

**THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN THE POETRY
OF THOMAS HARDY
(1840 - 1928)**

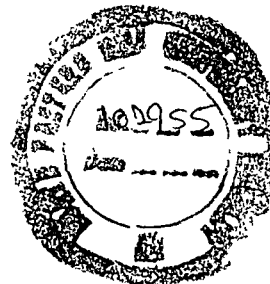
By

UTPALA SEWA

DISSERTATION

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT
FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

To



**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES
NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY
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SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATE

I certify that the dissertation entitled **THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN THE POETRY OF THOMAS HARDY** submitted by **Utpala Sewa**, in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, is the record of original investigation carried out by her under my supervision.

She has been duly registered and the dissertation presented is worthy of being considered for the award of the M.Phil degree. This work has not been submitted for any degree of any other university.

Place : Shillong

Date :


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INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hardy, the novelist, has received greater literary and critical attention than Thomas Hardy, the poet, although by nature and choice, Hardy was first a poet. He considered verse a superior art-form that "contained the essence of all imaginative and emotional literature".¹ But it was only after the controversy which Jude The Obscure (1895) aroused, that Hardy turned exclusively to poetry. Moreover, the novels represent, interestingly, an interruption of only about two and a half decades to a poetic career begun in his early twenties and continued till his death in 1928 at the age of 88. He published 918 poems in eight volumes during this period. At the height of his involvement with novel writing, Hardy wrote and published poetry, eventhough the popularity of his novels overshadowed the worth of his poetry.

Following Lionel Johnson's study of the novels in 1894, there have been many books written on Hardy, but they have concentrated on his fiction, to the virtual exclusion of his poetry. H.C. Duffin, in the first edition of his critical study on Thomas Hardy (1916), took no notice of the poems at all, although five volumes of verse and three parts of the Dynasts were already published. In the second edition, Duffin observed :

"... from the point of view of literary value ... it is probable that not one of the 8 volumes of Hardy's poetry is worth a single chapter from one of his major novels".²

Duffin finds endorsement in W.R. Rutland who in his book on Hardy states that "... the poetry is in the nature of a commentary on the novels".³ This view of the poems as by-products of the novels runs through Hardy criticism from the earliest reviews until quite recent times. This dominance of Hardy's reputation as a novelist over his poetic achievement is ironic in view of his own attitude towards his two vocations. His biographer, the second Mrs. Hardy, records Hardy's ultimate literary ambition as the distinction of having a poem included in a prestigious anthology like "The Golden Treasury".

Hardy obviously considered his poetry with greater seriousness than his novels; he told Sir Sydney Cockerall (who was the executor after Hardy's death) that he would have never written a line of prose if he could have earned his living at poetry. It is thus the endeavour of this study to view Hardy's poetry as a complete and exclusive body of creative work; reference to his novels has been deliberately avoided on the premise that his poetry is not dependent on the novels for understanding, or for critical evaluation, explication and or interpretation.

In fact, for a clearer and a deeper understanding of his poetry, it is not to the novels but to the life of the poet that one must turn. Delivering the Warton Lecture on Poetry on 6th June 1951, C. Day Lewis began with this apologetic declaration that "... there is another reason why personality must enter any discussion of Hardy's verse. Almost all his finest poems are deeply, nakedly personal."

In After Strange Gods, T.S. Eliot made the following observation :

"The work of the late Thomas Hardy represents an interesting example of a powerful personality uncurbed by any institutional attachment or by submission to any objective beliefs; unhampered by any ideas, or even by what acts as a partial restraint upon inferior writers, the desire to please a large public ... He seems to me to have written nearly for the sake of self-expression as a man well can."⁴

This comment from the apostle of the impersonality of Art, is a stricture against Hardy. Nevertheless, with reference to the present study, it emphasises all the more the need for a Hardy reader to refer to the poet's life and the decisive incidents that shaped his personality, particularly those that went into the making of his interesting, though complex, image of Woman. If any further justification was necessary for the inclusion of relevant biographical references, we have Hardy himself asserting that there is more autobiography in a hundred lines of his poetry than in all his novels.⁵

Hence it becomes necessary to refer the multi-faceted image of Woman that emerges from his poems to the three major kinds of feminine influence in the poet's life. To see the exact importance, as well as the degree of influence asserted by them, the women's roles must be seen against the proper biographical background.

When Thomas Hardy was born on 2nd June 1840, at Higher Bockhampton, in the county of Dorset, Queen Victoria had been on the throne nearly three years, and the Industrial Revolution was well under way in England. However, throughout Hardy's boyhood years Dorset continued to maintain the rural, agricultural climate and remained relatively unaffected by the rapid industrialisation that surged over the North and the Midlands. Dorset carried on its age-old pattern of life of small market towns and villages that later provided that rural flavour to the writings of Thomas Hardy.

Hardy's father was a self-employed mason living in the large and comfortable cottage left to him by his grandfather. This put the Hardys amongst the 'cottager-class' in the very class-conscious country society. This enabled them to live a life not only of decent respectability but conferred a definite social status on the family. The Hardys, for example, were the backbone of the cultural activities of the village of Higher

Bockhampton and were deeply involved in the church and choir activities.

Thomas Hardy was the eldest of four children, with two sisters and a brother after him. His father, from the account given by Hardy in his Life, appears to have been a fairly successful mason with several employees under him, and was apparently an easy-going man, fond of music. He played the violin at home for his family, and was much in demand in social gatherings and local festivities. Thomas Hardy learnt the art at an early age and often accompanied his father at these occasions.

It was Hardy's mother, Jemina Hand, who was the driving force in the family, continually encouraging the young Hardy to set high goals for himself, and with the same indefatigable energy smoothing the path towards their realization. The Life describes her as "a 'progressive' woman, ambitious on his account though not on her own".⁶ She encouraged him in his early reading, gave him the opportunity to join the best possible schools at a time before Education was free, and later helped him secure the valuable apprenticeship under John Hicks, a Dorset architect.

Hardy's love for his parents, his family, and his acknowledgement of the key role played by his mother in

their happy, close-knot family, are evident in a number of poems, particularly in "The Self-Unseeing", "Logs on the Hearth", "Sacred to the Memory", "A Church Romance". In fact, many of the poems and the stories had their source in the Bockhampton cottage.

Hardy possessed a remarkable memory and power of total recall that enabled him to draw on these early experiences again and again for the subject of his poems. About this unusual gift Hardy himself wrote :

"... I have a faculty (possibly not uncommon) for burying my emotion in my heart or brain for forty years and exhuming it at the end of that time as fresh as when interred".⁷

Scattered over a poetic career spanning nearly four decades, are numerous poems whose origins lie in real experiences undergone in early years ("Childhood Among Ferns", "For Life I Never Cared Greatly", "The Self-Unseeing"). One such remarkable example is "He Never Expected Much". The poem contains a childhood experience exhumed from memory after an incredible period of eighty years. Such "memory" poems, or poems on events long past written with all the vividness and freshness of an immediate experience, are important in so far as they reveal the importance of some of the crucial feminine influences on his life.

His mother, though easily the most important of such a feminine influence on Hardy, figures in a relatively fewer

number of such poems. Nonetheless, such poems as there are, where she is the subject ("The Self-Unseeing", "A Church Romance"), as well as the evidence of the biography by Florence Hardy, point to her being, for Hardy, the role-model of Woman as a constructive, life-generating influence. Emphasising this facet of Hardy's image of Woman, are also the poems addressed to his sister, Mary, with whom he shared a special closeness, an almost boyish comradeship.

An overspill of this dimension can be discerned in his relationship with Florence Hennicker. The daughter of an aristocrat, and wife of an army officer, Florence Hennicker herself had literary inclinations, though her attempts in that direction were slight and amateurish. Her interest in Hardy, the poet as well as the person, flattered Hardy and bound him to lifelong relationship of warmth and friendship. On first seeing her, Hardy noted that she was "a charming intuitive woman"⁸ -- an opinion he held till the end. The poem "A Broken Appointment" is generally referred by critics to her. Through Florence Hennicker began his various friendships with the socialites of the time whom he referred to as his "Noble Ladies". Thus began his climb to the higher reaches of society and to the subsequent social fame.

The two other women who played important roles in the poet's life, and so acquainted him with the other facets of

Woman, were his wife, Emma Lavinia, and his cousin Tryphena Sparks.

By nature a romantic, Hardy must surely be amongst the very few who become aware of the romantic aspect of Woman as early as he did. He was all of ten years old when he formed an attachment with a local landowner's wife, Louisa Augusta Martin. Recalling the incident, he says in his Life⁹(p.19) that "... though he was only 9 or 10 and she must have been over 40, his feelings for her was almost that of a lover."

There followed several other infatuations through his adolescence. The pages of his Life revive various childish loves the memory of which inspired him from time to time. The figures of Lizbie Brown, the daughter of a gamekeeper, and the farmer's daughter, Louisa Harding of Stinsford, were revived later in his poems; the passing of these figures in their maturer years was like the passing of old friends.

These infatuations ran through his early years to culminate into that passionate, though little known, relationship with his cousin, Tryphena Sparks. Lois Deacon, the Hardy critic who has devoted years to energetic sleuthing of this incident of Hardy, gives us reason to believe that his relationship with his cousin might have

have been more serious than usually believed. She has unearthed evidence, through extensive interviews with Tryphena Sparks' daughter, Mrs. Bromwell, to indicate that a son, Randall, might have been born of this relationship.

On his 25th birthday, with a rejected proposal behind him (in 1862 Hardy had proposed to a girl named Mary Wright, the daughter of a Stinsford printer and bookseller), Hardy wrote in his diary "Wondering what woman, if any, I should be thinking of in five year's time..."¹⁰ and exactly two years later, on his return to Dorset, he fell in love with Tryphena Sparks, his distant cousin from Puddleton, and became engaged to her despite her being 11 years his junior - 16 years to his 27. Her character is difficult to assess due to the reticence of the poet and the entire Hardy-Sparks families on the subject, but there can be little doubt that she was talented, strong-willed, probably capricious and impulsive as well (a stray comment in his Life reveals the deep-seated connection in his mind between woman and capriciousness : "... a feminine nature which first decides and then finds reason for having decided").⁸

The brevity of the relationship notwithstanding, it obviously left a deep impression on Hardy. F.R. Sutherland, in fact, is convinced that "her influence upon Hardy's work and personality were crucial and it is

scarcely an exaggeration to say that each of Hardy's work contains her portrait."⁹ Much to Hardy's bitterness, the relationship came, however, to an abrupt end due to his family's strong objection to her on grounds of her morality, it is conjectured. His poems, "On a Forgotten Lock of Hair" is traced to Tryphena Sparks, and his wistful, but very reticent, "Stray Thoughts on Phena" makes a sad reference to her having come down in life through her subsequent marriage to an innkeeper.

Hardy's recovery from this breakup was completed when he met Emma Lavinia Gifford in March 1870, while on a restoration job at the church of St. Juliot in Cornwall. A daring horsewoman and a charming companion and helpmate, Hardy fell in love with Emma, and after 4 years of courting, married her in September 1874. The four years of companionship, the country-rambles, the stimulating literary discussions between them, was a period that the poet delved into often for much of his later 'memory' poems of Emma. The side of her nature seen by Hardy during this period epitomised, as did the early Tryphena Sparks, the more romantic image of woman as beloved. However, a difference between these two experiences might be mentioned - with Tryphena the relationship was more impetuous, with an undercurrent of secrecy, perhaps even bordering on the illicit, while with Emma it was a gay, cheerful and

socially acceptable wooing (although her father took great exception to Hardy's humble origins). She opened up vistas of a hitherto unknown world for the poet at this period, an experience he was later to acknowledge in his poem "She Opened the Door".

Ironically, the same Emma was to provide Hardy with the archetype for that final facet to his Image of woman as betrayer. The gradual erosion of love between them, the total withdrawal from each other that led them at the end of their 30-odd years of marriage to a complete breakdown of communication awakened Hardy to the more negative side of Woman. This, concurring as it did with a period exclusively devoted to writing poetry, is perhaps why this negative aspect of Woman as the inconstant, the tormentor, the betrayer, figures in a relatively larger number of his poems.

It is interesting to note that an entry made in Life as Hardy making a profound discovery, probably with the enigma of Emma's loyalty in mind : "... I am more than ever convinced that persons are successively various persons according as special strand in their character is brought uppermost by circumstances."¹⁰

By making such an observation, Hardy has, one may say, in a way absolved Woman of her crime, making her more a creature cornered and challenged oftener by circumstances than as intrinsically false.

END-NOTES

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CHAPTER-I

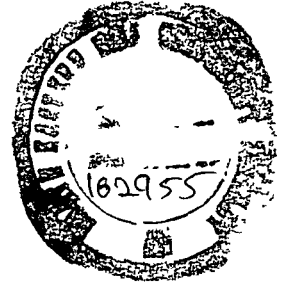
WOMAN AS PROTECTOR

When one considers the crucial role women have played at various periods of his life, it is not surprising that a sizeable portion of Hardy's poetry deals with the subject of Love. Perhaps they do not all qualify strictly as Love poems in so far as a greater number of them are too grim and ironic with the prevalence of disaster and crossed fidelities. They are rather about Love: detached, critical, even cynical commentaries, rather than romantic, ecstatic, sentimental or idealised. In fact, the three volumes of poems published before Emma's death in 1912 consist of philosophical poems revealing an unhappy man; even those narrative poems of 'small occasions' and human-interest stories are obsessively concerned with unhappy marriages.

However, scattered amongst them are a few that stand out in sharp contrast by the warmth and positiveness expressed in them by the poet. In these poems, he sees the love of Woman, in all its various manifestations, as a force of infinite value, capable of utmost benignity. His conviction that despite general evidence, the love of Woman, or even just her mere presence in the world, is a benign force, comes through in poems that meditate upon the protective and constructive influence of Woman.

One of the rare poems where Hardy has drawn a purely positive picture of Woman and highlighted her life-giving and love-generating potential, is "The Self-Unseeing". The poem opens with a picture of deadness -- all is worn, cold and lifeless on that 'ancient floor'. In contrast to the staleness and decay here, the second stanza bursts into a picture of remembered warmth, radiance, music, dream and dance. At the centre of it, sparking it on, indeed eddying it into these joyful manifestations, is Woman, here as the Mother-archetype, the centre of love and life. She is 'smiling into the fire' and the poet here not only wishes to show her contentment, but also the parallel between her and the fire: the warmth, the quiet strength, the reaching out and the transfiguration of the surrounding so that 'Everything glowed with a gleam'.

The poem, a 'memory' poem originating in the recollection of a typical family evening in the Hardy home



in Bockhampton, is an ecstatic declaration of the blessedness of the influence of Woman. Implicit in it is his belief that she exudes a force that inspires man to greater strivings, opens up vistas of unknown glories: hence, the man in the poem is urged to play the instrument 'higher and higher' and the poet to dance 'in a dream' by her mere presence. There is a definite hint of reverence here in his attitude to Woman: due to her influence alone, says Hardy, 'Blessings emblazoned that day'. Interestingly, despite this unabated, undiluted praise of Woman, the grimness inherent in a Hardy world creeps into this picture of joy: the last line says wistfully, 'yet we were looking away', suggesting by it that no matter how profound, however benign Woman is as Protector and as nurturer of life and love, she is limited by the dark forces of the Hardy world.

It is with this touch of irony that Hardy saves the poem from being a mere impassioned panegyric. This last line provides not only the ironic twist that adds pungency and depth to his vision, but also places and locates definitely the influence of Woman within the realism of a Hardy world.

However, notwithstanding the awareness of the limitation of woman-power, it is to Woman Hardy turns when circumstances weigh him down. In "I Sometimes Think" (Late

Lyrics and Earlier, 1922), the caring and concern of Woman is, when all other inspirational influences abandon him, the faithful, unfailing influence to his creativity that he gratefully acknowledges. When the persona in the poem is faced with the realisation that all his efforts, which according to his own assessment, have been things 'not unfit to face the sun', have yet met an indifferent response from the world, when the creative urge has eagerly expressed itself only to be transformed by an indifferent public to mere 'words in the wilderness', then 'who cared to heed?' he asks. On the brink of defeat and despair, his creativity is saved by the care of Woman, he humbly acknowledges. Thus, Hardy speaking as a poet and creator, pays the supreme praise to feminine influence by linking it with his creativity.

But the poet is impelled, however, to raise the image of Woman here above the flesh and blood woman of workaday world. Perhaps because he has acknowledged the enormity of her role in his creativity, he must elevate her to the fleshless entity of a spirit and a wind: she is 'spiriting into my house ... like wind on the stair'. She ceases to be just a woman, but in the role of a poet's Muse, is transfigured to an uncorporeal power and a force.

But it is not always that he acknowledges this inspirational influence in a mood of thankfulness. In his

A closer study of the poem reveals that the barely-disguised disgust that permeates the poem is not directed specifically at Woman because she harnesses him to life and work and creativity, but is really an overflow of that general feeling of bitterness towards this indifferent world.

Another dimension to this aspect of his image of Woman is given in "Logs on the Hearth" (Winter Words, 1928), subtitled 'A Memory of a Sister', and its companion piece, "Molly Gone", written after the death of his sister, Mary, in 1915. In the first poem Hardy is watching the logs of a well-recognised tree burn at the fireplace. As the flames leap to consume the logs, the poet watches the progress, recognising every branch, fork and knob. Superimposed on this scene are the scenes recalled from his childhood. His sister, Mary, is seen as his companion and his 'fellow-climber' who shared joyfully the rough and tumble of boyish pastimes. He remembers her^s camaraderie with wistful fondness; tree, sister and such carefree joys are now cruelly dead. Mary, then, emerges as Woman who is first and foremost, a companion.

This aspect of Woman is again emphasised in "Molly Gone". He recalls various pleasant excursions, outings the two shared with pleasure. As in "The Self-Unseeing", in this poem too it is Woman's presence, her sharing of

the experience that elevates the mundane to the milestones they become in the poet's memory. It is Woman's companionship that draws the poet into a private world of trust and joy. The departure of such a companion from his life brings the chill of perpetual winter to the poet: without her to share it with, the years will henceforth bring no summer for Molly or for him.

The indication then is towards this that Woman by her very companionship can transform the ordinary, even perhaps the trivial to a momentous experience, and through them create a private world which for Hardy, would stand as antimony to the insecurities surrounding human life.

Tenderness marks Hardy's celebration of Woman as the core, the 'sweet heart', of all beauty in Nature; the spring that nourishes as well as embellishes Nature, in the poem, "Rain on a Grave" (Satires of Circumstance, 1914). In the first two stanzas we have the poet's poignant recollection of the lady's dainty ploys to deflect the attempts of the rain to 'dishonour' her beauty by falling on her. But once dead, she makes her peace with it. She now turns the rain to her comrade to awaken and nourish the star-like daisies that cover her grave. So involved is she, and so integral to the process of Life and growth, that even beyond the grave, Woman remains tied to the world and Life. This act of creation and preservation of all

forms of life is not viewed as only a passive, mindless act, but as one in which she thrills, and actively pursues, identifying herself with all her creations 'till she form part of them'.

Hardy wishes to show here that the Life-giving propensity of Woman is not, ironically, life-bound, i.e., bound to the period of her life and consciousness. It survives her physical decay and continues to live even beyond and apart from it. This observation of the poet gives a certain spirituality to this Life-creating force in Woman and brings through the wondrous potency of this time-defying power. Invested with such power, Woman appears larger than life and certainly awe-inspiring. Disguised when alive by the physical frailty, this life-giving power within Woman is unyielding and stronger than even Death. She emerges thus more as part of primeaval and elemental force than as just an ordinary mortal.

In the poem, "Sailor's Mother" (Late Lyrics and Earlier, 1922), we have a greater poignancy underlying the poet's awareness of this same life-giving life-preserving force that he has identified with Woman. Viewed against the backdrop of a common human sorrow a mother's love is seen as powerful a force and as uncaring of the physical self as in the previous poem. The old mother of a lost sailor, 'a woman like a skeleton with socket-sunk eyes',

walks up along distance to her old home, unmindful of the storm, the night-fog or the rough path, urged on by this powerful force within her to seek the safety of her son.

This image of Woman does lean towards a more traditional, perhaps even an idealised view of Woman as Mother, but into this image Hardy has introduced the view of Woman/mother as the embodiment of a powerful and single-minded creative-protective force.

In his poem, "Best Times" (Late Lyrics and Earlier, 1922) Hardy sees Woman as perhaps the only spot of light and joy in a world which he views as hostile. The poem has an atmosphere of gloom with dark hints of crossed fidelities and impending tragedies. The poet, one gathers, is now caught up irrevocably in the darkness that has only increased and snowballed with time; and in this poem he looks back at the past to pick out the rare occasions of happiness. And it is in retrospect that Hardy is able to pick out and recognise his happiest moment. Needless to say, it is one where a Woman has shared the moment. "Best Times", it was, he admits, because a Woman gave him her time, love and companionship :

'We went a day's excursion to the stream,
Basked by the bank, and bent to the ripple-
gleam,
And I did not know
That life would show
However it might flower, no finer glow.'

In the concluding stanza of the poem, Hardy confesses that the occasion provided him with a 'gaeity prolonged and rare', while the title of the poem does the rest to indicate how important is Woman, in his eyes, as a source of all that is good and wholesome in life. She is, in this poem, multifaceted - she is not only a companion sharing the experience with easy camaraderie - basking in the banks, rambling over the countryside, but she brings into it the gathering protectiveness of a Mother-figure ('unlooked for I arrived on a rainy night,/And you hailed me at the door by the swaying light,/And I full forgot/That life might not/Again be touching that ecstatic height'.), as well as the romantic love of a beloved.

The poem carries suggestions that all might not have gone well with this relationship, yet, even with the full knowledge of the later betrayals and pain suffered, the poet looks back with joy on this occasion; he scans the past and selects this occasion spent in her company as the 'best time' of his life.

Interestingly, in this poem, Hardy is able to dissociate and extract these moments of joy and to appreciate them without having his knowledge of later sorrows, cast a shadow on their worth. Such a feature is not usually very often present in the poems of Hardy. In fact, more often the knowledge, sometimes even just the vague

premonition of the misfortunes lying in wait, tends to mitigate the present pleasure, to give it an undercurrent of shadows through the juxtaposition of the moment with the future sorrows (e.g. "At the Piano", "First Sight of Her and After").

However, in "Best Times" though pointers abound that tell of future misfortunes, yet the poet is able to view the past pleasure as a separate, complete experience.

This poem brings an interesting amalgam of the three facets of Woman that Hardy's poems often project: Woman as Protector, Woman as Beloved and Woman as Betrayer. And there is frank acceptance of this reality by the poet: there is no irony, no bitterness, no condemnation or recrimination, only immense tenderness towards this reality, Woman, who has made it possible for him to experience that moment of 'ecstatic height'.

In poems such as this, Hardy appears not only reconciled to the negative aspects of Woman, but with the passage of time, appears to be able to distance himself sufficiently to ignore it and focus, in retrospect, only on the more positive aspect of her. He appears to be able to appreciate, after this lapse of time, her life-giving, nurturing aspect with greater warmth and sincerity. At all times, however, he is conscious of the sorrows that follow

her entry into his life, but appears to have convinced himself that the despair she brings is more than compensated by the moments of glory she provides life. This comes through clearly in yet another poem, "Conjecture" (Moments of Vision, 1917). This poem opens with the poet emphatically declaring that the influence of Woman in his life is what has given meaning to it :

'If there were in my Kalendar
No Emma, Florence? Mary,
What would be my existence now -
A hermit's? - Wanderer's weary?'

It is inconceivable that he would be what he is without these powerful influences that not only affected the present they occupied but the times to come, his whole life. The very being, his very essence was moulded by them. These influences have given his life its character, direction and purpose :

'... with how strange aspect would these creep
The dawn, the night, the daytime
If memory were not what it is
In song-time, toil, or prayer-time
O were it else than this,
I'd pass to pulseless sleep!'

The belief expressed in these concluding lines is emphatic: it is Woman who makes the difference between Life and a 'pulseless sleep'.

CHAPTER-II

WOMAN AS BELOVED

In the Introduction reference has been made to the young Hardy as having precociously a special awareness of the more romantic aspect of Woman. Beginning at some time when he was around ten years old, Hardy's life was marked generously with instances of infatuations and courtships. In his poem, "Great Things", he numbers Love as one of the 'great things' of his life :

'Love is, yea, a great thing
A great thing to me ...'

In the same poem he speaks of the enduring quality of its magic when life is at an end and he looks back at all the attractions of temporal life, he is certain that even at that stage of life, he will feel that

'... Joy-jauunts, impassioned flings,
Love, and its ecstasy
Will always have been great things
Great things to me.'

The very definition of the term 'Love' in these concluding lines of the poem indicates that the love he is talking about is the romantic love of 'impassioned flings' and ecstasies.

Hardy has written quite a number of poems where the attitude to love is wholly romantic, where the usual ironic undertones are absent. "A Church Romance" is one such example. Originating in the much-loved family tale of the Hardy parents' courtship and marriage, it has all the freshness and naivete of a child's fairy tale view of Romance. The lady at prayer in the pew and the musician at the viol in the musician's gallery experience that most romantic of experiences - love at first sight. And it is roses all the way for them. In the true manner of fairy tales, this story of love ends in marriage - naturally one in which love does not suddenly evaporate, as Hardy's poems are generally fond of hinting. Their 'hearts-bond' endures, with all the romance intact.

This poem of idyllic love generously gives both the participants equal credit, but another poem written in a similar vein, inclines towards a more favourable comment on the lady's role in its success. The poem is very expressively called "She Opened the Door". A simple poem of four quartrains, each quartrain lists the benefits the poet-persona has reaped through his relationship with his

beloved. She has opened the door to a life 'rife with revelry', he declares, and continues :

'She has opened the door of Romance to me,
The door from a cell
I had known too well, ...
Too long, til then as was fain to flee.

She has opened the door of Love to me,
That passed the wry
World-welters by
As far as the arching blue the sea.

She has opened the door of the Past to me,
Its magic lights
Its heavenly heights
When forward little to see!'

What the poet apparently wishes to declare is that Woman, as Beloved, brings ecstasy to life, frees man from his own prison-cell of personality, from his inhibitions and from the ever-present 'world-welterings'. Man is lifted by this romance to a world of perpetual 'revelry' that leaves the present behind and moves to the 'magic' of the Past - magical, perhaps because it is the past.

In the light of the above poem, it seems fair to assume that in Hardy's opinion, the love of, or more precisely, the love for a woman lifts man from his own little-ness, it elevates him above his limitation: in effect, she opens the doors of his ^mcraped, cell-like existence.

But this romantic view of Woman veers almost towards the naive at times, with every other consideration swept

aside. The important thing is the joy, the sheer thrill of these 'impassioned flings'. The suggestion being that they are goals in themselves, so that the role of Woman here is somewhat overshadowed by it. Woman is viewed in a generalised, and paradoxically, in an almost impersonal way: she is not so much an individual, a person, so much as a love-object whose sole role is to afford man the chance to fall in love and hence reach the 'heavenly heights' of romance. She is not so much the one who opens the door as the door itself, the gateway to a great experience. It is just this attitude towards Woman that prompts Hardy to write a poem like "Faint Heart In a Railway Train". The poet is on a journey, which is to all evidence, a routine and uneventful one, when all of a sudden, the tedium is broken by a fleeting glimpse of a woman's 'radiant face' at a passing station. The momentary vision passes even before he can muster up courage to alight. With it passes the moment's impulse. But it leaves him forever regretful. We are left with the impression that a moment's indecision has deprived him of a wonderful experience. A mere glimpse of a 'radiant face' was all that was required to assure him beyond doubt that the pot of gold-Romance, was waiting at the end of that particular rainbow.

However, the sheer ecstasy of the love experience is underlined by the heavy shadows of an uncertain future in a

majority of Hardy's love poems, an outstanding example being the poem, "First Sight of Her and After". The awe and wonder seen in the poems mentioned earlier, are present, but uncertainty and the poet's lack of confidence at its durability gives the poem an interesting under-current of irony. In the moment of ecstasy, doubts assail him so that he asks, in this evening of joy the precursor of similar future happiness, or, '... is this eve the end of all/Such new delights for me?'

It is not very clear whether his doubts stem from his uncertainty regarding her or Time. In either case, Hardy would be prone to view the future uncertainty as a part of a hostile world, even if the indirect instrument of it might be the faithlessness of his beloved.

Even if, as a recipient of his love, the Woman was to later scorn the love, his ire would be directed more towards Time and Fate that would so decree that Woman be false to him. Hence, the point that emerges is that Woman is caught up in the pressures of circumstances and that the recriminations against her are more often muted down by compassion.

Two other poems deal with this purely romantic view of Woman as Beloved. The first is "As 'Twere To-night". The poem recalls with the vividness of the present, a time long

ago. The moment from the past has been immortalised for the poet by the 'vision of a girl of grace'. Two stanzas of the poem further elaborate the effect of the sighting: the poet remembers with vividness his being lifted out of himself; he recalls having walked and talked 'airily', so drunk was he with delight. More importantly, he recalls that the moment brought his sorrows to an end by giving him 'trancings of bliss' thereby providing him a thankful escape or 'soar from sorrow'. The poet recalls the incident with joy and thankfulness because romance, in the shape of a 'girl with grace', redeemed him from what, one gathers, was a meaningless, even painful existence, and breathed life and joy into it. It not only rejuvenated his existence but practically led to a rebirth: he emphatically declares twice in the poem that this incident 'broke new life' on him.

The other poem, "A Bygone Occasion" is also, like the last, a celebration of the memory of the advent of romance. Here too the poet conveys the heady euphoria of romance, but with deeper undertones. The opening two lines of the poem, by the very repetition of the short, clipped words "That night, that night/That Song, that song", suggest a breathless excitement. The poem speaks of the secret, subtle power that attracts the two people, the thrill of the recognition of it, and the sweetness of the

exclusiveness of the experience: "No mirth was shown/To
outer seers,/But mood to match has not been known/In modern
years."

In a move quite rare in Hardy, these almost metaphysical descriptions are rooted in their very physical sources: "O eyes that smiled,/O lips that lured". The use of the word "lured", and his consciousness of being "beguiled" by those eyes and lips into believing that the passion would be lasting, indicate the poet's awareness that the euphoria of romance is ephemeral. However, even in this, the indication is perhaps more towards the fickleness of woman as beloved than to the insubstantiality of romance. The poet is emphatic on that score because the experience was so true and powerful that even its very memory has the power to thrill him even now after all that time; remembering it, he is still able to 'drink to its recalled delight'. Even in absentia, romance has the power to exhilarate him; and more importantly, to provide him escape from a painful present where 'Tears may Throng'.

In the above poems, Woman has been celebrated as the inspirer of romance. These poems have tried to tell us that romance is what helps man rise above his sorrows, and it is that which gives life to man's existence. Hence, however ephemeral, it is a goal worth striving for. The focus of these poems is thus on the exhilarating effect of

romance rather than on the inspirer of it, Woman. That is why, perhaps, although they may contain oblique references to her faithlessness, censure is absent. Whatever she is, the poet celebrates woman as beloved because she brings romance into man's life. Consequently, in these poems of lighter vein, the romantic interludes mentioned remain pleasant but fleeting moments and do not mature into anything more serious. Hence, the presence in Hardy's work, of a number of poems with references to 'old' and 'new' loves without either self-consciousness or embarrassment, e.g. "Two Serenades", "He Abjures Love".

Woman enriches man's life by her presence : man may or may not receive her love and loyalty but she alone is responsible for inspiring love and romance in him. She inspires such emotions in man that not only he but his whole world stands transformed. Hardy goes so far as to indicate that Nature too borrows charm from her presence. "Rain on a Grave" as already discussed in the previous chapter, says that woman provides the core of vitality from which springs life in Nature. A somewhat similar theme is also present in the poem "The Background and the Figure". The poem's subtitle 'A Lover's Ditty, 'alerts the reader that Woman here is seen from a lover's perspective. The narrator is thinking of the splendour of a particular spot of wilderness. With loving detail, he speaks of the

periwinkles and the fuchias there, even of the piece of sod that gleams with the sunlight falling on it through the blooms. He concludes that it is his beloved's presence there in their midst that lends that lends them charm; it is her sight that 'richened' them, he says. Beauty in Nature, the poem attempts to say, is transfigured and enriched by the beloved's presence there. The lover experiences a heightened awareness of beauty around him because love has lifted him to a high level of sensitivity. Hence, everything around him appears to wear the extra charm, that extra measure of beauty that the poem celebrates in the opening stanza.

Almost as if to reiterate this point about love's alchemy, Hardy has written another poem, "The Difference", that says the same thing although from a slightly different point of view; in effect, if love transforms all to the wondrous and the beautiful, what does its absence do? In this poem the background and circumstances are perfect: the moon, the warbling birds, the soft twilight but they all fail to impress the poet. The moon appears to be thin and sorry, the birdsong mere tired "old airs'" - all this because the loved one has never visited here: "This spot is unknown to that Heartmate of mine!" hence, not only her physical presence but even the slenderest of association with the beloved renders the place either worthy and

impressive or sad and dismal.

The second stanza re-emphasises the point by stating just what transformations that piece of Nature would undergo ~~were his beloved~~ undergo were his beloved to stray into it: "the song would be joyous, and cheerful the moon", he is certain. The poet relapses into gloom when he realises that the chances of any association of the landscape with her is non-existent, and he is certain "she will never see this gate, path or bough". He can thus see no charm nor beauty nor joy in the scene or in the melody of the bird.

An interesting point to note about the above poem is the quaint reference to his beloved as his 'Heartmate'. This is indeed a change from being just the doorway to heightened experience. The image of woman as beloved has come from the almost inconsequential inspirer of love and romance a mere catalyst bringing about an impressive change in man, to this status of a 'Heartmate'.

An interesting aspect of Hardy's image of woman as beloved is that in this role there is a blend of at least two roles: as a companion and as a betrayer. In the first, she is the sources of joy and in the second, the source of man's sorrows. Woman's intrinsic ability to give joy, however fleeting, comes across in a few poems. One such is

"Under the Waterfall". This poem captures beautifully the gay abandon of the lovers at picnic near the waterfall. It communicates the lively companionship shared by them: the simple tasks of carrying their picnic basket, of lunching together outdoors in the wilderness, the enthusiastic search by the pair of the drinking-glass accidentally lost in the waterfall (the glass being prized because the two had drunk from the same glass in a gesture of love) speak of the warm friendship and a camaraderie underlying their love : they are friends first and lovers only after.

The poem brings to light the fact that when love is reciprocated in equal measure it then takes the form of a companionable friendship. There is no agony, no great ecstasy, except the contentment and pleasure gleaned from the most commonplace human activities.

"At Castle Boterel" is another poem that underscores this same idea. Castle Boterel is Hardy's name for Boscastle near St. Juliot, which he had visited with Emma in 1870, and again revisited in 1913 after her death. The scene from the past is recalled from memory, and over the rain-sodden, dreary present is superimposed the memory of that first visit in "dry March weather" with Emma. The presence then of the 'girlish' form of Emma had transformed the ordinary sightseeing expedition to Castle Boterel into an experience to remember. On thinking back, the poet

states with amazement that it was not what they spoke about, nor anything singular about the walk up, nor even the aftermath of the expedition together that has made the experience one which he cherishes. He reflects that during those fleeting moments he came closest to happiness, and he wonders "... was there ever/A time of such quality, since or before".

Not only has the experience remained in his memory with pristine clarity and indelibility as a high point in his life, but it has, he is convinced, been an experience of rarity even for the very landscape itself. Thus, the love of the two for each other was the alchemy that wrought magic into the ordinary expedition, and now, he confesses, that he has lost the magic of love, he will no longer be able to '...traverse old love's domain/Never again'.

The poems seen so far have thus projected, generally, woman in the role of beloved in a favourable light. This is not say that Hardy has lost his usual alacrity at picking out the weaknesses. If these poems have shown Love as a redeeming and exhilarating force, then there are a sufficient number of them that alert us to its drawbacks. However, the point to note in such poems is that the drawbacks do not contradict, negate, or even mitigate the point he has tried to make about the magic of love. They only show that the power and the glory that he says love

can bestow is true enough, but it does so at a cost. Nevertheless, the reader is left with the definite impression that the loss is negligible in relation to the gain.

In the poem "Love the Monopolist", the demanding possessiveness of love comes across emphatically. In addition, the poem in a sense continues the earlier theme that Nature gains or loses worth depending on the presence or absence of the loved one. The opening lines of the poem state a temporary separation of the lovers : the poet is journeying out of town. He desires that his lady-love dwell only on thoughts of him and their love while he is away. He begs her not to squander away attention on things unrelated to him or their love : people, places, even the beauty of Nature should arouse no joy in her. During their separation, everything should be read, he says, "as things barren and distasteful". The jealous possessiveness will allow no other interest, no other joy, save itself. It is so powerful and exclusive an emotion that it must, and does, wipe out every other aspect of the person. This demanding, jealous possessiveness insists on a total surrender to it to the exclusion of all else, for the lover their love is the core of reality to which every other aspect of the world is tagged, as it were, gaining meaning, relevance or losing them in proportion to its relation to it.

This is perhaps why several of Hardy's poems deal with the theme of illicit love, ~~but~~ with the passion presented often without any moral prejudices. No value judgements are passed on the situation. An example of this attitude is the poem "In the Days of the Crinoline", which has yet another claim to fame in as much as it has attracted much adverse critical attention on account of the triteness and mundane nature of its subject. Nonetheless, the poem amply illustrates the point sought to be made here. The subject is the guile used by a Parson's wife to carry on an illicit attachment. She maintains a demure, even dowdy appearance but quickly changes in to a dashing headwear on the way to a love tryst. The hat is kept concealed in her ample crinoline dress, hence the title. Whether the subject is a proper one for poetry or not (the point enthusiastically argued by Hardy critics), the poet's attitude in it is interestingly liberal, almost as if he is amused by the trickery employed. He is aware of the deceit and disloyalty involved here, yet he refrains from commenting on them. It is almost as if he is only conscious of the immense power of the emotion of love, hence he withholds moral judgement and condemnation. In the poem "The Love Letters", Hardy's mood is more gloomy and his irony sharper. The consumptive, betrayed lover carries the love-letters returned by his lady-love of better days. The news of his death soon follows. His death appears to have been caused

as much by the betrayal as by the disease. The woman, the poem clearly indicates, is heartless and materialistic; she has decided to sever connections with him because he is a dying man. Hardy spends no time on her, not even to condemn her. The whole poem is instead focussed on a portrayal of the youth's deep love for the unworthy one; his helplessness, his anguish and hurt, and his hopeless love for the lady, comes across powerfully. The poet seems more impressed by the strength of his feelings than by the lack of hers. Hence, this poem, in an indirect and inverted way, acknowledges the power of woman as beloved. Her intrinsic worth may be suspect, but her role in raising man to great emotional heights (or, depths, as in this poem) cannot be denied. This is one of the most powerful aspects of Woman. So powerful that even as he senses the truth about her, he is already enslaved by his love for her. This is the subject matter of yet another poem, "The Torn Letter".

In "The Torn Letter" the bid for freedom has already been made : the poet burns her letters and watches the strips curl up in smoke. But no relief, no sense of freedom follows; the poet remains as fettered to her. With morning comes the realisation that he can never free himself of her: "I learnt I had missed, by rash unheed, / My tract...".

He carefully gathers the half-burnt bits and tries to piece them together, humbly acknowledging as he does so that "... that ache for you, born long ago, /Throbs on; I could never outgrow it." He remains forever susceptible to her charms, he is forever in love with his image of woman as beloved. Thus, this poem is really an acknowledgement of his recognition of the importance of this aspect of woman.

In contrast to some of the poems seen earlier where woman is viewed mostly as a passive object of love, rather than as an active co-sharer of the emotional experience, there are a few poems that portray her as an active, involved partner. One such poem is "In a Restaurant". It is a short but powerful, and dramatic poem. The man is unwilling to elope with the lady, apparently a married woman. He disguises his cowardice and weakness with a show of reasonableness : the world will be cruel to them and their unborn child because of the scandal their elopement would cause. But the lady is firm : her love is strong enough to ignore the world's contempt, she argues. The depth and power of her love and her resolute stand makes the world's censure appear petty and totally irrelevant. In sharp contrast to the woman in "The Torn Letters", the woman here is bold, sure and wholly positive. In love she is so totally uncaring of the cost that the deceit and the moral deviation involved stands totally ignored by the poet

and reader alike. In Hardy's eyes it is this honesty in the love-relationship that absolves her of the crime of immorality.

A somewhat less powerful, but an equally positive picture of woman as lover is portrayed in the poem "A Woman's Trust". As the title itself might suggest, the subject of the poem is rather more romantic and sentimental, even perhaps a little time-worn. The subject is a woman who loves, if not too wisely, only too well. The object of her enduring, whole-hearted love and devotion (child-like, the poet calls) is a totally unworthy person, who grows progressively more unworthy with the passage of time. The poet sings his admiration of her steadfast love, and the title suggests that the whole of womankind has been encompassed in this glorification of a woman's love.

There is a sizeable number of poems where Hardy displays an ambivalent attitude towards woman as beloved, especially in the context of the effect she has on man's life. They clearly show the pain that she brings to his life. But equally strongly do these poems suggest the underlying awareness of the joy she has also provided him. It is almost as if Hardy cannot quite decide which is her greater role : as a bringer of happiness, or the cause of man's pain.

In the poem "A Night in November", the pain is almost palatable. The atmosphere of personal desolation is heightened by the autumnal desolation in Nature : the trees have shed their dead leaves and a storm is brewing outside. The dead leaves are swept into the poet's room and a link is forged between the personal sorrow and the desolation outside. It is not only the trees but the poet too who mourns being so mercilessly bereft, and the raging storm outside parallels the disquiet in him. A dead leaf that has strayed into his bed, brushes against his hand and he is deceived momentarily into believing that his dead love is back again, "saying, at last you know". The personal storm, the chasm of misunderstanding is as if bridged. However, illusory and however momentary this moment of peace, the concluding lines of the poem signify the brief respite from sorrow for the poet. His sorrow stems from her not having understood him; his momentary relief too occurs on account of his belief of her having come back. The indication is that his private autumn will change its season if she were to return; the pain, as well as the relief from it, depends on her.

The poem "A Broken Appointment", expresses similar feelings more emphatically : "You did not come,/And marching time drew on me, and wore me out", he says. Her breaking the appointment has as if swept the life out of

him. He is not only desolate, but the numbness that he mentions is the emotionlessness of the dead, the state similar to the 'Unhope' he mentions in another poem, "Tenebris".

The second half of the poem "A Broken Appointment", opens with the painful declaration that she does not love him any more, "I know it, and I knew it" because, he reasons, "love alone can lend... loyalty". But, ironically, despite his knowledge of her insincerity, he finds himself pleading for her presence to dispel this state of death-like stupor that he finds himself in:

"Once you, a woman, came
To soothe a time-torn man; even though it be
You love me not."

As in the last poem, here too woman as beloved brings sorrow in her wake, but then the poet is only too alive to the realisation that she alone can lift him out of this state of numbness. This numbness figures again in the poem "Last Love Word", where he elaborates the description as a state of being 'dead and dumb'. However, in this poem he refrains from holding her alone responsible for this state, and shifts the blame to circumstances beyond their control: "the first look and touch, / Love, doomed us two". The implication being that love's path is by nature uncertain, hence the blame cannot be put on any one of them. This belief about the hazards of love's path does not deter the

Clear views and certain
 But - after love what comes?
 A scene that lours,
 A few sad and vacant hours,
 And then, the Curtain."

The poet has thus carefully weighed the pros and cons against a backdrop of felt experience and his conclusion is emphatic : love, with all its drawbacks, is the one worthwhile experience that gives meaning to life. By extension then, woman as beloved, false by her own volition or otherwise, is yet important to life because of the meaning she gives it. Her legacy of pain is adequately compensated by the happiness, however brief or illusory, that she ushers into life in her role as beloved. It is this realisation of her worth that leads Hardy to express in certain poems his love for her despite his all too acute awareness of her weaknesses. In effect, she may be false, but she is dear because without her his life becomes a mere succession of "vacant hours".

Thus he loves her beyond her frailties, in fact even beyond death. The group of twenty-one lyrics, "Poems 1912-1913", written after the death of his wife in November 1912, shows the poet transcending the bitterness of the long years of conjugal turmoil to arrive at a quiet acceptance of the enrichment of his life through his love for her.

"The Going" is the first of these poems and it records the sense of shock immediately after Emma Hardy's death.

It shows Hardy's shock and disbelief at her going "calmly, indifferent quite" - as indifferent to life as to her husband's sorrow: his shock emanates as much from the suddenness of it as from there being no possibility of reconciliation.

The third verse hints at the development seen in this group of poems towards a poetic re-establishment of contact between Hardy and his dead wife, although in this first poem what is recorded by the poet is just a sense of missing a familiar person, and his disbelief leading him to imagine seeing her. However, the shattering of the illusion brings a sense of despair at the end of verse III. He escapes this by recollecting the joys of their courtship and their early love. This is the form of escape from the sorrow that Hardy will use in the later poems of this group, and achieve a sense of consolation.

The breakdown of the colloquial, informal tone in the final verse reflects the poignancy and the full realisation by Hardy of the present situation - "Well, well! All is past amend,/Unchangeable. I must go."

In a remarkable image Hardy describes himself as already dead but merely held up vertical physically by his body, but nonetheless doomed 'to sink down soon' into his grave. The sense of weary resignation in this verse is

shattered by the despairing cry of anguish in the final sentence. Nothing is resolved but the poem has explored a wide range of emotions and conflicts that Hardy experienced after the death of his wife.

In "The Haunter", the mood goes beyond the despair and conflicting emotions of the earlier poem. There is an attempt towards an establishment of the process by which Hardy was eventually to find consolation: the imaginary establishment of contact with his dead wife. Through it they both try to make amends for the breakdown in their relationship and their love. He imagines that Emma still cares for him. The poem also examines the lack of communication between them when alive. He depicts Emma's ghost lovingly haunting him but perplexed by the problem of letting him know that she does so. There is also a strong element of self-reproach in the second verse that he had neglected and ignored her when she could have been a living companion to him. In the final stanza, he imagines Emma's ghost imploring him to find a means of communication between them now.

"The Voice", a far more intense and urgent poem, is in a sense a sequel to "The Haunter" in so far as in it Hardy demonstrates his success at establishing the contact that Emma so desired in the last poem; in it he answers Emma's voice that 'calls' to him. The poem opens with the poet's

certainity that she is calling him. The verse reflects in its reticent obliqueness the painful nature of its subject; the obliqueness also intends to disguise Hardy's implied criticism of Emma. She, during her lifetime had changed from the woman he loved, 'the one who was all to me', and it is only now after her death that she appears to be filled with remorse and once again become what she was, 'as at first, when our day was fair'.

The second stanza expresses the poet's incredulity that he is really hearing her: 'Can it be you that I hear?'. As if to test his human faculties, he moves from hearing to sight: 'Let me view you, then', he says. And through the power of his memory, he sees her clearly with all the detail of the early, happy years, 'even to the original, air-blue gown!', he exclaims. The detail of the recall seems to verify the actuality of the vision, only to bring, in the next stanza, a renewal of doubts. Is he deceived by the wind? Is her sight to be lost forever? Is she to be 'Heard no more again far or near?' The anguish of these despairing thoughts is continued in the doubt-ridden final stanza, and reflected by the complete breakdown of metre. However, the poem is not without hope; although he is faltering, he is still moving 'forward', and the woman is still calling him.

The lyric, "Beeny Cliff", from the same group, shows how the poet is able to transcend the anguish of separation

and his conflicting emotions and once again feel that early lightness, joy and freedom of loving and being loved. The poem recaptures the incident from the past : a visit to the Beeny Cliff with Emma in March, 1870. He recalls the dazzling, rich beauty of the day with the 'opal and sapphire' sea, the momentary 'irised' rain, and Emma's 'bright hair flapping free'. He remembers the fleeting shadows of rain and the sudden burst of sunshine after it. The thrill and the pleasure of the memory is muted by the poet's realisation that though the cliffs of Beeny remain, Emma is 'Elsewhere'. There is no anguish at this realisation, only a calm acceptance. The acceptance is perhaps made the easier for Hardy's having rediscovered his love for his wife.

This love for his beloved, even beyond death, keeps the channels of communication open between them. Dominating the poignancy inherent in these twenty-one lyrics, is the impressive reality that woman's influence on man's life is enduring and his love for her survives even the physical separation through death; she remains forever inseparable and hence alive in and through him.

The poet hears her calling him in "The Voice", and is led by her to places they had visited together when she was alive ("After a Journey") in experiences which neither sound hallucinatory nor bizarre. They have the matter-of-

fact, natural tenor of everyday happenings, and indeed the poet's awareness of her presence often occurs in the midst of the most ordinary events. For example, in "The Shadow and the Stone", the poet has just strolled past a Druid stone in that corner of the garden where Emma often worked. Suddenly, the 'shifting shadows' cast a familiar shape of head and shoulders and the poet says 'I thought her behind my back,/Yea, nor I long and learned to lack'. He is fully aware that it is just his imagination playing tricks, yet the consolation in the belief that she is actually present, makes him hesitate to check closely 'I would not turn by head to discover/That there was nothing there'. And he leaves the spot without a backward glance, gladdened by his delusion that Emma is out there gardening in her usual corner by the stone.

These poems suggest attitudes and emotions more complex than just lamentation and loss. In these poems, as the poem above has demonstrated, his need to believe that somehow his wife still lives, often co-exists beside his calm, bleak knowledge that she does not. Again, they often carry references to his regret about the failure of his marriage, and even examine his guilt at his unkindness to hear.

In "An Upbraiding", we have the poet uncomfortably aware of his past neglect of his wife. This makes him view

the revival of his love for her, ironically. Emma recounts his past unkindness to her and places each one against an instance of loving kindness now practiced by him :

'Now I am dead you sing to me
The songs we used to know,
But while I lived you had no wish
Or even care for doing so.

The second stanza introduces another dimension of the poet's feeling of guilt. Far from being consoled by the resurgence of love for his wife after a hiatus of decades of conjugal indifference, the poet wonders guiltily what use is this love now what the time is past. His love is mistimed, as it were, coming too late to bear any significance on their relationship:

'Now I am dead you come to me
In the moonlight, comfortless;
Ah, what would I have given alive
To win such tenderness'.

The last stanza brings an even more interesting examination of this late - blossomed love for Emma. In it, she asks

'When you are dead, and stand to me
Not differenced, as now,
But like again, will you be cold
As when we lived, or how?'

Hardy is aware that this phenomenon of re-kindled love after all these years of coldness, must be examined dispassionately. The fact that love has returned after her departure could well indicate that it is in reality rooted in his sense of guilt, and possibly when both are 'like again' and not 'differenced' by death and life, and when

the sense of guilt is passed, his former indifference will return. The question then that he considers is: which is his real feeling for her - his newly kindled old love, or his coldness of many years?

The poem, "The Curtains are now Drawn", from the same group of poems written after Emma's death, provides, if not an answer to the crucial question posed at the end of "An Upbraiding", at least an attempt to throw some light on the issue.

The two stanzas each describe scenes of storm and gloom: the first is a recollection of an event in the past and the second is the present where the poet stands rain-sodden in the storm, beside Emma's grave. Following each of these scenes of blustering storm and darkness, is the refrain :

'O, the dream that thou art my Love, be it thine,
And the dream that I am thry Love, be it mine,
And death may come, but loving is divine.'

The indication is clear: the only way to get out of the storm is to create a 'dream' of love to withdraw into. The reality and the genuiness of the love is immaterial - let it even be as real as only a dream, even so, it will have achieved the purpose of seeing them through the storm; it will blunt the impact of sorrows and breathe meaning into life. Thus, love requires no close examination, just acceptance.

This love beyond death establishes the link between them, and years pass by, each futhering the memories and thereby strengthening the bond. In the poem, "Ten Years Since", written in 1922, ten years after Emma's death, Emma is still the 'woman much missed' of the earlier poem, "The Voice". He recalls her at the head of the stairs, hears her busy at household chores out amidst all this vivid recall, he has accepted that the Past is no longer there. Her absence these past ten years has brought a pall of gloom over everything: the piano wires are rusty and the room has grown mustier. The trees outside have grown tallen, they now cast deeper shadows and have inched out the sunlight from the garden. The only hint of joy is in his reference to the blooms struggling valiantly in the little patch of light because their sight would have enthralled her: even now his joys come from a kind of shared experience.

Out of the gloom of her death, the poet's love for her has struggled to stay alive. In doing so, he has kept her alive as a source of joy and thus made life still tolerable and meaningful for himself.

The poem, "He Prefers her Earthly", brings back the earlier theme of the fickleness of woman but now in the context of death. That is, he examines his attitude towards her essential weakness against the backdrop of her

death. In the poem mentioned above, Hardy arrives at a clear stand vis-a-vis her fickleness. Hardy may be only too aware of her shortcomings, as a majority of his poems have gone to prove, nonetheless he accepts her as she is. He in fact goes a little further than mere acceptance in this poem: he would not have her in any way different. Paradoxical as it may sound, the man who has noted with minute care the frailties of woman in this role, in the final analysis, 'prefers her earthly'. The above mentioned poem begins with a picture of the setting sun, showing Nature's resplendent beauty. The Beloved, who obviously is dead, is remembered by the poet. He wonders if this is the kind of majestic 'glory - show' where she now dwells. He assumes a deliberately impartial pose to comment that it is very likely that it is so. But he cannot resist the ironic qualification to his acceptance:

'There are strange things in being
Stranger than I know'.

Yet, it is a strangeness that he finds disquieting. He is struck by the mis-match between 'that chasm or splendour' and her 'moral mould'. With all her remembered weaknesses, she is, he feels, in no way an apt habitant of the 'glory-show'. The falseness, the inaptness, of it all goads him to acknowledge afresh her imperfections. Included with is also the suggestion that he has been unable to forget her. The admission is forced out of him

that 'I would not have you thus and there'. He prefers to remember her as of old; as she was known to him. He confesses that he still grieves on missing her, but not in the image of the purified, sanctified 'firmament-riding earthless essence', but 'as the one you were', a creature of frailties, 'the fond and fragile creature'.

This poem reveals the essence of Hardy's attitude to woman: as a beloved, woman's weaknesses stand revealed, but Hardy sees them as unimportant, her fickleness is to him 'fragile'. Her weakness thus assumes the aura of intrinsic helplessness that inspires fondness, love, even perhaps chivalry, in man. It is perhaps this view of her frailties that makes the poet gloss over, even overlook, her drawbacks; and this awareness of her failings makes her all the dearer to the poet.

This very romantic view of woman's weakness has, however, indications of a more disquieting nature. The reader is left with the faint impression of an attitude towards woman that is perhaps a little patronising: even her failings are not important enough to merit a serious censure.

However, there is another poem, "At the Piano", distinct in being perhaps the only one in Hardy's poems on woman as beloved, that throws light on this magnanimity of

Hardy. the poem displays with swift but graphic detail, a scene of perfect companionship between the lovers: the woman is at the piano playing for her beloved, and he is enraptured by her and revels in this experience of perfect bliss. The two candles at the piano highlight the grandeur of her beauty and the man is filled with admiration of her. Pain, says the poet, had not trace there. However, the next stanza tells us that a 'cowled apparition' of which both are blissfully unaware, comes between them, and the beauty of the moment makes ready to depart. Hardy puts the blame on neither, his bete noir is that 'cowled apparition', which may stand for Fate, Chance or Destiny, something extrinsic to the lovers, and hence, something beyond their control. It is this belief that inimical forces around the lovers tarnish their love eventually, that makes him often hesitate to condemn. He sees human action as perhaps only an innocent agency through which the forces operate to bring agony and the pain his love poems often mention.

CHAPTER-III

WOMAN AS BETRAYER

In the last chapter emphasis has been placed on Hardy's equivocal stand with reference to the question of ethics and morality in the poems where he portrays woman as beloved. The poems which showed his appreciation of vitality and power of 'woman' in that role also carried the reference to her essential faithlessness. The poet seemed unable to censure her on that point in these poems. This is the reason for Samuel Haynes's postulate that the essential pattern of Hardy's poetry is 'antinomial'. He was confronted with antinomies he could not resolve. He placed opposite beliefs, promises, emotions or values side by side and allowed them to play against each other, in the process giving a piquant ironical slant to them.

Nevertheless, Hardy's belief about the fragility of woman's loyalty finds expression with greater gloom in a

number of his poems, although even there it is seldom that one finds anything approaching harsh censure : he examines the effects of her disloyalty, he tries to throw light on her motives or pressures; but almost always the impression carried by the reader is Hardy's dismayed acceptance. It is as if Hardy views woman as a creature apart -- her faithlessness is an integral part of her and man has no choice but to accept her as she is.

The poems considered in this chapter probe into this aspect of woman's nature, its varied manifestations; chiefly, as it manifests itself in betrayal in love. She may inspire noble emotions in man but she remains unchanged by them herself. In "The Love Letters" the woman has obviously aroused a deep and enduring love in the unfortunate young man, but the experience is certainly not mutual. She retains her distance and the moment the situation turns undesirable, she is able to snap the ties without a backward glance. In so far as the major focus of the poem is on the plight of the miserable youth, the poet seems less occupied with the culpability of the woman. Nonetheless, the silent finger points to her crime, but he refrains from passing a categorical judgement. Woman, in this poem, lays bare her selfishness, but the words of pained forgiveness uttered by the dying youth that "perhaps she rather felt them fetters..." and his ironic comment

that she was quite right to send back the letters and break off the ties showed her 'true foresight' as he was in a slow decline, are echoes of Hardy's feelings too. However bitter this acknowledgement, and fraught with pain the thin laughter of this man, this statement represents an attempt to understand her faithlessness by referring it to her tremendous instinct for survival. The man is dying, hence his love will be nothing other than 'fetters' that restrict and tie her to the past. She is unwilling to accept what appears to amount to a premature death for herself.

Another poem which considers Woman as betrayer in love is "in Her Precincts". This poem states succinctly in two short verses the poet's wistful discovery that in love, the commitment of Woman is not as total as that of a man. The poem reiterates the point of view expressed in the last poem, "The Love Letters"; it also adds this dimension that it is man's lack of understanding that has prompted him to assign love and loyalty to Woman.

"In Her Precincts" opens with a scene of external gloom that parallels the desolation the poet feels : 'Her house looked cold from the foggy lea,/And the square of each window a dull black blur/Where showed stir.' The preponderance of monosyllables of the opening lines conveys the grip of dull, dead misery on the poet. The next few lines show the poet concluding sorrowfully, if somewhat

A woman in love, hence, does not reflect the intensity and totality of involvement of man. Thus, one may interpret the line 'Yet my love for her in its fulness she herself did not know' to mean not just her ignorance of his true state of feelings, but an inherent incapacity of Woman to understand an emotion she does know.

But the poems where Hardy has shown his grimmest irony are those that consider Woman as betrayer in conjugal love. Significantly, these poems far outnumber those that dwell on the other manifestations of Woman in the role of betrayer. The overall mood might range from deep satire to grim humour, but running through a large number of them is his deep consciousness of this aspect of Woman.

The irony in "The Dolls" is made all the sharper by introducing this facet of Woman via an innocent query of a child. This relationship of mother and child, symbolic of all that is honest and wholesome in human relationship, is tainted by the deceit involved. This child innocently asks the mother why her dolls are made to wear soldiers' uniform in preference to the frills, frocks and curls. The mother is silent, but her thoughts confess: 'Your mammy's heed/Is always soldiers,/... One of them was your daddy/His name I must not tell;/He's not the dad who lives here/But one I love too well. The deceit of the woman is rendered bitter not on moral grounds in the sense of illegitimacy, but on

the grounds of the disregard of the ethics of conjugal relationship, in her having shortchanged the 'dad who lives here' with a pretence of loyalty she does not feel.

The poet's censure, however, here too is restrained, and implied, because it is directed not at her but at the general attitude of Woman to view marriage not as a concurrence of interests and emotions of the partners but as a cover to hide all sins. As he says in another poem that touches on the subject of conjugal love, "A Conversation at Dawn", that marriage is generally held to be '... a plain event/Of black and white/Without a ghost of sentiment. It is one which has been commonly used to save a woman's 'fame' : '...to cloak it by marriage I'm not the first', says the protagonist of the poem. Yet another poem, "Honeymoon Time at an Inn", reflects a strikingly similar theme.

The poet is deeply dismayed by this attitude of Woman, the tone of his poems speaks of his awareness of it as a major failure of Woman, but he refrains from launching into a bitter tirade against her. His censure may be dark and grim but it is restrained, and softened even, at times, by the consciousness running through the bulk of his poetry that she is a creature of circumstances and social pressures. Hence, the poet's deeper censure in these poems is directed more towards society than towards Woman. In

the final analysis, it is more often the social mores that force the hypocrisy on them, and there are hints of the pressure of circumstances to tone down the harshness of some of the betrayals. For example, the poem examined earlier "The Dolls", makes this interesting point that the Woman is capable of remarkable consistency in love; she continues to love and remember her lost love even after her marriage elsewhere. She thus appears to be more a victim of circumstances; her loveless marriage, the overriding consciousness that all will be well if she keeps her secret under wraps, are indications of hypocrisy and lies brought on by the rigidity of social mores.

Sometimes he underplays the betrayals with even a touch of grim humour, giving a distinct impression that he cannot bring himself to judge her too harshly. In the poem "A Practical Woman" the poet views the failure of the woman to respect the marriage ties with wry humour. It opens with the dilemma of a woman who has had, in thirteen years of marriage, seven children, but who are 'sickly every one':

'Three mope about as feeable shapes;
Weak, white; they'll be no good.

One came deformed; and idiot next;
And two are crass as wood.'

The mother is a far cry from the archetypal mother, hence the title's reference to her as 'A Practical Woman'. Her dilemma has to be solved - she proposes to have a child

of this tale is that it is indeed a 'cool, queer tale', which it is, about a woman's attitude to the man tied to her in matrimony. Two other poems reveal a somewhat similar aspect of Woman with reference to her marriage ties, are "In the Room of the Bride-elect" and "The Sweet Hussy".

The poem, "I Rose Up as My Custom Is", shows Woman's betrayal as stemming from her practical approach to life. In the poem the ghost of the poet rises on All Souls' Day to visit his lost love and her husband. She tells him she's happy because this man does not probe into her mind and soul. Moreover, he has been able to afford the material comforts that she feels are important contributives to marital success:

'Women are practical, and they
Crave the wherewithal to pave their way
And slake their social thirst.
... look at this man snoring here -
He's no romantic chanticleer
Yet he keeps me in good style.'

The poet draws attention to this fact that love alone is not sufficient to make a woman's life complete - her practical nature easily grasps the relevance of material requirement and hence her betrayal in love and in marriage is often prompted by this.

To be 'rich and respectable' is the convention that eventually wins over Woman, even one who has at one time

been bold and daring, as was the protagonist of "The Elopement". There are also those poems which consider Woman as betrayer not only in love and marriage but even as a friend and companion. In the earlier chapters, it was seen that for the poet a woman's role as beloved, as spouse, eventually are viewed as successful only when they carry along as successfully the additional roles of friend and companion. Hence, before any failure as an object of love, or as a marriage partner, there is first the failure as a companion and friend. In other words, the lines of communication snap before the beloved changes or the marriage turns into a mockery.

The poem "The Division" depicts the poignance and the irrevocability of such a breakdown of communication. This poem again has the usual Hardy setting : the emotional state is exposed in a natural environment or setting that closely approximates the essence of that emotion. In this poem the natural scene is one of desolation : the cold, wet day with the rain beating down the window panes seems to isolate the poet, even physically, from the world around him. The blasts of wind shake the 'creaking doors' an image that parallels the ruin of the relationship that forms the subject of the poem : 'I am here and you are there/And a hundred miles between!'

But the miles he talks of is not the physical distance

destroying : 'Wasted were two souls in their prime/And great was the waste that July time/When the rain came down'. In addition, "The Upraiding", "Ten Years Since", "She Charged Me" are poems that also speak of the same aridity, the same seeping out of the sense of comraderie that occurs before a relationship finally breaks.

"A Broken Appointment", "The Going", "The Voice", poems which have been discussed in the last chapter, are woven around this central theme of the Man-Woman relationship suffering through the disloyalty and undependability of Woman as a partner or companion. The indication in them is that she has not done justice to her role. While in the poems mentioned earlier, "We Sat at the Window" and "The Division", the blame for the breakdown of the comraderie and companionship seems to be equally shared by both, "The Upraiding", "Ten Years Hence" tilt the blame towards the man. In the poem "She Charged Me" although the lady accuses the man of disloyalty, what the poet wishes to emphasise is that it is in reality she who is responsible for the final breakup : 'Her mouth was hard, and her eyes, and her face, / And her white forefinger lifted slow...'. These deliberately set-up details serve to communicate the reaching of the breaking point in the relationship, and they prepare the reader well in advance for the admission

by the poet persona at the end that he "knew from the fall of each word, and pause between,/That the curtain would drop upon us two/Ere long in our play of slave and queen". The blame here is certainly on Woman, she raves and rants where a 'kiss might have closed it'. The most important clue is so quietly inserted into the concluding line that one could well miss it, and hence miss the whole point of the poem. In the last line the poet ironically refers to their doomed relationship as 'our play of slave and queen' -- one where the man is subordinated. It is not a partnership of equals (hence she 'charges' him); it is thus a relationship doomed to failure. A basis of friendship is essential before any relationship can thrive, and possible only between equals. This naturally leads one to consider those relationships, essentially conjugal, that have soured because Woman has dramatically failed to understand the precise nature of her obligations. This point, as we have just seen, is delicately hinted at in the poem "She Charged Me", but is elaborately worked out in the poem "The Nettles". This poem tells the tale of the sad visit of a father to the grave of his estranged son. The estrangement and even the death, it is implied, are brought about by a cruel wife and a miserable marriage. The father, with greater wisdom and objectivity, had found her to be a 'hard, unfeeling' woman whose only care was to ensure a husband. One infers . . .

that it was the nettle-like, stinging cold-heartedness of the wife that finally drove the husband to his grave. Her lack of warmth for him, in life as well as in death, and the complete absence of remorse, is evident from his grave turning into an untended, unkempt wilderness of nettles. Woman here has betrayed her role as wife as a cherishing, and hence cherished, companion. This contributes to the failure of the relationship. Agressiveness in Woman mars the delicate balance necessary for a successful partnership.

Woman as a companion, a friend, as also a beloved and a wife may fall short of the necessary grade, but how does she rate as a human being? In her various roles through which her ties and links with man are forged generally, she does often fall short, as we have seen. But as a person, as an individual apart from these relationships too the poet sees certain weaknesses that mark her departure from the accepted norms. For example, a number of poems discussed in this chapter so far, have indicated a heavily materialistic attitude to life and relationships. Her priorities and scale of values by which she lives are different. Whether the poet condemns her for it, or is even shocked by it is not very clear but he has certainly noted and registered it with irony in several poems. The poem "The Pink Frock" is a cry of

bitterness of a just-widowed woman who feels her husband has cruelly mis-timed his demise :

'O my pretty pink frock,
 I shan't be able to wear it!
 Why is he dying just now?'

She feels grossly mis-used because she feels he could have 'contrived' to live on a little longer and died in July so that she would have had the opportunity to wear her pretty pink frock 'puff-sleeved and accordian pleated'. The death of her husband makes no impact on her in the face of the greater tragedy of leaving the dress unworn.

In this poem there is just that hint of sarcasm underlying his irony that distinguishes it from the "Lament" where Hardy similarly speaks of Woman's love of the fineries of life contrasting it with the absoluteness of Death. But in this poem ("Lament") the attitude and tone is more compassionate. It is as if he recognises the weakness, but is able to look beyond it and so view it with compassion. The lady in the poem is long dead. The party is just the kind she would have loved where 'bright hatted and gloved', she would have mingled with the guests, enjoying every moment. The poet draws the contrast between where she is now -- cold and lonely in her grave, and what she lived for when alive. The transient joys that Woman considers the centre of her life stands paled to insignificance by the irrevocability of

Death. But he is neither condemning nor even bitter when he makes these observations about Woman and her values.

If, on the one hand, a too practical and coldly calculating mind (in the desire to be 'rich and respectable') has been the root cause of Woman's betrayals in the poems seen so far (e.g. "The Love Letters") then on the other hand, paradoxically, it is sometimes her impulsive, fun-loving nature which has provoked the betrayal. Even more than "Lament" and "The Pink Frock", it is "At the Altar Rail" that shows this most distinctly. The lady of the poem betrays her groom at the altar because she cannot eventually bear the idea of a staid, respectable life as a farmer's wife. In the final analysis she finds that 'a swift, short, gay life' suits her best. This rare poem showing Women's betrayal in a totally different light might well have led Hardy to share the conclusion with the protagonist here that 'what I am you have never gleaned'.

The two poems, by providing contrasting, almost contradictory portraits of Woman's betrayals, have conveyed the view that either as a materialistic, negatively 'practical' person, or a carefree, fun-loving, impulsive one, Woman's betrayals come basically out of her selfishness, her single-minded pursuit of gratification of her own desires. It is this lack of awareness of the

emotional needs of anyone other than herself, that the poet analyses as her weakness out of which stem her other betrayals.

"The Rival" and "She Charged Me" both show the destructive effect that her other weaknesses have on the Man-Woman relationship. Her jealousy is the specific weakness the above two poems consider. In "The Rival" the Woman is contrite, but it comes too late to save the relationship. The man, whose devotion she has baselessly rejected, is long since dead : 'Bitterly have I rued my meanness/And wept for it since he died.' The interesting point made by this study of Woman's jealousy and its tragic effect, is that it really needs very little to arouse her jealousy. In this poem, it is first because she suspects him of loving another. Even when she subsequently discovers that it is her own photograph of long-ago that he keeps locked and sighs over, she does not feel reassured, but becomes jealous now of her former self : 'I chafed that he loved not the me then living,/But the past women still.' In retrospect, she is able to acknowledge her part in the breakdown of their happiness, but the overall impression is that it has come too late to enable us to absolve her of her crime.

When her jealousy is roused, rightly or not, the devastation that it causes to the relationship is

projected with chilling reality in "She Charged Me". She accuses him about his past relationships and the 'endless pour/Of the rain on the roof and the road below', reflect both her relentless accusations as well as the feeling of being closed-in, of the suffocating tedium that the poet-persona feels. This display of wanton jealousy signals the first cracks in the relationship :

'Had she done it gently, or shown a trace
That not too curiously would she view
A folly flown ere her reign had place...'

the poet feels that there could have been hope for them yet. But this episode signals clearly the end of the relationship because that essential friendship which must underlie any such relationship is lacking here. Jealousy and unreasonable resentment, and her inability to bring compassion and magnanimity to relationships are what have led to suffering.

It is not only her weaknesses that contribute to the destruction of any meaningful relationship. The poet gives a certain measure of complexity to his study of Woman as a destructive influence by including two more poems that show how it can sometimes be her very strengths that can cause the breakdown of the relationship. In "Had You Wept" the poet feels that a mere but timely display of misery or regret might have saved their relationship :

'Had you wept; had you but neared me with
a hazed uncertain ray,

Dewy as the face of the dawn, in your
 large and luminous eye,
 Then would have come back all the joys
 the tidings had slain that day,
 And a new beginning, a fresh heaven, have
 smoothed the things awry.↵

The poet realises that this stoic endurance is strength otherwise, but in a close, inter-personal relationship, this reserve has the effect of isolating one from the other :

*But you were less feebly human, and no
 passionate need for clinging
 Possessed your soul to overthrow reserve
 when I came near.↵

Thus the conclusion of the poet is that because a strong woman is able to keep her grief to herself, she betrays one of the basic canons of human relationships -- that of sharing. She remains too individualistic for a perfect merging of interests; hence, he states that 'the deep strong woman is the weakest, and the weak one is the strong' in the complex and fragile partnership between Man and Woman. It is this reserve restraining her from finding a 'balm' for her 'torrid sorrow' that is the root cause of the 'deep division, and our dark undying pain'.

It is Woman's intrinsic strength that is responsible for the breakdown in "Had You Wept", then it is a certain forthrightness and honesty that comes in the way of inter-personal relationships in the poem "You Were the Sort that Men Forget". The men have not taken too

kindly to her because she practised no 'art':

*You'd not the art - you never had
 For good or bad -
 To make men see how sweet your meaning,
 Which, visible, had made them glad.*

But it is not only that she kept her sweetness from ever being 'visible' but also because she was honest to the point of rudeness tactlessness that they turned away : 'You would, by words inept let fall/Offend them all' and compound the sin by a certain obtuseness in her relationships :

*You lacked the eye to understand
 Those friends off hand
 Whose mode was crude, though whose dim purport
 Outpriced the courtesies of the bland.*

Her sterling qualities won her no friends, just brought her sorrows, because she did not possess the very important qualities of tact and discernment. Without these, the poet is pained to observe, human relationships seldom can endure, and Nature's gift of a warm and loving nature goes waste in so far as it neither gives, nor gets, what it richly deserves.

What this poem would have us infer is that unless one can bring to human relationships sensitiveness and wisdom, goodness alone is not sufficient. The 'art' that the poet talks of in this poem does not necessarily have negative connotation; in fact, by linking it with the gifts of Nature in the last but one line, he has shown that the

term has been used by him in its positive meaning of a sensitivity that is perceptive of the needs of others.

With the glaring exception of "The Nettles", the other poems mentioned so far in this analysis of Hardy's views regarding the betrayal of Woman in her manifold roles, carry, with varying degrees of obvertness, the poet's compassion. Over-riding his irony and even bitterness, is his desire to see the other side of the argument. One gets the impression in them of someone genuinely trying to understand why the tragedy is so. He has shown, through them, that a human relationship is that complexity which defies a text-book solution: each relationship requires special examination, and normally its own special solution. Failures occur when the solutions offered are not appropriate to the specific cases, or when there is an imperfect understanding of the situation by those involved in it.

That is why there is betrayal in "At the Altar Rail". The woman is just the wrong person for the farmer whose personal estimate of Woman as a creature of comforts fails him here in this specific relationship, just as the very practical woman of "The Love Letters" is precisely the type who would take the sensitive youth unawares. This is why, it is seldom that one finds him holding a categorical moral stand or clearly voicing a judgement. In "Had You

It would be injustice to Hardy's sensitivity if we were to consider his poems only as recountings of particular experiences, personal or otherwise, without mentioning his sincere attempt to go beyond the hurt and the gloom towards a greater understanding of Woman. Thus, an over-view of the above poems reveals the reasons or the deeper causes of Woman's betrayals; sometimes it lies in the nature of the particular woman in her strengths or her weaknesses, sometimes in the social circumstances, and sometimes in forces beyond human control.

The poems that were examined under the subject of Woman's betrayals in conjugal relationships, especially in that of marrying without love, it was clear that whether it was because the marriage would hide her sins, or because it would provide her a respectable place in society through material benefits, the woman have to be viewed as victims of society. It is the social mores that force Woman to either hide an 'illegitimate' child through marriage, or purchase financial security through a prudent but loveless marriage. Even the mother/child relationship is marred by this pressure of society that makes hypocrisy the safer basis of relationship ("The Dolls"). Even in the poems where Woman is viewed as destructive influence, her destructiveness stems from her unreasonable jealousy, which, if examined more closely, might be indicative of

her deep-seated sense of insecurity. It is again just this insecurity which might be behind her inability to open up to bring about a true merging of interests that would signal a successful relationship.

Finally, the fact that a Woman represents instincts and desires typical and particular to her femaleness must not be overlooked. This is the reason why we have the woman of "A Practical Woman" casting aside all other loyalties in her quest to satisfy a thwarted Mother-instinct. She has gone against the ethics of conjugal fidelity only because it has come in the way of a greater, and in her eyes, more essential duty of procreation.

The poems that feature Hardy's examination of Woman as Betrayer, thus are remarkable for the breadth of vision, the generosity of spirit that he has brought to bear upon it. Being, as he was, always aware of the positive qualities of Woman, his poems depicting her betrayals cannot be held as the work of a misogynist. Rather, they should be viewed as the attempt to arrive at a clearer picture of ~~Woman~~ an enigma, *Woman*.

CONCLUSION

Hardy's poems constitute a voluminous bulk spreading into eight volumes. The poems examined in the previous chapters represent but a small fraction of all that Hardy, the poet, wrote. However, different in tone, mood and treatment, these poems have shown the different facets of Woman; often the perspectives have appeared to be contradictory, or at least, continually shifting, so that any attempt to find a single, unified point of view with reference to the poet's attitude to Woman might appear an exercise in futility. However, if a very general overview of the poems be made, an interesting, although highly complex, view of Woman emerges.

The poems studied in the first chapter, under the title, "Woman as Protector", showed the poet acknowledging the life-giving, life-generating role of Woman. She was viewed as the centre of man's life, giving his total existence meaning and significance. Hardy revealed an almost child-like enthusiasm and a reverence bordering on awe, in his contemplation of Woman in the role of the Mother-archetype. Woman was seen as the origin and the nurturer of life, both in Nature and in man. He saw her as the inspirational force, revitalising his creativity again and again. Hardy enlarged his concept of Woman as protector to include her role as preserver of tradition

and through this, a link between generations.

An interesting and highly significant observation that emerges from the study of the poems in this chapter is that the poems where his view of Woman is totally positive, are those that are inspired by them who are long-since dead, that is, the memory poems; they are the experience exhumed from the past. Hardy appears to reserve his highest praise for them who are no longer a part of his present so that one is left with the query as to how much of what he says is the romanticisation of the long-forgotten, distant past and how much of the veneration is based on real, hard facts. The doubt lingers whether it is mere nostalgia or reality. The poems dealing with his dead first wife, his mother, grandmother and his dead sisters, are especially open to these lingering doubts.

In the poems that have been considered under the chapter, "Woman as Beloved", Hardy has acknowledged the supremacy of Love, hence Woman, in man's universe. In them he considered Love to be a force capable of utmost benignity. An attitude of immense tenderness, as also often of mild irony, marked a sizeable portion of the poems considered under this section where the image of Woman was predominantly romantic. These poems revealed that Hardy's concept of the Beloved carried with it the

undertones of Woman as inspirer, as companion as well as betrayer. There were the poems where the beloved filled him with the joy of living, there were others where her companionship transformed the plebian, the common experiences to the exciting and the memorable, while there were a good number of them where the poet's love was steady but hers was not, so that he was plunged into dark gloom. Often, we have seen Hardy restraining himself from passing judgement on her, preferring rather to dwell on the torture her inconstancy wreaked on the poet-persona's life. In these poems, he examined his own emotional condition with minuteness and sincerity as if to determine the exact nature and extent of the damage to him. In the final analysis, what came through was that romantic love is the very essence of life, giving meaning and joy to it. It has the effect of honing man's sensitivity to a refinement where the secret, deep joys of the ordinary world stand revealed. An interesting point to note in the poems here was that more often than not the ecstasies and the despair that are associated with romantic love was reflected by Nature as if the joys of love sensitised the poet to the wondrous beauty of Nature, and its despair to the dark, joyless side of it.

The poems considered in this chapter, by the very diversity of their emphasis within the broad parameters of

the image of Woman as beloved, have led to the inference that Woman is, even as a beloved, multifaceted and capable of kindling a variety of emotions, ranging from tenderness, impatience, pathos to admiration. But the poet's warmer emotions were evoked by what were really memories of romantic attachments of long ago, or remembrances of his love for someone now dead (e.g. his first wife). They were thus in the nature of love exhumed after years of neglect, or kindled after Death or Time had suffused the experience with an aura of romanticism that had not impressed itself upon Hardy earlier.

"To find Beauty in Ugliness is the province of poets", believed Hardy, and this is the overall impression that we arrive at after a study of the poems included in the chapter, "Woman as Betrayer". The irony that is never very far in Hardy's poems was most strongly prominent in these poems where Woman was viewed as inconsistent, forcefully destructive, aggressive, negatively practical. The poet was often satirical, but paradoxically, also sometimes regretful and wistful. In those poems where the attitude was predominantly regretful, the desire of the poet to find excuses for her failings and apparent inconsistencies, was discernable. It often seemed as if the poet really desired to understand the inconsistencies of Woman so that the irony was at times muted by a deeper

sympathy, as the poet tried to see the pressures of the circumstances that made Woman act in a manner that the world considers acts of betrayals. Consequently, these poems are marked often by a compassion, implicit or explicit, that has invested them with richness and complexity. There were poems where the betrayals were deliberately underplayed; sometimes even with grim humour so that the readers was forced to look beyond the betrayals and see the mother, companion or beloved pressurised into these betrayals by circumstances beyond their control. These forces beyond her control were shown as circumstances outside her, or innate, undeniable urges within Woman herself. In other words, the pressures, the poems revealed, as emanating either from external circumstances like society or role expectations, or internal circumstances like the instinct for motherhood, instinct for survival, or a deep sense of insecurity. Hence, even in her role of betrayer, Hardy saw Woman as victim rather than actively evil.

There was thus, finally a merging of these roles of Woman as protector, as beloved and as betrayer. Thus, Hardy's poems have indicated that Woman is not one or the other exclusively, but a composite whole of all these roles and perhaps more.

The poem "Best Times" carried most fully the poet's

light of an endearing fragility which inspires such indulgent tenderness in him), there is discernable an undertone of an attitude distinctly patronising. She is viewed as worthy of protection, care, and eligible for man's love because of her inherent weakness that make her require the support of man. She is weaker, hence inferior and hence lovable. She is no equal partner, so her sins are overlooked. Tensions, betrayals, destructions are all associated with her only in those poems where she demands, or has been acknowledged as an equal. For example, strength, in a woman is seen as a 'weakness' that divides her from man ('Had You Wept').

However, ~~Woman~~ 'Woman' may or may not be all that man would like her to be, yet the poems, on the whole, reveal that her presence ^sinspires Love and Romance in man. With all her shortcomings, she is the best that life has to offer man;

*It was what you bore with you, Woman,
Not inly were,
That throne you from all else human,
However fair!

It was that strange freshness you carried
Into your soul
Whereon no thought of yours tarried
Two moments at all.

And out from his spirit flew death
And bale, and ban,
Like the corn-chaff under the breath,
Of winnowing-fan.*

("Without Not Within Her").

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