he marginalizes one of the binary opposites, that is, nature. But the novel does not offer any evidence to show that 'nature' is inferior to 'culture' especially in the cultivation of humanistic values as embodied in Giles and

Marty South. The historic constructions of what is good or bad, superior or inferior, are mere illusion without any basis in reality. The character of Melbury is in its essence a critique of modern tendency to replace what is stable with what is culturally questionable. Both Grace and Melbury are totally confused individuals. Eugene Goodheart observes that 'the characters of Hardy's novels are somewhat confused products of social creation and natural endowments.'²⁴ The image of modern man is best expressed by T. S. Eliot: "Men are bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind." The modern education has brought a crisis, a threat, a fragmentation and alienation that are new to Grace's cultural consciousness.

Giles Winterborne and Marty South remain unperturbed by the larger social changes taking place around them. But both are victims of social changes without being active participants in it. They are firmly rooted in their culture. Giles accepts his existential situation without a murmur of complaint. He is meant to convey not only Arcadian simplicity, but a morality that is both altruistic and humanistic in nature. His father was once wronged by Mr. Melbury and now he himself is wronged by him for his social ambition. But Giles remains unperturbed in the face of all adversities. Even Fitzpiers, a sophisticated modern representative, envies Giles's "chivalrous character." (p.344) His character is not informed by any

learning or education. It is nature unadorned. In his stoicism he is a companion to Gabriel Oak. His self sacrifice is evocative of that of Sydney Carton in Charles Dickens's novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*. After the tragic death of Giles, Grace comes to praise his character more than ever:

Nothing ever had brought home to her with such force as this death how little acquirements and culture weigh beside sterling personal character.
(p.344)

Of all the characters in *The Woodlanders*, Giles shares Hardy's cultural sensibility more than anybody else. Referring to the character of Giles, Noorul Hasan makes a pertinent observation about Hardy's cultural imagination:

The archetypal Hardy hero is not the natural man, not the noble savage, but the communal man, the man capable of fellow-feeling and cultural inheritance.²⁵

Set against the ambitious Melbury and his educated daughter, Giles lacks the traits of both but he has a personality that is free from any division. He is sure of himself whereas both Melbury and Grace drift between two cultures, settling with neither. He is implacably rooted in his time and place. There is no sign of cultural crisis in him.

Giles differentiates himself from the rest of the characters in the novel, except Marty South, in his intuitive awareness of the historical as well as cultural significance of his existence. He does not rebel. He does not pine for imaginary 'absences.' Though his end is tragic and his life has been one of frustrated youthful dream, he never loses his moral integrity till the end. He knows and practises what the learned fail to do.

Giles is a victim of the pressures of society; he is a victim of conventional morality. Nowhere is it more concretely revealed than in his self abnegating death. It is difficult to understand the natural Giles Winterborne whose 'fastidious morality seems so unnatural, or the cultivated Felix Charmond, who can't resist the promptings of her instinct.'²⁶ Hardy does not simply present Winterborne as a passionless human being. He is blood and flesh. At least on one occasion his humanity outlives the conventional barriers. He lives like a man when he takes Grace in his arms and kisses her for the first and last time. And Hardy comments:

Winterborne, though fighting valiantly against himself all this while-though he would have protected Grace's good repute as the apple of his eye, was a man; and, as Desdemona said, men are not gods. (p.299)

But the guilt that grips him after that reveals his primitiveness and the force of social convention over his personality that "he would hardly

refrain from tears.”(p.300) It is the same propriety which makes Grace say: “Can it be that cruel propriety is killing the dearest heart that ever woman clasped to her own!”(p.322) Giles’s self sacrifice is in contrast with the utilitarian ethos of the emergent new world of Mrs.Charmond and Dr.Fitzpiers.

Marty South is a fit moral companion to Winterborne. ‘She incarnates the strength of Hardy’s peasant stock, and feel deeply but quietly, accepting stoically whatever fate gives them.’²⁷ She is Giles’s true partner in knowing nature. Like Giles she personifies the quality of conventional moral values. She embodies an ideal of silent affection, self abnegation and stoic acceptance of one’s existential situation. Her unambitious existence may be contrasted with the ambitious project of Melbury. But it is ironic that both the states of life are visited by sufferings. It is the mysterious way of the universe, Hardy seems to suggest. Thinking of Marty we are reminded of the subaltern in the colonial culture. But she is a self exiled subaltern. She is not exploited except in the sale of her hair for Mrs.Charmond. But that too is done after learning that Giles is not for her but for Grace:‘That, then, is the secret of it all’, she said. ‘I had half thought so. And Giles Winterborne is not for me!’(p.23) Marty’s is a limited, unambitious world. The thought of the loss of Giles is unbearable

to her. Yet, Like Gabriel Oak, she bears her pains without malice or grudge. Gabriel Oak remains faithful to Bathsheba in spite of her callousness towards him. He always keeps the interest of his loved one above his own. Similarly, Marty always wishes Winterborne happiness. Never once does she open her heart to him or try to seduce him into a marriage with her as Arabella does with Jude. Her character and gentleness are evocative of Lucie Manette in *A Tale of Two Cities*. If we look at Marty's sale of her hair to Mrs.Charmond from a symbolic point of view, it re-establishes the interdependence of human life. It is ironic that Mrs.Charmond can sustain her charming appearance only with the help of a person who belongs to a community that she despises. A similar situation arises when Dr.Fitzpiers does not hesitate to use Melburry's money though he despises his class. What does Hardy try to suggest here? Both the representatives of modernism depend on what they despise for their survival. It shows an unconscious recognition of the relevance of the other. No system or individual gains significance in isolated existence. Hardy stresses the interdependence of human existence. Irving Howe observes that the characters of Marty and Giles come as a 'relief from the endless clatter about individuality which fills modern literature and life.'²⁸

Dr. Edred Fitzpiers is a social snob. He seems to be firmly rooted in the modern culture of hierarchies. His tragic failure is the intolerance of the identity of the 'Other'. If we examine closely we find that *The Woodlanders* is a celebration of difference, not a repudiation or rejection of it. In its essence the novel establishes the fundamental postmodern respect for cultural pluralism. Postmodernism is a correcting or readjusting of old perceptions and world view; it presents a radical change of attitude to global co-existence. Multiplicity, transience and specificity are the distinguishing characteristics of the postmodern condition. There is an erosion of fixities and monopoly of perception. Respecting the specificity and difference of the various social and cultural groups is the underlying structure of postmodern thought. We live in a world of interconnected differences. No absolutes or universals are taken for granted. It is a totally decentred world. There is a radical decomposition of all central principles of culture, philosophy, politics and even literature. But Fitzpiers's whole life and attitude are marked by a rejection of the other; it amounts to 'the annihilation of the other.'²⁹ He is oppressed by the rusticity of the people of Little Hintock. His snobbishness is informed not only by his false notions of social superiority but also by a deep rooted hypocrisy and inauthenticity. He wants Grace as a mistress just to while away his lonely time, and not because he loves her sincerely:

This phenomenal girl will be the light of my life while I am at Hintock; and the special beauty of the situation is that our attitude and relations to each other will be purely casual. Socially we can never be intimate. Anything like matrimonial intentions towards her, charming as she is, would be absurd. They would spoil the recreative character of such acquaintance. (p.138)

Fitzpiers is guided by mere impulse and selfishness. There is no love involved in his attraction for Grace. He is a hypocrite, a master of deceptions. His fundamental error in his relation to Grace and Little Hintock is that he views others from a background of chimerical notions and ideas. Richard Bernstein in his book *The New Constellation: The Ethical or Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* argues that we have an ethical obligation to try to understand the other, not simply in our terms but so as to recognize the “singularity” of the other although we may fail to do justice to the “alterity of the other.” The main conclusion he draws from his reflections is that ours is the ethical ‘responsibility to acknowledge, appreciate, and not to violate the alterity of the Other.’³⁰ Both Fitzpiers and Mrs.Charmond try to subsume the other out of existence by the self’s projections. But we need ‘to transcend(our) narcissistic egoism in understanding the alterity of the Other.’³¹ From the postmodern point of view, Dr. Fitzpiers is deluded if he believes in the certainty of his modern identity, for we are certain about nothing. In such a situation he cannot make judgments on the Other. It is the focus of postmodern thought

and Hardy anticipated it in almost all his Major novels. Fitzpiers is an idealist. Even in his pursuit of learning he shifts focus from one topic to another. He leaves an impression of total rootlessness. He is a reckless sensualist. He gives up his future prosperity for momentary pleasures. For instance, his practice at Budmouth is given up for the pleasurable company of Mrs.Charmond at Little Hintock. There is no relationship between his varied interest in learning and the actual life he leads. He is a confused, fragmented personality. He is 'incapable of feeling the reality of any world outside himself, whether it is the woods or the people who live there.'³²

Mrs.Charmond, like Fitzpiers, is a representative of modern civilization. Like him, she too is a snob, refusing to respect and tolerate the other. In this connection Noorul Hasan makes a very perceptive observation about her: 'Mrs.Charmond is a compliment to the doctor. The two together constitute the anti- ethic of the *The Woodlanders*.'³³ What is the ethic of the novel? It seems to be that when intellectual awareness is not accompanied by an awareness of human and social responsibilities, life can become tragic. Mrs.Charmond is incapable of adjusting herself to her given social context. She is oppressed by the rigidity of traditional Hintock:

The terrible insistencies of society- how severe they are, and cold, and inexorable- ghastly towards those who are made of wax and not of stone. O, I am afraid of them; a stab for this error, and a stab for that- correctives and regulations pretendedly framed that society may tend to perfectio- an end which I don't care for in the least. Yet for this all I do care for has to be stunted and starved. (Pp.204-205)

In this outburst of Mrs.Charmond we can read Hardy's own protest against some aspects of the Victorian social and moral system. It is eloquently stated when Giles dies for a meaningless social morality. But what Mrs.Charmond fails to understand is that individual happiness or pleasures should not be had at the cost of the other. In her illicit affair with Fitzpiers she is violating another individual's legitimate right to happiness. When she does not care for others, she cannot expect others to care for her individualistic whims. Her behaviour is socially chaotic.

In Mrs.Charmond's emotional reaction to the world around her, Hardy reveals the conflict between nature and culture. Mrs.Charmond can neither merge with nor tolerate the values of Little Hintock. She lives like a recluse. The rustic coachman's observation proves the point: "I have never known her do it before, for as a rule she takes no interest in the village folk at all."(p.44) This self-exiled existence is a result of her urban consciousness which disdains the rural form of living. Her whole life and ultimate tragic death are a testimony to the inherent emptiness of a life she

has lived hitherto. Her tragedy is that she does not recognize any form of life outside her own. Besides, she has been deeply involved in egoistic pursuits without any concern for others.

By the time Hardy came to write *The Woodlanders* a lot of changes had taken place in the literary scene as well as in the Victorian social world. According to Urmila Chakraborty 'the novel in the nineteenth century was the product of a social order and a world view that had been irretrievably lost.'³⁴ The familiar ordered society is gradually crumbling in *The Woodlanders*. The Arcadian world of *The Woodlanders* will not be able to hold on too long. The tension between the new and the old is too perceptible in the novel:

The nineteenth century novel projected the image of the rounded, individuated, private self, a recognizable being with whom the reader could identify. The twentieth century view of man was at odds with this conception, seeing man as the alienated, fragmented consciousness that he is.³⁵

Though Hardy wrote *The Woodlanders* in 1887, his intuitive vision rightly captures the actual state of man in the emerging new world. That is why John Bayley observes:

Hardy's attitude to consciousness is totally, even disconcertingly, modern. Only his attitude to society is of its time.³⁶

Hardy ends *The Woodlanders* with the moving, sentimental words of Marty South. She is not affected by the intrusion of modern consciousness into her traditional community. The values of Hintock are still dear to her. Marty “looked almost like a being who had rejected with indifference the attribute of sex for the loftier quality of abstract humanism.”(p.379) Humanism may have dithered around her, but not in Marty. Hardy seems to warn that the deterioration of humanistic values would be a threat to mankind. And it is this absence of humanism which dominates his last two novels-*Tess* and *Jude*.

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Chapter 5

TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES (1891)

Of all the novels of Hardy *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is regarded by many critics as the 'most problematic novel, stable in scarcely any aspect.'¹ Apart from its superficial theme of agricultural crisis and the destruction of English peasantry, the novel engages into a vigorous examination of Victorian morality and 'the complexity of sexual morality as a whole.'² Clementina Black praises the novel for its 'profoundest moral earnestness.'³ Echoing more or less akin critical insight, Katherine Porter observes:

Hardy's mind led him out of the tradition of orthodoxy into another tradition of equal antiquity, equal importance, equal seriousness, a body of opinion running parallel throughout history to the body of law in church and state: the great tradition of dissent.⁴

Furthermore, Dorothy Van Ghent, Irving Howe and Dale Kramer, among other things, try to treat the novel as a fictional enquiry into the inevitable tragedy of individual consciousness. A recent critic, Peter J. Casagrande examines the novel as a study in, to use his own jargon, 'beaugliness'- beauty in suffering, ugliness and defeat.⁵ Thus *Tess* has attracted a startlingly enormous body of critical opinion all of which do contribute to

Page references to *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* are to the Penguin edition (1978).

the intensity of our understanding of this powerfully moving creative work. *Tess* demands a more rigorous critical examination to comprehend the vitality of the novelist's tragic vision. Essentially *Tess* is the tragic tale of a simple woman of exceptional natural propensities ruined by the combined forces of the universe and society. Rutland's acute observation in this connection is worth quoting:

Tess is, among other things, an argument. It is an argument made up of two related, but quite distinct elements: one is a grievance against the organization of human society; the other is a quarrel with the ordering of the universe.⁶

In portraying *Tess*'s tragic social life and sympathizing with her existential plight, Hardy anticipates the postmodern tendency to deconstruct the established assumptions about sexual morality. In fact, postmodernism tries 'to express a contextual discourse that disturbs us into revisioning the ideological orientation of dominant and dominating discursive practices.'⁷ Hardy is subverting the notions of sexual morality and female purity. *Tess*'s individuality is self-reflexive, free from any romantic conceptions of female identity. Here Hardy is questioning the basic assumptions and premises of morality that we have taken for granted. 'In place of the well-wrought urn, in other words, postmodernism posits the module of a kaleidoscope wherein there are no fixities and finite patterns but multiple

possibilities.’⁸ In questioning the received structures and concepts, Hardy shows affinity with Foucault who is a champion of anti-totalisation. All the other issues that go into the narrative structure of the novel are meant to supplement this central concern. The controversial attack on Victorian social arrangements and the indictment of Christianity needs to be viewed in relation to the fundamental impulse of the novel which comes into direct conflict with the established social and ethical principles of society. Without any radical departure from the centrality of his cultural imagination, Hardy earnestly advocates the cause of a reviled, innocent woman whose uniqueness of situation calls for sympathy and flexibility in the application of a universal moral code. ‘In opposition to the limitations and inadequacies of the conventional social attitudes of his time, Hardy consistently evokes a world of action and values more truly natural and therefore more fully human.’⁹ *Tess* articulates the perennial conflict between the natural and the unnatural, instinct and crude rationality; spontaneity and cold reason. It is a celebration of the subjective over the collective; particular over the general, and the specific over the universal. Throughout the novel Hardy stresses the subjectivity of Tess. She is simultaneously in and out of the ordinary. There are discordant elements in her personality – natural and the social. Therefore, ‘Tess’s suffering is at once highly personal and irrefutably universal.’¹⁰ What Hardy stresses in

the novel is the sanctity of the individual in spite of the social or moral laws. In her is combined 'the tragic extremism of individuality and of general significance. In herself she is Dionysian and Apollonian.'¹¹ Like *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is the tragedy of a particularly inescapable inner life. The difference, however, is that whereas Henchard is ruined more by his inner life, Tess is ruined by both the external and internal forces. Tess's character is full of complexities and ambiguities. In this connection Dale Kramer observes:

Hardy never reconciles Tess's ordinariness and her specialness; her simple-minded literalness and her sensitivity to the explicitly non-literal; her sexual 'purity' and innocence and her sensuality and flirtatiousness - all contradictions which of course enhance her life likeness.¹²

Unlike in Hardy's earlier novels, in *Tess* the ethical polemic is targeted against the hypocritical dispensation of moral laws in a hierarchical male dominated society. The changing social world of *Tess* is divided irrevocably between the poor and the rich, the working class and the capitalists, the customary and the educated. But in the novel Hardy subverts and disintegrates the age old idea of the elite, and of morality. If in the earlier novels it is the rebellious, anarchical individual who ostracizes himself from the communal fold, here the callous society excommunicates the individual. It is the dislocation and extradition of the natural by the unnatural which is

the focus of the novel. Hardy is not a revisionist here; he is rather openly highlighting the inherent contradictions on which the emergent new civilization is being built. In the creation of Tess, Hardy places nature in opposition to culture as in *The Woodlanders*. If Giles's death is suggestive of the death of rural culture, in Tess's death too Hardy finds the elimination of all that is unique, natural and humane. She is a real human character in whom is combined conventionalism and paganism, submissiveness and rebellion, sexuality and guilt in equal proportion. In her death all that is normal and natural is dead too.

H. C. Duffin's observation about this life destroying defect of the Victorian social system is worth our attention:

Tess arises from narrow conventional views usurping the place of the one great law by which all other must be tested, the golden rule of love and happiness. The ordinances of society are administered with great neglect of this golden rule, in a rigid and unintelligible fashion.¹³

What is brought into sharp critical focus in the novel is the ugliness and inhumanity that lie beneath the sham facade of a fossilized category of moral precepts- axioms and doctrines which are arbitrarily created and executed without adequate scrutiny of their contextual aptness. Hardy's belief is in a philosophy of humanism.

Hardy's moral vision is informed by his particular concern for the individual. He is a celebrant of particularity over universality. In Brazil Angel Clare realizes, through his own experiences and through the intervention of a friend, the folly of "being influenced by general Principles to the disregard of the particular instance." (p.423) Tess's tragic death is a sacrifice to the false philosophy, false morality of pharisaic Christianity legitimized by conventions which are dialectically opposed to an authentic individual self. Tess never falls from her basic integrity or inner virtues; she is merely ruined by the whimsical capriciousness of the social world. The novel illustrates the unscrupulous destruction of simplicity and artlessness by sophisticated social constructs. Hardy is insistent in his repudiation of the universalizing, totalizing moral laws, something that the postmodern thinker, Michel Foucault champions. 'Against the free life of NatureHardy counters the claustrophobic life denying moral law of human society which traps Tess like a bird in a springe.'¹⁴ Angel Clare's two educated brothers - Felix and Cuthbert - represent the mental limitation of the social world:

Neither had an adequate conception of the complicated forces at work outside the smooth and gentle current in which they and their associates floated. Neither saw the difference between local truth and universal truth; that what the inner world said in their clerical and academic hearing was quite a different thing from what the outside world was thinking. (p.220)

These two university educated individuals are prototypes of the larger social world which fails to comprehend the felt particularities of life as it is actually lived by the majority of the human race. Hardy wrote in his diary in March, 1890:

Society collectively, has neither seen what any ordinary person can see, read what every ordinary person has read, nor thought what every ordinary person has thought.¹⁵

The social laws, more often than not, are cruel inventions which attempt to thwart and repress the pure expressions of life; they are a threat to the natural growth and existence of the individual. For instance, the supercilious contempt entertained by the two brothers of Clare for the working class is the outcome of a conventional, stereotype mental training received by them which is alien to the elemental surges of a natural being like Tess or to the ancient, idyllic community of Talbothays. The organization of human society, Hardy seems to plead, ought to take into account the plurality of human nature. Society must not attempt to fit its members into its own mould without making room for specificities.

In Hardy's humane ethical system Tess is still essentially pure, for in her sexual defilement no personal choice is involved, a fact that Clare comes to realize in Brazil:

During this time of absence he had mentally aged a dozen years. What arrested him now as of value in life was less its beauty than its pathos. Having long discredited the old systems of mysticism, he now began to discredit the old appraisements of morality. He thought they wanted readjusting. Who was the moral man? Still more pertinently who was the moral woman? The beauty or ugliness of a character lay not only in its achievements, but in its aims and impulses; its true history lay, not among things done, but among things willed. (p.421)

And Tess's confession of her unfortunate past error of simple, innocent youth on the first night of her marriage with Clare is an eloquent expression of her intrinsic purity. Though it is a spiritual triumph, it acts as a slur in the world of conventional morality. Hardy does not see Tess's purity in a narrow moral sense. Hers is the purity of the spirit, not of the body. Irving Howe observes that 'Hardy shows with conviction that Tess reaches a purity of spirit even as she fails to satisfy the standards of the world.'¹⁶ Mentally and morally she is stainless, and remains so till the end of her tumultuous life. Even her final return to Alec 'd Urberville must be viewed as an act of sacrifice to save her impoverished, homeless family after its eviction from the cottage at Marlott following the death of John Durbeyfield. At The Herons, the stylish lodge where she stays with Alec, Angel Clare vividly perceives the astonishing transformation of Tess:

But 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 drifting like a corpse upon the current, in a direction dissociated from its living will. (p.467)

In her passionate, natural urge to prevent her family from falling into utter desolation, she has cared nothing for her body: "I didn't care what he did with me!"(pp.466-67).She subdues her nobler instincts to brute necessity. This brief interlude with Alec is a momentary annihilation of her cultural and moral self-hood to preserve the life of her little brothers and sisters. It is, indeed, the most self-destructive sacrifice, an immolation that transforms her into an embodiment of pure love and self-renunciation, which may be viewed as immoral by a priggishly conventional society. Tess embodies the virtue of self-renunciation. To view her still pure one has to correlate her personality with the circumstances of her life. In this connection Peter J. Casagrande makes a subtle observation on Tess's personality:

As a woman Tess can be pure only in terms of her particular experiences: that is, she can be chaste but not virginal. Hers then is not the purity of a beautiful innocence, but the purity of ugly experiences, something one perhaps might wish to term a higher innocence, because an innocence she has sought and forged rather than inherited.¹⁷

Casagrande here seems to focus on the purity of Tess's intention though her virginity is lost in the physical sense. Furthermore, it suggests the unflinching loyalty of Tess to the preservation of her sexual and spiritual integrity throughout the course of her ordeals - both physical and mental. With the experience of her physical violation, her beautiful, natural innocence is corrupted; but within the brutality of that involuntary

experience lies a pure, natural self which has never deviated from its native virtues in the direction of impurity either in thoughts or desire. To remain spiritually pure, despite the ugly physical and mental experience, is a nobler kind of innocence and purity. So Tess's whole life is marked by 'beaugliness'- beauty in the ugliness of her unique situation.

Many critics have tried in vain to settle the exact nature of Tess's sexual violation in the Chase. Is it seduction or rape? From the ambiguity of the given circumstances of the incident, it is hardly possible to be absolutely certain about either, and Hardy wants us to consider it as such. Had it been rape, the question of Tess's purity would have been settled too easily, for the Victorian legal laws were absolutely clear about it. Instead, he (Hardy) uses the expansiveness afforded by the novel form (rather than a single scene) to argue for a definition of female purity that includes Tess's sexual nature and her sexual responses to man.¹⁸ Tess's purity, Hardy seems to stress, has to be ascertained within the ordinariness of her natural human self, her own flesh and blood existence. It is quite clear that both seduction and rape have been resorted to by Alec for the sexual conquest of Tess. That her sexual violation is more than seduction is hinted by the reports of other people:

A little more than persuading had to do wi' the coming o't, I reckon.
There were they that heard a sobbing one night last year in the Chase;

and it mid ha'gone hard wi' a certain party if folks had come along. (p. 140)

And yet it is not a savage rape alone that subdues her. The narrative leaves enough scope to highlight Tess's sexuality. And the ignorance of her simple youth adds to the whole affair. Tess's views on it are made clear during their conversation later as she is accompanied by Alec to Marlott against her own will:

'What are you crying for'? He coldly asked
'I was only thinking that I was born over there' murmured Tess
'Well-we must all be born somewhere'.
'I wish I had never been born-there or anywhere else!'
'Pooh well, if you didn't wish to come to Tantridge why did you come?'
She did not reply
'You didn't come for love, that I'll swear.'
'T's quite true. If I had gone for love O' you, if I had ever sincerely loved you, if I love you still, I should not loathe and hate myself for my weakness as I do now! ----- My eyes were hazed by you for a little, and that was all.
He shrugged his shoulders. She resumed ---
'I didn't understand your meaning till it was too late.'(Pp.124-125)

This honest confession of Tess reveals how human she is, how innocent and ignorant she is about sexual matters. Her ignorance of male trickeries is clearly revealed when she cries out pathetically to her mother: "O mother, my mother!" cried the agonized girl, turning passionately upon her parent as if her poor heart would break:

How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house four months ago. Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men folk? Why didn't you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o' learning in that way, and you did not help me! (Pp.130- 31)

In this ambivalent approach to Tess's violation in the Chase, Hardy establishes the human essence of her personality: 'She is also to be seen as an emblem of purity on the one hand and as an emblem of the quintessential female on the other.'¹⁹ Hardy does not project Tess as a marble statue, but as a normal, healthy human being capable of the natural passions and emotion, subject to errors and mistakes:

She had dreaded him, winced before him, succumbed to adroit advantages he took of her helplessness; then temporarily blinded by his ardent manners, had stirred to confused surrender a while: had suddenly despised and disliked him, and had run away. (p.130)

Within the given natural, authentic self, Tess remains pure and honest in her thoughts and intentions which are her own, and are tainted only by external forces beyond her control. The character of Tess, as we have mentioned earlier, differentiates itself by its commingling of naturalness and social consciousness. The urgency of her life is to establish an identity for herself within the scope of her own being. She searches for her identity not in her supposed d'Urberville ancestry, but in her own definition of her unique self. Tess's sexuality and her sensuousness are hinted at in the novel from the very beginning. She cannot establish her identity without a fulfilment of her natural sexuality. But then, Alec is not the man. He can satisfy only the physical aspect of her sexuality, and not the spiritual. And when she thinks that she has met the right man in Angel

Clare, he appears or pretends to be more spiritual than physical. One violates her sexuality whereas the other undermines it. And Tess remains without a self defined identity, but she is defined by the social world and many undiscerning readers as immoral. Hardy wants the readers to understand that Tess's sexuality is as natural as the air we breathe. It is precisely for this reason that Hardy remains ambiguous in the narrative where Tess is defiled or seduced by Alec in the Chase. However, her final surrender to Alec should not be taken as a lapse in her moral life; it is an act of self sacrifice.

The sub-title-'A pure Woman'- was shocking to the Victorian public and the guardians of conventional morality. Hardy tried to persuade his vitriolic critics and readers to re-define the meaning of 'pure', which their traditional ethical system had taught them. Tess's behavior, her thoughts, her desires are unimpeachable. Her grace and vitality are evocative of pristine simplicity and frankness. Hardy is firm in his belief that it is not the act that should matter, but the intent. He attacks relentlessly the organized social and religious creeds, which have no foundation in nature. If the social and moral laws are not in harmony with the inherent laws of human nature, Hardy finds them destructive of human life and a deterrent to the limited possibilities of happiness. His

conventionality or traditional allegiance is an instinctive recognition of the vibrant flow of uninhibited expression of the inner self. In the moral judgment of Tess, Hardy pleads that her moral integrity ought to be measured not by one isolated, unintentional deed, but by the whole aim and tendency of her life and nature. Hardy refuses to endorse a collective moral code which ignores the elemental virtue of the individual. He explores the dichotomy between the rules and values of nature and those of contrived social arrangements. His uncompromising bitterness for the implausible, ridiculous authority of social laws is vividly expressed in his ironic authorial comment on sorrow's death:

So passed away sorrow the undesired that intrusive creature, that bastard gift of shameless nature who respects not the social law. (p.146)

In the parson's refusal to give sorrow a Christian burial we can perceive how his personal theological convictions have been diluted by the weight of social pressures: "Well I would willingly do so if we too were concerned. But I must not – for certain reasons." (p.147)

In spite of this learned parson's personal convictions of the validity of Tess's heroic private baptism of Sorrow, and the absence of divine wrath even if he gives a religious burial to the dead child, he is subdued by the force of social conventions to carry out what he personally believes in.

Tess, the pure incarnation of nature's legacy, is corrupted by society and sacrificed on the altar of conventions though she remains unalloyed till her death. Before she was compelled to enter into the world of dissolute Alec d'Urberville, she was a mere vessel of emotion untinged by experience" (p.51) Her journey from Marlott to Tantridge is a journey from innocence to experience, from artlessness to an environment of social manipulation and craft. She is the prototype of a pure nature intruded upon and assailed by an unscrupulous materialistic social world. At Talbothays Angel Clare recognizes her naturalness: "What a fresh and virginal daughter of nature that milkmaid is!" (p.176) Tess's personality is defined not in terms of modern social subtlety or intellectual accomplishments. Hers is a personality defined by an ancient culture. This is the effulgence in which Angel casts her when he pleads her case with his parents:

"She is not what in common parlance is called a lady", said Angel, unflinchingly, "for she is a cottager's daughter, as I am proud to say. But she is a lady nevertheless-in feeling and nature." (p.225)

Being a descendant of tough aristocratic d'Urberville lineage, Tess has inherited certain hereditary traits of that family's toughness, aggressiveness, dignity and capacity for self-respect. Even when she is sexually violated and bears Alec's undesired child, Tess never forces him to marry her, rather she repudiates such thoughts, if any, and always resists the advances of this unscrupulous, spurious d' Urberville. Remaining loyal

to the promptings of her instinctual self is an outstanding trait of Tess's personality and character. Her natural honesty and sincerity of feeling are implacable even in the menacing shadows of self annihilating circumstances. To Alec's nagging complaint "you'll never love me, I fear", she replies:

I have said so, often. It is true. I have never really and truly loved you, and I think I never can." She added 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. (p.126)

Hypocrisy and opportunism are alien to Tess. She is honest and sincere. It is the same moral force in her which drives her irresistibly to confess her past sexual lapse to Angel Clare on the night of their wedding though her more pragmatic mother had dissuaded her to refrain from such suicidal folly. *Tess of the d' Urbervilles* is, therefore, on one level a narrative of 'primitive emotion, guilt and sorrow.'²⁰ Tess represents the essence of genuine feeling and living which can neither be comprehended nor appreciated by a society dominated by petrified, obsolete conventions that are hostile to the rhythms and flow of a natural self. Tess is morally unimpeachable in her soul. Though she is more sinned against than sinning, she is forced to view herself as a sinner in the social and religious mirror of her antagonistic world.

Tess's aristocratic blood intensified by her unadorned primitive cultural personality is both a strength and a weakness: 'She has the strength, pride, and fineness of spirit that Hardy associates with the superior gentry, the passion and the violence.'²¹ For instance, when threatened with an imminent separation from Angel Clare after her heroic confession, she thinks of ending her miserable life through suicide; but her sense of honour compels her to refrain from such thoughts to preserve the reputation of her husband's name falling into a scandalous history. At Flintcomb- Ash, she does not adopt her husband's title so as to not tarnish his social image. And it is her long suffering and sense of pride which prevent her from indulging in pleas and entreaties at the time of Angel's separation from her:

If she had been artful, had she made a scene, fainted, wept hysterically, in that lonely lane, notwithstanding the fury of fastidiousness with which she was possessed, he would probably not have withstood her. But her mood of long suffering made his way easy for him, and she herself was his best advocate. Pride, too, entered into her submission- which perhaps was a symptom of that reckless acquiescence in chance too apparent in the whole of d' Urberville family- and the many effective chords which she could have stirred by an appeal were left untutored (pp.324-25)

It is the same pride and sense of dignity which restrain her from appealing to her in- laws for help when she has been physically and mentally tortured at Flintcomb – Ash .Tess is capable of pure, selfless love

as well as violent passions. Her love for Angel Clare forces her to deify him to the extent of self-effacement:

Her idolatry of this man was such that she herself almost feared it to be ill-omened. (p.281)

Her hitting Alec on his mouth with her glove is, on the other hand, an indication of the volcanic passion she is capable of. And in the end when Tess kills Alec, it is nature's law avenging the violator of a natural self. Tess has changed incredibly through her experiences. Life has taught her that "the serpent hisses where the sweet birds sing, and her views of life had been totally changed for her by the lesson" (p.123) The enormity of transformation brought upon Tess by her ceaseless sufferings is startling in its intensity. During her journey to Flintcomb-Ash, she kills the wounded birds, breaking their heads with her own gentle hands to relieve them of their suffering of which she has had a fair experience. In this moving scene Tess is presented both as a simple peasant and as an interpreter of contemporary philosophy. Her reflections in this scene are consistent with the novel's theme of a search for self-identity. She consciously longs for death to escape from her defenceless existence. Perhaps, it is only in her death that she can find her true identity. According to Alan Friedman, the 'expansion of Tess's innocence into experience has been towards disintegration and death.'²² But before this

physical disintegration through suffering Tess possessed the purest heart and innocence.

The most absorbing example of Tess's powerfully awe-inspiring, simple, natural faith and purity of heart is the baptism scene of her son, Sorrow. Her misery at the thought of her child not being baptized is beyond endurance. She cannot bear that her "darling was about to die, and no salvation" (p.143) She decides to baptize the child on her own, when her father has refused to let the parson in the house, even if that means her own doom in hell. She is haunted by the thought of "the child consigned to the nethermost corner of hell as its double doom for lack of baptism and lack of legitimacy." (p.143) Turning her little cottage into a church, and her little brothers and sisters the faithful congregation, Tess assumes the role of a parson and baptizes the dying child. At the time of this most moving baptismal ritual Tess "did not look like Sissy to them but as a being large, towering, and awful-- a divine personage with whom they have nothing in common." (p.146) This scene is evocative of the transfiguration of Christ on the mount (Bible according to Mathew 17, 1-13) Tess's uniquely deep faith has elevated her momentarily to the status of a spiritual being, endowing her with a kind of divine radiance. It is, perhaps, symbolic of the divine approval of her intrinsic goodness and her powerful faith. Hers

is a faith that is marvellously natural, godlier than the mundane faith of the rigid society which has ostracized her from its social and religious fold.

About her radical christening act she contemplates boldly and rightly so:

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 for her child (p.146)

In her private baptism of Sorrow, she defies the church, the tradition and the establishment. In her return to Alec, she defies the social as well as moral laws. By subverting the established norms of social behaviour, Tess becomes a forerunner of postmodern assertion of the subjective self. She acts by her sense of the right and wrong. Hardy negates the Victorian centralist attitude and privileges the marginalized, the periphery. Tess moves to experiential truth, and not to referential truth. The purity of her inner life and faith is too powerful for any dogmatic creed.

One of the chief causes of the tragedy of Tess is her obsessive sense of guilt and her individual consciousness from which she cannot disengage herself. For instance, Tess blames herself for the death of Prince more than anyone else in the family. It is her sense of guilt and duty that drives her to a strange new world which is the cause of her subsequent tragedy. Once violated by Alec, her innocent world transforms itself into a psychological hell. Her sexual abuse remains with intense force in her

consciousness. 'The dilemma of Tess is the dilemma of morally individualizing consciousness in its earthly mixture.'²³ This consciousness is her nemesis. According to Jonathan Wike 'in both the man and the race, consciousness has become a burden.'²⁴ Tess's individual consciousness is an extension of the totality of collective social consciousness. It is inalienably interwoven with the external world. Consequently, the individual is unable to disentangle himself from the value systems of his environment. In the dynamics of this interplay between the individual and society, there is hardly any chance for creating a comforting individual psychic world without the risk of personal frustration. Tess's personality and character are the result of her social, cultural and religious determinism. Her consciousness is conditioned by the inevitable external forces. The novel stresses the subjectivity of experience which is again guided by the social norms. The tenacity of Tess's consciousness ultimately becomes a destructive element in her cultural self. Dale Kramer is right when he says that '*Tess* is a tragedy of the individual, by which I mean that there is no valid way to judge Tess according to an extended standard of social necessity or duty.'²⁵ Hardy is protesting against the very concept of objective moral standards. Angel Clare's fears of a bleak future with Tess are the result of his social conditioning. Tess's individual consciousness is not simply a creation of her own autonomous self; rather,

her consciousness has evolved from the inescapable social world. In the absence of an external standard of social and moral laws, her life would have been less tragic. Hardy's authorial questioning makes the point clear:

Moreover, alone in a desert island would she have been wretched at what had happened to her? Not greatly. If she could have been just created to discover herself as a spouseless mother, with no experience of life except as the parent of a nameless child, would the position have caused her to despair? No, she would have taken it calmly, and found pleasures therein. Most of the misery had been generated by her conventional aspect, and not by her innate sensations. (p.141)

Isolating the individual consciousness from the value systems of society is an impossible task. Individual 'subject' means not simply a conscious person, but a social fact- a being subject to socially produced constraints and divisions which create dilemma in the individual. But Hardy seems to suggest that in a universe where events shape themselves by accident rather than by moral design, such aggressive moral consciousness is highly tragic, though unavoidable. Even if the individual is able to ignore the force of her consciousness, society does not absolve her of her deeds. Tess's spiritual exacerbation is caused by consciousness. She is trapped by her social self, her role as a social being. She is ruined by her own consciousness. 'Tess's confession is an acute form of the disillusion that follows enchantment.'²⁶

Tess's confession of guilt to Angel does no good except relieving the burden of her conscience, for Angel is driven away from her after the confession. Since then suffering becomes her mental harvest. It only adds to her miseries of life. It never turns out a ritual of salvation for her. The novel characterizes the "fallen" woman as superior to her confessor, although neither she nor her peers recognize her as such.' ²⁷ When she eventually discovers the falsity of her fantasized moral attitude towards her personal life, she supports the novel's critique of the romance of confession. In the essentiality of Hardy's vision he is critically censorious of the individual's obsessive allegiance to self destructive laws for "the world is only a psychological phenomenon and what they seemed they were" (p.134). But the tragedy is that this psychological phenomenon is conditioned by the social psyche from which there is no escape. In Tess's solitary walks among trees and hills, she would project her own mind into it and perceive it as a reflector of her present state of mind:

The midnight airs and gusts, moaning amongst the highly wrapped buds and bark of the winter twigs, were formulae of bitter reproach. A wet day was the expression of irremediable grief at her weakness in the mind of some vague ethical being whom she could not class definitely as the God of her childhood, and could not comprehend as any other. (Pp.134-35)

No durable sustenance can be had even if one forces oneself into believing that the world is a psychological phenomenon. Tess is simply

caught helplessly and irrevocably in the entanglement of social conventions- something that she cannot escape from:

But this encompassment of her own characterization, based on shreds of convention, peopled by phantoms and voices antipathetic to her, was a sorry and mistaken creation of Tess's fancy- a cloud or moral hobgoblins by which she was terrified without reason. It was they that were out of harmony with the actual world, not she. Walking among the sleeping birds in the hedges, watching the skipping rabbits on a moonlit warren or standing under a pheasant- laden bough, she looked upon herself as a figure of guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence. But all the while she was making a distinction where there was no difference. Feeling herself in antagonism she was quite in accord. She had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly. (p.135)

As an individual, Tess is a pure daughter of nature. Nevertheless she is overpowered by conventional society.

Though Tess personifies the ingrained rapport between man and nature- the focus of Hardy's central cultural imagination- she is a martyr of the conflicting claims of natural impulses and social laws: 'Two opposing elements struggle in Tess for dominance after her reduction: the law of nature and the laws of Victorian morality.'²⁸ She is destroyed both by the patriarchy and the arbitrary social laws. The compulsive power of Nature over human conduct and its supremacy over the laws of man is remarkably powerful even in her reduced state of social existence.²⁹ But what is ironically tragic is that her natural self is inconsequential in the face of intransigent social establishments which function with mechanical rigidity.

Suspended between the two worlds of equal force- the natural and the social – Tess is crushed by both. The oppressive weight of socially inherited moral consciousness combined with the callousness of Universal Will drives Tess to her tragic end. Eugene Good heart captures the irony of Tess's life:

Only nature can give freedom, Hardy seems to be saying, but she gives only slavery to the people who inhabit her world. This is the irony of Tess's suffering³⁰

This paradox of a natural self being destroyed by nature herself is a recurrent point of Hardy's imaginative understanding of life. Like his other novels *Tess* is a novel of character that may stand as an example of the part played in human destiny by a capricious, if not malign fate. Early in the novel Hardy alludes to the actual condition of human race in an inscrutable universe. This dismal spectacle of human life is communicated through the meditative dialogue between Tess and her brother Abraham during their catastrophic journey to Casterbridge to deliver the beehives:

'Did you say the stars were worlds, Tess?'

'Yes.'

'All like ours?'

'I don't know; but I don't think so. They sometimes seem to be like apples on our stubborn-tree.'

Most of them splendid and sound- a few blighted.'

'Which do we live on a splendid one or a blighted one?'

'A blighted one.'

'Tis very much unlucky that we didn't pitch on a sound one, when there were so many of 'em!

'Yes.'

'Is it like that really, Tess?' said Abraham, turning to her much impressed, on reconsideration of this rare information.

'How would it have been if we had pitched on a sound one?'

'Well, father wouldn't have coughed and creaped about as he does, and wouldn't have got tipsy to go this journey; and mother wouldn't have been always washing, and never getting finished.' (Pp.69-70)

In this incomprehensible universal scheme for man, we can easily recognize the cogency of the *raison d'être* of Hardy's use of tragic coincidences. Critics have often complained against Hardy's over indulgence in coincidences and chances to manufacture tragic events in the lives of his characters. In *Tess* too, coincidences play a key role. Parson Tringham's discovery of John Durbeyfield's knightly ancestry, the death of prince, Angel Clare not finding the letter of Tess's confession placed under his carpet in the room, and his belated penitent return to Tess are all coincidences rooted in the drama of human life. They are beyond the power of finite beings to control or evade. It is here that Hardy's tragic vision of life remains vindicated. It is painfully ironic that Tess, the genuine offspring of nature, has not been able to preserve her self either against the vagaries of society or within her own instinctual self. She

shouldn't mind learning "why- why the sun do shine on the just and the unjust alike... but that's what books will not tell me."(p.182) And, indeed, that's what will remain a mystery of life just as the causes of her own tragic sojourn on this "blighted" planet will remain forever an enigma. When she is hanged to death at Wintoncester, Hardy's authorial fury at the universe finds bitter outlet: "Justice was done, and the President of the Immortals in Aeschylean phrase, has ended his sport with Tess" (p.489) and ultimately the novel 'explores as in his earlier novels the insignificance of the individual's will and foresight and paradoxically the insignificance of the individual in relation to an immense and indifferent cosmos.'³¹

Among other factors that cause Tess's personal tragedy is the agricultural predicament of the times. Douglas Brown, H.C.Duffin and Arnold Kettle, to name a few, see the novel as the corruption of innocence by experience and the destruction of countryside by the intrusion of modernism. By the time Hardy came to write *Tess* the traditional order, which had sustained Gabriel Oak, Giles Winterborne, and to some extent Michael Henchard, had disappeared. Perhaps, Tess is the last representative- victimized, exploited and tortured- of the natural agrarian world of innocence and pristine purity. With her grotesque execution disappear symbolically a whole culture and an ancient way of life in rural

England. To witness such a traditional rural society wilting under the pressure of modernist tendencies was a painful experience for him. Tess's melancholy views about life startle even a supposedly well-read man like Clare. And he comes to the conclusion that "she was expressing in her own native phrases..... feelings which might almost have been called those of the age-- the ache of modernism." (p.180) In contrast to the idyllic and spiritually soothing atmosphere of Talbothays, Flintcomb- Ash is both physically and mentally enervating to Tess and other labourers. The threshing machine- "the red tyrant" (p.404) is symptomatic of the ruthless machine age which has little or no human concern for the agricultural workers. According to Arnold Kettle 'the sacrifice of Tess to d' Urberville is symbolic of the historical process at work.' ³² He represents the sinister, brutal forces of industrial advancement which are threatening the traditional, agricultural way of life still pursued by Tess and her social class. Faced with an unremittingly harsh materialistic culture, Tess's primitive simplicity and native feelings are doomed to total extinction. Alec is a man fully versed in the inhuman sensibilities of modern civilization. He is intrinsically evil, beyond any redemptive possibilities; he is the voice of the bestial, profligate aristocracy. As a fictional creation, Alec may be compared with Sergeant Troy in *Far from the Madding Crowd* and Manston of *Desperate Remedies*. His pretended conversion is

as hollow as his inner life: "Reason has nothing to do with his whimsical conversion, which was perhaps the mere freak of a careless man in search of a new sensation, and temporarily impressed by his mother's death." (p. 403) He moves from one extreme quality of licentiousness to another extremism of religiosity. He is unscrupulous, remorseless and reckless in his behaviour. His whole life has been marked by moral indiscipline. And Tess's murder of him is the natural response to the provocation of a whole culture, and through this she demonstrates her allegiance to her own natural self and the community to which she belongs; she reestablishes her identity as a woman of the field.

Angel Clare, one of the chief protagonists of the novel, seems to have been conceived in a mood of authorial outrage as well as sympathy in so far as the portrayal of his character and personality is concerned. Hardy stresses the inadequacy of abstract intellectualization when it encounters actual experiences of living. Clare's personality and character are as admirable as they are repulsive. In his dauntlessly radical questioning of the fossilized social stratification, class divisions and accompanying snobbery, and in his well-informed belief in the equality of the human race, Angel Clare is an exemplar of fine humanistic sensibilities; but in his retrogressive views of female sexuality and purity, he is irretrievably

retrograde. His “indifference to social forms and observances” seems to remain only as an intellectual and academic exercise without being supported by emotional convictions. Nevertheless “the material distinction of rank and wealth he increasingly despised.” (p.172)

Andrew Enstice gives a succinct picture of Angel Clare:

Clare is, in many ways, a type of the Victorian rationalism, scholarship and philosophical exploration which, while purporting to free the human mind from the shackles of human superstition and darkness, only served to mask and distort true feeling and the inexpressible wonder of the human mind.³³

He represents intellect with all its limitations; he lacks pathetically the vitality of imagination necessary to understand human nature and life. With all his intellectual pretensions, he is still vulnerable to the overpowering hold of conventions. What is eloquently demonstrated through his character is the undeniable truth that intellectual formulations about life cannot liberate oneself from the hold of obstinate conventional and moral orthodoxy. The lack of direction is central to Angel Clare's character. Angel is throughout ‘fluctuating between a rationalistic idealism and the corrective of concrete occasion.’³⁴ Like Tess, he too is seeking his real identity. It is in Brazil that he begins to reevaluate old systems of morality to take intention, not deeds, into account. Hardy himself has acknowledged that Clare is a type of a certain class of modern man--the representative of fragmented sensibility. Though he displays an amazing sense of identity

with the native culture and extraordinary courage to deviate from the settled thoughts and values of his social strata, he is more abstract and theoretical in practice. He has an idealistic, romantic cast of mind; he is so detached from the rhythms of natural life. But he makes conscious efforts to integrate himself with the natural forms of life. For instance, Angel's union with Talbothays is intellectual and deliberate whereas Tess's is natural and instinctive. Max Weber prophesied that the reign of rationality, applied equally in the social as well as in the natural environment, would produce the "disenchantment of the world."³⁵

As with Tess, Angel Clare too succumbs to the pressures of social consciousness:

With all his attempted independence of judgment this advanced and well-meaning young man, a sample product of last five-and-twenty years, was yet the slave to custom and conventionality when surprised back into his early teachings. (p.338)

Whatever harmony Angel tries to achieve with nature is dwarfed by his idealization, his gross rationalism. His social consciousness is too strongly ingrained in his personality to free himself completely from its haunting presence. To add to this he attempts to co-mingle what works independently. His impersonalized erudition finds itself in dialectical confrontation with the natural forms of life. Consequently, he is incapable of understanding the depth of Tess's character, her single-mindedness.

According to Dorothy Van Ghent, 'both Angel and Alec are metaphors of extreme human behavior, when the human has been cut off from community and has been individualized by intellectual education or by material wealth and traditionless independence.'³⁶ Without evolving an enduring set of alternative personal convictions, he has renounced the values of his natural class; nor does he fully understand the vitality of the life embodied in Tess. Theirs have been opposing worlds of values which are hard to converge. 'The division in Angel between modern thought and traditional feeling makes him, much more than Tess, our intellectual and emotional contemporary.'³⁷ For Clare the intellectual and the emotional seem to remain totally dissociated from each other, driving him to lead a typically dual psychic existence. Where sexual morality and female purity are considered, Clare's views are hopelessly dependent on conventional opinion:

Though I imagine my poor father fears that I am one of the eternally lost for my doctrines, I am of course, a believer in good morals, Tess, as much as you- I admired spotlessness, even though I could lay no claim to it, and hated impurity, as I hope I do know. (p. 291)

And in relation to Tess, Clare is blinded by the force of conventions to differentiate voluntary act of impurity from involuntary deeds. Besides, Clare applies two scales of moral values in judging the same moral offence- one to his own dissipation of the past and the other to Tess's

sexual defilement by Alec. His meanness is so bluntly expressed when he says:

O Tess forgiveness does not apply to this case. You were one person; now you are another. My God-- how can forgiveness meet such a grotesque prestidigitation as that? (p.298)

The tragedy of the Angel--Tess relationship is that both idealize each other. Both Tess and Angel idealize each other without being able to see the other as an individual susceptible to vices and virtues. For Tess, Angel is the epitome of goodness, an incarnation of perfection, and she almost deifies him. Her impressions of Angel's educated character impel her to fancy that he would always defend her and love her even with all her innocent fault. However, she is deluded into believing his appearances as the expression of his quintessential self. Similarly, Angel sees Tess as he wants her to be, and not as she actually is. He loves his own idea of her, her spiritual image:

'I repeat, the woman I have been loving is not you.'

But who?'

'Another woman in your shape.'(p. 299)

It is here Angel's romantic idealism alienates him from the crude realities of life. In looking for what Tess is not, Clare fails miserably to see

what she is intrinsically and spiritually. His sleep walk, carrying Tess to the graveyard is symbolic of the death of his spiritualized image of Tess. When Angel argues erroneously that Tess's "heart was not indexed in the honest freshness of her face" (p.305), he betrays his lamentable inadequacy to penetrate into the soul of Tess. And it is with intolerable pain that she confesses that "for I you love is not my real self, but one in my image: the one I might have been." (p.281). Both Alec and Angel fail to see the real Tess. If Alec, for whom Tess has only erotic value, violates her sexually, Clare violates her spiritually. These two men may be said to represent the contrast between the flesh and the spirit. Both are blind to the inner richness of her self. They can gratify only one aspect of Tess's personality, not the whole. They are egotistical. Both are diabolic, though in varying degrees, in their respective relationship with her. It is a delusion of Angel to think that he is morally superior to Tess. Surrendering to his middle class moral consciousness, Angel deserts Tess, for he fears himself being labelled. His apprehension of social criticism is indicative of the intellectual limitation of his mind just as that of his two scholarly brothers:

Within the remote depths of his constitution, so gently and affectionate as he was in general, there lay hidden a hard logical deposit, like a vein of metal in a soft loam, which turned the edge of everything that attempted to traverse it. It had blocked his acceptance of the church; it blocked his acceptance of Tess. Moreover, his affection itself was less fire than radiance, and, with regard to the other sex, when he ceased to believe he ceased to follow: contrasting in this with many impressionable

natures, who remain sensually infatuated with what they intellectually despise. (p.311)

It takes the effort of a simple, rustic girl like Izz Huett to make Angel see the sacrificial nature of Tess's selfless love for him, and the intervention of a stranger in Brazil to make him aware of the decrepitude of his moral principles. He learns through sufferings and experience what he has failed to learn through mere ratiocination. What Clare has failed to comprehend at the crisis of Tess's life is that love and intimacy can exist without reference to external laws.

Angel Clare's ultimate realization of his erroneous judgment of Tess comes a little too late to save her from the cruel hands of fate: "I did not think rightly of you- I did not see you as you were" he continued to plead. "I have learnt to since, dearest Tessy mine!" (p.466) Angel's particular cast of mind does not seem to ensure a happy married life even with Liza-Lu- "a spiritualized image of Tess." (p. 488) It is quite probable that this man of high idealism may fail in practical life. For instance, Tess's last question, "Tell me now, Angel, do you think we shall meet again after we are dead? I want to know" (p.486), remains unanswered by Angel. And Hardy's authorial comment is bitterly ironic: "Like a greater than himself, to a critical question at the critical time he did not answer." (p.486) A practical man of sincere emotions could certainly have answered the

question in the affirmative even if it was an assumption. But he still remains entrapped in his own hardened world of intellectual obstinacy. And Liza- Lu, the spiritualized image of Tess, would perhaps lack the sensuality and physical charm of Tess which was no less a factor in Angel's attraction towards her.

Tess's final rest in the dilapidated heathen temple at Stonehenge is symbolic of her primitivism, her inviolable affinity with the soul of nature:

And you used to say at Talbothays that I was a heathen. So now I am at home. (p.484)

This primitive heathen place connects Tess with the cosmic power of the universe. There is an ineluctable bond between her native self and that of the cosmos. Her brief happy interlude with Clare before her death is a reward for her inner purity and innocence, though it is highly doubtful whether Angel deserves it. Ultimately Tess's life becomes a redemptive martyrdom. The brutal execution of Tess is perhaps prompted by Hardy's uncompromising belief in the hostility of the omnipotent will towards man. Apart from this, and more significant indeed, Tess's death is a symbolic expression of the eventual eradication of an authentically unique self by inhuman social and moral laws. *Tess of the d' Urbervilles* is distinguished by its virtually obsessive, unswerving singularity of perspective- the indictment of the application of universal ethical laws to the utter disregard

of the unique individual. And in the novel he remains committed to the cause of the authentic individual. The organization of human society, he argues, ought to be on the basis of human nature, not on the basis of artificially imposed subjective social laws. It is the harsh and indiscriminate application of rigid moral laws which is resented in *Tess*. And Hardy seems to suggest that the individual should learn to turn back upon himself for moral evaluation when the social world is intransigently antagonistic to the life of nature. It is only appropriate to end this brief discussion with the words of Noorul Hasan: 'The peculiar resonance and form of this tale of the village maiden is the work of an ineluctable cultural memory. It is this memory which makes the novel what it is.'³⁸

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Chapter 6

Jude the obscure (1895)

Of all the novels of Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* is most noticeably informed by his multiple and contrasting perspectives on the problematic nature of human existence. And consequently, it involves the postmodern debate on the question of finality of meaning and universal truth. More than any of his preceding novels *Jude the Obscure* explores the relationship between man and the universe, man and society, and between man and woman in their conjugal life. Ian Gregor's understanding of the novel is worth our attention:

It seems, almost ostentatiously, to be "about" so many things – a malevolent universe, an outworn system of education, the rigidity of the marriage laws.....¹

It is this simultaneous preoccupation with divergent and contrasting issues which undermines any critical attempt to attribute a finality of vision to the novel's central meaning. The conventional ending of the novel is not in harmony with the tone and mood of this superb work. Judging from the structural design of the novel as well as its internal tensions, *Jude the*

Page references to *Jude the obscure* are to the Penguin edition (1978).

obscure is Hardy's rejection of any totalizing attitude. It is a plea for cultural as well as ethical pluralism.

Hardy's ultimate imaginative vision may rightly be compared with that of Dostoevsky:

Dostoevsky inaugurated a new "polyphonic" type of fiction in which a variety of discourses expressing different ideological positions are set in play without being ultimately placed and judged by a totalizing authorial discourse.²

However, in spite of the skillfully preserved symmetry of the novel, *Jude the Obscure* received vitriolic criticism from the reviewers as well as the reading public. Bishop of Wakefield announced in a letter to the papers that 'he had thrown Hardy's novel into fire.'³ A critic of the New York Word said '....when I finished the story I opened the windows and let in the fresh air...'⁴ There has been no dearth of disparaging criticism of this superbly executed novel which was considered by Hardy himself as the most moral of all his works.

The only point in the novel on which I feel sure is that it makes for morality..... that the ethical feelings of the novel, even if somewhat crudely put, was as high as that of any of the bishop's sermon's.....⁵

Even today there is no critical consensus about the ultimate vision embodied in the novel. The inherent ambivalence of the novel continues to paralyse any attempt to arrive at a closure. Besides, Hardy's refusal to

accept any totalizing principles as true is suggestive of the postmodern tendencies. Postmodernism condemns 'universalizing meta-narratives which ruthlessly expunge particular or local ... in its drive towards universal rationalization.' ⁶ *Jude the Obscure* marks an important stage in the development of ethical awareness, and an increasing recognition of the irreducible diversity of voices and interests which are true in their own right and context. Hardy himself acknowledged the contrasting elements in the novel: 'Of course the book is all contrasts – or was meant to be in its original conception.' ⁷ It is through the interplay of opposites that Hardy gives expression to his "series of seemings" or "impressions." Consequently, the novel displays a sense of the irresolution of issues. What the novel ultimately leaves behind is a 'dualistic impression.' ⁸ This is because 'we do feel a genuine disparateness of theme, a constant oscillation of interests.' ⁹ The characters are seen in 'constantly shifting emphasis and depth.' ¹⁰ The dialectics in Hardy's imagination can be best comprehended if we examine the three basic issues in the novel – relationship between man and the universe, man and his society and, the question of marriage laws.

In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy's long standing love-hate relationship with nature receives a thorough probing. His critical estimate of nature is best expressed by Phillotson's remark to Arabella:

Cruelty is the law pervading all nature and society; and we can't get out of it if we would. (p.389)

Phillotson's observation is an echo of Sue when she cries out "O why should nature's law be mutual butchery!" (p.378) Hardy seems to go back on himself by 'making nature share with society the responsibility of man's unhappiness.'¹¹ Among other things *Jude the obscure* reveals Hardy's enhanced awareness of the plight of man in his cosmic setting. There is an intensification of his consistent belief that the universe is malign, hostile and always thwarts man's efforts to achieve success and happiness in life. The novel evokes a sense of 'cosmic tragedy'¹², a sustained air of 'cosmic gloom.'¹³ Like Alexander Pope Hardy complains of a snag in the cosmic structure. The universal order is marked by complexity, contradictions and incompatible elements. There are various episodes in the novel which illustrate that man and animals alike are victims of nature's cruelty. Orphaned by the premature death of his parents, Jude feels himself unwanted by everyone, even by his own aunt, Drusilla. The inherent cruelty of nature is discovered by Jude even as a tender boy of eleven years of age. It is first evident when Jude is physically punished by Former

Troutham for letting the rooks eat the farmer's corns. Young Jude is surprised at the scheme of things:

That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another sickened his sense of harmony. (p.57)

The same perplexity is encountered later by Phillotson when he lets Sue go free from her marriage contract with him. He is dismissed by the School Management for his liberal attitude towards Sue. And yet he "did not see how an act of natural charity would injure morals." (p.312)

In Jude the Obscure, the term 'nature' is taken both as an impersonal, external force and as the 'inner voice' of the individual. Since as an external force nature remains callous and indifferent to man's aspirations, it is the inner voice, the dictates of the inner self that Hardy seems to rely upon as the true basis of actions. At the same time Hardy seems to suggest that 'the personal fate of the individual is largely at the mercy of impersonal forces over which he has little control.'¹⁴ Then the question that the novel raises is the extent to which man's inner voice is free from the influence of nature as an external force. According to Peter J. Casagrande, 'Hardy believed that human life is unavoidably out of harmony with the orders that encompass its movements.'¹⁵ Within such

cosmic design man is doomed to failure, no matter how authentic and resourceful he is. Jude's life is a robust statement of the impossibility of achieving centrality in the mysterious cosmic scheme. Nor is there any comfort producing meaning of life. Aunt Drusilla's belief that there is a natural curse on Jude's family further demonstrates the cruelty of nature as Hardy saw it. Little Father Time's murderous act is a response to his reflections on the law of nature after his conversation with Sue. Soon after this tragedy we find Jude trying to console Sue by saying "It was in his nature to do it." (p. 410) It is this deep sense of determinism which informs *Jude the Obscure* and excludes even the possibility of living according to one's inner voice, for the supposed source of the inner voice itself is antagonistic to man. In the face of such cosmic hostility, Hardy raises doubt about the propriety of leading what is called 'natural' life, and the novel testifies to this dilemma in Hardy.

Apart from nature, society is also partly responsible for the existential plight of man. Claiming itself as an enunciator of natural laws, society creates its own structure which further aggravates the existential traumas of man. Jude's fate proves how difficult it is for man to fight against circumstances and surroundings. Circumstances, bad chances, poverty, society and his own natural inclinations combine to make his life a battle ground. In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy shows how both nature and

society contrive to frustrate the genuine aspirations of man. In a letter addressed to one of his friends Hardy wrote:

The "grimy" features of the story go to show the contrast between the ideal life a man wished to lead, and the squalid real life he was fated to lead..... It is in fact, to be discovered in everybody's life though it lies less on the surface perhaps than it does in my poor puppet's.....¹⁶

Hardy seems to re-examine seriously his earlier belief that social conventions are the concrete articulation of natural laws. Both the laws are intransigently inimical to man. In this connection, William R. Goetz's observation is worth quoting:

In Jude the Obscure the natural law initially seems to be prior to the social law, which must be interpreted either as an "enunciation" or a deformation of it. By the end of the novel, these two laws are threatening to collapse into one; or rather they become two versions of a system of determinism that governs human fate.¹⁷

Both nature and society are seen as partners in wreaking havoc on the human individual. Man is ultimately ravaged by these two inescapable external forces. First Jude is trapped by his own natural sexual instincts towards Arabella, thereby shattering his academic hopes through a duped marriage. Then his renewed hopes are further defeated by his magnetic, natural affinity he feels for Sue. In spite of the individual differences of their unique personalities, they would have remained happy had it not been

for the unyielding attitude of their society. What seems to be emphasized by Hardy is that

the cruelty resulting from the laws of nature resembles the cruelty brought about by laws of man: both kinds of laws have a relentless universality, an indifference to the fate of the individual..... In their monolithic universal quality, the laws of nature become arbitrary, cruel and machinelike.¹⁸

Hardy's tragic hero and heroine are caught between these two forces.

The question that naturally arises is that in such uncertain cosmic structure what kind of morality should one adhere to? – Individual or social? *Jude the Obscure* can be studied as a critique of both types of morality, their virtues as well as drawbacks. This is why the novel defies any critical attempt to elicit a singularity of vision. The reverse movements of the chief protagonists – Jude and Sue – are balanced in such a way as to make any finality of vision impossible. Jude proceeds from a state of conventionality to that of unconventionality whereas Sue moves from blatant unconventionality to perverse conventionality. When Jude gradually severs himself from the oppressive creeds and dogmas of society and creates a new self for him, he remains committed to it. It is a commitment born of conviction. It can't be affected by even the most grotesque of adversities. Before his acquaintance with Sue, Jude was more or less a

conformist. If he accepted a situation, he had done it with utmost truthfulness to his own self at a given moment of time. What distinguishes Jude from Sue is the authenticity of his personality. For instance, when Arabella feigns pregnancy in order to drag Jude into an early marriage with her, he makes no effort to eschew responsibility. His own instinctive sense of morality is best expressed when he tells Arabella :

I have next to no wages as yet, you know; or perhaps I should have thought of this before..... But, of course, if that's the case, we must marry! what other thing do you think I could dream of doing. (p. 101)

These are the morally assuring words of a man who owns up to the responsibility of his carnal desires. Even though a marriage at this juncture would smash all his hopes, he is ready to forfeit them in order to remain true to the morality of his inner self. In spite of his conviction that Arabella is not an epitome of real woman hood, he accepts the consequences of his action.

Yet, such being the custom of the rural districts among honourable young men who had drifted so far into intimacy with a woman as he unfortunately had done, he was ready to abide by what he had said, and take the consequences. (p.102)

Jude remains loyal to his own natural sense of right and wrong. Simplicity is the distinctive trait of Jude's personality. Ann, a friend of Arabella speaks of Jude as "simple as a child." (p.85)

In contrast, Arabella is inauthentic, insincere and cunning. Her words are lies, her hair is false and her motive of marrying Jude is not informed by any sincere love for him. She is an embodiment of carnal physical desires and despicable practicality. She is a symbol of the hypocrisies and selfish interests of the emerging utilitarian society. Hers is not a 'spontaneous animality', but 'calculated coquetry.'¹⁹ Nothing more vividly illustrates her practicality of life than the scene where she tries to seduce Vilbert while Jude is lying in his death bed. 'The Pig symbolism used for Arabella successfully brings out her essential sickness.'²⁰ She is an antithesis to Jude's intrinsic sense of morality and altruism. In a way she reveals the hypocrisy of the emerging modern milieu.

Though Jude began his career as a conformist, yet his total personality was always in disharmony with the natural and social world around him. His was a life surrounded by the inauthenticity of society and people. From the very outset of the novel, Jude is confronted with a world

that is out of tune with his authentic temperament and attitude. The remaining tale of Jude is a painful self discovery that his sense of natural harmony and sincerity of intention will always be a rarity in the world. As a young boy he is deceived by Physician Vilbert who promises to give him Greek and Latin grammars. Then his dream of entering Christminster, the centre of learning is obstructed by the deceitful Arabella. And the final blow comes in the guise of Sue who deserts him after converting him to her own radical beliefs and ideologies. Sue's final desertion of Jude points to two things – first, the doubtful integrity of her former conviction, secondly, the implacable influence of society on the individual. Jude has always been a victim of social conventions. Apart from his early marriage with Arabella the stratified Victorian society has been responsible for Jude's failure to get admitted into the university. Hardy himself declared that the novel is a pathetic tale of a socially and economically disadvantaged youth's frustrated attempts to receive university education. Hardy is highly critical of the discriminative attitude of the Victorian society in particular and every other similar society in general. In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy has more or less truthfully followed the general tendencies of narrative literature which shows 'the fortunes of characters as they define themselves and are defined by various combinations of their past, the choices they make and the social forces that act upon them.'²¹ The much awaited letter from a

Master in one of the colleges clearly states the conservative attitude of the society of Hardy's time. It was a society that catered to the affluent, the influential and socially privileged classes. *Jude* has affinity with *The Poor Man and the Lady* in its stringent and direct attack on class prejudice and the economic squashing of aspirants of humble station..Jude's intellectual abilities and brilliance can't find fertile soil for fulfilment in such a snobbish social world. And Hardy is vocal in his resentment of the social apartheid practised by the so called enlightened, intellectual community of his time. What Jude embodies in his thoughts and feelings is:

the deepest aspirations of his class, and generation – for education, for an enlarged professional skill, for a more scientific philosophy, and above all for personal and sexual relationship based on a new level of candour and equality.²²

But Jude's hope of rising above his cramped social condition is frustrated by the rigidities of society. The frustrated Jude then reconciles himself to his inescapable fate and retorts:

And I don't regret the collapse of my university hopes one jot. I wouldn't begin again if I were sure to succeed. I don't care for social success any more at all. (p. 177)

He is disappointed with society, with its fixed laws and notions, bias and social exclusion of the poor. The observation of Sue about Christminster is, to a great extent, Hardy's own views:

It is an ignorant place, except as to the towns people, artisans drunkards, and paupers.... They see life as it is, of course; but few of the people in the colleges do. You prove it in your own person. You are one of the very men Christminster was intended for when the colleges were founded; a man with a passion for learning, but no money, or opportunities, or friends. But you were elbowed off the pavement by the millionaires' sons (p.205)

Any social arrangement based on economic or class divisions is unethical, for it excludes the marginalised 'other.' An individual's potential for growth can be throttled by such socio-economic structures. Hence, it is immoral. Society's egoistic arrangements are perceived by Hardy as an attempt of the affluent to retain social, economic and political power centres. These are historical and opportunistic cultural constructs. They are not, by their very nature, informed by any natural truth.

Social conventions and ethical principles receive rigorous critical scrutiny in *Jude the Obscure* when Hardy dwells upon the question of marriage laws. Though he declared that the central concern in the novel is not with marriage laws yet this issue seems to occupy a major portion of the narrative. The technique employed in the narrative is to place genuine and authentic individuals like Jude and Sue in dialectical opposition to society's established moral paradigms. In the process of exploring the

unsettled debate about the validity of individual and social morality, Hardy provides a critique of both without betraying any authorial predilection. Yet the novel clearly illustrates one thing that Hardy's ethical impulses have not conformed themselves intellectually to social morality although emotionally he remains a conventionalist. This division in Hardy can be felt throughout the novel. By portraying the tumultuous lives of Jude and Sue with their unconventional ideas and attitudes, Hardy takes the narrative to the subtle question of marriage laws. Jude may be said to represent all that is natural which comes into conflict with the artificial, whereas early Sue embodies the intellectual rebellion against all that is irrational in society. Together they form a revolutionary voice against society's stubborn resistance to comprehend the very basis and meaning of marriage. Jude's is a very natural, instinctive kind of personality. It was his impulsive nature which drew him to Arabella once, and it is the same force which later draws him to Sue. Jude's life and character vividly express Hardy's deep insight into human nature:

He knew there was an element in human nature, not subject to mathematical or the water – tight theories of dogma, and this intransigent, measureless force, divided against itself, is in conflict alike with its own system of laws and the unknown laws of the universe, was the real theme of Hardy's novels.²³

Jude the Obscure questions by implication the primacy of thought over feeling, reason over instinct. The novel demonstrates the predicament and tragic consequence of the individual's craving for natural existence in a society constructed by the rational consciousness of man. Though crushed by both nature and society, Jude does not flee from his half-natural, half-created self unlike Sue. What gives an irresistible morality to Jude's personality is his tenacious truthfulness to his natural self. There is neither pretension nor hypocrisy in his dealing with both women who enter his life. Both are treated with equal magnanimity and with an inexorable commitment to his sense of right and wrong. Jude does not desert either Arabella or Sue, but he is deserted by both. In his relationship with both the women Jude displays an incontestable sense of moral integrity. His unimpeachable sense of right and wrong is best expressed when he struggles to resist his natural impulses towards Sue, his own cousin. It is an incontrovertible evidence of Jude's primary urge to honour the 'letter' of his marriage with Arabella.

The epigraph of the whole novel chosen by Hardy is "The Letter Killeth" Here "letter" stands for the laws, conventions and customs of society which remain insensible to the quintessence of a unique individual. The epigraph is taken from St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians,

(Chapter 3:6). Interestingly, the second half of this quotation, “the spirit (that) giveth life” is omitted by Hardy. This apparently deliberate omission adds to the subtlety of meaning and puzzles the critics in their attempt to arrive at a consensus about the finality of Hardy’s moral vision. The “letter” of the law becomes the emblem of what is wrong with the institutionalized society.’²⁴ If Hardy had taken the whole quotation of St. Paul then it would mean the “spirit” is more redemptive than the “letter” But the dramatic ending of the novel holds back the readers from dashing into such easy conclusion, and this is what Hardy wanted to accomplish in his last novel. Hardy refuses to take sides, and presents issues before the readers for their own personal judgement. Judging Hardy as a conventionalist from the formal ending of the novel is a critical error. The epigraph is too obvious to prove otherwise. As it is, the epigraph reveals the opposition between ‘the state of civil society and the state of nature’²⁵ The “letter” kills something or somebody. What or who does it kill? From the narrative structure of the novel we can easily answer these questions: the “letter” kills otherness, difference and authenticity. And yet, Hardy seems to ask himself whether these are worth defending. The answer is, they are. The tragedy is that they can’t find a place in a social structure that is too intolerant to accommodate differences. By quoting only the first part of St. Paul’s letter, Hardy attempts to show the pernicious tendency of man

made laws which thwart all that is elemental in man. And by avoiding the second part of the quotation he refuses to be labelled as a moral preacher, for his works are only a 'series of seemings or impressions.' It is after a long struggle between the claims of the "letter" and of the "spirit" that Jude denounces the former for the latter. But the "spirit" does not give him life, rather takes away his life literally and Sue's psychologically.

Jude's initial respect for established social conventions can't hold on for long against his natural impulses in his relationship with Sue. The natural ultimately triumphs over the unnatural. In his struggle "the human was more powerful in him than the Divine." (p.267) It is, however, after long meditation and inner struggle that Jude surrenders to his instinctive self:

Some men would have rushed incontinently to her, snatched the pleasure of easy friendship which she could hardly refuse, and have left the rest to chance. Not so Jude – at first. (p.146)

But once he recognizes the intensity of his affinity with Sue and his love for her, he remains true and loyal to the end. Never does he disown the consequences of his action. Jude's attraction for Sue has a qualitative difference from his earlier attraction for Arabella. The latter was of a

physical and carnal nature. But the Jude – Sue relationship is characterized by its spiritual, ethereal quality. The ineffable, mysterious affinity that exists between Jude and Sue is acknowledged by even the aggrieved Phillotson. A reflection attributed to him confirms that fact: “ They seem to be one person split in two.” (p. 293) From the orthodox point of view Jude’s fascination for Sue may be regarded as immoral, for he “was licensed by the laws of his country to love Arabella and no other unto his life’s end...” (P. 146) But here Hardy is engaged into a critical scrutiny of the very basis of a durable, meaningful marriage. After Jude’s matrimonial debacle with Arabella, he realizes the inherent error of their union:

Their lives were ruined, he thought; ruined by the fundamental error of their matrimonial union: that of having based a permanent contract on a temporary feeling which had no necessary connection with affinities that alone render a life-long comradeship tolerable. (p.115)

Viewed from outside the purview of conventional ethical standards, their marriage lacks the support of any natural ties that alone are capable of sustaining a life-long relationship. Though in his heart Jude is convinced of its invalidity, especially after the discovery of Arabella’s feigned pregnancy, yet he remains committed to the social norms:

There was perhaps something fortunate in the fact that the immediate reason of his marriage had proved to be non-existent. But the marriage remained. (p.107)

It reveals Jude's conscious attempt to conform. Nothing is more moving than his sincere efforts to pray against his new weakness for Sue. But ultimately the natural in him proves too forceful for the life denying social morality. It is too tangibly evident when he tells Sue:

I'll never care about my doctrines or my religion any more! Let them go!
Let me help you, even if I do love you and even if you..... (p. 276)

According to William R. Goetz, *Jude the Obscure* 'seeks to call into question the institution of marriage on the grounds of natural morality.'²⁶

What compels Phillotson to allow Sue to go to Jude is his intuitive sense of the immorality of holding her back forcibly. He makes no secret of it when he discusses the issue with his friend, Gillingham:

I know I may be wrong – I know I can't logically or religiously, defend my concession to such a wish of hers; or harmonize it with the doctrines I was brought up in. Only I know one thing: something within me tells me I am doing wrong in refusing her (p. 293)

What prompts Phillotson to make such concession is his awareness of a natural morality as opposed to the social.

Both Jude and Phillotson have an intuitive awareness of what is right and what is wrong. They respect the 'otherness' of the other, something unthinkable in the pre-modern world, but celebrated in the

postmodern world. Social and moral laws in any society are formulated on the basis of a belief in the 'metaphysics of presence' – a notion that there is a transcendental signified, a God-Word that underlies all philosophical talk and guarantees its meaning.²⁷ Hardy never believed in the transcendental presence of a purposeful, conscious being from whom emanates everything in the phenomenal world, or who attributes meaning to life. He never believed in the possibility of an ultimate Truth or Being. In this Hardy seems to have anticipated the postmodernist skepticism on the possibility of truth. Jim Powell's view of Derrida is worth quoting because Hardy seems to share the spirit of Derrida:

According to Derrida, all Western thought is based on the idea of a centre – an Origin, a Truth, an Ideal Form, a Fixed Point, an Immovable Mover, an Essence, a God, a Presence, which is usually capitalised, and guarantees all meaning. The Problem with centres, for Derrida, is that they attempt to exclude. In doing so they ignore, repress or marginalize others (which become the other)²⁸

The logical outcome of such structures of thought is a tendency towards fixity, institutionalization and totalitarianism. Within such social atmosphere, the unique and the authentic will be oppressed by the social machinery. It is society's refusal to accept plurality of thinking which causes the tragedy of Jude and Sue. According to William K. Frankena 'Morality must recognize various sorts of excuses and extenuating

circumstances.’²⁹ This is exactly what is not happening in *Tess of the d’Urvilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. Hardy regrets the societal attempt to freeze the free play of differences in the individual. It is a blatant refusal to recognize the pluralistic nature of man. The issues raised in Hardy’s last two novels transcend the barriers of conventionality, pointing to a world of multiplicities.

Jude Fawley’s transition from a state of conventionality to that of unconventionality unveils his increasing awareness of the absurdity of universalism. His is a gradual evolution from an uncritical acceptance of conventions through doubt and questioning, to an intellectual comprehension of the invalidity of man made laws. The tenacity of his conviction, earned through experience and meditation, is too powerful to sever him from their influence even in the midst of intolerable adversities. Whereas Sue makes a backward journey intellectually with the change of her circumstances, Jude remains intransigent. His ‘identity is based on personal qualities that are revealed during the tribulations of life.’³⁰ In his stoicism Jude has an affinity with Crabriel Oak of *Far From the Madding Crowd*. The essential self of Jude comes into being in his encounters with the world. Essentially Jude has been authentic and Sue inauthentic. Her

inauthenticity is exhibited through trying circumstances. In this connection the observation of Jonathan Culler is worth our attention:

Western novels reinforce the notion of an essential self by suggesting that the self which emerges from trying encounters with the world was in some sense there all along, as the basis for actions which, from the perspective of readers, bring this self into being. The fundamental identity of characters emerges as the result of actions, of struggles with the world, but then this identity is posited as the basis, even the cause of those actions.³¹

There is an indisputable harmony between Jude's natural self and his actions. During his initial inclinations towards Sue, Jude engages into an inner battle against the temptations as a married man. It is not Arabella's personality or his love for her which inspires him to be moral, but his spontaneous respect for a religious marriage contract. Falsity is alien to Jude's natural make up. For instance, when Phillotson comes to seek a clarification about the scandalous relationship between Sue and Jude, he would have easily sent him off in agony and defeat. But Jude is a genuine, authentic person, and "his action did not respond for a moment to his animal instinct." (p. 219) The most redeeming trait of Jude's personality is his acutely felt concern for others. At his surprise encounter with Arabella in a bar at Christminster after so many years of absence, Jude "pitied while he condemned her." (p. 244) While feeling a keen sense of revulsion for her decline into despicable dissoluteness, as a legal husband he felt pity for

her. "She seems much the same as ever- an erring, careless, unreflecting fellow-creature." (p.331) When Arabella comes to the lodging of Jude and Sue, pleading for help, his natural sympathy is aroused. To Sue's argument that Arabella is no longer his wife, he retorts: " What those legal fellows have been playing at in London makes no difference in my relation to her." (p.331) What is striking about Jude's personality is that in him is combined the spirituality of Sue and the animality of Arabella.

The only occasion when Jude seems to lapse into inauthenticity is when he diverts his attention from his frustrated intellectual ambition to altruistic ecclesiastical adventures. It is not the consequence of any ethical enthusiasm although it was there in him before he met Sue. This voluntary transition of Jude from authenticity to inauthenticity is short-lived. However, it reveals how social circumstances can lead people into a life of inauthentic existence:

He feared that his whole scheme had degenerated to, even though it might not have originated in, a social unrest which had no foundation in the nobler instincts; which was purely an artificial product of civilization. There were thousands of young men on the same self-seeking tract at the present moment. (p.181)

It is an anticipatory echo of what he will discover painfully later about the Wessex music composer. Finer instincts in a man are strangulated by the

rapidly changing social world which is more materialistic and artificial than spiritual and natural.

In the last two parts of the novel Hardy's chief focus is on the question of marriage laws. Marriage as a legal institution is placed under scathing critical scrutiny, especially through the radical views of Sue. She is apprehensive about the capacity of a marriage contract to sustain permanent love between the partners. She tells Jude:

I have just the same dread lest an iron contract should extinguish your tenderness for me, and mine for you, as it did between our unfortunate parents. (p. 323)

Marriage as a misguided convention receives a penetrating treatment in the novel. Sue finds a relationship without any legal backing likely to be more enduring and passionate than the one brought about by legal contract. Hardy is exploring the viability of a union based on mutual understanding and natural affinities, rather than one created through a legal contract which undermines the real meaning of marriage. According to William R. Goetz *Jude the Obscure* 'would demonstrate the perversion of a marriage that strays from the laws of nature into cruelty and yet cannot be corrected through divorce.'³³ A legal contract, argues Sue, is potentially destined to

drain away all the natural passion for each other. People generally react against external compulsions. A permanent contract must be based on good will, not on any binding law. Sue is aggressively outspoken about her hatred of marriage institution:

What Arabella has been saying to me has made me feel more than ever how hopelessly vulgar an institution legal marriage is – a sort of trap to catch a man – I can't bear to think of it. (p. 337)

Sue sees a conventional marriage contract irrevocably binding. If the initial passions of a union dither away and living together becomes intolerable, there is no scope for separation in the conventional scheme of marriage contract.

What Sue resents most is the 'spiritual bankruptcy and cruelty'³⁴ of a civil contract. Throughout the novel Sue and Jude live in a constant state of tension between civil laws and the laws of nature. A legal marriage contract is fundamentally based on the utterance of a pledge. In other words, it is the "letter" and not the "spirit" which determines the union. In this connection Goetz observes:

In so far as marriage furnishes the "machinery" for *Jude the Obscure*, the novel becomes an exploration of the marriage contract considered both as "letter" and speech act.³⁵

If we deny the 'metaphysics of presence', then a marriage contract which is fundamentally based as mere utterance of a pledge cannot claim to have any sanctioning authority. It is particularly this absurdity of the contract which constitutes the basis for Hardy's critique of marriage as an institution. In conventional contract, marriage is simply a speech act, an oath. And the convention of the marriage oath is intrinsically incongruous because of the nature of promises and the nature of human diversity. A momentary feeling, an oath, binds one for life as it happens between Jude and Arabella. Most legal marriage contracts are based on physical attraction, not on spiritual affinity. Besides, the conventional, legal contracts do not attempt to find out whether such contracts are based on mere sexual attraction or spiritual affinity. According to Sue, legal marriage is not only a verbal convention, but also an occasion for the sexual act.³⁶ She contends that 'if the "spirit" of marriage seems to be contained in its verbal contract, its "letter" is found in the sexual act.'³⁷ And it is the letter that almost "killeth" Sue. She sees legal marriage as a licensed occasion for sexual acts. However, what Sue fails to recognize is the truth that sex is a natural, procreative act. Yet, her natural repulsion towards sex is only a minor snag in an otherwise natural response to the question of marriage.

The fundamental objections raised by Sue to a legal marriage contract call for a critical evaluation of this natural phenomenon. Even Mr. Phillotson's approach to Sue's request for a mutual separation is informed by his deep insight into the problematic issue of marriage contract. His eventual decision to grant Sue freedom reveals his acute awareness of natural morality as against the superficial, oppressive morality of society or the Church. When caught between the opinions of society and his own personal convictions about the serious nature of his relation with Sue, Mr. Phillotson listens only to his conscience. He places the individual above the social laws and religious conservatism, and let Sue go her own way. In the eyes of society his position may be indefensible, but not in the eyes of natural law. Their marriage has not been one of mutual love and understanding. And she has no hesitation in undoing such a loveless union which would be only a misery to both:

I am certain one ought to be allowed to undo what one has done so ignorantly! I dare say it happens to lots of women; only they submit, and I kick... when people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times we have the unhappiness to live in, what will they say ! (p. 276)

Sue's radical views about the conventional rules of marriage may be provocative to the moral sensibility of a traditional society. But Hardy's

purpose is to turn the attention of the readers to the rigidity of moral laws that are callous to unique cases. Not only Sue, but even Phillotson feels the same with regard to their separation:

... I am more and more convinced everyday that in the sight of Heaven and by all Natural, straight forward humanity, I have acted rightly (p. 312)

The rightness of his decision lies in his conviction that a marriage without love is dead and dry. It is as good as no marriage at all. It mocks the very meaning of marriage. Seeing through the eyes of nature, the marriage of Phillotson and Sue is adulterous. This is what Sue feels about it :

For a man and woman to live on intimate terms when one feels as I do is adultery, in any circumstances, however legal. (p. 285)

Sue's calling her own marriage adulterous amounts to a radical attack on the institution of marriage. It implies that adultery can happen not just outside of marriage but inside as well. Sue's essential argument is that the 'marriage law necessarily generalizes something that is in essence particular, and makes contractual a feeling that should be voluntary.'³⁸

Jude is not as radical as Sue although he advocates the need for toleration and circumstantial judgement of a particular case:

Well, I don't know. The intention of the contract is good, and right for many, no doubt; but in our case it may defeat its own ends because we are the queer sort of people we are – folk in whom domestic ties of a forced kind snuff out cordiality and spontaneousness. (p. 354)

Hardy does not reject the institution of marriage altogether. What he suggests is the need for flexibility in applying general rules to different individuals, for men are pluralistic in nature. He pleads for the dissolution of the universal perspective. Hardy seems to have anticipated the postmodern thought that the pattern or the centre is only a wishful thinking, an imposition. When social laws tend to be rigid, Hardy parts company with conventions. That is why T.S. Eliot speaks of Hardy as 'a powerful personality uncurbed by any institutional attachment or by submission to any objective beliefs.'³⁹

What makes life hard for Jude and Sue is not any intrinsic flaw in their unconventional union, but the intransigent attitude of society. When the neighbours in Spring Street, where Jude and Sue stay with Little Father Time, begin to suspect the basis of their intimate relationship, they begin to ostracize them. The spiritual affinities that constitute their relationship are of no significance to the rabble. They want conformity to laws and rules.. Society refuses to understand and recognize the nature of their spiritual

union that any marriage should ideally represent. Sue's bitter reaction to social attitude is worth recalling:

I can't bear that they, and everybody, should think people wicked because they may have chosen to live their own way! It is really these opinions that make the best intentioned people reckless and actually become immoral (p.372)

What Hardy is protesting against is the utter lack of 'sensitivity to differences' and the inability 'to tolerate the incommensurable'- something that the postmodern world has begun to understand and tolerate.⁴⁰ Any unorthodox leaps out of existing paradigms or governing structures of thought were morally as well as socially offensive in Hardy's time. If Hardy had been writing today his ideas would have found many takers in the postmodern society, for it 'yields the vision of cultural "heterotopia" (pluralism) which has neither edges, hierarchies or center.'⁴¹ And Hardy himself knew that his ideas were a little too in advance of his time. Contemplating over the failure of their unique union Jude tells Sue that their ideas were fifty years in advance of their time to be of any use or success. Though true to themselves, they can't escape the conventional judgement of society. They are out of tune with the times.

Hardy himself declared that ‘... A marriage should be dissolvable as soon it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties.’⁴² In *Jude the Obscure* the divorcés do not, however, bring a lasting solution to the problems of the protagonists. Rather, both the protagonists are ultimately united with their first partners. In Jude’s case his remarriage with Arabella is a callous, meaningless exercise from his point of view. But Sue’s reunion with Phillotson is a voluntary, conscious act. Many critics like to cite this dramatic ending of the novel as a reaffirmation of Hardy’s inalienable belief in social conventions. On the other hand, many are disappointed with Hardy for leaving the problem where he found it. He pointed to a way without showing the possibility of success. This is, in fact, a conscious, deliberate structural design of the novel which is meant to be of ‘turbulent contradictory views’,⁴³ without providing any kind of finality of vision. The novel is full of contrasting views and opinions expressed by different characters. They are suggestive of Hardy’s own internal conflict. Dale Kramer makes a pertinent observation about the final impression of the novel:

The relative validity of the several viewpoints of the characters and the narrator is supported by the lack of absolutes in the story.⁴⁴

In Hardy’s conscious refusal to endorse any particular viewpoint as universally true, he shares the postmodern skepticism about truth. In *Jude*

the Obscure singularity of perception is replaced by multiple perspectives; universalism is replaced by particularity. The emphasis on the 'intensity and sanctity of individual perception in *Tess* and *Jude* makes them among the most intimate and compelling narratives of the last century.'⁴⁵ And it is this quality of these novels which makes them appealing and relevant to contemporary readers.

In part VI – the final section of the novel – Hardy's technique is to draw Jude and Sue apart from each other in totally opposite directions. It is part of his artistic design to maintain equilibrium of his moral vision. Sue's self torturing journey back to Phillotson's arms, to the lap of conventions, vividly illustrates the horrendous hold of conventions on the individual. After the tragic death of Little Father Time and her own children, Sue is no longer the old, intellectually emancipated, unorthodox woman. She is shattered by the tragic events. Here Hardy is not supporting conventions; rather he seems to suggest that

.... to do and live according to one's personal ideals in defiance of earth's opposition and the thunders of Heaven..... is only for vast Promethean natures; perhaps, only for male natures; certainly not for fine and fragile natures as Sue's.⁴⁶

After the terrible death of her children, Sue leaves an impression of mental derangement. Her self sacrificing surrender to all that she once despised evokes in the readers both sympathy and a sense of her perversion. She turns superstitious to the extent of becoming a worshiper of her own nemesis:

We must conform. All the ancient wrath of power above us has been vented upon us, His poor creatures, and we must submit. There is no choice. We must. It is no use fighting against God! (p. 417)

While Jude gradually frees himself from the shackles of dogmas partly under Sue's influence, and partly through his own reflections, she succumbs to conventions which she once loathed. While analyzing Sue's character Ian Gregor observes:

With her we find displayed the consciousness of self, the innate uncertainties, the psychic disturbances with which the fiction of our day is to make us so familiar.⁴⁷

Sue is inextricably imprisoned within her own extremities. She has never known the moderate path. In her immoderation, Sue shares an affinity with farmer Boldwood. Sue's tragedy springs basically from two factors – her inauthenticity and the inability to maintain equilibrium. But then, throughout the novel Sue is portrayed as a highly particularized individual. She is mysterious, enigmatic and distinguished by the peculiarity of her

nature. Her whole life bears witness to “her colossal inconsistency.” (p.231) She is of “double nature” (P.269) and there is “no order or regularity” in her life (p.283) The impression Sue leaves on the readers is that “things which were right in theory were wrong in practice.” (p. 280) What she ultimately suggests is the inherent disharmony in her personality between what she claims to believe and what she actually practises. Jude seems to have perceived this discrepancy in her character when he tells her:

I have sometimes thought, since your marrying Phillotson because of a stupid scandal, that under the affectation of independent views you are enslaved to the social code as any woman I know .(p. 305)

This is an evidence of Sue’s inauthentic nature. Sue’s love for Jude was initially brought about by feminine capriciousness and jealousy. She herself acknowledges it later:

At first I did not love you, Jude; that I own. When I first knew you I merely wanted you to love me. I did not exactly flirt with you; but that inborn craving which undermines some women’s moral almost more than unbridled passion – the craving to attract and captivate, regardless of the injury it may do the man – was in me; and when I found I had caught you, I was frightened. And then – I don’t know how it was – I couldn’t bear to let you go – possibly to Arabella again – and so I got to love you, Jude. But you see, however fondly it ended, it began in the selfish and cruel wish to make your heart ache for me without letting mine ache for you. (p.429)

What is undoubtedly clear is that Sue’s love for Jude, and her final surrender to his physical desires were partly stimulated by her jealousy of

Arabella – “ Mine was not the reciprocal wish till envy stimulated me to oust Arabella.” (p.428)

The dramatic change in Sue’s intellectual opinions about convention and marriage laws is linked to her inherent “colossal inconsistency.” Her abrupt reversal perplexes Jude:

Sue and himself had mentally travelled in opposite direction since the tragedy: event which had enlarged his own views of life, laws, customs and dogma, had not operated in the same manner on Sue’s. She was no longer the same as in the independent days, when her intellect played like lambent lightning over conventions and formalities which he at that time respected though he did not now. (p.419)

Sue’s eventual return to Phillotson may appear to be a compelling evidence of Hardy’s conventionality. But this is not what the spirit and mood of the novel indicates. Though Hardy believed in the saner, humanly ennobling aspects of social conventions, in *Jude* man is shown as defeated and ruined by ‘the obduracy of the world about him...’⁴⁸ The individual will and social forces are in constant interplay in the novel. The final vision that emerges from the dynamics of this interplay is the need ‘to reject the necessity of a conflict...’⁴⁹ and the cultivation of a symmetrical attitude towards life. Both Jude and Sue have adopted extreme courses alternately, and suffered accordingly. If Sue had abandoned her eccentric attitude

towards legal marriage and opted for a legal contract with Jude after getting their respective former marriages dissolved, they should have found at least a modicum of happiness. But her extremity of views denies even that last possibility. What she does not realize is that it is not a contract that determines the course of love; rather it is love that leads to a contract and preserves it. Marriage with Phillotson was not the result of love, but a social compulsion following her relationship with Jude. And her final reunion with Phillotson is a repetition of the first blunder she committed. When she enters Phillotson's bed "clenching her teeth" she betrays herself as well as Phillotson. (p. 479) Her eventual sexual submission to Phillotson is evocative of Tess's surrender to Alec to save her destitute family. In both the cases the spirit remains severed from the body. This forced union of Sue with Phillotson may be seen as Hardy's ironic mockery of a conventional, loveless marriage. Yet he was compelled by his age and his own sense of the form of the novel to wrench a formal conclusion from a work that does not offer one. As Ian Gregor has rightly perceived in *Jude* Hardy tried to venture into new territories which his imagination had no access to.⁵⁰ With regard to the conventional ending Ian Gregor's observation is worth quoting:

In *Jude* Hardy was still committed to a fiction which pressed for a conclusion even though it was to be a conclusion shaken to the core by the pressure of contraries. Looking back, it is difficult to see how that last hard-won ending could have been anything other than the ending to his whole fictional journey.⁵¹

Hardy seems to have realized in course of the evolution of his story what Jude was slow to realize:

Perhaps the world is not illuminated enough for such experiments as ours! Who were we, to think we could act as pioneers! (p. 428)

Though Jude and Sue could not become successful pioneers, yet they and their creator have shown a way for later day pioneers. John Bayley makes a very pertinent observation about Hardy's works:

The most Victorian thing about his (Hardy's) novels is their plot: the least, their sense of time, place and event.⁵²

With the conventional ending of the novel, Hardy has not achieved any moral resolution to the problems raised in the novel. The reunion of Sue with Phillotson, and Jude with Arabella is not a moral resolution at all. It may be 'a formal resolution, but a moral dissolution.'⁵³ Society, Phillotson and undiscerning critics may be comforted by this illogical resolution but not Jude and Sue. Jude dies with a curse on his lips. His is the tragic end of an honest, authentic individual. And Sue is left behind to continue her inauthentic existence with Phillotson. Sue's wretched state is vividly

captured by Arabella. To Widow Edlin's opinion that Sue has found forgiveness and peace in her return to Phillotson, Arabella replies:

She may swear that on her knees to the holy cross upon her necklace till she's hoarse, but it won't be true!.... She's never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she's as he is now. (p. 491)

Society may triumph, but the individual is crushed. Ultimately Jude and Sue are victims of nature, society and their own authentic selves. In *Jude* Hardy has fictionalized a world where authentic existence will be possible only at the cost of one's own happiness and even life itself. The best summing up of this brief discussion is that of John Rabbets:

Jude takes its bitter flavour and its shape from this merciless quality of separation – separation of man from his accustomed environment, of talent from opportunity, of compassion from convention, of love from marriage.⁵⁴

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Conclusion

Reading Hardy's novels is a perplexing experience. In his novels he has fictionalized the fundamental existential conflicts of man with the inscrutable universe and the social world. The conflicts and tensions that inevitably attend the reality of human existence are the chief focus of his creative work. He is an expositor of man's sufferings and cosmic alienation. Hardy was quite aware of a crisis, a threat, a fragmentation and alienation that were happening in the nineteenth century. Like Shakespeare Hardy shows an awareness of the cruel irrationality of the conditions of human life. The puerile gods torture us not for punishment, but for sport. Hardy presents a world forsaken by God. H. C. Duffin makes a pertinent observation about Hardy's Works:

Hardy is among those who have given us works of art wherein, having grasped the central idea of each, we find it to be not only a thing of beauty but a grand moral lesson also.¹

Hardy believes in the absolute incomprehensibility of the universal forces, and also in the inevitable tragedy of human struggle against them. All of Hardy's major novels are a record of this deep rooted belief. In novel after novel, he stresses the need to understand this truth and to accommodate to the invincible forces of the universe. Those who rebel are either defeated or killed; and those who surrender continue to achieve at least minimum

success and happiness, but at the cost of their authentic existence. Another chief focus in his novels is the perennial struggle between the individual and society. His highly humanistic imagination calls for a social order that has enough space to accommodate individual differences. Both the rigidity of society and unbridled individualism are brought under severe attack in his novels. Any rational system of morality must synthesise social and individual claims. When either of them is excluded, there is tragedy for the individual as well as for society.

Most of Hardy's great characters are archetypal. They are engaged into a dual struggle against the forces of the universe and the irrational elements in social traditions. Each of his major characters embodies within himself the totality of human nature. His characters transcend time and place. They are essentially true to life. Judged against the scenario of postmodern approach to life, Hardy assumes greater relevance in his particularly intense respect for cultural and individual specificities. In his novels Hardy critically examines the possibility of happiness in both rural and urban contexts. He loved his Wessex- a metaphor for rural life- for its simplicity and natural forms of living. He is 'the first writer to achieve the necessary range and realism of the novel of English country life.'² But at the same time, he was not totally averse to the changes that were fast

transforming rural England. Though acutely and painfully conscious of the gradual disappearance of the familiar world, he yet accepted the modern changes as inevitable. In his sociological essay, *The Dorsetshire Labourer* Hardy wrote:

They are losing their individuality, but they are widening the range of their ideas, and gaining in freedom. It is too much to expect them to remain stagnant and old-fashioned for the pleasure of romantic spectators.³

But Hardy's major objection to the emergent civilization was its emphasis on rationality and the tendency towards universalism. The Enlightenment belief that reason and science alone can achieve human progress and happiness was distrusted by Hardy. He did not believe in Modernism's optimism about achieving a unified destiny for mankind. Hardy's division, especially in his last two novels, shows that no simple solutions are possible to the crisis of mankind. In his refusal to take side with any particular form of life as the ultimate, he remains relevant to the postmodern condition which refuses to accept any fixed formulas about life. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy protests the intransigent Victorian social and moral systems. Though he lived in both the Victorian and the modern world, he was far in advance of his time as Jude and Sue were. Steven Connor's observation of postmodernist culture can be easily applied to the essential spirit of Thomas Hardy as a seer:

First of all, postmodern theory legitimates the evacuation of the centre or the idea of the centre, splintering it into 'dissident micro-territories', 'constellation of voices', and 'plurality of meanings', allowing and promoting specificity and regionalism, social minorities and political projects which are local in shape, or surviving traditions and oppressed forms of knowledge.⁴

Hardy's novels are fundamentally a recognition of the 'voices' of rural England, its virtues and enduring humanity. Modernism failed in the cultivation of the fundamental human virtues of concern and kindness for others. Two World Wars bear witness to this truth. And postmodernism gropes in the ocean of indeterminacy and uncertainty. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, there are many postmodern thinkers like Lyotard, Derrida and Foucault who hark back to some of the pre-modern values as a solution to the contemporary crisis. What Hardy believed so passionately seems to be valid today. Noorul Hasan makes a very pertinent observation that Hardy saw the rural matrix as 'an alternative to the chaos of rationality and progressive assumptions.'⁵ His greatness consists in bringing to light the wealth of a life of the marginalized, common people. William Howitt(1792-1879) in his book *Rural Life of England* writes about rural England in the following words: 'There is no part of the population for whom so little is done, and of which so little is thought.'⁶ But Hardy thought and wrote about them more effectively than any English novelist. In rustic life Hardy found, as did Wordsworth, the real emotions and

feelings of humanity. Hardy's works have some influence upon and affinities with writers such as John Cowper Powys, John Fowles, William Faulkner, Ibsen, Zola and Dreiser. All these writers base the details of their narratives on ordinary life. Their works present the helpless subordination of the individual to external forces. Like Hardy, they too are sympathetic to the individual whose identity and individuality are recognized. Hardy does not seem to believe that 'self identity is constituted within the gaze of the other.'⁷ For him the individual weighs more than society. But in their passionate quest for authentic existence, Hardy's heroes and heroines are ruined by society. They protest against unbearable human conditions; they challenge the basis of prescribed social morality without any success. They succumb to public opinion and the 'human compact.' So in Hardy's novels there is a consistent confrontation between the individual conscience and social conscience. The illustration of this division is one of the themes of Wessex novels.

Hardy's disapproval of any attempt to shape the world in the image of the privileged is evident in all his novels, especially in *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. The Victorian attempt to interpret reality in a centralist mode is called in question. Victorian England was not quite different from its colonizers outside the country, where they suppressed the

other for their difference. But in the twentieth century we find an inversion of many of the western paradigms of thought. And by the time we come to the postmodern world, the distinction of centre and periphery becomes more and more blurred. The nineteenth and twentieth century conceptions of social and moral theories are deconstructed in the postmodern critique of western epistemology. Many of the Victorian social and moral perspectives which Hardy questioned are today deconstructed or dismantled as absurd. Hardy's novels are indictments of Victorian ethical hegemony and modern trust in rationality and its ability to arrive at the truth. He tried in his own way to critique the dominant categories of ethical and social systems of his time. It would not be wrong to describe Hardy as a 'Victorian postmodernist.' According to Terry Eagleton, we are simultaneously and inextricably modernists and traditionalists-always in and out of time simultaneously.⁸ The Victorian society had witnessed a deep cultural crisis- a transition from the traditional to the modern which offered no real solutions to the basic problems of life. This anxiety is evident in Hardy's novels more than in any other novelists of his time. To quote Frederick R. Karl:

Although Hardy's roots, like George Eliot's were solidly within a nineteenth century intellectual framework- a pre-Freudian world of Darwin, Spencer, and Huxley- nevertheless, his characters and plots move in a sphere unknown to his contemporaries, an area that no other

Victorian, excepting Dickens in some of his minor characters, had attempted to define⁹

Hardy's understanding and observation of life, his knowledge of human character, his insight into motive and passion, his wisdom and his quality as a seer- all these combine to give to his view of the world a moral significance which no thoughtful reader is likely to overlook. When we speak of morality in Hardy, we do not mean that Hardy wrote his novels to prove any thesis or to convey any moral lesson. But, his impressions about life and morality seem to be the fundamental problems of mankind. And all his novels can be read as pointers to this problem. In this connection Wolfgang Iser's observation is worth quoting:

The unwritten aspects of apparently trivial scenes, and the unspoken dialogue within the 'turns and twists', not only draw the reader into the action, but also lead him to shade in the many outlines suggested by the given situation, so that these take on a reality of their own.¹⁰

Like his autobiography, they seem to conceal more than they tell. Hardy pleads, like the postmodernists, to employ more than one hermeneutic approach to decipher the meaning and purpose of life. Meanings are not single, but multiple. Besides, they are devoid of any 'metaphysics of presence.' They are historical and social constructs. Any approach to life that does not respect pluralism in all walks of life is against the very nature of man. Hardy objected to the arbitrary construction of historical and

cultural realities. He admired rural culture and resented unreasonable importation of rationality into it. As mentioned earlier, man is engaged into a battle against the universal order and society. And in these conflicts, it is the latter which destroys the individual. Hardy is opposed to the suppression of the natural in man. In his novels all the major characters are destroyed by the mechanical and legalistic aspects of society. They are defeated or ruined by the false social world. All the major characters of Hardy are defeated or killed for their authentic selfhood, for their difference. This is true of Eustacia Vye, Michael Henchard, Tess, Jude and Sue. With relentless courage Hardy has tried to communicate that life cannot be reduced to a system of mere rationalistic ideas. An individual's existence is unique and distinct. He is responsible for his actions and life. He exists authentically in so far as he strives to realize values that are really his own. Beyond a certain point Hardy's authentic characters refuse to be shaped by the artificial social and moral laws. They transcend all categorization. In its essence Hardy's novels capture the existential truth that the very fact of communal existence points to a confrontation with that which is other than itself. Lance St. John Butler's observation about Hardy's work is worth looking at:

Hardy's world view probably coincides far more closely with what we are now likely to see as the truth than the world view of most of the said great.¹¹

Hardy is fundamentally a celebrant of the uniqueness of individual life. He castigates the individual only when there is a rebellion against the values embodied in a cultural community. He has always seen a traditional, cultural community as a true representative of the natural world. It is the artificially constructed social world which is opposed to the cultural self of his characters. According to him the social world is an irrational historical construct. It tries to alienate man from his natural self. Therefore, it should go.

In Hardy there is no division when it comes to a confrontation between the authentic individual and the inauthentic social world. He dismisses society's intransigent attitude as irrational. His novels are a record of this perennial conflict and dilemma encountered by humanity. But Hardy's ultimate approach to these existential problems is informed by a deep insight into and understanding of the nature of human existence. Individual authenticity and moral conscience are recognized by him in so far as they conform to what he believes to be the laws of nature. He does not let the individual undermine certain moral laws if that leads to chaos in society. Similarly, society is castigated for its intransigent attitude towards genuine, authentic individuals. When individual selfhood is in danger of

being submerged in some impersonal kind of collectivism, he champions the legitimate right of the individual. Hardy lets the individual stand out as the unique person he is. He does not believe in any supreme power that establishes values or sets an ideal towards which all must strive. The only ideal he values is the ideal of the incomprehensible, primal morality of nature. The struggle to free oneself from the tyranny of society is one of the obvious themes of Hardy's novels. Unless the individual frees himself from the crowd, he cannot be fully himself.

Hardy believes that the individual and society are indissolubly bound together. His novels are an eloquent reminder of this truth. They reveal the inevitable interpenetration of the individual and his social world. They are rooted in the common experience of humanity. Hardy is simultaneously a celebrant of age old forms of traditional living and a discerning critic of the irrational elements of social conventions that restrict human freedom or diminish human dignity. His much acclaimed cultural imagination has been able to accommodate individual specificity and authenticity of existence. Hardy's postmodern tendency lies basically in his particular concern for the uniqueness of the individual subject and an acknowledgment of the plurality of human nature. In the contemporary world the conditions of life are changing so fast. Consequently, there is a continuous search to find solutions to the problems of living. Hardy's

suggestion to look inward rather than outward seems to have relevance in our time of cultural crisis.

The apparent contradictions and inconsistencies in his novels suggest not a lack of intellectual integrity or emotional balance; rather it is the sincerity of a mind in search of a meaningful and happy life. That he has refused to subscribe to any particular system is the mark of his greatness as a true artist. The essence of Hardy's impressions about life is summed up in his own words:

After reading various philosophic systems, and being struck with their contradictions and futilities, I have come to this: Let every man make a philosophy for himself out of his own experiences. He will not be able to escape using terms and phraseology from earlier philosophers, but let him avoid adopting their theories if he values his own mental life. Let him remember the fate of Coleridge, and save years of labour by working out his own views as given by his surroundings.¹²

It is a view which resists all forms of universalism. Hardy's view of life is tentative and transitory. His art selected and gave imaginative shape to various and sometimes conflicting experiences. Hence, his ambivalence. Taken together his major novels from *Far from the Madding Crowd* to *Jude the obscure* constitute a prophetic and intuitive understanding of what is recognized today as the inescapable reality of living. At birth, Hardy was thrown aside as dead till he was rescued by the woman who attended as nurse. Finding him alive, she exclaimed to the surgeon, ' Dead! Stop a

minute: he's alive enough, sure!'¹³ Indeed, Hardy is more alive and relevant in today's world than he was in his own.

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