

THE TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN THE MAJOR NOVELS
OF HARDY AND LAWRENCE : A COMPARATIVE STUDY

by

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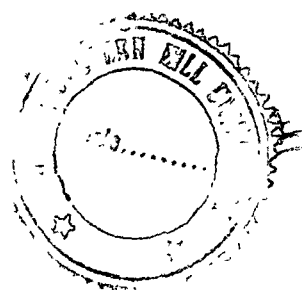
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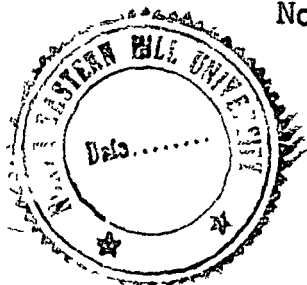
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of bonafide research work carried out by her under my
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CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION : THE FICTIONAL WOMAN BEFORE HARDY

Victorian novelists of the latter half of the nineteenth century were fully aware of the evils of their age, of the havoc caused by the Industrial Revolution, and the consequent presence of mass poverty. The rapid creation and growth of a new system had a transforming effect on the methods of production, and hence had far-reaching effects on the entire society. By a gradual pattern of change, the revolution produced a transformed society. There is too a change in the character of the social divisions in England.

The change is one resulting from moving out from old ways and ideas, and also places. There have been various condemnations of the changes taking place. An entire way of life is in the process of vast and far-reaching change. A new culture enters England. It is the age of a crumbling aristocracy, a new middle-class, and a growing working class, greater and steadily increasing disparities between the poor and the rich. The industrialized world is to be gained at the cost of independence and individual worth. Mill's "man of the woods" is losing way to the civilized man of a mechanized world.¹ In Carlyle's description of the change taking place in the methods production:

On every hand, the living artisan is
driven from his workshop, to make room

for a speedier, inanimate one. The shuttle drops from the fingers of the weaver, and falls into the iron fingers that ply it faster.²

Consequent upon this, there are social changes:

What changes, too, this addition of power was introducing into the Social System; how wealth has more and more increased, and at the same time gathered itself more and more into masses, strangely altering the old relations, and increasing the distance between the rich and the poor, will be a question for Political Economists, and a much more complex and important one than any they have yet engaged with.³

There is a collision now between the old and the new. Earlier, abuse of power was less complex. It was man's tyranny over man that moved Fielding. Now, that tyranny is further intensified by the establishment of the new economic order. Public attention is now drawn to the evils that had always existed, but now exist on so colossal a scale that they can no longer be ignored. Hence there is a protest by the middle and skilled working classes against the incontinence of the age. They called for economic and moral betterment. It began as a well-directed and conscious desire for improvement through thrift, self-control and hard work. However, this was gradually reduced to a code of respectability that was governed by

In this age of discreetness and respectability, woman became the greater victim. Always explained in terms of her sex, and reduced to her gender, woman faced the brunt of Victorian hostility towards the licentiousness of the age. The "fallen woman", for instance, becomes the target of Victorian disapproval. The suffering fallen woman is not new in literature. In Milton's epic, at the fall of Eve,

Earth felt the wound, and Nature from
her seat
Sighing through all the Works
gave signs of woe
That all was lost.⁴

However, the Victorian fallen woman suffers alone. This was the reading public that was outraged when Hardy presented Tess as a pure woman. Victorian public morality could not go beyond physical chastity, choosing to ignore the intrinsic worth of the young Tess, and the intention behind Hardy's

attempt at presenting her in terms of her difficult circumstances.

From the beginnings of the English novel, the experience of many a young fictional heroine has turned on those crucial moments at which she may not speak until spoken to. Woman is subject to the seemingly ubiquitous courtship plot:

If you think of a novel in the vague,
you think of a love interest⁵

and there are considerable constraints placed on her by convention. Even where "her lot is made for her by the love she accepts",⁶ the proper heroine must be modest and do little actively to encourage that love. Ideally, she should think as little of it as possible and must be scarcely conscious of where she has the most at stake.

The experiencing heroine was felt by many writers and readers to^{be} the distinctive quality of women's writing. However, women have been portrayed in varying degrees of compassion and understanding by the first novelists in English. Richardson's central concern was for justice and his protest was in the name of religion and morals. In his novels, virtue is consistently related to reputation and prudence, and the aristocracy is still to be aspired for. Pamela, the maid, has her virtue rewarded when she marries into the squirearchy. Clarissa's family want to consolidate their upper middle-class

position and acquire a title. In his turn, Lovelace can never harbour any doubt that Clarissa will find the prospect of marriage with him desirable. Respectability becomes the external form of prudence and sometimes of virtue too. However, Clarissa loses her respectability even though she has guarded her virtue. Pamela takes care of her chastity until she can enter into a marriage that offers financial security and social position. The Squire turns from a villain into a desirable husband, but once a girl loses her virtue and her respectability, she becomes socially irredeemable. However, by making the chief characters of his first two novels women, and pitting them against the libertinage of men, Richardson made a substantial contribution towards elevating the position of women. For this, he has also been called a radical feminist. His Clarissa shows courage when she escapes the clutches of Lovelace. She refuses to submit to his fantasies which would lower herself in her own eyes.

In Fielding, however, virtue becomes a matter of innate disposition and intention. Goodness is a matter of the good heart rather than one of public demonstration. In Tom Jones, he exposes the moral pretensions of Square and Thwackum, and focuses on the adventures of Tom to bring out his basic goodness of heart. The girl who loves him is intelligent and perceptive. Sophia Western remains generous but clear-eyed about the faults of the others. She is young

and charming but Fielding places her intelligence and moral worth far above her appearance. Her love for her father makes her indulgent towards him as Emma is towards Mr Woodhouse in Jane Austen's novel. But this is so only in matters of no great consequence. When her own integrity is at stake, she refuses to obey him, leaving home to avoid doing so. But the person who wins her love is presented as a chivalric lover who expresses inane sentiments without seeming to be really in love. It is left to Jane Austen to bring the treatment of love into its own. While both Fielding and Richardson present women struggling for some degree of independence, Jane Austen's mature perception of love enhances the position of woman, circumscribed though she is still by the society she lives in.

K In Jane Austen's novels, there is a deep feminine acceptance of, and involvement, in life. The Jane Austen woman displays no radicalism. She tries to fulfil herself in the terms available to her within the limiting culture. Individual happiness is still possible within the existing forms, and integrity need not be sacrificed to achieve it. Viewed very superficially, Jane Austen's subject matter is always a young woman's finding a husband. However, she escapes the eighteenth century infection of sentimentality and she never takes recourse to it. This quality, untouched by the Romantic movement, proved ample material for her satire and irony. There is tension between her ideals for women and her basic

endeavour therefore is to reconstruct and establish imaginatively a certain stability in social norms, and in personal relationships. Her best known novel, Pride and Prejudice, opens with the lines:

It is a truth universally acknowledged
that a single man in possession of a
good fortune must be in want of a wife.
(p.51)

Mansfield Park opens thus:

About thirty years ago, Miss Maria Ward of Huntingdon, with only seven thousand pounds had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram of Mansfield Park ... and to be thereby raised to the rank of a baronet's lady, with all the comforts and consequences of an handsome house and large income. All Huntingdon exclaimed on the greatness of the match, and her uncle, the lawyer, himself allowed her to be at least three thousand pounds short of any equitable claim on it. She had two sisters to be benefited by her elevation; and such of their acquaintance as thought Miss Ward and Miss Frances quite as handsome as Miss Maria, did not scruple to predict their marrying with almost equal advantage. But there certainly are not so many men of large fortune in the world, as there are pretty women to deserve them.
(p.41)

Here Jane Austen really questions: is physical beauty as admirable a trait as good sense and true moral worth? Is the rich husband a prize to be won? One may wonder if Jane Austen condones society for its inclination to judge men according to their incomes, and women according to their looks. Her style is deceptively tranquil but her ironic vision is not very far from it. She makes acerbic comments on the presence of folly, meanness, even viciousness, in human nature. What at first appear comical are pretty acid comments on people like Mrs Bennet:

She was a woman of mean understanding,
little information and uncertain temper.
(*PP, p.52)

Jane Austen's gentility does not shadow the ironic perceptiveness of and protest against certain accepted social norms. Her ironic vision stems from her experience of life and her rather uncommon commonsense, and she never seeks the comfort of illusion. All of Jane Austen's heroines start in isolation and loneliness. Their conception of, and capacity for, generous love marks them off from the follies and delusions of the world around them. To these women, love is not a vague ideal. As they go through the process of clearing misconceptions and establishing a proper communication with others, they find fulfilment in a relationship of love, trust and mutual respect. However, the heroine's mature conception and consciousness of love does not separate her completely from the rest of society.

* Pride and Prejudice

Marriage in Jane Austen is a natural affirmation of an understanding that can essentially stand by itself. To the intelligent individual with the capacity^{to love} marriage does not necessarily mean a nullification of love. To the novelist, the feelings, preferences and intelligence of the heroine do matter. These women will not accede to the terms of human relationships that others of their family and acquaintance would subscribe to.

Jane Austen delves beyond the externals of familiar social customs to the essentials of human conduct. She is not in complete harmony with her society but her observations are not in the nature of a total rebellion. Her heroines are in a process of adaptation to an unfriendly social environment without sacrificing their integrity, dignity and self-esteem. In the novels, the social world does not change. It is the men who marry the heroines who see and appreciate their qualities, their moral and, at times, intellectual superiority to the rest of society. But their worth is scarcely recognized by others. Elizabeth Bennet for instance is misunderstood by her own family. The heroine is to eventually leave this crass atmosphere for a more congenial home. However, she must discipline herself and learn greater self-control before she leaves the difficult environment. There is no indulgence in self-pity because she must accept society, appreciating its virtues while putting up with its unfairness and injustices. She strives towards greater moral strength which gives her an

honest assessment of herself. She is constantly learning and developing. Elizabeth Bennet realizes that her opinions can be fallible.^x Anne Elliot, in Persuasion, learns to have greater faith in her own judgment. These women win moral victories through tact and politeness and their disciplined conduct. Norms of propriety demand that the strongest emotions must be regulated. So Anne Elliot plays the music to which Captain Wentworth dances with Louisa Musgrove with the best possible grace. Even under stress, they display fortitude and grace and a calm composure. Charlotte Brontë was impatient with such a lack of emotion in Jane Austen's women. She felt that Jane Austen had no idea of the existence of the stormy sisterhood of passion. But in Jane Austen, the heroine's superior worth is dependent on her capacity to hold her feelings in check. In Sense and Sensibility, Elinor's greater worth is due to the fact that she

has an excellent heart; -- her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern them.
(p.42)

The love intrigues in Jane Austen do not display any romantic giddiness. The women must not only be able to respect the men they love, but must also be capable of commanding the men's respect. Love is not sentimental and illusory, and mutual appraisal is made on rational terms and with a sense of responsibility. Elizabeth Bennet is not impressed

by Darcy's wealth. She is not to be intimidated by riches and feels equal to anyone of rank, at a time when rank and wealth and possessions seemed to measure an individual's worth. She is later persuaded that the man himself is well worth her respect. However, the Jane Austen heroine does not scorn money; she is never so much in love as to believe that she can do without a comfortable amount of it. Neither Elinor nor Edward in Sense and Sensibility "were ... quite enough in love to think that three hundred and fifty pounds a year would supply them with the comforts of life" (p.358). But it must still be secondary to human worth.

In Pride and Prejudice, Elizabeth is set apart from her family by her warmth and her generous heart. She is the only one in the family who feels Jane's pleasure at Bingley's favourable attention. She is also marked off by her self-esteem, without conceitedness:

"His [Darcy's] pride," said Miss Lucas, "does not offend me so much as pride often does, because there is an excuse for it. One cannot wonder that one so very fine a young man, with family, fortune, everything in his favour should think highly of himself. If I may so express it, he has a right to be proud."

"That is very true", replied Elizabeth, "and I could easily forgive his pride, if he had not mortified mine".
(PP, pp.66-7)

Elizabeth's vanity is hurt when he comments on her looks slightly, and here begins the prejudiced stand she takes against him. Here is also a case where a woman's pride comes into count; she is not dismissed as a simpering fool. Elizabeth's independent spirit is masked behind polite social acquiescence and feminine diffidence. But when she thinks necessary, she throws aside this mask as when, against her mother's wishes and against the prevailing norms of feminine propriety, she goes to visit the ailing Jane at Netherfield Park. She is shocked when Charlotte Lucas agrees to marry Mr Collins, a curious mixture of inflated self-importance and a cringing humility, to secure her own future without having ever been handsome. Charlotte thus identifies herself with the standards of the marketplace that ruled marital transactions. When Charlotte marries the grotesque Mr Collins, she knows very well that this could be well her last chance and she takes the step deliberately, weighing her future husband's peculiarities against the social and economic security marriage with him offers. Elizabeth has always had a poor opinion of "prudent" marriages where financial or social considerations were the main deciding factor, and she is shocked. But Jane Austen takes some pains to let us how hopeless Charlotte's choice is, and how she chooses the lesser of the two evils. She knows that spinsterhood, with no independent income of her own, will make her a most unwelcome burden on her selfish family. However, Elizabeth is sincerely concerned about

Charlotte's future happiness with this pompous, almost comic, man. She brushes aside Jane's belief that their friend has made a wise decision:

"My dear Jane, Mr Collins is a conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly man, you know he is, as well as I do, and you must feel, as well as I do, that the woman who marries him, cannot have a proper way of thinking. You shall not defend her, though it is Charlotte Lucas. You shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the meaning of principle and integrity, nor endeavour to persuade yourself or me, that selfishness is prudence, and insensibility of danger, security for happiness!" (PP, p.174)

Elizabeth is taken aback when she finds that Charlotte Lucas has neither the inclination nor the strength to stand against the pressures that society exerts on women to abandon their self-respect. She herself cannot complacently acquiesce to society's norms which depersonalize relationships. She has continually refused to accept such valuation of herself as Charlotte has accepted. Neither Elizabeth nor Darcy performs for society. However, Elizabeth being the woman does occasionally have to take refuge in polite disguise, when she must struggle to unite civility and truth and conduct herself with the most disagreeable person with ^{the} utmost tact and composure. Her love for Darcy is the exact opposite of romantic love. His wealth fails to impress her and his arrogance actually turns

her away from him. Her prejudice against him fills her with shame when she learns the truth about him and his essential nature. Her experience and realization of her love for, and goodwill towards, Darcy is significant:

She certainly did not hate him. No; hatred had vanished long ago, and she had almost as long been ashamed of ever feeling a dislike against him, that could be so called. The respect created by the conviction of his valuable qualities, though at first unwillingly admitted, had for some time ceased to be repugnant to her feelings, and it was now heightened to somewhat of a familiar nature, by the testimony so highly in his favour ... But above all, above respect and esteem, there was a motive within her of goodwill, which could not be overlooked. It was gratitude, -- Gratitude, not merely for having once loved her, but for loving her still well enough, to forgive all the petulance and acrimony of her manner in rejecting him, and all the unjust accusations accompanying her rejection. He who, she had been persuaded, would avoid her as his greatest enemy, seemed, on this accidental meeting, more eager to preserve the acquaintance, and without any indelicate display of regard, or any peculiarity of manner, where their two selves only were concerned ... Such a change in a man of so much pride, excited not only astonishment but gratitude -- for to love, ardent love, it must be attributed; and as such its impression on her was of a sort to be encouraged, as by no means displeasing though it could not be exactly

defined. (PP, pp.284-5)

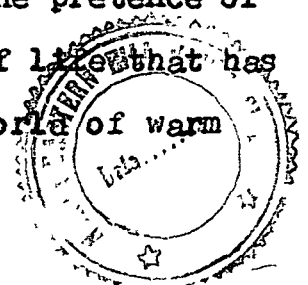
Elizabeth's love is spontaneous and whole-hearted, and although it has none of the headiness of romantic love, and it is necessary for her that the man she loves should be able to recommend himself to her by virtue of his superior worth as a person.

In Persuasion, the heroine seems to have become more discreet and disciplined. Her moral delicacy equates her with Elizabeth Bennet. Persuasion explores the predicament of Anne Elliot:

She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older — the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning. (p. 31)

Following the advice of her godmother, Lady Russell, Anne had broken off her relation with Wentworth who parted from her angry at what he saw as her weakness. She had been so persuaded because Wentworth had nothing to recommend him but himself. At twenty-seven now, Anne realizes that the code to which she had conformed as a young girl was shallow and worthless. She seemed to have lacked confidence in him and in her own judgment. When she does eventually marry him, it is with the confident hope of being able to walk along with him in happy independence. Away from the small-minded actualities of her father and the pretence of her sister, Anne identifies herself with a way of life that has greater warmth and loveliness in it. It is a world of warm

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personal relationships, not of disdainful snobbery. In the Harvilles' home in Lyme, Anne discovers

a bewitching charm in a degree of hospitality so uncommon, so unlike ... dinners of formality and display. (*P, p.98)

The Crofts are an admirable couple whose relationship is one of true affection and generosity. When Sir Walter is forced by his own extravagance to let Kellynch Hall and settle in Bath, his house is rented by Admiral Croft who fulfils the manorial duties much better than Sir Walter has ever done. The Crofts' abilities, their integrity and independent spirit, like Wentworth's, are representative of the changes taking place in English society.

As the novel progresses, there is a significant affirmation of Anne's ideals. When she recognizes that Wentworth's claim upon her affection is more steadfast than the selfishness and empty vanity of her family, she defies her father and sister and feels equal to everything which she believed right to be done. She now confidently and gladly unites herself with Captain Wentworth. Jane Austen shows us the obtuseness and shallowness of a society which equates true worth with wealth and worldly success. Wentworth has now become more acceptable socially because of his success. It was only Anne who recognized his worth at the time when he had not "proved" himself yet.

The Jane Austen heroine goes against certain norms of the well-bred society, but she never breaks out of its bonds. There is resignation to circumstances, but she attempts to shape her own happiness within the limitations of her society. She becomes the living representative of the ideal of love and intelligent commitment to values that will not be swamped by dehumanizing economic mores of society. Jane Austen makes no pretentious announcement of any moral purpose and displays no exhibitionist technique. Her ironic awareness of the tensions between spontaneity and convention, between the claims of personal morality and those of social and economic propriety is significant in her novels. Her books present essentially an eighteenth century world in its habits, tastes and appearance. Her fictional world is still untouched by the ravages of industrialism and we still read of country towns and the unspoiled loveliness of the countryside:

[Jane Austen] was describing, though she did not know it, the last generation of Englishmen and Englishwomen who could face life as they faced a minuet, with cheerfulness, decorum, and determination to go through the appropriate motions with elegance, grace -- and enjoyment. This is neither romanticism nor sentimentality, but shows a remarkable insight into the relation between social convention and individual temperament.⁶

An Elizabeth Bennet or an Anne Elliot redeems woman from being valued in market terms. They do not lend themselves to such valuation. To the woman, marriage should not and need not mean a purely pragmatic contract entered into for security. It is, in the case of Elizabeth or Anne a confirmation of a bond of love that rests on individual worth and mutual acceptance with affection, respect and trust. A more open and spirited protest against circumstances is to come in ✓Charlotte Brontë's heroine in Jane Eyre. We have here a heroine who stands up undaunted and spiritedly against pressure on her. No longer passive in her relationship with men, she is now more assertive, confident and not uncertain about expressing herself. When Jane feels that Rochester seems to be about to marry another woman, she prepares to leave Thornfield:

"Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automaton? ... a machine without feelings? You think wrong! ... I have as much soul as you ... and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities or even of mortal flesh: -- it is my spirit that addresses your spirit, just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal, -- as we are!" (*JE, p.234)

* Jane Eyre

For the first time, in Jane Eyre, we see a heroine who is plain, even bold and able and ready to stand up for her rights. Charlotte Brontë's novel is a representation of passion in the life of the young Jane as she grows from unwelcome childhood with her aunt through the ghastly and primitive rigours of Lowood School to struggling independence and, eventually, love and marriage. The first person narrative gives life to Jane's speeches. With fierce passion, she recounts her lonely, repressed womanhood. The story opens on the frighteningly lonely world of an orphan in an alien atmosphere with a family that does not make her feel welcome. The first section of Jane Eyre is a moving portrayal of lonely but proud childhood. Jane finds herself alone not only because of her circumstances but also because of her sensibility and courage and intelligence. She is a rebel who

"must resist those who punish me unjustly.
It is as natural as that I should love
those who show me affection, or submit to
punishment when I feel it is deserved."
(JE, p.58)

Jane, constantly in revolt against adverse circumstances, is the harbinger of resurgent womanhood in the novel.

Jane Eyre is no traditional governess, and Charlotte Brontë does not envelop her in any aura of romanticism. Plain and even dowdy, Jane is attractive to us because of her living reality, her intelligent sensitivity. She is a real woman drawn with understanding and compassion.

Charlotte Brontë goes against the social mores of her times in the creation of Jane Eyre. She is too sincere a writer to accept convention that goes against the grain of her clear and honest thinking. Jane is from beginning to end a person not only of passion but of genuine intellectual capacity too. Not particularly attractive, she is, however, conscious of her moral and mental superiority. Her self-regard and sense of dignity as a woman prompt Jane to stand up against all odds, at first against the bullying cousin at Gateshead and her aunt, and later against Rochester when he keeps her in the dark about his lunatic wife. Her response is intense and total and uninhibited. Even her appearance is something novel in English fiction. And with her, passion becomes a part of the novel. Before Jane Eyre, the treatment of love had been of two kinds: as a rational and scarcely tempestuous affection between man and woman on the one hand, and a healthy animal sensuality, such as we find in Tom Jones, on the other. In Jane Eyre, passion is something that transcends sensuality because here is a blending of the spiritual with the physical:

No sooner did I see that his attention was riveted on them /some ladies, and that I might gaze without being observed, that my eyes were drawn involuntarily to his face: I could not keep their lids under control: they would rise and the iris would fix upon him. I looked, and had an acute pleasure in looking, -- a precious, yet poignant pleasure; pure gold, with a steely point of

agony: a pleasure like what the thirst-perishing man might feel who knows the well to which he has crept is poisoned, yet stoops and drinks divine draughts nevertheless. (JE, p.163)

This is a passionate response to all of life. Charlotte Brontë depicts in Jane the isolated, naked soul responding to the experience of life with a maximum intensity. Compton-Rickett has called her "the pioneer of the novel of emancipation".⁷ She certainly shows no limp puppet in Jane Eyre, but a real and courageous woman. Her book is not in the nature of an escape romance because her heroine does not enjoy a complete unreal triumph and does not take pleasure in illusory notions about the nature of her love, and about Rochester himself. In Jane Eyre, we have a picture of spirited womanhood that does not acquiesce blindly to masculine expectation. She fights her lonely battle and emerges undismayed and triumphant. The fictional portrayal of woman begins to change now.

In Emily Brontë, there is more of the soul of primitive woman. The feminine gentleness had kept Charlotte's tumultuous energy in check. Unlike her, Emily seems to be the very embodiment of the windswept Yorkshire Moors, and her chief characters in Wuthering Heights scarcely lend themselves to any evaluation in human terms. They defy all psychological standards, seeming to be the primal, elemental forces of

nature: passion incarnate. There is a fierce intensity of feeling that has gone into their creation.

There is a vast difference in the imaginative quality of the novels of the Brontës and that of other novelists of their time. There is in their work an emotional intensity rarely found in their contemporaries. Both Emily and Charlotte are at heart in spiritual sympathy with those rugged primal natures so familiar to them in their environment of the untamed moors.

In Wuthering Heights, the passionate intensity of Emily's vision is present in its essential purity. The central theme is concerned with the love of Catherine Earnshaw for Heathcliff. But, for all its passion, Emily Brontë raises it above melodrama. The relationship is based on the concept of primitive, elemental passion. In Catherine's "'I am Heathcliff'" (*WH, p.71), there is no trace of any transitory impulse or desire. It reflects the essential nature of the speaker. There is no sentiment or pleasure, no verbiage to give it a sharp, defined quality. There is no egoism in Catherine's love for Heathcliff. She sees no self-sufficient justification in her feeling. She recognizes that the individual is not totally self-contained, and that he or she seeks, and needs, contact with another for completion:

* Wuthering Heights

"What were the use of my creation, if I were entirely contained here?" (WH, p.71)

There is a profound sense of the dependence of man:

"Surely you and everybody have a notion that there is or should be an existence of yours beyond you" (WH, p.71)

The need is for an existence by which the self may find full meaning. Catherine's is a consuming metaphysical passion, and the presence of only the external world would seem totally empty, because it is unrelated to the relation between Heathcliff and her:

"If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be, and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger: I should not seem part of it." (WH, p.71)

Linton represents the superficial graces of civilized life, graces in which Heathcliff is totally lacking. On account of his urbane charm and courtesy, Catherine, at a certain level of her nature, is attracted and responds to Linton's affection. But, as she realizes, the deepest part of her nature is not involved here:

"My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it; I am well aware, as winter changes the tree. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little

visible light, but necessary." (WH, p.71)

Catherine clearly defines the difference between her affection for Linton and her all-consuming passion for Heathcliff.

Catherine is persuaded by reason to choose Linton over Heathcliff. Socially, Linton would probably bring her normal domestic happiness and felicity. But to Catherine,

"[Heathcliff] is more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same; and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire." (WH, p.70)

Their love does not belong to the definable/^{world}of social values and considerations but rises above them to a level of passion. Their relationship is one in which the social world becomes irrelevant by its absence or presence, and it defies all conventional, easily understood values. Here, the heroine is not at odds with her environment as we have seen in the case of Jane Eyre and the Jane Austen women. To Catherine, the world is essentially unimportant. Heathcliff is her natural complement, without whom she feels incomplete and in whose absence her life is utterly meaningless.

However, women before and after Wuthering Heights have been, and continue to be at odds with the social world. Too often, the woman has been made to explain herself on the basis of her difference from the male norm. Romola virtually apologizes to her father for being a daughter rather than the

son that he would have preferred. Her father appreciates her efforts at serious study but discounts her aptitude for scholarship in a misogynist tone. He would maintain that a woman is lacking in the patience and sustained zeal that a man has. George Eliot's heroine must perforce account for her womanhood. Romola must be reminded that notwithstanding her diligence, she is still a woman. " In Middlemarch, Dorothea shares Romola's advantage of birth and breeding but, unlike Romola, Dorothea does not get the opportunity to serve the poor at Lowick after her marriage to Casaubon. In this portrayal of provincial life in the early nineteenth century, George Eliot shows a firm grasp of diverse and slowly evolving cultures. The stories of Dorothea and Tertius Lydgate have been seen as twin studies in defeated aspiration. Dorothea's nature is "altogether ardent, theoretic, and intellectually consequent", and it is "hemmed in by a social life which seemed nothing but a labyrinth of petty courses, a walled-in maze of small paths that led no whither"(*MM, p.51). She is the innocent idealist who wishes to do good in a world that cramps and confines her ardour so that she drifts into marriage with the pedantic Casaubon. Following his death, she struggles towards the love and relative freedom with Will Ladislav, the vaguely artistic and rather nebulous figure whom George Eliot fails to develop. Lydgate hopes to combine the reform of medical practice with basic research but his hopes are frustrated when he finds himself in a stultifying relationship with

* Middlemarch

the egoistic and extremely shallow Rosamond Vincy. Mary Garth in her turn saves Fred Vincy from shiftlessness by the strength of her sensible and solid love. Both Casaubon and Lydgate display a limited vision of woman: the one wants a secretary in his wife, and the other an ornament. Dorothea's initial disillusionment with her husband, however, grows into an understanding of his parchment aridity. Lydgate's dreams dwindle into a fashionable practice. Rosamond's egoism is of the deadly sort of the spoilt child. Her brother, Fred, is equally spoilt but he is reclaimed by the sturdy good sense of ^{the} girl he loves.

Virginia Woolf says Middlemarch is "the magnificent book which for all its imperfections is one of the few English novels written for grown up people".⁸ In the novel, Dorothea's moral re-education is the prime focus of George Eliot. The provincial society of Middlemarch seems to Dorothea a prison from which she would like to escape by involving herself in some great cause or promoting some noble cause. However, her equation of this idea of freedom with Casaubon's claustrophobic and pedantic world, which seems to consist of only the dead and the decayed, is bewildering. It is in this ill-advised marriage that her painful growth from disillusion begins:

It had been easier for her to imagine how she would devote herself to Mr Casaubon, and become wise and strong in his strength and wisdom, than to conceive with that

distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling -- an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects -- that he had an equivalent centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference.

(MM, p.243)

Her disillusionment is inevitable and bitter. Her too-ardent, not-too-practical nature leads her to this:

Her mind was theoretic and yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the world ... she was enamoured of intensity and greatness and rash in embracing whatever seemed to her to have these aspects; likely to seek martyrdom, to make retractions, and then to incur martyrdom after all in a quarter where she had not sought it. (MM, p.30)

The intensity of her ardour somehow seems streaked with egoism. When Casaubon's curate assures her that everything is well in her parish,

she felt some disappointment, of which she was yet ashamed, that there was nothing for her to do at Lowick, and in the next few minutes her mind had glanced over the possibility, which she would have preserved, of finding her home would be in a parish which had a larger share of the world's misery, so that she might have more actual duties before her. (MM, p.103)

Her wide charity finds no direction. She is seen as a St Theresa born in the wrong place at the wrong time, unable to give expression to her dreams. She is taken up by the splendour of her aspirations. Her zeal for self-sacrifice is tremendous but it smacks of spiritual arrogance.

Henry James sees in Dorothea a rare spiritual beauty:

... we seem to look straight into the unfathomable eyes of the beautiful spirit of Dorothea Brooke. She exhales a sort of aroma of spiritual sweetness, and we believe in her as a woman we might providentially meet some fine day when we should find ourselves doubting of the immortality of the soul.⁹

Dorothea's gift for passionate abstraction leads her to seek religious justification of everything delightful. To the practical Celia, jewels are jewels, nothing more or less. But Dorothea must rationalize the reality of the gems, and also explain her delight in the colours, and give it spiritual justification. On seeing her mother's jewels,

"How beautiful these gems are!" said Dorothea under a new current of feeling, as sudden as the gleam. "It is strange how deeply colours seem to penetrate one, like scent. I suppose that is the reason why gems are used as spiritual emblems in the Revelation of St John. They look like fragments of heaven". ... All the while

her thought was trying to justify her
delight in the colours by merging them
in her mystic religious joy. (MM, pp.35-6)

This almost puritanical strain gives a certain priggishness
to her nature, evident also in her attitude to art:

To poor Dorothea these severe classical
nudities and smiling Renaissance
Corregiosities were painfully inexplicable,
staring into the midst of her Puritanic
conceptions; she had never been taught how
to bring them into any kind of relevance
with her life. (MM, p.99)

Dorothea's attitude to the world outside changes as she learns
not only about herself but also about her relationships, as
she

felt the largeness of the world and the
manifold wakings of men to labour and
endurance. She was a part of that
involuntary, palpitating life, and could
neither look out on it from her luxurious
shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her
eyes in selfish complaining.

She is both agent and patient in the entire human scene. Her
destiny is shaped not only by the narrow limits of her
provincial circumstances but also by the abstract yearnings of
her "theoretic" nature. Her ardent aspirations find no place
in the provincial world as her attempts tremble off without
finding something definite. Dorothea's sensitive and passionate

nature is never understood or appreciated by Casaubon. George Eliot has thought and argued about religion, ethics, history, character, about woman herself. She allows Dorothea to try her wings in her association with Ladislaw, letting her enter a younger world, and into greater openness and promise than her marriage with Casaubon allowed.

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CHAPTER - II

WOMEN IN HARDY : THE EMERGENT WOMAN

"What are my books but one long plea against man's inhumanity ✓
to man - to woman - and to the lower animals?"¹ declared
Hardy. Hardy is notable for his tremendous empathy with
women, and almost all his major novels have central women
characters. Irving Howe comments on Hardy's "gift for creep-
ing intuitively into the emotional life of women."² Hardy's
women have evoked varying responses from his readers. Both
his men and his women have been drawn with infinite tenderness
and they

were creatures to him of infinite attraction.
[However] for the women he shows a more tender
solicitude than for the men, and in them, perhaps,
he takes a keener interest.³

Women are traditionally, and by nature, more susceptible to
suffering and they are victims as much of man's dictates as
of the treachery of circumstance that Hardy is so acutely
aware of. Chance, coincidence and natural law seem to con-
spire against the hapless individual who finds himself
enmeshed in circumstances not of his own making and beyond his
control. Men are victims too and, as Jude tells Sue, she must
not fight the man, but together they must brave the unrelenting
circumstances which make their world. Rosalind Miles observes
that

Hardy used women, fictionally, because of their
combination of weakness and strength, fragility

with capacity for suffering, endurance with so much to endure ... A woman in Hardy's hands could be made to bear a weight of suffering whose inflictions transcend the personal and move through human to sublime, he never found the same true of a male character.⁴

Because of her inherent capacity for suffering, woman is the more interesting and, ultimately, lovable. Nourished by tradition, she persists through defeat. Hardy has rightly been acclaimed as "one of that brave and clear-sighted minority" that has drawn a distinction between simple chastity and moral worth.⁵ Other critics have pounced upon the strong "sexist assumptions" in Hardy's works, contending that his women, instead of moving ahead, have retreated further. But Hardy's women have been endowed with remarkable fortitude, and although he belongs to a time when women were growing increasingly conscious of their position in society, Hardy himself does not place his women with this class:

Throughout Hardy's fiction ... there is a curious power of sexual insinuation, almost as if he were not locked into the limits of masculine perception but could shuttle between or, for the moment, yoke together, the responses of the two sexes.⁶

This is Hardy's remarkable gift. This is what distinguishes him from his peers. As the women love, so also they suffer, often with tragic results:

Vain might their beauty be and terrible their fate, but while the glow of life is in them their step is free, their laughter sweet, and theirs is the power to sink into the breast of Nature and become part of her silence and solemnity, or to rise and put on them the movement of the clouds and the wildness of the flowering woodlands.⁷

They are not unscathed by experience, because they are vulnerable; since they are vulnerable, they emerge remarkably fortified, and noble.

The women's relationships with men form the core of Hardy's exploration. As he enters feminine psychology, his perceptions are lucid and very compassionate. Except The Mayor of Casterbridge, all his major novels centre around the lives of women, and they are an honest portrayal of the relationship of the sexes. Marriage by now has ceased to be the coveted end of a woman's life. Bathsheba initially laughs it off and Eustacia Vye tries to use it as a means of achieving her dream, that of going to far-off Paris. While at first Grace is content to heed her father's word and marries the socially more acceptable Fitzpiers, her love for Giles does not remain suppressed for long. To Tess, marriage with Angel comes in the form of a monstrous betrayal and by the time of Jude the Obscure, it takes on more complicated turns and marriage as a sacrosanct social and religious institution becomes questionable.

Far From the Madding Crowd is the only major novel that is resolved by the promise of a happy marriage. The story weaves around the vivacious young Bathsheba who comes to stay with her aunt on whom she is dependent, but she is free and soaring of spirit. She rejects the homely advances of the serious minded young sheep farmer, and expresses a certain contempt for marriage. Later, as an economically independent woman and owner of her large farm, she grows from an inexperienced girl, from vanity through foolishness and hurt and anguish to a new mature womanly fortitude, strengthened by Gabriel Oak's unwavering love for her. She has been powerfully created and in her is present the consciousness of the emergent modern woman. Early in the novel, she scoffs at the idea of having a husband around all the time:

"I hate to be thought man's property in that way, though possibly I shall be had some day."⁸

She does not desire marriage, yet she succumbs to masculine charms. This country girl is wooed and later betrayed by her dashing soldier husband. In her initial highhanded treatment of Oak, there is an assertive, confident energy about her. Friedman sees in her a "temperamental disposition to exercise control over men."⁹ By her own admission,

"I should feel triumphant and all that about marriage⁷. But a husband --" (*MC, p.67)

*Far From the Madding Crowd

She is unimpressed by Oak because of his lack of assertiveness. She tells him:

"I want somebody to tame me; I am too independent, and you would never be able to, I know." (MC, p.68)

Bathsheba is impulsive, and has so far been unable to direct her will into any definite groove. Later when she marries Troy, it is not so much out of conviction as out of indecision. She is neither "a trifler with the affections of men" nor a "schemer for marriage", and "a censor's experience on seeing an actual flirt after observing her would have been a feeling of surprise that Bathsheba could be so different from such a one, and yet so like what a flirt is supposed to be" (MC, pp.155-6).

Bathsheba suffers her first setback in her relationship with her double dealing husband. Through shock and virtual disbelief she learns that it is Fanny Robin, not she, who has been Troy's "very, very wife" (MC, p.327). Rejected by Troy,

"You are nothing to me -- nothing ... A ceremony before a priest doesn't make a marriage. I am not morally yours." (MC, p.327),

she is saved by the steadfast Oak. The initial picture of Bathsheba shows her as coquettish and charming, capable of resisting the simple, unaffected Gabriel, but her faith in Oak remains instinctive and unerring. The bond between them

is first established when she saves Oak from suffocating inside his hut. Later Gabriel is to save Bathsheba's hayricks and she comes to see him as an instrument of salvation. Her independent spirit backed by economic sufficiency, she rejects Oak's discipline even as she seeks his opinion:

"I cannot allow any man to criticize my conduct ... Nor will I for a minute. So you'll please leave the farm at the end of the week!" ...
 "Very well, so I will," said Gabriel calmly. (MC, pp.167-8)

But she soon realizes how indispensable Gabriel is at her farm work. When she appeals to him: "Do not desert me, Gabriel", it is not in her authority as an employer but as a woman seeking help (MC, p.195). She is also chastened by her disastrous marriage with Troy. As early as this novel, Hardy turns his attention to how a relationship or marriage earns its validity. Its worth is not dependent on the vows before a priest but on the strength of the commitment of the two people. When we first see Bathsheba, she seems to us a whimsical, impulsive creature who shows a willing vulnerability, a readiness to be "tamed". When she does finally turn to Oak, she has grown wiser through difficult experience. About Troy, she reflects: "between jealousy and distraction, I married him" (MC, p.282). The once rash and capricious young woman learns a new fortitude through her trials and

disappointments, and returns to Oak. Bathsheba becomes a subdued person, her high spirits now under control:

Deeds of endurance which seem ordinary in philosophy are rare in conduct, and Bathsheba was astonishing all around her now, for her philosophy was in her conduct, and she seldom thought practicable what she did not practise. (MC, pp. 402-3)

Bathsheba's relationship with Oak is self-forming, independent of social props, and the social formulation of their bond is redundant for

Theirs was that substantial affection which arises (if any arises at all) when the two who are thrown together, begin first by knowing the rougher sides of each other's character, and not the best till further on, the romance growing up in the interstices of a mass of hard prosaic reality. (MC, p.419)

Bathsheba herself is a maturer person, having had to learn through personal misfortune. At first amusing and rather vain, she turns into a person of courage and endurance. Is the picture of the restrained Bathsheba consistent with that of the spirited woman who spurns Oak's offer of marriage? Early in the novel, as she regards her features in a mirror, she imagines "dramas in which men would play a part -- vistas of probable triumph -- the smiles being of a phase suggesting that hearts were imagined as lost and won". (MC, p. 44). This urge "to exercise control over men" is

channelized through experience into restraint and courage, and she becomes capable of that "compounded feeling [which]" proves itself to be the only love which is strong as death" (MC, p.419). The quality of the love between them is

a product of the evolution of their first unconscious reciprocity. It is not sudden or something we are unprepared for. The marriage at the end is really superfluous, for even without it their relationship remains established.¹⁰

This promise of a happy marriage is not found in Hardy's subsequent novels. Marriage becomes fraught with unequal expectations, hence leading to disappointment and disillusion. As he explores relationships, Hardy stays by the woman who is spontaneous, trusting in the life in close contact with the earth, and not overburdened by ideas. Bathsheba is young, lively -- and impulsive. When she marries Troy, she does so impulsively, and subsequently suffers. Her bond with Oak also grows stronger not only because of Oak's steadfastness but also because of Bathsheba's spontaneity of response. In all her dealings with Oak, although she is, especially in the beginning, assertive, she is never deliberately manipulative:

The mature Bathsheba may have to depend on Oak at critical hours, but she is a courageous person in her own right. She has been changed by responsibility and disaster.¹¹

It takes the steady love and support of Gabriel to awaken her senses. She is restored to life, to the community, and to the regenerative power of its customs and traditions. Though restless, Bathsheba has never been neurotic. This pathological restlessness is to come with later Hardy heroines. In Eustacia Vye, Guerard sees the first of Hardy's "irresponsible and mildly neurotic hedonists!"¹² Our first glimpse of Eustacia in The Return of the Native shows her consumed by her passion to see the Paris boulevards. She manipulates her first meeting with Clym and marries him under the illusion that he would be instrumental in removing her from a limiting environment. Preoccupied with love,

To be loved to madness -- such was her great
desire (*RN, p.96),

her sense of identity is dependent on the man whose recognition she hopes to win.

Throughout the novel, Eustacia lives on the outskirts of the Egdon community, physically and otherwise. She is aware of this difference, and to the Egdon natives, her strangeness is something of a threat which Susan Nunsuch seeks to dispel by old, traditional means of warding away witches. When we first see her, Eustacia is

weary of too many things, unless she could have
been weary of more; she knew too much, unless

*The Return of the Native

she could have known all. It was a dangerous rock to be tossed on at her age. She had done with dreams and interests of young maidhood; the dreams and interests of wifedom she had never begun, and we see her in a strange inter-space of isolation.¹³

Her marriage to Clym does not succeed in making her a part of the Egdon community. She is separated from the heath by "a gulf of incomprehension".¹⁴ There is an adolescent fervour in her; she is "a woman whose mind and aspirations are those of a romantic schoolgirl".¹⁵ While Eustacia hopes to escape from the heath through her marriage, Clym becomes the more determined about working in and for Egdon. The gulf between them is widened by Mrs Yeobright's hostility towards their marriage, and to Eustacia. A stranger to the heath, Eustacia feels hemmed in by it:

To dwell on the heath without studying its meanings was like wedding a foreigner without learning his tongue. The subtle beauties of the heath were lost to Eustacia; she only caught its vapours. (RN, p.97)

And her marriage does little to help her. Earlier, she has dreams of being loved to distraction:

Love was to her the one cordial which could drive away the eating loneliness of her days. And she seemed to long for the abstraction called passionate love more than for any particular lover. (RN, p.96)

She feels with any intensity only about an absence that she yearns for:

Paris -- or some other glittering city of the mind, and non-existent heroes can stir her imagination to a feverish pitch of activity.¹⁶

The "Queen of Night" becomes a prisoner of the heath (RN, Title of Ch. 7). Unlike her, Thomasin belongs to Egdon as Eustacia can never do. Thomasin is not deceived by Egdon:

The drops which lashed her face were not scorpions, but prosy rain, Egdon in the mass was no monster whatsoever, but impersonal open ground. Her fears of the place were rational; her dislikes of its worst moods reasonable. (RN, p.380)

But the reckless Eustacia, disappointed sorely in her marriage, and the prospect of remaining in Egdon looming unpleasantly large on her horizon, summons her old lover on the heath. She eventually has a vital role to play in Clym's relationship with his mother, and things reach a crisis on the day Eustacia fails to answer Mrs Yeobright's knock on her door. Because Wildeve is with her, she feels challenged to open the door, yet she resolves not to:

What appears to be utter lack of deceit in her ... is at bottom an empty verbal posture concealing her basic inability to act morally one way or the other. "I won't open the door" is an expression of her refusal to meet the consequences of her life and action.¹⁷

When Clym is faintly roused from his deep slumber by the knock on the door, he turns in his sleep, murmuring "Mother". Eustacia then mistakenly assumes that he must be awake and will open the door. It is from this failure to respond to the knock that the tragedy arises:

[This] pathological moral hesitancy [highlights] ... her inability to share in the culturally accredited sanctions of the novel ... She is at odds with her environment without having a moral alternative to it.¹⁸

Eustacia refuses to face the consequences of any commitment, and reflects self-righteously on what has just passed:

She had certainly believed that Clym was awake, and the excuse would be an honest one as far as it went; but nothing could save her from censure in refusing to answer at the first knock. Yet, instead of blaming herself for the issue she laid the fault upon the shoulders of some indistinct, colossal Prince of the World, who had framed her situation and ruled her lot. (RN, p.317)

Mrs Yeobright, for her part, feels just as much circumscribed by the Egdon world. As she lies exhausted and dying, she longs to escape the world:

While she looked a heron rose ... and flew on with his face to the sun ... Up in the zenith where he was seemed a free and happy place, away from all contact with the earthly ball to which she was pinioned; and she wished that she could arise uncrushed from its surface

and fly as he flew then. (RN, p.309)

Mrs Yeobright has remarkable similarity with the later Mrs Morel of Lawrence's Sons and Lovers. She is "a curate's daughter, who had once dreamt of doing better things". (RN, p.60). She offers reasons for her hostility towards Eustacia, but it could be just a cover for the hostility she feels towards the young girl who is competing with her for Clym's affection:

[Clym's] theory and his wishes about devoting his future to teaching made an impression on Mrs Yeobright. Indeed, how could it be otherwise when he was a part of her -- when their discourses were as if carried on between the right and the left hands of the same body? (RN, p.212)

About this inordinately close relationship between mother and son, Penny Boumelha observes:

[Mrs Yeobright] lives vicariously through her son, and this gives her behaviour towards him a curious blend of dependence and dominance. Clym has a life and a will of his own beyond this one relationship, yet remains strongly bound to his mother for emotional support and approval.¹⁹

Like Gertrude Morel, she too would like her son to "do well" outside the heath. After his mother's death, Clym's denunciation of Eustacia is in very strong terms. Ian Gregor sees his angry outburst disintegrate:

largely into rant. It comes to that because there has never been any intensity of feeling between them in the first place; its absence has been masked by the vehemence of Mrs Yeobright's opposition, which has helped to create in the reader's mind a feeling between Clym and Eustacia which has never really been there.²⁰

However, Clym is not indifferent to Eustacia despite his anger. When she tries to tie her bonnet strings and fumbles, Clym says:

"Let me tie them."

She assented in silence and lifted her chin. For once at least in her life she was totally oblivious of the charm of her attitude. But he was not, and he turned his eyes aside, that he might not be tempted to softness. (RN, p.349)

After moving to Bloom's End, Clym has a strange expectation of his estranged wife and he is alert to the gentle sounds of leaves outside and birds looking for worms and "he fancied that they were Eustacia, standing without and breathing wishes of reconciliation" (RN, p.361). Eustacia has already been yearning for the "music, poetry, passion, war and all the beating and pulsing that is going on in the great arteries of the world" (RN, p.303). She feels ill-used to the last, still yearning for the fanciful, unsure about being unfaithful for so small a gain as Wildeve:

"He's not great enough for me to give myself to -- he does not suffice for my desire! ... If he had been a Saul of a Bounaparte -- ah! But to break ^{my} marriage vows for him -- it is too poor a luxury! ... How I have tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me! ... I do not deserve my lot!" she cried in a frenzy of bitter revolt.
(RN, pp.371-2)

The weariness we see in her in the opening chapter of the book never leaves her. It is difficult to say whether her death by drowning in the weir comes about by accident when she mistakes her path on her way to elope with Wildeve, or whether, overwhelmed by her weariness and hopelessness, she gives up her life in despair. She has never been able to reconcile herself to life on the heath, always skirting its periphery and never entering it. She hankers in vain after an alien life that exists only in her dreams. She fails to recognize that she has been largely the agent of her own bitter discontent. She never belongs to the fold of the rural community because she has never tried to belong. She does not therefore profit by its healing, wholesome influence that is felt by the other heath dwellers. Unable to identify with her physical surroundings, Eustacia remains incompatible with it. She is never painted wicked by Hardy but certainly he sheds light on her inability to commit herself morally to any degree. The novel is concerned with ill-matched couples and

the resultant frustration, with a restless discontent with life. Undefined aspirations embitter Eustacia and dissatisfaction and restlessness of a different nature is explored again in later novels. The feeling is comparatively mild in The Woodlanders where Grace, alienated from the rural community by her expensive education, longs to come back to its folds, and by the time of Jude the Obscure, Hardy focuses attention on the new woman plagued by neurotic tendencies and fastidiousness:

... The significance of Grace ... lie(s) in the fact that she provides Hardy with an opportunity to do a first sketch of Sue Bridehead.²¹

In this "first sketch", Hardy recognizes the presence of modern nerves in association with primitive feelings. Grace Melbury is the more timid and wavering while Sue is in every sense a more interesting person. Melbury sees his daughter not as an ordinary woman, but as one in a "peculiar situation, as it were, in mid-air between two storeys of society". (*WL, p.246):

... It is not possible to represent Grace satisfactorily throughout as a realist heroine: rather, she migrates unsettingly between pastoral survival, tragic protagonist, realist centre of consciousness, and melodramatic heroine. The very fluidity of her narrative role and function makes of her at times an almost nebulous figure.²²

* The Woodlanders

Grace has not been given any fixed or definitive summary by the narrative:

What people therefore saw of her in a cursory view was very little; in truth, mainly something that was not she. The woman herself was a conjectural creature who had little to do with the outlines presented to Sherton eyes; a shape in the gloom, true quality could only be approximated by putting together a movement now and a glance then, in that patient attention which nothing but watchful loving-kindness ever troubles itself to give. (WL, p.69)

She allows herself to be used by her naively snobbish father as a means of social ambition and advance. Her education estranges her from the natural world of Little Hintock, and she struggles to restore herself to the tradition of Giles and Marty, both children of the soil, capable of "intelligent intercourse with nature" (WL, p.357). Grace meekly abides by her father's directive that she should not marry Giles. There is already a gulf between her and Giles, consequent upon misconceptions and cross-purposes:

He sees her as an ethereal being, an alien to Little Hintock, and her remoteness sustains his fascination. He feels on her inaccessibility. For Grace too Giles has no human solidity; he is seen either simply in terms of his work, or as a human distillation of nature, "Autumn's very brother".²³

After her education abroad and with her new found, petty, frivolous interests, Grace can hardly be at one with Giles. Her thoughtless concern for the opinion of society leads to Giles's sleeping in the cold outside his own house. Her education has given her a "veneer of artificiality" and her experience lacks tragic intensity as she suffers largely due to her undue concern with propriety. (WL, p.236):

[Hardy] said that Grace never interested him much; he was provoked with her all along. If she would have done a really self-abandoned, impassioned thing (going off with Giles), he could have made a fine tragic ending to the book, but she was too commonplace and straitlaced, and he could not make her.²⁴

The prim and proper Grace is a far cry from the tomboyish and free and independent Sue. Grace's education has been a decision of her father's, but Sue's learning is entirely self-motivated. Sue is more intense than Grace, with a mind of her own. Grace conforms to most of Melbury's wishes and there is an absence of definite identity in her, in that she is prepared to fulfil her father's plans for her. Coming back to Hintock after her absence, she is isolated:

Grace Melbury is deracinated from class as well as region, and she makes her strongest claim on our sympathy when she longs once more for the old primitive life.²⁵

Hardy is, strangely, emotionally detached from Grace. There

is in her a basic insecurity about her nature which makes Fitzpiers seem, at the time of her marriage to him, "her ruler rather than her equal" (WL, p.197). Extremely submissive to expectations, there is a striking absence of definite identity. In Giles's hut, ill and alone,

She seemed almost to be apart from herself -- a vacuous duplicate only. The recent self of physical animation and clear intentions was not there. (WL, p.335)

Grace's sense of her own individual significance is considerably undermined when she is reckoned a good "investment" by her father:

"I too cost a great deal, like the horses and waggoons and corn!" she said, looking up sorrowfully. "I didn't want you to look at those; I merely meant to give you an idea of my investment transactions. But if you do cost as much as they, never mind. You'll yield a better return." "Don't think of me like that!" she begged. "A mere chattel!" (WL, p.119)

Because she does not assert her individuality, Melbury is comforted. She is a "good girl" who complies with her father's every concept of her; she is good "material" which is "sure to be worthwhile" (WL, p.185). Through this "social hope of the family", Melbury wishes to rise above the social situation (WL, p.117). Even though "somewhere in the bottom of her heart there pulsed an old simple indigenous feeling favourable to Giles", she allows herself to be persuaded into refusing him

(WL, p.112). It is later that she becomes more perceptive about "the relative incorruptibility and purity of the woodlanders against the schematic deceptions of the world she has married into".²⁶ This basically uncomplicated naive girl feels lonely in the milieu of her younger years. To her, Giles

looked and smelt like Autumn's very brother ... Her heart rose from its late sadness like a released bough; her senses revelled in the sudden lapse back to Nature unadorned. The consciousness of having to be genteel because of her husband's profession, the veneer of artificiality which she had acquired at the fashionable school were thrown off, and she became the crude country girl of her latent early instincts. (WL, pp.235-6)

She has so far been able to muster but a faint protest at her father's socially ambitious and grossly utilitarian plans for her. Her sensibility becomes touched by the social mores of the world outside Hintock:

Beside this visioned scene (of a fashionable suburb of a fast city) the homely farmsteads did not quite hold their own from her present twenty-three year point of survey. (WL, p.73)

But there are occasions when she finds identification with her native world. As she tells Giles, after first meeting Mrs Charmond:

"As for myself, I hate French books. And I love dear old Hintock, and the people in it, fifty times more than all the Continent!"
(WL, p.98)

She does eventually see the "internal vacuity and dullness" that characterizes the world of education.²⁷ She laments the consequences of her expensive education:

"I wish you had never never thought of educating me, I wish I worked in the fields like Marty South! I hate genteel life ... Cultivation has only brought me inconveniences and troubles. I say again, I wish you had never sent me to those fashionable schools you set your mind on. It all arose out of that, father. If I had stayed at home, I should have married --"

She closed up her mouth suddenly and was silent, and he could see that she was not far from crying. (WL, p.251)

Sadly disillusioned by her marriage with Fitzpiers, Grace finally realizes that "there was one man on earth in whom she believed absolutely, and he Giles was that man" (WL, p.331). After the tragic circumstances of Giles's death, Grace recognizes the ideal, natural counterpart for Giles:

"He ought to have married you, Marty, and nobody else in the world!" said Grace with conviction, after thinking in the above strain. " ... You and he could speak in a tongue that nobody else knows - not even my father, though he came nearest knowing - and

the tongue of the trees and fruits and flowers themselves." (WL, p.358)

However, she does not abjure her new perception of her essential identity. She realizes that her marriage with Fitzpiers has been a great mistake, consequent upon her passivity in the face of her father's plans for her. She feels no jealousy at the knowledge of her husband's wandering affections:

But though possessed by none of the feline wildness which it was her moral duty to experience, she did not fail to suspect that she had made a frightful mistake in her marriage. (WL, p.23)

Her much vaunted education places her in a peculiar position. She cannot now make a definite commitment to Giles. Melbury wishes to consolidate his daughter's new-found social position by marriage with Fitzpiers. But when Grace finally goes back to a numb and passive acceptance of the incorrigible and wayward Fitzpiers, she does not go back to a happy marriage. Hardy does not imply any hint of reform in Fitzpiers who remains what he has always been. In a letter to JT Green regarding the dramatization of the novel, Hardy wrote:

You have probably observed that the ending of the story - hinted rather than stated - is that the heroine is doomed to an unhappy life with an unconstant husband. I could

not accentuate this strongly in the book, by reason of the conventions of the libraries, etc. Since the story was written, however, truth in character is not quite such a crime in literature as it was formerly; and it is therefore a question for you whether you will accent this ending or prefer to obscure it.²⁸

In The Woodlanders, Hardy deals with the issues of marriage and sexuality. For Grace, in this novel, marriage becomes the yardstick of status for a middle-class woman. Unlike Felice Charmond who enjoys an independent income and Marty who earns her living, Grace is to be that woman who "takes her colour from the man she's walking with" (WL, p.117). Her reconciliation with Fitzpiers does not constitute a happy ending and their mutual declaration of love is rather melodramatic. Grace is faced with the unwelcome prospect of living with a faithless husband. Through this experience of an uncertain relationship with her husband, and her realization that it has been a gross error, Grace comes to the knowledge of her kinship with the community of Hintock. She sees in Marty the perfect partner for the now dead Giles. However,

Grace's acknowledgement of Marty's equation with Giles does not suggest a loss of personal involvement. After Giles's death she can very well associate him and Marty without her own interests being at stake. Perhaps she also discovers in Marty an ideal undemonstrative

affection which she would fain possess herself. Marty is an ideal, a mythic counterpart of Giles Winterborne. This much Grace is brought to acknowledge. In giving expression to her sense of nearness between them she is not proposing a hypothetical marriage for their dead hero but giving evidence of her sensitivity to Giles's world, and Marty's, and of her awareness that she herself fell short of the ideal. But this is not the same thing as a feeling of disengagement and separation.²⁹

The creation of Grace is significant because with her, Hardy is able to provide an insight into the contemporary awareness of woman. Her modern nerves will be later expanded upon in the portrait of Sue Bridehead. Grace's marriage with Fitzpiers is not deeply felt. This is so because there is no marriage in a real sense between them. Grace watches with languid indifference when her husband rides away to Mrs. Charmond. She feels dissociated from herself - "a
 x vacuous duplicate only". Her experience is felt by Hardy's next heroine:

Tess had spiritually ceased to recognize the body before him as hers - allowing it to drift, like a corpse upon the current in a direction dissociated from its living will. (*Tess, p.429)

Hardy is concerned with the divided self, making an extreme later in Sue. In Tess, there is a fundamental ambiguity.

* Tess of the D'Urbervilles

She is both working woman and member of the aristocracy:

She was an ideal of the peasant girl, the sort of girl who in his earlier novels would have been regarded sympathetically but without personal sentiment, but who has now become the kind of princesse lointaine whom the girl in the grand house once represented. His finest conception of Tess stopped there, but the ingenuity of reverie then provided her with an under-image of the distinction - even the hauteur - possessed by his early aristocratic heroines.³⁰

Hardy's Tess is everything that woman, for Hardy, essentially should be. She becomes an archetype of the wronged woman. Living at an age of prudish Victorian moral values, and suffering on account of its unequal values, Tess remains courageous and loyal, and at the same time acutely sensitive to the sufferings of others. She displays remarkable fortitude in the face of adversity:

(Tess of the D'Urbervilles) finds a single person capable of revealing conflict which, in the earlier novel, had been widely dispersed. The temptations of Sue (Suke ?), the endurance of Marty, the troubled consciousness of Grace, come together and find a fresh definition in Tess.³¹

The chain of events which eventually become Tess's undoing begins after her father is informed of their noble

lineage. When Tess first appears to the reader, she has "a luxuriance of aspect, a fulness of growth, which made her appear more of a woman than she really was" (Tess, p.71) and, in effect, seems "a woman when she was not more than a child" (Tess, p.78). In her appearance can be caught glimpses of her brief history:

Phases of her childhood lurked in her aspect still. As she walked along today, for all her bouncing, handsome womanliness, you could sometimes see her twelfth year in her cheeks, or her ninth sparkling from her eyes, and even her fifth would flit over the curves of her mouth now and then. (Tess, p.43)

- × Hardy's presentation of Tess as "a pure woman" enraged Victorian sensibility which failed to appreciate what Hardy perceives so well that there is a gulf of a difference between moral worth and simple chastity. Is Tess then a victim of society or of nature, or of the two men who are incapable of loving her? Her seduction by Alec provokes social censure, and Tess suffers from a sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society. Later, as Hardy reflects on this, he remarks, "But for the world's opinion these experiences would have been simply a liberal education!" (Tess, p.135). Henry James has called this novel "vile" because its heroine, suffering tremendous pressures, is seduced and has an illegitimate child; later marries but is deserted by her husband; lives with her seducer and eventually

kills him. Despite her bizarre life and all that she goes through, Tess remains vitally alive, gentle and loyal, and has the straightforward sensitivity and natural simplicity of one who has lived close to nature. Vulnerable though she is, Tess is able to come back to life and living after so much of hurt. At Talbothays, she is supremely happy:

The sapling which had rooted down to a poisonous stratum on a spot of its own sowing had been transplanted to a deeper soil. (Tess, p.168)

The depth and beauty of her character lay "not in its achievements, but in its aims and impulses; its true history lay not among the things done but among things willed" (Tess, p.388). She remains the most admirable person in the novel, essentially much above the two men who wrong her. Both Alec and Angel have mistaken and false ideas of human relationships. While Alec plays the aristocrat to an unsuspecting young girl, Angel lives under the illusion that there is a native purity among all working class women. To him, Tess's attractiveness is added to by her working class identity. Both these concepts cruelly undermine the individual human values which are central to human relationships. Tess thus becomes the unwitting victim of social prejudices and misconceptions and illusions. Once wronged, Tess finds it impossible to escape her past. An unfair moral code condemns her, the victim, and not the seducer. Angel too persists in censuring Tess while

he extenuates his own sins. She is vulnerable not only sexually, but also socially and economically. Alec and Angel together embody the polar attitudes to women, physical passion and idealization:

Why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman the man, many thousand years of analytic philosophy have failed to explain. (Tess, pp.107-8)

Hardy mourns the irony of life as he ponders over its strangeness. Tess is rooted in her cultural origins which provide the rational basis of her sense of guilt after the death of Prince. After subordinating her needs to the more urgent needs of her family, she goes to claim kinship with the rich cousins of Trantridge. At first "a mere vessel of emotion untinctured by experience", Tess is not a dumb victim of social forces, but has awareness, and her education has given her articulateness but does not make her estranged (Tess, p.42):

Tess demands nothing that can be regarded as the consequence of deracination or an overwrought will; she is not gratuitously restless or neurotically bored; she is spontaneously committed to the most fundamental needs of human existence.³²

She is at ease in her natural surroundings. She also feels discomfort at her difficult social place; a shiftless family reeling under poverty, which compels her to yield her independence and approach the rich "cousins".

After the betrayal by Alec, she is really "harried, at a slowly increasing pace as the book goes on".³³ That while at Trantridge Tess is not wholly immune to Alec's trite charms suggests that she is not just "a stiff bundle of virtue".³⁴ She "had been stirred to confused surrender awhile" (Tess, p.117). After this unfortunate incident, Tess is a changed person "who did not find her especial burden in material things" (Tess, p.110). She becomes more conscious of her surroundings and of her fellow-men. In response to the sign-painter's words, she says, "Pooh - I don't believe God said such things" (Tess, p.116). Her courage is remarkable. In response to Alec's remark that she does not love him, she replies:

"I have never really and truly loved you, and I think I never can," she added mournfully. "Perhaps, of all things, a lie on this thing would do the most good to me now, but I have honour enough left, little as 'tis, not to tell that lie. If I did love you I may have the best o' causes for letting you know it. But I don't." (Tess, p.113)

Tess is not a broken woman in any sense. Notwithstanding her suffering, she cannot suppress the vitality that is integral to her, as she "throbbingly resume(d) her walk" (Tess, p.116). Her representative nature is unmistakable:

She felt that she could do well to be useful again - to taste anew sweet independence at

any price. The past was past; whatever it had been it was no longer at hand. Whatever its consequences, time would close over them, they would all in a few years be as if they had never been, and she herself grassed down and forgotten. Meanwhile the trees were just as green as before; the birds sang and the sun shone as clearly now as ever. The familiar surroundings had not darkened because of her grief nor sickened because of her pain.

(Tess, pp.126-7)

At Talbothays, Tess becomes herself once again, and reaches a radiant fulness. Because of her experience, she becomes a more thoughtful woman, making her, ironically, Angel's counterpart:

Symbols of reflectiveness passed into her face, and a note of tragedy at times into her voice. Her eyes grew larger and more eloquent. She became what could have been called a fine creature ... a woman whom the turbulent experiences of the last year or two had quite failed to demoralize. (Tess, p.135)

By her own assertion, Tess is "only a peasant by position, not by nature" (Tess, p.275). She has both dignity and refinement. This young village girl is distinguished by her fresh innocence, her genealogy and the shiftless and witless parents. However, Hardy makes a special case of Tess not merely by projecting an utterly blameless Tess. But under pressure of her peculiar circumstances, Tess does become more

sinned against than sinning. She is not unimplicated in the happenings of her life. Because of her involvement, Tess becomes a comprehensive character in whom opposing impulses are in constant friction. Once her initial period of sorrow is over,

almost at a leap Tess changed from simple girl to complex woman. (Tess, p.135)

As she picks herself up,

some spirit with her rose automatically as the sap in the twigs. (Tess, p.136)

Her inner world is unique. Her "passing corporeal blight has been her mental harvest" (Tess, p.163). The seduction leaves her with a sense of vulnerability, and the child heroine of the beginning of the book acquires, through the experience, a reflective consciousness. As she recalls the incident, "she had never wholly cared for (Alec), she did not care at all for him now. She had dreaded him, winced before him, succumbed to adroit advantages he took of her helplessness ... That was all" (Tess, p.117). The maturer Tess too suffers at the hands of a man who cannot cope with the implications of her sexuality to which he nevertheless responds. "Her sexuality (is) superbly at ease with itself; she is the only one of Hardy's heroines who does not use it to manipulate or crush men".³⁵ Angel is incapable of appreciating the vibrant richness of Tess. His love is "ethereal to a fault, imaginative to impracticability" (Tess,

p.287). Mary Jacobus sees in Hardy's depiction of Tess a "sustained campaign of rehabilitation" while Tess is made

so blameless that the tragedy of the ordinary becomes the tragedy of the exceptional -- blackening both man and fate in the process.³⁶

Tess is hardly regarded by Hardy as "immune to the experience she undergoes "as Mary Jacobus contends.³⁷ Tess is not a futile exercise in attempted purification of the heroine. Her life is representative of the struggle of a universal archetypal pattern, that of the individual pitted against relentless circumstances. Her marriage with Angel at Talbothays marks the end of the pastoral idyll and the beginning of her greatest suffering and victimization. Everything shows a complete loss of sympathy:

... the complexion even of external things seemed to suffer transmutation as her announcement progressed. The fire in the grate looked impish -- demoniacally funny as if it did not care in the least about her strait ... All material objects around announced their irresponsibility with terrible iteration. (Tess, p.270)

Tess now feels removed from the world where she had known happiness. With Angel gone, and her own survival becoming precarious, life for her becomes increasingly mechanical:

And there was something of the habitude of the wild animal in the unreflecting instinct with which she rambled on -- disconnecting herself by littles from

her uneventful past at every step, obliterating her identity, giving no thought to accidents or contingencies which might give a quick discovery of her whereabouts by others of importance to her own happiness, if not to theirs. (Tess, p.321)

When she goes back to Alex it is for the same reason as that of her first association with this man. Once more, she surrenders herself to him to ease the abject poverty of her family. This self-denial is intensely humiliating but, under the dire circumstances, inescapable. Only by murdering Alec does Tess redeem herself from her submission to him. She is aware of her instincts:

"I feared long ago, when I struck him on the face with my glove, that I might do it some day for the trap he set for me in my simple youth." (Tess, p.436)

This is the response of a long suffering individual who has suffered at the hands of stringent moral codes and cruel personal betrayal:

Her stabbing of Alec is her heroic return through the "door" into the folk fold, the fold of nature and instinct, the anonymous community.³⁸

- x Irving Howe sees Tess as one of the best examples of how a writer, through the intensity of his affection, can shape a cultural stereotype into something that is morally ennobling. Tess faces the isolation and neglect with fortitude, and

she comes to seem Hardy's "most radical claim for the redemptive power of suffering".³⁹ Despite her fall and the consequent isolation due to the standards and conventions of her day, Tess retains^a vibrant responsiveness to life and ultimately moves beyond the stain of her wretched circumstances. "Though a dialectic of negation, Tess reaches purity of spirit even as she fails to satisfy the standards of the world."⁴⁰ In her stoicism in the face of unfortunate situations, Tess becomes the reminder of the traditional ballad heroine. And in the words of William Watson,

Hardy himself proposes no remedies, and suggests no escape -- his business not being to deal in rostrums of social therapeutics. He is content to make his readers pause, and consider, and pity.⁴¹

Hardy's next fictional heroine is both chronologically and temperamentally one of those in whom the ache of modernism is manifest. To Hardy, Sue Bridehead took shape as "a type of woman which has always had an attraction for me".⁴² An early reviewer of Jude the Obscure saw Sue as "the first delineation in fiction of the woman who was coming into notice in her thousands every year -- the woman of the feminist movement -- the slight, pale "bachelor" girl -- the intellectualized, emancipated bundle of nerves that modern conditions were producing".⁴³ Sue does have much in common with the new woman of the last couple of decades of the nineteenth century. But she has not been borrowed from among the feminists and she

belongs to no movement. She is intensely individual, a living woman who does not represent a type, and Hardy does not portray her as a professed feminist.

Lawrence sees in Sue the antithesis of his idea of woman:

She was born with the vital female atrophied in her; she was almost male ...
 Sue is the production of the long selection by man of the woman in whom the female is subordinated to the male principle ...
 But Sue is scarcely a woman at all, though she is feminine enough ...
 yet she wanted some quickening of this atrophied female. She wanted even kisses ... But she could only live in the mind.⁴⁴

It is not that the female in Sue is so atrophied. She is fastidious but what she is repulsed so strongly by is institutionalized sex, the demands of marriage made permissible by the government stamp. Hardy questions in Jude the accepted tradition of marriage which makes demands on the individual. And Sue's is not only a sexual revolt, but is primarily a social one. Hardy

attempts to deal unaffectedly with the fret and fever, derision and disaster, that may press in the wake of the strongest passion known to humanity; to tell, without a mincing of words, of a deadly war waged

between flesh and spirit; and to point the tragedy of unfulfilled aims.⁴⁵

Both Sue and Jude are acutely aware of their experience and of the course they choose. They are no strangers to modern loneliness. "The two of them are linked in seriousness, in desolation, in tormenting kindness, but above all, in overbred nervousness. Theirs is a companionship of the nerves".⁴⁶ Sue's initial pagan joy, passionate and quick, infects Jude. He comes out of his ascetic shell, only to suffer her tantalizing charms. She refuses to conform, choosing to live with men on her own terms. In all her relationships -- with the Christminster graduate, Phillotson, and Jude -- she tries to retain an area of personal freedom. This issue of personal relationships is to become a familiar motif in later novelists. In Sue rages the conflict between personal freedom and commitment to another. The pattern of advance and retreat that she practises with Jude drains him. As she rehearses the wedding ceremony in church with him, "I like to do things like this," she tells him, in the delicate voice of an epicure in emotions.' (*Jude, p.192). Is she being supremely selfish and thoughtless or is this a reflection of an unsettled consciousness?

Irving Howe has seen in Sue "one of the great triumphs of psychological portraiture in the English novel. Sue is that terrifying spectre of our age, before whom men and cultures tremble; she is an interesting girl".⁴⁷ She is

*Jude the Obscure

pitted against harsh and relentless suffering. Though she has struggled against social conventions, despite censure and hostility, she is not presented as an active feminist. Hardy's Sue is not propaganda. Despite all her contradictions and inconsistencies, Sue remains highly individual, thoroughly lovable and charming. Lawrence's interpretation is too simplistic, and is blind to Hardy's complex portrayal of Sue. To her, marriage comes as a disillusion which Jude foresees: "O Susanna Florence Mary! ... You don't know what marriage means!" (Jude, p.189). He on his part has already experienced an ensnarement into marriage. Sue is indignant at the wedding ceremony:

"... my bridegroom chooses me of his own will and pleasure; but I don't choose him. Somebody gives me to him, like a she-ass or a she-goat, or any other domestic animal. Bless your exalted views of women, O Churchmen!" (Jude, p.190)

However, she does not question it further just yet. A fuller realization of what marriage entails comes later. She finds Phillotson repugnant as a husband:

"Though I like Mr. Phillotson as a friend, I don't like him -- it is a torture for me to live with him as a husband! ... there is nothing wrong except my own wickedness, I suppose you'd call it -- a repugnance on my part, for a reason I cannot disclose, and what would not be admitted as one by the

world in general ... what tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes, good^{er} as he is morally! the dreadful contract to feel in a particular way in a matter whose essence is its voluntariness!" (Jude, p.232-3)

She shies away from having to "belong" to a husband. It is now she realizes how naively she has got herself into a tie which she now finds too demanding. In her fresh perception of herself there, there is a memory of Bathsheba:

"before I married him I had never thought out fully what marriage meant, even though I knew. It was idiotic of me -- there is no excuse, I was old enough, and I thought I was very experienced ... I am certain one ought to be allowed to undo what one has done so ignorantly! I daresay it happens to lots of women, only they submit and I kick ..." (Jude, pp.235-6)

Hardy had once disavowed the view that Jude was associated with the marriage question and denied that it was a manifesto on it. But such a plea is somewhat negated by the 1912 post-script of Jude:

My opinion at that time, if I remember rightly, was what it is now, that a marriage should be dissolvable as soon as it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties -- being then essentially and morally no marriage.

The question of marriage is evidently not an afterthought. By now, Ibsenism has aroused woman from her long slumber.

And feminist literature is also evident in novels like Henry James's The Bostonians. But Hardy does not join this bandwagon of writers who focus on this new movement. Although Sue suffers because of the conventional expectations of marriage, her predicament is eventually and essentially her own.

Both Sue and Jude escape their ill-advised first marriages and become parents, but lose their jobs, and their children, and each other. All along Sue has feared irrevocable sexual commitment. But does she find in the free union with Jude a guarantee of the freedom which she cannot have in marriage?

One point illustrating this I could not dwell upon, that though she has children, her intimacies with Jude have never been more than occasional, even though they were living together ... and one of her reasons for fearing the marriage ceremony is that she fears it would be breaking faith with Jude, to withhold herself at pleasure, or altogether, after it; though while uncontracted she feels at liberty to yield herself as seldom as she chooses.⁴⁸

Sue's sexual reserve and intellectual enterprise collapse eventually into "enslavement to forms" (Jude, p.394). While Jude is able to talk of dying "game" even to the end, Sue capitulates. Jude is bewildered:

"What I can't understand in you is your extraordinary blindness to your old logic.

"Is it peculiar to you, or is it common to woman? Is a woman a thinking unit at all, or a fraction always wanting its integer?"
(Jude, p.371)

When Sue is disenchanted with marriage and gains a fresh perception of herself, her conflicts deepen: "I am called Mrs. Richard Phillotson, living a calm wedded life with my counterpart of that name. But I am not really Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies ..." (Jude, p.226). She has never been Mrs. Phillotson any more than she is Mrs. Jude Fawley in her association with Jude. The marriage contract cannot reduce her to a wife whose identity merges into that of her husband. Jude too suffers "the artificial system of things, under which the normal sex impulses turned into devilish gins and springs" (Jude, p.238). In their obtaining freedom from their respective marriages, Hardy is not advocating the cause of divorce so much as he is questioning the institution and convention of marriage,

whether marriage, as we at present understand it, is such a desirable goal for all women as it is assumed to be.⁴⁹

It is not only the woman who struggles against coercion:

"Still, Sue, it is no worse for the woman than it is for the man. That's what some women fail to see, and instead of protesting against the conditions they protest against the man, the other victim ..." (Jude, p.306)

Free from their earlier ties, Jude and Sue recoil from the forms of civil marriage and ritual of a church wedding. There is ^aprecarious balance in their relationship, and though Lawrence is probably right that Jude and Sue never know "actual, sure footed happiness",⁵⁰ that the twain were happy -- between their times of sadness -- was indubitable. This is apparent to Arabella who cynically begins to wonder if this "more exceptional couple" could be married at all (Jude, p.315).

What breaks Sue is the loss of her children, and this brings on her self -- flagelleting impulse. She now gives in, choosing to go back to Phillotson, to atone for her 'sins', for what she now sees as wrong in her life with Jude. She chooses to suffer marriage with Phillotson: "We should mortify the flesh -- the terrible flesh -- the curse of Adam" (Jude, p.364). When she first asks Phillotson to let her go to Jude, she finds in Mill a basis for her assertion of her individuality and freedom:

'She, or he, "who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need for any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation"' (Jude, p.244).

Her eventual breakdown contrasts with Jude's steadfast adherence to these values for which they have both suffered so much. She now wants to shackle herself to a marriage with Phillotson, forgetting her own earlier belief in the

words of Mill. The blow of her bereavement destroys her reasoning. Her earlier earnestness gives way to timidity and submission: "who were we," she laments at the death of her children, "to think we could act as pioneers!" (Jude, p.372). In going back to Phillotson, her deepest self is suppressed. Though she gives in to the expectations of conventional morality, three months later she finds that she is still in love with Jude: "I find I still love him -- O, grossly!" (Jude, p.413). Meanwhile she has endured Phillotson with clenched teeth and she is "quite a staid, worn woman now. 'Tis the man -- she can't stomach up, even now!" (Jude, p.428).

On the other hand, Jude's belief in the validity of his bond with Sue is never shaken, and he is rightly perceptive: ("You are, upon the whole, a sort of fay, or sprite -- not a woman" (Jude, p.373). His anguished accusation comes when she retracts from her association with Jude. "You have never loved me as I love you -- never -- never!" (Jude, p.373). When Jude reproaches her: "Sue, Sue, you are not worth a man's love!" (Jude, p.408), she cannot endure it:

She rushed to him and, with her mouth on his, continued: "I must tell you -- O I must -- my darling Love! It has been -- only a church marriage -- an apparent marriage, I mean!" (Jude, p.409)

Married again to Phillotson, her deepest self is negated as

she represses her love for Jude. Her living death within the confines of social morality evokes Widow Edlin's appropriate response:

"Ah! poor Soul! Weddings be funerals
'a b'lieve nowadays." (Jude, p.417)

There is an ironic reversal in the stances of Jude and Sue. At first Sue and her heathen gods are set against Jude's reading the Greek Testament. Sue the pagan weans Jude away from his ascetic Christianity. But later it is Sue who retracts from her earlier beliefs. The death of their children comes as an added burden to Sue and Jude, as if in consequence of their following natural laws in the face of a hostile environment and severe social censure. Sue comes to understand that "There is something external to us which says "you shan't!" First it said, "you shan't learn!" Then it said, "you shan't labour!" Now it says, "you shan't love!"' (Jude, p.357). Nature seems to conspire against them. At Sue's capitulation, Jude observes:

"She was once a woman whose intellect was to mine like a star to a benzolene lamp; who saw all my superstitions as cobwebs that she could brush away with a word. Then a little affliction came to us, and her intellect broke, and she veered round to darkness, strange difference of sex, that time and circumstance, which enlarge the views of most men, narrow the views of women almost invariably." (Jude, p.419)

Despite all her inconsistencies, there is something special in Sue that endears her to us. It is Lawrence who articulates the question that we are all left asking:

She was Sue Bridehead, something very particular,
 Why was there no place for her ?
 She had a being, special and beautiful ... why
 must man be so utterly irreverent, that he
 approaches each being as if it were a no being?
 Why must it be assumed that Sue is an "ordinary"
 woman -- as if such a thing existed ? Why must
 she feel ashamed if she is so specialized ?⁵¹

Exasperating, yet fascinating, Sue remains "an utterly charming and vibrant creature".⁵² In Jude, Hardy explores complex, psychologically disturbed people. Rosemary Sumner sees the central contrast in Jude between "well-balanced resilient Jude and neurotic, vulnerable Sue".⁵³ At a major crisis, Sue loses her equanimity. In the character of Sue and in the sufferings of Jude, Hardy does not seek to present a picture of his disenchantment with tradition. He explores the relation between the world and this new woman of his times: intelligent, vivacious, highly individualistic, professing to be unconventional, yet capitulating to those very forms of life that she has tried to repudiate:

Everdene and Sue Bridehead

The specific sequence of heroines from Bathsheba¹ to Ursula Brangwen and Constance Chatterley, has some relevance to a study of the shaping of experience by Hardy and Lawrence. All four heroines are carefully shown to pass from virgin

innocence to the wider experience of a wider and threatening sexual morality. But the first two are finally guided or beaten into a retreat, while the latter two are encouraged to persist.⁵⁴

As the "thick cluds ... of modern problematic consciousness falls across the horizon of Wessex",⁵⁵ individuals begin to see themselves in a new light. As women begin to shake off their traditional roles, there is a change in attitude towards women in fiction. Woman's place in society is redesigned: woman not as the new ruler, but as the counterpart of man. Hardy opens new vistas in human sexuality, and "it was Hardy's openness to the feminine principle that drew D.H. Lawrence to his work and led him to see there, with some justice, a kinship with his own".⁵⁶ Hardy opens the doors to the existence of "a strange, dark continent that we do not explore".⁵⁷ It is this small cautious advance to the edge of an area into which Lawrence boldly plunges.

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CHAPTER-III

WOMEN IN LAWRENCE : THE "LIVING STRIVING SHE"

Lawrence is a worthy successor to the tradition of Hardy. He too looks at woman as a definite, separate entity with singleness and individuality. In all his major novels, he has focussed a great deal of attention on women. His central interest lies in the relationship between man and woman. The individual's life can be fulfilled in a creative, valid marriage. This great relationship is germane to every other human relationship. Woman is no longer the submissive subordinate but a person in her own right. Lawrence's woman does not merge herself into the person of the man she loves. She retains her singleness even in union. Kingsley Widmer sees in Lawrence's works

... The twentieth century well-to-do and cultivated Anglo-Saxon woman, no longer subservient to masculine purpose, and bored, wilful and half-believing her romantic and ideal fantasies of herself
...¹

But the Lawrencean woman is not full of brittle romantic fantasies. Her wilfulness is coupled with courage and tenacity and confidence. She picks herself up from struggles and realises that she has "got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen" (*LCL, p.5). She moves away from, and rises above, the constraints set on her by society.

* Lady Chatterley's Lover

✓ Lawrence is immersed in feminine sensibility and delves with compassionate empathy into feminine psychology. As he redesigns woman's social and sexual identity, he holds no brief for the strident feminist. The female principle must be in harmonious conjunction with the male. However, his woman must come into her own before she can have a fulfilling relationship with a man. In personal relations, the closer the man and woman are, the greater and more complete their mutual acceptance of each other's separateness and otherness.

Critics have censured Lawrence for not being sympathetic towards the women he creates in his novels. Faith Pullin contends that in Sons and Lovers, the three women -- Mrs. Morel, Miriam and Clara -- are all "manipulated in Paul's effort at self-realization, the effort to become himself".² On the other hand, Lydia Blanchard maintains that the ideal Lawrencean woman like Ursula defines herself "in relation neither to children nor to men";³ seeing in the character of Ursula the ideally self-sufficient and independent woman.

These are two rather extreme views on Lawrence's attitude to the women in his novels. (In all his major works, Lawrence has portrayed at length women in relation to their world, to the men they love, and how these women try to find fulfilment in love. In Sons and Lovers, Dorothy Van Ghent discerns "an organic disturbance in the relationships of men

and women",⁴ and this thread of disturbance is manifested through his major fiction. Both man and woman struggle against the ravaging effects of a mechanized society and are questing for the new relation which is one in which, as Birkin sees, man and woman would be like "two, single stars balanced in conjunction" (*W in L, p.210).

As he probes into feminine psychology embodied in uprooted or distressed women, Lawrence depicts the tension between them and society:

Let it my soul be blind than commit
the vast wickedness of acquiescence,⁵

says he. Lawrence does not want his women to merely conform. His wilful woman of spirit must assert herself without desire for domination. In "his heart of hearts, ... (Lawrence) always dreaded women, felt that they were in the end more powerful than men",⁶ and woman must voluntarily and spontaneously yield her stronger will in reciprocal response to the man. In the relationships he portrays, Lawrence seeks a way in which the female will and spirit can be harnessed to achieve a mutually fulfilling relationship in which there is no loss or submersion of personal identity:

... the love between a man and a woman,
when it is whole, is dual. It is a
melting into pure communion, and it is
the friction of sheer sensuality ... In
pure communion I become whole in love.

* Women in Love

And in pure fierce passion of sensuality
 I am burned into essentiality. I am
 driven from the matrix into sheer separate
 distinction. I become my single
 self, invincible and unique, as the gems
 were once perhaps driven into themselves
 out of the confusion of earths. The woman
 and I, we are the confusion of earths. Then
 in the fire of their extreme sensual love,
 in the friction of intense destructive
 flames, I am destroyed and reduced to her
 essential otherness. It is a destructive
 fire, the profane love. But it is the only
 fire that will purify us into singleness,
 fuse us from the chaos into our own unique
 gem-like separateness of being.⁷

This separateness of being is what Lawrence envisages for his
 men and women as they struggle to realise a satisfying
 relationship which does not entail subjugation.

In his thinly disguised autobiographical novel,
Sons and Lovers, Lawrence gropes for the kind of novel he would
 eventually write. He creates powerful characters, but the
 concept of the new woman is explored only in his later novels,
The Rainbow and Women in Love. In this early novel, complex
 psychological pressures go to shape the fictional personality
 of Paul, and they affect his relations with the women.
 Gertrude Morel, the middle-class woman of some refinement and
 education who marries a miner is a very strong influence on

Paul during his early years. When her initial passion for her husband fades away, she turns her attention and affection towards her sons, first William and after his death, towards Paul. Mrs Morel is the matriarch of this miner's family, a symbol of possessive motherhood and reminiscent of another such mother, Mistress Yeobright in Hardy's The Return of the Native. "Delilah-like",⁸ she has a crippling effect on her husband's self-esteem. In this she anticipates those later women -- Anna and Gudrun and Hermione -- who strive to dominate their men's wills and somehow rob them of their "legacy" of male authority. This twisted desire to "possess" other person's arises from the failure to respect the individuality and "otherness" of the other person. Miriam too wishes to possess Paul, and consequently comes into conflict with Mrs Morel who has a strong hold over her son. She lives too much in the spirit and denies her own natural, spontaneous womanhood. Instead she takes upon herself the mantle of the suffering martyr.

Miriam is an intense person who seems to live through and for her soul:

And she was cut off from ordinary life, by her religious intensity which made the world for her a nunnery garden, or a paradise, where sin and knowledge were not, or else an ugly cruel thing, (*S and L, p.185)

* Sons and Lovers

We see this intensity on a number of occasions. "She madly wanted her little brother of four to let her swathe him and stifle him in her love" (S and L, pp.177-8). This is characteristic of Miriam and it is this kind of stifling possessive love that she has for Paul. After Paul has been ill:

... she felt he would be weak. Then she would be stronger than he. Then she could love him. If she could be mistress of him in his weakness, take care of him, if he could depend on her, if she could, as it were, have him in her arms, how she could love him! (S and L, p.178)

Fiercely possessive about Paul, Miriam wants him "all to herself. But he must be made abstract first" (S and L, p.214). She can love him only when he makes no demands on her. What she wants is a mystical communion with Paul, for that is all her unnatural spiritual nature permits her to do. She tries to remain independent of him even while drawing him towards herself.

Miriam inherits this inordinate intensity from her mother who "exalted everything -- even a bit of housework -- to the place of religious trust" (S and L, p.182). Her intense spirituality limits her. She secludes herself from reality, and because of her inclination to be mystical, she "breathes religion in (her) nostrils, and sees the whole of life as a mist thereof" (S and L, p.177). Despite her wish

to give Paul the support of her strength if he should depend on her, she instinctively resists his masculine authority. There is in Paul too a wish to avoid her excessive intensity. He is aware that Miriam "wants the soul (of) his body" (S and L, p.339) and what she wants with him is a 'soul union' from which Paul instinctively shrinks away.

Miriam's strange intensity is brought out in the flower scenes too. "So her friend, her companion, her lover, was Nature" (S and L, p.205). And she sees Paul "slender and firm, as if the setting sun had given him to her" (S and L, p.205). And it is her fierce intensity that bothers Paul constantly:

"Oh, you make me knit the brows of my very soul, and cogitate ... I'm so damned spiritual with you always!" he cried. (S and L, p.232)

For her, the soul is God's to be offered if need be, in sacrifice to appease Paul. She would, with clenched teeth, give herself up to him like a sacrificed martyr, just so his soul remains hers. She supplicates before God, dedicating her love for Paul to God. She is hypersensitive to the physical life -- the cycle of birth and begetting -- on the farm and because she cannot bear "the faintest suggestion of such intercourse ... she felt as if her whole soul coiled into knots of shame" (S and L, p.212). Her perpetual air of sanctity and fervent spirituality infuriates Paul. She must give herself up to him to the greater glory of God, and sees in Paul her own Christ figure:

"Make me love him splendidly,
because he is Thy son," she cries
(S and L, p.212)

Paul attempts to escape this suffocating religiosity. In her unnatural intensity and her propensity for glorious suffering Miriam anticipates Hermione Roddice of Women in Love.

When Miriam does give her physical being in ritual slaughter to Paul, it is only after her relationship with him is threatened by his new relationship with Clara. Here we are reminded of Hardy's Sue Bridehead who gives in finally to Jude's passion for fear of losing him to Arabella who makes her sudden re-appearance in his life.

Miriam's sacrificial solemnity makes Paul wish for a second that "he were sexless, or dead" (S and L, p.354). She is incapable of abandon: "There was no looseness or abandon about her. Everything was gripped stiff with intensity and her effort, overcharged, closed in on herself" (S and L, p.191). She lacks Clara's natural abandon. Unlike Miriam, Clara has a liberating influence on Paul. "She may have at times overpowered him," says Niven, "but we must not make light of Lawrence's words at their moment of separation!"⁹

Together they had received the baptism
of life, each through the other.
(S and L, p.439)

Furthermore, Clara is accepted by Mrs Morel like Miriam has

never been. Clara brings him back into touch with life again after "his natural fire of love ... (has been) transmuted into the fine stream of thought" (S and L, p.214). Clara's strangeness helps Paul see the unknown forces in himself:

Her history was open on the surface,
but its inner meaning was hidden from
everybody. (S and L, p.323)

Though she is not a well-defined character, there is a vivid presentation of her sensual power over Paul. She seems to him what Lawrence was later to term Magna Mater:

There was no himself. The grey and
black eyes of Clara, her bosom
coming down on his, her arm that
held gripped between his hands, were
all that existed. Then he felt
himself small and helpless, her
towering in her force above him.
(S and L, p.403)

No satisfying relationship is reached in Sons and Lovers.
The search continues into the later novels. 

When Lawrence felt Miriam and Clara and Paul's affairs were not "worth writing about", he planned another work whose "germ" would be the theme of "woman becoming individual, self-responsible, taking her own initiative".¹⁰
The book he had in mind was The Sisters, which was eventually

published as two books: The Rainbow and Women in Love. Here we see a more mature Lawrence, and in these two novels, he has brought alive a "living, striving, she".¹¹

The Rainbow deals with the plight of the individual in a world of social diversification. The three generations of Brangwens represent the stages of development as it were in the man-woman relationship which Lawrence thinks is "the great relationship"¹² to which all other relations are subsidiary. And in this relation woman is no more the subservient subordinate. It is the anonymous Brangwen women, early in The Rainbow, who look outward to "the world beyond" (*R, p.9), away from "the heat of the blood" (R, p.9) and "the drowse of blood intimacy" (R, p.8). They are no longer content with the natural world they have known and are drawn towards "the battle ... being waged on the edge of the unknown" (R, p.9). While their own men are predictable, the vicar belongs to a world that lay beyond the known and familiar sphere:

She knew her husband, but in the vicar's nature was that which passed beyond her knowledge. (R, pp.9-10)

This need to know is seen in every important woman in The Rainbow as well as in Women in Love. The early Brangwen women wish for an alternative to the constrictions and the

* The Rainbow

closeness of their surroundings, to move outward and beyond any constraints.

The unknown world is introduced into the Marsh by the presence of Lydia Lensky. And Tom Brangwen is soon to find out that she is eventually unknowable, and he is unable to break through her essential foreignness. In this, and in the subsequent relationships that Lawrence portrays, every individual needs his freedom. And woman too needs a firm separateness, from which she can establish a living relationship without losing her identity.

When Lydia Lensky enters the novel alone on a country road with her "curious, absorbed flitting motion, as if she were passing unseen by everybody" (R, p.29), she is already marked off as different from any woman in the neighbourhood. Despite her "long, marital embrace" (R, p.12) with Tom Brangwen, the sense of mystery in Lydia is never totally dispelled and she remains distant. Together, they discover "a new universe" and "they were together in an elemental embrace beyond their superficial foreignness" (R, p.59). However, despite this, there still remains in Lydia a part that is "still foreign and unknown to (Tom)" (R, p.59). From her closed, personal world, she shuts out her husband, whereupon Tom Brangwen turns towards Lydia's daughter for companionship. But through the first two years of married life they do have

the complete confirmation. Their feet trod strange ground of knowledge, their footsteps were lit up with discovery. Wherever they walked, it was well, the world re-echoed around them in discovery. They went gladly and forgetful. Everything was lost and everything was found. The new world was discovered, it remained only to be explored. (R, p.95)

But Tom and Lydia do not go on to explore this new world, this other "circle of existence" (R, p.95) that opens up before them. Perhaps it is because the first Brangwen couple do not go beyond their discovery of each other that Tom Brangwen's life remains "unfinished and unformed" (R, p.135) and why at his death, Lydia observes:

"I shared life with you, I belong in my own way to eternity", said Lydia Brangwen, her heart cold, knowing her own singleness. (R, p.251)

Between Tom and Lydia, there have been polarities which never meet although each opens out doorways to the other and "met to the span of the heavens, and she (Anna) was free to play in the place beneath, between" (R, p.97). The quest for the unknown is left to the next generation.

The young Anna wants to assert herself. Her childhood activities and pleasures are self-contained, with the authority as well as the assertiveness of a woman. Even as a

child, "Anna was very conscious of her derivation from her mother, in the end, and of her alienation" (R, p.87). Her "passion for dominance" (R, p.85) becomes progressively stronger as she grows older. She is a child of limited horizons who can feel no pity for the village cretin because "he's a horrid man" (R, p.89). Anna struggles against her own natural curiosity:

It was her passion to avoid thinking,
to avoid it, to save herself. (R, p.105)

She recoils from whatever she finds unfamiliar and restricts herself to the known and familiar.

Anna's relationship with Will is initially intense but ultimately incomplete and unfulfilled. In her marriage with Will, she continually seeks to dominate him. This "vain, independent minx" (R, p.135) has no tolerance for her husband and from this crops up the tension and disharmony of their opposing wills. There is the "confrontation of elemental principles".¹³ And in this confrontation, Will's spirit is finally crushed:

He ceased to fret about his life. He
relaxed his will, and let everything go.
(R, p.207)

Anna weaves around herself a self-satisfied world in which Will has no place and he feels "she jeered at his soul" (R, p.171). Her indifferent, uncaring manner towards him makes him feel that "never had his soul felt so flayed and

uncreated" (R, p.152).

There is a destructiveness in Anna, a strong desire to dominate over him and to constantly mock Will's manhood:

She was not to be interfered with.
Was she not herself, and he the
outsider? (R, p.165)

Her closed responsiveness twists her love for Will:

They glowered at each other, he with
rage in his hands, and she with her
soul fierce with victory. (R, p.163)

She holds herself back and shuts him out from her private world. To her, Will's passion for her "was always the unknown, ... and she clung fiercely to her known self" (R, p.167). Afraid of exploring the unknown, Anna contents herself with her withdrawal into motherhood. She lacks "the confidence in the abidingness of love" (R, p.167). To her, Will is an "insulator, the obstruction" (R, p.168) between her and her limited world, and she resents what she thinks is an attempt on the part of Will to assert himself over her while she wants to preserve herself from the unknown, she realises that "they were opposites, not complements" (R, p.169). She belongs totally to the human sphere and to her new-found role as child-bearer in which her husband's part is only incidental. With him, she felt she must suffocate, and she fought him off. While she, the Magna

Mater defeats Will, hers is a limited and hollow victory because she has denied "the adventure to the unknown" (R, p.196).

Pritchard sees Anna as representative of a new woman:

Lawrence indicates perceptively the parallel between the couples' sexual relationship, and social changes: as women achieve greater social liberation, it becomes more and more difficult for men to fulfil their traditional roles.¹⁴

Against her overriding presence, Will does try to establish his lost authority, and fails. And Anna does not liberate herself from her self-satisfied world, from which she ridicules her husband:

But why must she start on the journey?
... With satisfaction she relinquished
the adventure to the unknown. She was
bearing her children ... she was a door,
and a threshold, to herself. (R, pp.195-6)

This strongly assertive womanhood is also seen in Lettie Beardsall of The White Peacock. She undermines the man's hold on life and rejects manhood for gentility. She chooses security and comfort, going against the promptings of her heart, and despite her stronger attraction for George:

Having reached that point in a woman's career when most, perhaps all, of the things in life seem worthless and insipid, she had determined to put up with it, to ignore her own potentialities into the vessel of another or others, and to live life at second hand. This peculiar abnegation of self is the resource of a woman for the escaping of the responsibilities of her own development. (*WP, pp. 280-1)

She has not enough courage to take on the responsibilities of her self. She retreats from life and is content to lead "a small indoor existence with artificial light and padded upholstery. Only occasionally, hearing the winds of life outside, she clamoured to be out in the black, keen storm" (WP, p.281). Like Anna, she retreats into mindless domesticity, letting the unknown pass. Despite her uncertainty and her wish to be free from her engagement to Leslie, she does marry him. It is left to the later heroines to respond to "the winds of life outside".

Like Sue Bridehead, Lettie does not risk or commit herself. Hers is a token proffer, superficial and incomplete. The fear of responsible commitment leads her to marriage with the lesser man. She weaves around herself a world which she need not share with anybody else. She puts herself in a position of advantage over that of the man:

* The White Peacock

A woman who has a child in her arms
is a tower of strength, a beautiful
unassailable tower of strength that
may in its turn stand quietly
dealing death. (WP, p.332)

This is true of Mrs Morel and Anna Brangwen as well. Each transfers her affection towards the child, clearly shutting the man away from this closed world. Anna limits her own horizon and, unlike her parents, she refuses to open out to the existence of a world beyond herself. And she cannot be seen as the precursor of the ideal Lawrencean woman. Resisted by Anna, Will remains always unformed and unsure about himself. Later in the novel we see:

After all these years, he began to
see a loophole of freedom ... The
growing up of his daughters, their
developing rejection of old forms
set him also free. (R, p.355)

However, Gudrun's rejection of old forms has to wait until
Women in Love.

Very early in Ursula's life, a special intimacy grows between her and her father. And even at this early stage, Ursula has a strong sense of her singleness:

She passionately resented her mother's
superficial authority. She wanted to
assert her own detachment ... She was
always herself, the world outside was

accidental. Even her mother was accidental to her: a condition that happened to endure. (R, pp.218-9)

She isolates herself from the mass world and it is in her that the spirit of "woman becoming individual, self-responsible, taking her own initiative" is strongest. With uncompromising eagerness, Ursula wants a complete realization of self, a "oneness with the infinite" (R, p.441). She must first slough off the ties of an ordinary life. After she withdraws from her chaotic atmosphere of her home, she escapes into the school she attends at Nottingham. Here she experiences disillusion through her relationship with her class teacher, Winifred Inger. Miss Inger is "a rather beautiful woman of twenty-eight, a fearless seeming clean type of modern girl whose very independence betrays her sorrow" (R, p.336). She is a believer in scientific humanism, has great faith in the Women's Movement and absolute contempt for men who, she believes, "have lost the capacity for doing" (R, p.343). Ursula's admiration and love for the older woman lead to a lesbian attachment which, however, later leaves Ursula feeling cold and nauseated. Winifred Inger wishes to initiate Ursula into her own position of thought: that "truth does not lie beyond humanity" and that "the human desire is the criterion of all truth and all good". (R, p.342). But Ursula turns away from this "heavy cleaving of moist clay, that cleaves because it has no life of its own" (R, p.344),

to strive for what she really wants. "She wanted to go away, to be free to stand straight up to her own height" (R, p.419).

As a young school teacher at Wiggiston, she realises that "the whole situation was wrong and ugly" (R, p.388) and that society is dying on account of it. Away from "the close, physical, limited life of herded domesticity" (R, p.354), Ursula now finds that "the prison was round her now" (R, p.372), "shut in with unliving, spectral people" (R, p.368). She must break away, though not "into her fields where she was happy. She must have her place in the working world, be a recognized member with full rights there. It was more important to her than fields and sun and poetry, at this time. But she was only the more its enemy" (R, p.410). She will continue to strive for "joy, happiness, and permanency" (R, p.411) within modern industrialized society:

She would fight and hold her place in this state also, in the world of work and man's convention. (R, p.406)

The need for Ursula is to be free of the barriers of a restricted society. For her, it is not mere female emancipation:

She had within her the strange, passionate knowledge of religion and living for transcending the limits of the automatic system that contained the vote. But her fundamental organic knowledge had as yet to take form and rise to utterance ... she felt that somewhere, in something, she was not free. And she wanted to be. She was in revolt. For

once she were free she could get somewhere.
 Ah, the wonderful, real somewhere that was
 beyond her, the somewhere that she felt deep,
 deep within her. (R, p.406)

Ursula struggles beyond the known world, her soul now moving
 towards another landscape:

To be oneself was a supreme, gleaming
 triumph of infinity. (R, p.441)

at
 She looks at Skrebensky as her "key, the nucleus of the new
 world" (R, p.442), but once again, she feels "as if she were
 a blank wall in his direction, without windows or outgoing"
 (R, p.356). But unlike her sister Gudrun, and Hermione
 Roddice later, Ursula's concern is not self-gratification.
 She is a life-enhancing person and she cannot live within the
 limited concept of love that Anton Skrebensky has. His
 self-abnegating tendencies are evident in his response to such
 ideals as "nation" and "property". He is a product of the
 modern world of social commitment. Ursula resists Skrebensky's
 concept of love. She yearns to be free:

If only she could but get away to the clean,
 free moonlight. (R, p.319)

She struggles hard to gain a foothold in "The Man's World"
 (R, title ch.13) "as a separate social individual" (R, p.364).

While her forbears face struggle and strife during
 marriage, Ursula tries to resolve hers before marriage. Her
 rejection of Skrebensky establishes a victory of sorts over

him:

So she held him there, the victim
consumed, annihilated. She had
triumphed: he was not anymore.
(R, p.322)

Though her pride is satisfied, Ursula is aware that there
has been no real victory. With him, she has become a fierce
"beaked harpy" (R, p.480), that melts his heart in fear.
She rejects Skrebensky because he is too known:

Then a yearning for something unknown
came over her, a passion for something
she knew not what. (R, p.478)

With this realization comes the need to try and strike her
own roots after throwing over the constraints that her rela-
tionship with Skrebensky imposes upon her. Ursula represents
in The Rainbow, "the great devious onward-flowing stream of
conscious human blood" which draws its warmth from ^{and} responds
to "the old tribal fire", but which must grow into greater
conscious life. Her heredity gives her these disparate urges:
her Brangwen connection responds unconsciously to the call of
instinct while the Polish blood of her grandmother Lensky
makes her demand sensitive awareness and satisfaction of her
intelligence. She needs to have both in harmony.

At the end of the novel, Ursula remains an unattached
person. Lawrence is one of the first novelists to deal with
this theme. Keith Sagar says:

Ursula is emancipated and uprooted:
 She is free as her parents and grand-
 parents were not, but free as a woman
 overboard without a life belt is freer
 than those trapped aboard a sinking
 ship. In which direction shall she
 strike out?¹⁵

Hers is a characteristically modern dilemma. At college,
 Ursula is full of self-doubt and despair:

She did not know what she was. Only
 she was full of rejection, of refusal.
 Always, always she was spitting out of
 her mouth the ash and grit of disillusion,
 of falsity. (R, p.437)

She fails to establish a bond with Skrebensky but, despite
 the mistakes she makes, there is a basic vitality in her.
 Her split with a circumscribed society is inevitable:

Against those who represent their
 society fully, the Skrebenskys, the
 Winifred Ingers, the uncle Tom
 Brangwens, the irrevocably lost, are
 the Ursulas, alienated and struggling
 towards humanity.¹⁶

Ursula's disillusion with modern society does
 not leave her embittered or cynical. It is transcended by
 her courage and she now has new dreams and her faith in life
 remains firm. There is a sense of desiccation in her inner
 life when she struggles unsuccessfully against the diverse

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constrictions, of her home, her job as well, as in that unfulfilled love for Skrebensky. Towards the end, as her fevers subside, "she sat to watch a new creation" (R, p.494). Ursula's new creation is not seen until Women In Love. The Rainbow very unconvincingly ends on this new note:

She saw in the rainbow the earth's new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the overarching heaven.
(R, p.496)

It is only half-concluded. But there is yet the glimmer of a promise in the future.

The Ursula of Women in Love does not follow straight from the Ursula of The Rainbow who has just begun to come to terms with herself after her unsuccessful relationship with Anton Skrebensky.

Lawrence wished to "do a novel about Love Triumphant one day ... My work for women, better than the suffrage".¹⁷ And for Ursula, in The Rainbow, "as for Maggie, the liberty of women meant something real and deep" (R, p.406). But unlike Maggie, she is no suffragette nor does Lawrence make Ursula a feminist on the warpath. She looks for a somewhere that admits the infinite. She looks not only for independence but also for dependence and interdependence. As she moves towards her dream of happiness and permanency, she must break from "that form of

life wherein Maggie must remain enclosed" (R, p.412). In her there is no sadness about the "inevitable passing-away of things" (R, p.411) because in Ursula there is optimism and faith in her future. By the time we meet Ursula in Women in Love, we see that Lawrence has allowed her to grow from experience during the intervening years:

I must have. Ella Ursula's original name⁷
get some experience before she meets her
Mr Birkin.¹⁸

Ursula is to have an eventually fulfilling relationship with Birkin. The early Brangwen women had looked towards a re-adjustment in their lives. And it is to come in the life of Ursula. Like The Rainbow, Women in Love was to be about "the problem of today, the establishment of a new relation, or the readjustment of the old one, between man and woman".¹⁹

The novel begins with a discussion on marriage between Ursula and Gudrun. To Gudrun, marriage could be an "experience". Just back from her studious life as an art student in London, the "natural, proud indifference" (R, p.335) of the young Gudrun of The Rainbow turns into cynicism:

"Don't you find, that things fail to
materialize? ... Everything withers in
the bud?" (¶W in L, p.55)

* Women In Love

What Gudrun sees as the "inevitable next step", marriage, could also become an experience of unbearable predictability and mundaneness. Ursula remarks:

"But really imagine it; imagine any man one knows, imagine him coming home to one every evening, and giving one a kiss--"

There was a blank pause. "Yes," said Gudrun, in a narrowed voice. "It's just impossible. The man makes it impossible."
(W in L, p.55)

While Gudrun "wanted to be quite definite" (W in L, p.53) and would like a man: "a highly attractive individual of sufficient means" (W in L, p.54), Ursula waits with "sensitive expectancy" (W in L, p.54) until a natural response comes.

Ursula's first meeting with Birkin takes place in her schoolroom. Like Jane Eyre bringing the candles into the room of the blind Rochester, Birkin brings light to Ursula:

"It is so dark," he said, "shall we have a light?" (W and L, p.84)

Ursula wakes up as if from a trance, "she looked like one who is suddenly awakened" (W in L, p.85). This first episode establishes a bond between them.

In The Rainbow, Ursula is repulsed by the scarred lives of the people living in an industrial society, evident in her experience as Standard Five Teacher. Cossethay is marked by its ravaged landscape and the Wiggiston miners are "subjected to slavery to that symmetrical monster of the

colliery" (R, p.350). "No more would (she) subscribe ... to the great machine which has taken as all captive" (R, p.350), but though she is no zealous reformist in the tradition of feminist reformers, she is filled with revulsion for the world of constraints and limits. In Women in Love, her rage at the tyranny of industry upon people has changed almost to irrelevance. She now has a feeling that society is irrelevant for her. Even in the social milieu, the inner nature of Ursula stands apart. There is a solitariness about her as she finds her way, rather tentatively at first, towards Birkin. When they first meet,

Her spirit was active, her life like a
shoot that is growing steadily, but
which has not yet come above ground,
(W in L, p.57)

while

His life seemed uncertain, without any
definite rhythm, any organic meaning.
(W in L, p.58)

They are at about the same stage of their personal growth. As she sees the social world fail her, Ursula's quest turns inwards. If the 'fine flame' of her nature is to be kept alive, she must shed the darkness imposed on her by the world. "I don't want to inherit the earth" (W in L, p.451); instead, for her is "a whole new world to be explored. Birkin offers:

What I want is a strange conjunction with
you ... not meeting and mingling; ... but

an equilibrium, a pure balance of two single beings; as the stars balance each other". (W in L, p.210)

Ursula has responded to Birkin with her natural abandon, tenderness and spontaneity. Birkin mistakes her passion for a desire to be dominating and possessive, like Hermione has been. Hermione seems like a more worldly and extreme version of Miriam of Sons and Lovers. With her acute self-consciousness, "she had sought to make herself invulnerable, unassailable, beyond reach of the world's judgement" (W in L, p.63). In her very deliberateness there is a lack of natural sufficiency in her; instead, there is a terrible void. Her predatory nature, which succeeds in alienating Birkin from her, is in sharp contrast to the natural spontaneity of Ursula. Hermione has a thoroughly cerebral and aesthetic view of all human relations and can respond only to the "mental thrill" (W in L, p.91) of experience.

With "almost insane fury", Birkin turns against "woman (who) was always so horrible and clutching, she had such a lust for possession, a greed of self-importance in love. She wanted to have, to own, to control, to be dominant" (W in L, p.270). His experience with Hermione embitters him against woman. He begins to see Ursula too as the "awful, arrogant queen of life" (W in L, p.270) wishing to possess him while all he wants is singleness even in their union. He becomes hesitant and apprehensive. In the younger Ursula

of The Rainbow, there is in her relationship with Skrebensky some of that feminine arrogance, the kind that Mellors is later to complain of to Lady Chatterley. However, it is not so much possessive arrogance on her part as a certain inadequacy in the man that allows this imbalance. She has seen Skrebensky "just (as) a brick in the whole social fabric" (R, p.328), and he has been unable to bring his self into birth, as if he were a nonentity:

"It seems to be as if you weren't anybody -- as if there weren't anybody there, where you are. Are you anybody, really? You seem like nothing to me!" (R, p.311)

But now, to her Birkin is "unknown", hence infinitely more satisfying. At first she resists his ethereal concept of what their relation should be:

[She] was strictly hostile to him. But she was held to him by some bond, some deep principle. This at once irritated her and saved her. (W in L, p.159)

In the beginning, they resist each other. But their many differences end in reconciliation, and harmony is restored unimpaired.

Ursula, frail and flower-like, yet capable of looking after herself, embodies Lawrence's version of the new woman. She takes her own initiative like her forbears, the Brangwen women at the beginning of The Rainbow, had never been able to do. What they saw as a far-off dream, Ursula

is experiencing. Lawrence's new woman looks for the new, superfine "bliss without desire or insistence anywhere, this ... heaven: to be together in happy stillness" (R, p.328). Ursula would like to forget the pain of evolution, of growing up, by forgetting her past, so that only the achievement remains. However, though the pain of the past cannot be obliterated, Ursula, with Birkin, would like to believe that man has a future, and that love and its beyond are what man needs to work towards:

Ursula quivered.

"I don't know what is going to happen," she said. "I only know we are going somewhere."

Gudrun waited.

"Are you glad?" she asked. Ursula meditated for a moment. "I believe I am very glad," she replied.

But Gudrun read the unconscious brightness on her sister's face, rather than the uncertain tones of her speech.

"But don't you think you'll want the old connection with the world -- father and the rest of us, and all that it means, England and the world of thought -- don't you think you'll need that, really to make a world?"

Ursula was silent, trying to imagine.

"I think," she said at length, involuntarily, "Rupert is right -- one wants a new space to be in, and one falls away from the old." (W in L, p.533)

It is essential to her relationship with Birkin that they should never finally "know" each other as Hermione had wanted to know Birkin. Each must acknowledge the otherness and the mystery of the other -- each has an odd mobility and changeableness, each can "fly away from himself in real, indifferent gaiety" (W in L, pp.278-9).

In Women in Love, Gudrun does not take second place to her sister. Compared to her definiteness, Ursula at first appears the more diffident. Both wish to know what life is all about but unlike her sister, Ursula does not restrict herself to the social world about her. A more tranquil woman now, social importance holds little merit for her. Gudrun, the product of her social world, has had an unfettered life in fashionable London. She is aware of and values social status, and flaunts her unorthodoxy in dress as well as in manner. There is in Gudrun what Gerald Crich recognises as a "dangerous power" (W in L, p.102). There is a lack of compassion in her for other people, even for Gerald on the occasion when she steals into her room:

She seemed to look at him as at a pebble far away under clear dark water ... Ah, this awful, inhuman distance which would always be interposed between her and the other being. (W in L, p.390)

The relationship she shares with Gerald is a destructive, "fatal" one, for it always involves exploitation of the other.

In them, the mystery of the unknown, of incarnation is dead, just as they are blind to the sanity and normalcy of the rabbit. What they are committed to is "the obscene beyond" (W in L, p.317). Where Ursula sees jewel-like butterflies "standing upon a flower and breathing with his soft wings, intoxicatingly, breathing pure ethereal sunshine", Gudrun sees

mud, soft, oozy watery mud, and from its
festering chill, water plants rose up ...
having dark, lurid colours, dark green
and blotches of black-purple and bronze.
(W in L, p.178)

Middleton-Murry has seen the distinction between Ursula and Birkin on the one hand, and Gudrun and Gerald on the other as false, that Gudrun and Gerald "simply represent Rupert and Ursula at their previous stage of sensual self-destruction".²⁰ However, while Ursula has a vision of a new creation after her relationship with Skrebensky turns out to be a failure, in Gudrun there is a profound sense of meaninglessness and futility. Her head ticks like a clock, with a very madness of dead mechanical monotony and meaninglessness, from which she recedes still further in her affair with Loerke. With Loerke, she discusses primitive art and they prefer to stay in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and at this moment the future is irrelevant.

Unlike her, Ursula does not regress into the past. Her vision is of the future. As the man-woman relationship takes shape, woman finds herself in a different role: from acquiescence to assertion of herself not in domination but in her separateness through which alone she can find a satisfying relationship with a man.

It is the natural man who, in Lady Chatterley's Lover awakens Connie from a kind of coma. Mellors comes from the world of pastoral purity, and his strength to help Connie counters the neurotic modern world. She is brought back into touch with the beauty and richness of life and also of her natural surroundings. Her passage from Wragby Hall to the woods is a journey from death-in-life to a renewed freshness of life. She has felt the need to be born again, to be resurrected. Her social identity as Lady Chatterley of Wragby Hall has overshadowed her womanhood. But Mellors responds to her as a woman and brings her to a level of being where

she was like a forest, like the dark
interlacing of the oak wood, humming
inaudibly with myriad unfolding buds.
(*LCL, p.143)

She begins to live again. She escapes from the impotent, intellectualized, mechanical civilization of which Clifford

* Lady Chatterley's Lover

is representative. Connie, with Mellors, flees from the life-denying world to her little paradise that is protected from any intrusion of the world outside or of other people.

In their relationship there is hope, and in their mutual love, Mark Spilka sees neither "male mastery (nor) female subjection".²¹ They do reconstitute their faith in the possibilities of life, and Connie understands that the way out of the nightmarish dehumanization of emasculating industrialization lies in individual effort. However, the promise of their relationship is not as convincing as that of Ursula and Birkin. Connie and Mellors have removed themselves from the world and from other people, and this falls short of the comprehensiveness of the relation between Ursula and Birkin. Ursula remains a more whole and more perceptively drawn character.

6 Lawrence depicts in his women a greater capacity to face adversity. He believes that woman was capable of a greater sufficiency unto themselves. Which is why perhaps we see that in the unsuccessful relationships, it is the man who is the "victim", the greater sufferer. We finally have in Ursula a woman who has in her sufficiency been able to love Birkin, to believe in him and in their "freedom together" (W in L, p.215). Lawrence holds no banner for the feminist woman:

If a woman doesn't believe in a man,
she believes, essentially in nothing.

She becomes, willy-nilly, a devil.²²

What he offers woman is "better than the suffrage" and he sees that woman needs not the vote so much as a real effort and courage to break away from the shackles of society, and find her essential, individual being. And "his approach involves a sanity, a depth which those of the women's movements often lack".²³

Lawrence has constantly tried to restore into life the natural flow of common sympathy between men and women, and in the last two novels discussed here, the natural balance is revived. However, in an ambitious novel that he wrote before Lady Chatterley's Lover, Lawrence restructures this relationship and he deviates from his initial concept of human relationships. In The Plumed Serpent, he presents a relationship purported to be above and beyond the bonds of human love. Kate Leslie, who had loved her husband, now dead, as much as it is humanly possible, feels that there is a beyond where love of a man or even the love of her children need not beckon her:

... The yearning for companionship and sympathy and human love had left her, something infinitely tangible but definitely blessed took its place; a peace that passes understanding.
(*PS, p.65)

* The Plumed Serpent

Once she is in Mexico, Kate is entranced. "She felt like a bird around whose body a snake has coiled itself". (PS, p.79). She has tried to get away from the mechanical and social world as Ursula and Birkin do. However, Kate is relegated to the position of a half-being who exists only in relation to the man, who is incapable of seeing her as an individual:

Cipriano could not see Kate as being by herself. And if he lived a thousand more years, he would never see her as such. He would see her only as reciprocal to himself. As the balance of him, and the correspondence on the other side of heaven. (PS, p.404)

Kate is amazed at "her halfness! Was there no star of the single soul? Was that all an illusion?" (PS, p.404). This concept of the halfness of Kate makes us all feel that Lawrence uses this as a means of bringing about a submissiveness in his main female character. As Cipriano, whom she initially finds physically repugnant, casts "the old twilit Pan-power over her, she felt herself, submitting, succumbing. He was once more the old dominant male ... and she was swooned prone beneath, perfect in her proneness" (PS, pp.324-5). Kate glories in her passivity and accepts Cipriano as "the Master. The everlasting Pan" (PS, p.326).

Lawrence goes back on his earlier stand on women in the presentation of Kate. She is reduced to an utterly

abject acceptance of Cipriano, marrying him on his terms. However, Lawrence does find this "leader-cum-follower relationship" a bore. And with Lady Chatterley's Lover, he recasts his attention on "the new relationship [which] will be some sort of tenderness, sensitive, between men and men and men and women, and not the one up, one down, lead on, I follow ... sort of business".²⁴

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CHAPTER - IV

CONCLUSION : THE CHANGING RELATIONSHIP

The century that began with Jane Austen's well-balanced heroines of strong will, who literally "will" themselves into normal behaviour, rushes towards its end with the wilful self-destructiveness of Hardy's heroines and heroes, who "will" themselves not into normality but into an obsession with guilt and penance.¹

The difference from earlier fiction is now both psychological and structural. The world view of conventional Christianity is by now shattered by Darwin's theory of human evolution. Beliefs are shaky. With Hardy, too, religion becomes more of a memory of past rituals:

Hardy continued to love the country parsons long after he had ceased to believe what they kept repeating from generation to generation ... He became a skeptic not with the sneer of the disbeliever who rejoices in shaking off priestly bonds nor the indifference of a rationalist for whom faith is never an option, but with the gnawing and tender regret of the lapsed Christian. "I have been looking for God fifty years," he wrote toward the end of his life, "and I think that if he existed I should have discovered him." From the pen of a twentieth century writer such a remark would seem merely flippant; from Hardy it is simple honesty.²

The loss of faith marks the beginning of the spiritual isolation of an entire generation. There is no God to hold

responsible for the misfortunes and miseries of the world. Industrial and scientific progress bring with it a heritage of confusion and spiritual uncertainty. A frightening consequence of this world is Sue Bridehead. Walter Allen, in The English Novel, says Sue

is the most subtle delineation of a not uncommon type of woman in the modern world and it is significant that the only writer on Hardy who has fully understood his achievement in creating her is D.H. Lawrence.³

The social problems of marriage and divorce, and repressive moral censorship by Victorian public opinion are continued, through Hardy, in Lawrence's novels, and the problems of modern unrest and modern introspectiveness and modern melancholy are probed into further. After Hardy's Far From the Madding Crowd, the conventional happy ending becomes a thing of the past. "The imitation of the older form, the containment of a novel's moral and emotional climax by marriage, collapses."⁴ There is a revision of relationships; a fresh look is taken at woman's position in these relationships. "The unfathomable mystery of the essential otherness"⁵ intrigued Hardy as much as it did Lawrence later:

the peculiar Lawrentian sense of the paradox of personal relations, especially of those between a man and a woman which make and validate a marriage; the insistence that the more intimate and essential the relations, the more must the intimacy itself be, for the

two lives that are brought into so essential a contact, a mutual acceptance of their separateness and otherness.⁶

Hardy's outspokenness where sex is concerned made him, in the eyes of his contemporaries, the English counterpart of European novelists like Flaubert, Tolstoy and Zola. However, Hardy's is an older art of story-telling than theirs. His is an intensely local world and his provincialism, not fashionable life, is his strength. He revives "Wessex" to denote a particular region in England and his characters thus live in an additional dimension of history and myth. Most of them seem to live in a timeless era that is detached from historical events and changes, and assume thereby the largeness of myth. Acutely aware of the modern world, he looks back to the past and recreates a world that is more primitive and pagan than the changed actual world of nineteenth century England. George Eliot's rural world, though somewhat earlier in time, and provincial, seems more modern than Hardy's. Social life in Hardy is not the same as in Jane Austen, Thackeray or George Eliot. His characters stand in relation to other things -- the weather, the topography or some traditional skill. Giles Winterborne is always remembered as the peasant good with trees and at one with nature; Gabriel Oak is the good shepherd, honest, faithful and steady; Tess the dairymaid. What concerns Hardy most is the individual's response to the deep-rooted passions, above all, sexual love.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the situation of women changed radically -- from subordinate domesticity and repression to the beginnings of emancipation. Through the eighteenth century and the nineteenth, the English novel was firmly ensconced in a social world. The fact of social class was taken for granted not only by Richardson but by Jane Austen too. Marital position and, at most times, status have been important to the patterning of the plot. The woman has for long been the person to whom things happen. She has been subject to a standard of womanliness which, while being restrictive and not quite fair, is her only means of survival. From her constricting world, she moves outward. Woman need no longer be only a figure of endurance. Bathsheba Everdene, vivacious, independent, confesses that she wants somebody to "tame" her as she is too independent. Assertive herself, she would like a more assertive Gabriel too. The struggle, problems and the relationships involving women have intrigued both Lawrence and Hardy. Much of the earlier writing depicting women with affection, understanding and perceptiveness have come mainly from women novelists. Woman now begins to receive proper attention and proper valuation:

Hardy comes at the fag end of one tradition, that of the solid extroverted English novel originating mostly with Henry Fielding; but he also comes at the beginning of another tradition, that of the literary "modernism"

which would dominate the twentieth century.⁷

The question of women's specific problems in the modern world are no longer irrelevant. The feminine principle is well-established in the fictional worlds of Hardy and Lawrence. Between the two writers there is, from folk heroine to modern woman, an entire gamut of intriguing womanhood. In Hardy's novels, there is an element shedding light on women that attracted Lawrence and made him feel kin to it.

In Jane Austen's world, a happy marriage could be a union that is an advantage to both, and each improves from the other. At worst, marriage is the only honourable means of provision for a young woman of small fortune, as in the case of Charlotte Lucas. Marriage marks a resolution of conflict as all problems are ironed out before an Elizabeth Bennet marries a Darcy. Jane Austen does draw attention to poor marriages, like the one between the elder Bennets, where a husband gives in to cynicism in the face of his wife's silliness; Charlotte Lucas marries Mr Collins not out of any heartfelt conviction, but, as the eldest daughter in a family of many daughters and limited means, chooses this opportunity to ensure herself a secure future. When, in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy make their way past comic misunderstandings to a happy marriage, they share a sense of superior cultivation. Their additional advantage of status serves as a protection against the dull world outside. Emily Brontë's

Catherine and Heathcliff are barely aware of the common life, which to them becomes totally irrelevant. But by the time we come to the modern individual, we see that he has scant, if any, means of escaping into a private world. There is a constant and sustained tussle between the individual and the larger community. Edwin Muir observes that Hardy "is on women's side against man, just as he is on man's side against nature, and for the same reason, for woman is the final victim".⁸ By nature and by tradition the more vulnerable, woman finds a special niche for herself in Hardy's novels. Only one of Hardy's major novels ends in a happy marriage. However, in the process, a vivacious and confident young woman is tossed about by circumstance as much as by her own recklessly impulsive nature. In subsequent novels, Hardy dwells on marriage as a continuing process, and contemporary marriage conventions come in for attack. Hardy perhaps was never Christian but he had earnest and deep convictions of what was good and bad in human life. Holloway sees Hardy's view as simple enough:

[In Hardy's world] it is right to live naturally ... To live naturally is to live in continuity with one's whole biological and geographical environment.⁹

To Hardy's mind, intellectual culture is at the bottom of human unhappiness. It is education that isolates Grace from the ways and the people of Hintock when she comes home after her education abroad. It brings on an element that is alien

to the natural culture of the countryside. The simple country girl and the educated young woman in her give rise to conflict within herself. It is her cultivated side, persuaded by her ambitious father, that wins over her spontaneous, instinctive self when she agrees to marry Fitzpiers. Giles Winterborne and Marty South know the language of the trees, of the natural world; they draw strength from their proximity to, and kinship with, nature and are deeply rooted in the substance of instinctual life.

Education reaching the rural community has succeeded in pushing a wedge into their sensibility. Tess, educated up to the sixth standard in the National School, speaks two languages. However, she is still rooted in the ready and the spontaneous. Grace Melbury represents a more prominent divide. Grace's divided response allows her to repudiate Giles in favour of Fitzpiers. It is again education and awareness that bring such conflicts within the sensitive Sue Bridehead. Tess herself is hardly troubled by any intellectual ambition; she remains a warm-hearted, unpretentious country girl. As Hardy shifts attention to the signs of deracination of an overwrought will, instinctual life gradually loses ground to the acute awareness and demands of personality. Before the advent of the modern girl we see

Tess ... that rare creature in literature:
goodness made interesting.¹⁰

She has, apart from affection and trust, the powers of

suffering, struggle and survival. This is what Sue, with her intellect and education, seems to lack. She eventually proves unequal to living out her early beliefs, in the face of adversity.

Lawrence's Hermione Roddice too suffers from an excess of intellectual drive. Wanting in warmth and spontaneity, she goes through ^{life} with blinkers on her emotions and perceives everything through her mind. However, the college educated Ursula suffers no ill-effects as we later see.

Marriage is seldom an affirmation of harmony very early in Hardy; we see marriage not as a resolution of conflict but as a lived out process with its fair and natural share of problems. It is acknowledged to be a problematic relationship, where both partners enter into a truce with unequal expectations. Elizabeth and Darcy, as Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth, resolve misunderstandings before uniting in a happy marriage. But in the Hardy world, it is not so simple. Ill-matched couples must suffer their marriages. In The Woodlanders, the question of divorce is broached. Marriage is no longer considered sacred but is a contract that is, or should be, terminable in cases of disharmony. It is later, however, in Jude the Obscure, that a marriage is actually dissolved. This promises both the man and the woman a degree of freedom from a tie when it is no longer one of mutual love and trust. Hardy had denied that Jude the Obscure was meant

to be a treatise on the marriage question. But the truth is that this is the first work of literature in which marriage is studied with such an honest eye. Fidelity too takes on a fresh meaning in the new context:

If fidelity is the most precious and elusive of the Wessex virtues, fidelity for the sake of conventional appearance and fidelity to an unworthy partner is condemned as absolutely wrong. Neither the sexual act nor even the imminence of a child is in itself sufficient grounds for marriage.¹¹

Marriages can be, and are, wrecked by social ambition. Grace, allowing herself into a socially "better" marriage, opens her eyes to the reality of a promiscuous husband, but must bear her lot. Eustacia Vye also marries for the wrong reasons. Prudish convention unite Jude and Arabella, not once but twice. The fickle Sue seems to flit in and out of relationships unable to hold on to her early beliefs. The happiness that Jude and Sue share comes outside the formal binding of marriage. This happiness belongs to two people who seem instinctively to belong to each other, not necessarily bound by formal ties. The Return of the Native is the first major Hardy novel that deals with marriage not as a resolution of the plot but as a continuing process. There is discord in marriage. Eustacia's tragedy is consequent upon her nature. She is unable to settle into the Egdon community because of a lack of kinship with it. Hers is a destructive sexuality,

not bound morally to any one man and she is aware that

"... want of an object to live for --
that's all is the matter with me."
(RN, p.145).

Restless in Egdon, she dreams of far-away Paris, anxious to make marriage with Clym her passage to the world outside. Clym himself marries Eustacia with the idea that one day she would help him in his work among the people at Egdon. Hardy conceives of marriage as

a dramatic illustration of the human
impulse to work at cross purposes long
before he wrote Jude the Obscure.¹²

Sue is not Hardy's first study of the wilful woman. However, Sue's wilfulness is compounded by modern confusion, and after disaster she reverts to self-imposed constraints. She has none of the calm that Tess displays, and none of the fortitude of Jude. When she returns to Phillotson to atone for her life with Jude and renounces her early convictions, is it the response of the woman in her, or of the severely disturbed individual that she is? Is she basically incapable of living out her convictions or is it that the world and her circumstances are simply too overwhelming? In all her relationships with men, she displays the very modern fear of personal commitment. When marriage is no longer a very desirable goal for women as it was assumed to be, it is partly the fear of commitment that accounts for this attitude. But the plight of

ill-matched couples and their helplessness in an irreversible tie concerns both Hardy and Lawrence. In part, Jude the Obscure is an attack on indissoluble marriage with a frank acknowledgment of sexual incompatibility. However, it is not a very sudden or radically new direction of attitude in Hardy. And Sue is not the first study into the psychology of the epicurean woman. After Bathsheba Everdene spurns Oak's initial hesitant approach, she learns through bitterness and humiliation the worth of a good man's love. Grace Melbury, similarly, prefers Fitzpiers over Giles Winterborne and suffers for it. Eventually, however, she must return to Fitzpiers although Hardy provides little evidence that would point towards a potentially reformed Fitzpiers. Hardy, in The Woodlanders, still hesitates to stray away from form, and manipulates a conclusion that leaves the reader unconvinced. Apprehension about public opinion led him to contrive his conclusions to satisfy an orthodox reading public. In *Tess*, too, the final union between Angel Clare and 'Liza-Lu is rather far-fetched. By Jude the Obscure, Hardy abandons form for sincerity of purpose, no longer bound by any obligation to his readers:

Coming at the moment it did, Jude played a part in the modern transformation of marriage from a sacred rite to a secular and therefore problematic relationship.¹³

There is a very honest appraisal of the modern young woman who struggles to gain a foothold on life. In Hardy's world,

"the great disaster for an individual is to be deracine".¹⁴

Sue suffers from restlessness, a trait that Hardy saw as characteristically modern:

In personal background, novelistic technique, choice of locale and characters, Hardy remains mostly of the past, but in his distinctive sensibility, he is partly of the future.¹⁵

Jude is a picture of modern deracination. He seems

an anticipation of modern rationality struggling to become proudly self-sufficient and thereby cutting itself off from its sources of physical life.¹⁶

Sue's nature is not a coherent force, and it does not remain consistent, but is an undefined area in which conflicting impulses clash. In Tess and Jude, Hardy faces difficulties: the problem of ethics without dogma and the problem of the restless and isolated modern ego. Hardy is distinctly ahead of his time in recognizing the consistency of irrationality in human conduct. When a writer works out a plot, he tacitly assumes that there is a rational structure in human behaviour. But in modernist literature, these assumptions become questionable. In Jude, plot does not signify as ^{much as} it did in Hardy's earlier novels. Jude anticipates clearly the theme of personal relationships which is to form a pervasive theme in the twentieth century novel, with its accompanying loneliness and rootlessness. It is dominated by psychology and

it is not the kind of book that
can offer the lure of catharsis
or the relief of conciliation.¹⁷

All through his novels, Hardy's attachment to the rural world is deep, providing him with something equivalent to a moral absolute:

But Hardy, by the point he had reached
in Jude the Obscure, could no longer
find in the world of Wessex a sufficient
moral and emotional support.¹⁸

To Hardy, the rural world has always had some kind of sustaining power. The people in Jude are deracine, restless and anchorless, not because the world of Wessex no longer provides emotional support. It is in the absence or in the renunciation of this world that the individual finds no moral refuge, losing himself in the urban jungle. The uprooting of traditional English life resulting from a new historical situation and its accompanying changes in intellectual and social life marks the turmoil of not one individual but of an entire social group. Sue hovers between a self-recriminating and repenting Christian, and a social rebel who revels at the thought of freedom. Her indecisions, her attitudes, even her charm "are all conditioned by the growth of intellectual skepticism and modernist sensibility".¹⁹

The closeness that Sue and Jude share is a special one too. They are not merely romantic lovers. They share

intellectual companionship and each sees in the other a point of understanding in the confusion of an incomprehensible world:

Lonely, distraught, rootless, they cling to one another like children in the night. Exposed to the racking sensations of loneliness, they become prey to a hint of panic whenever they are long separated from each other. The closeness of the lost -- clutching, solacing and destroying one another -- is a closeness of a special kind, which makes not for heroism or tragedy or even an exalted suffering but for that somewhat passive "modern" sadness which suffuses Jude the Obscure.²⁰

Even as the woman grows estranged from society as traditional beliefs lie shattered and psychological stability becomes yesterday's strength, a woman begins to be partner to man in more ways than one. Hardy was distinctly ahead of his time in recognizing this aspect of the romantic role. Woman need no longer be an appendage to a man. Hardy's women have been wilful, restless, patient, long-suffering, calm, torn by nerves, coquettish, guileless, high-handed, compassionate, wronged, subject to men's desires, also spurning his advances:

The radicalism of Hardy's representation of women resides, not in their "complexity", their "realism", their "challenge to convention", but in their resistance to reduction to a single and uniform ideological position.²¹

However, one thing clearly emerges: woman becomes individual, a person, noticed, and thought about for her own sake. It is a significant step forward. Hardy has shown tremendous understanding towards the individual trapped in a hopeless marriage. Certainly, this relationship is basic to every other human relationship, as Lawrence observes. For too long, marriage had stood unassailable. But now, its unquestioned validity is no longer taken for granted:

I have been charged since 1895 with a large responsibility in this country for the present shop-soiled condition of the marriage theme. I do not know.
(Postscript, Jude, p.X)

Hardy probably did not know what he was doing. Drawing attention to the miseries of bad marriage, he demystifies the bond, and suggests that incompatibility be resolved by divorce, and shows the strength in the natural sincerity and commitment of people sharing life outside the tie. There is obviously more to marriage than a church wedding. His candid handling of the marriage theme and his compassionate treatment of woman, with a moral shift in the shape of experience, led to a great public outrage, and Hardy gave up writing novels and turned to his first love, poetry,

... but having already turned the stream,
he left it running in what became the
direction and channel of the twentieth
century.²²

Lawrence saw in Hardy a soul kin to his own. Woman, to Lawrence, is always a totality, a steady whole:

In a man's life, the female is the swivel and centre on which he turns closely, producing his movement.²³
Every man seeks in woman for that which is stable, eternal.²⁴

The man's attitude is not one of mastery but of mutual interdependence. One must be a single, separate whole before one can enter into a satisfying relationship with another. The attitude of the man is:

"She is the unknown, the undiscovered; into which I plunge to discovery, losing myself".

And what we call real love always has this attitude.²⁵

The ideal relationship is one that is held in balance by the man and the woman. Fear of and apprehension at the possibility of female dominance marks Lawrence's work. Anna in The Rainbow is the Magna Mater, a figure of dominance that defeats the growth of any long term relation with a man. Lawrence's primary focus is on the individual life in its inescapable relations with others. Education in Hardy is a cause of the individual estrangement from society for with its advent vanishes the spontaneous response to life. However, Ursula retains her capacity to love; her sensitivity is not marred by her intellect. Education and awareness have placed

her and her sister, Gudrun, in a class to which marriage has lost its earlier significant and unquestioned place. Yet they wonder: if not marriage, what?

The sisters found themselves confronted
by a void, a terrifying chasm, as if
they had looked over the edge. (W in L, p.57)

Ursula and Birkin look towards a readjustment between the sexes which will bring woman out of her atrophy. Ursula has had her share of unrest in The Rainbow, struggling to arrive at something enduring in her eventually unsuccessful relationship with Skrebensky. The ease with which she recovers from this experience does not belong to Hardy's Sue Bridehead. Sue's epicurean temperament and urge to self-destruction are compounded by spiritual isolation. Hardy's reading public was outraged at Hardy's candid handling of marriage:

The fury aroused by Jude the Obscure
was the fury of outraged optimism, not
of outraged prudery.²⁶

But having dealt with the question of woman and her social and sexual position, Hardy paves the way for later portrayals of the emergent woman. When Lawrence sees the struggle in Ursula, it is Ursula the individual who strives towards the unknown, hoping to lose herself in its mystery. Her womanhood is significant, although she does not expressly fight for any female cause. Unlike other young women of her time, Ursula is not bothered about the women's vote. Her struggle is at once

individual and intensely personal.

As in Hardy, there is in Lawrence the feeling that too intellectual a life results in an unbalanced development, leading eventually to unfulfilling relations. The too spiritual can also snuff out the essential physicality of life. Miriam's intense spirituality leads her to see Paul not as a man but as some god before whom she must sacrifice herself. It is unnatural and, consequently, their relationship suffers. It is also her fierce possessiveness that estranges Paul from her. Hermione Roddice is to lose her hold over Birkin similarly in Women in Love. This fear of the dominating woman stalks Will Brangwen in The Rainbow and Oliver Mellors in Lady Chatterley's Lover.

In Lady Chatterley's Lover, Connie turns towards a natural man, more attuned to the physical world than Clifford. War renders Clifford physically and sexually crippled. But his lack of vitality is not new. It is doubtful whether Connie could have had a satisfying and total relationship with him even if he had been physically whole. What she cherishes in Mellors is his natural tenderness and spontaneous response to the woman in her. Clifford himself is utterly insensitive to Connie's needs, mistaken in his idea that togetherness of mind is enough to sustain a marriage, maintaining that what matters is "the life-long companionship ... the living together from day to day, not the sleeping together once or

twice". (Lady Chatterley's Lover, p.46)

The woman's needs are acknowledged, and found to be legitimate. Over and above both the man and the woman is what they share :

The great relationship, for humanity, will always be the relation between man and woman ...

And the relation between man and woman will change forever, and will forever be the central clue to human life. It is the relation itself which is the quick and the central clue to life, not the man, not the woman, nor the children that result from the relationship as a contingency ... Men and women are subtly and changingly related to one another; no need to yoke them with any "bond" at all. The only morality is to have man true to his manhood, woman true to her womanhood, and let the relationship form of itself, in all honour. For it is, to each, life itself.²⁷

What about the woman who undermines the man's worth and what about the beauty and vanity of womanhood? In The White Peacock, Lettie's refusal to marry George leads ultimately to George's becoming a broken man. Anna's arrogance in The Rainbow throws Will into a state of uncertainty about himself. Sue's hesitations, impulsive wilfulness and disregard for the man's needs wreck the lives of three men to varying degrees. However, Gabriel Oak is made of sterner stuff. He

has an inner strength that no woman's capriciousness can break.

As the rural community feels the urban pressures, there grows a sustained opposition between the country and the city, and between the individual and the community. In the changing relationships, love is endangered. The kind of love between Oak and Bathsheba that is as strong as death becomes increasingly rarer. As modern pressures lead to greater psychological problems, the individual sees himself in a new light, not as an appendage of the social order, but as a person in his own right. Victorian complacency gives way to a self-consciousness that struggles for an identity in a fast-changing modern world. Hardy, skeptical of the modern way of life, is basically rooted in the rural community and in the past, although his novels do look towards the future. His consciousness of the past gives him a standard by which to measure the present. Sue's personal drama is woven from the materials of historical change, the transformation and the uprooting of traditional English life. The contours of her psychology are shaped by the new historical situation, and conditioned by the growth of increasing skepticism. This trend perceived by Hardy continues through Lawrence well into the twentieth century.

In the quest for the ideal personal relationship, there is also a quest for the ideal womanhood. Both Miriam

and Clara in Sons and Lovers prove inadequate to the real need of Paul. John Middleton-Murry calls "The Rainbow ... radically, the history of Lawrence's final sexual failure".²⁸ Ursula does fail to save her relationship with Skrebensky because she finds nothing in it that is worth saving. To her, he presents no mystery of "otherness". His sensibility falls short of hers. And even as she suffers out of their failed relationship, it is not the final failure, just as Sons and Lovers is not either. As Ursula recovers, she looks with hope towards the future. Her fate is not sealed and she can yet look forward towards fresh horizons, wiser for the failure. Lawrence's failure really comes, I should say, in The Plumed Serpent where he attempts a relationship between man the master and woman the submissive inferior. The entire exercise goes against the grain of his belief in the nature of the man-woman relationship. Women in Love stands as a strong refutation of his strange Mexican adventure. His final belief is in what Ursula and Birkin share -- a relationship in which each balances the other, each an entire entity, needing no external prop to support their bond. It is there in the instinctive sympathy between Lady Chatterley and gamekeeper Oliver Mellors that transcends all social considerations.

In this context, marriage becomes an exercise in futility. Where the couple is ill-matched, marriage is only a cruel and irreversible tie. And where the natural bond is

deep and total, marriage becomes redundant, because such a relationship can support itself, requiring no social consent. In Women in Love, marriage between Ursula and Birkin is an affirmation of their commitment to each other. The questioning of marriage begins with Hardy. His candour in handling the theme shocked the sensibility of his times. But indignant public opinion could do little to stem the tide that Hardy let loose. This primary relationship gets respectful recognition and the theme of sexual love is zealously taken up by Lawrence. He had great faith in his own relationship with his wife, Frieda, and "the one bright book of life"²⁹ becomes the "perfect medium for revealing to us the changing rainbow of our living relationships".³⁰ He warns us not to look for absolutes:

All things flow and change, and even change
is not absolute.³¹

Every relationship must be subtly changing; it is not an unchanging bond but one that grows and matures.

Modern neurosis has produced in Sue a fear of commitment and her freedom is, consequently, negative and destructive: "a self-possessive individualism which sees all permanent commitment as imprisoning, a fear of being possessed which involves a fear of giving".³²

Lawrence looks askance at the over-intellectualized woman who fears such commitment. The ideal Lawrencean woman

retains her instinctive response to life and people, trusting the promptings of her blood above the dictates of cold reason. She must retain her faith in man if she is to be fulfilled and not be the

Modern woman, who, "emancipated" from her belief in men, is peculiarly self-conscious and has an unappeasable and abstract belief in love.³³

She must live in the light of her own womanhood, and be true to herself. She must be a free and autonomous being, not competing with man but striving to be his natural counterpart even while she remains whole and separate.

Hardy and Lawrence together stand as "explorer-novelists" of the changing rainbow of the man-woman relationship.

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