Chapter - 3

Physical Aspect of Love: Bribed to Breed
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We are bribed to breed
God's men like cattle or horses or dogs,
On high purpose with a plan a design.¹

These lines that appear in P. R. Kaikani's 'The Civilization', though not intended by the author, very appropriately describe Hardy's views on physical love. 'To a Motherless Child' (CP, 58), 'Nature's Questioning' (CP, 58), 'The Re-enactment' (CP, 339), 'Honeymoon Time at an Inn' (CP, 484), 'Life Laugh's Onward' (CP, 435) are only a few poems, among many others, where Hardy discusses designs of Nature
to deceive each generation into the procreative act, under the guise of love. Hardy was convinced that primarily love is nothing more than a physical phenomenon. Animal instinct aims at the release of physical tension only, through which nature deceives man into pro-creation. Serious contemplation regarding various aspects of life, influenced by the rapid changes affected by the industrial revolution and the spirit of inquiry fostered by the French Revolution stimulated Hardy, alike most others in his generation, to examine everything with relentless disinterestedness. The phenomenon of love or physical passion was no exception. Hardy’s early formative period from 1859 to 1881 witnessed the publication of radical thoughts that brought about a caprice and a sudden upheaval in the Victorian mindset. Darwin rocked the foundations of man’s universe with the publication of The Origin of the Species in 1859. John Stuart Mill published his Essay on liberty in the same year. This was followed by Essay on Utilitarianism in 1863 and On the Subjection of Women in 1869. But more important, for Hardy Scholars, was the publication of Three Essays on Religion, published posthumously in 1874. J. S. Mill, in these essays discussed his attitude towards religion, his concept of God, and the problems of immortality among other related subjects. The ideas expressed by Mill are strikingly so similar to Hardy’s own concepts on the subjects, as expressed in his writings, that it becomes difficult not to consider them among the fecundating source for many of Hardy’s own ideas. Similarly, Man’s Place in Nature 1863, Lay Sermons 1870, Principles of Biology 1864, Principles of Sociology 1876, by Huxley and again Essays on Freethinking and plain speaking 1873, by Leslie Stephen and finally The Revised Version of the New Testament 1881, encouraged Hardy to examine life with crude disinterestedness.
Thus Hardy’s poems are not mere temporary impressions. They, indeed, result from his meditative contemplations on aspects related to life and the universe. His poetry, which is more reliably closer to his heart than the novels, which he himself termed as ‘pot-boilers’ present Hardy thinking aloud. In the introduction to the Mellstock edition of *The collected Poems*, Hardy wrote:

> Turning now to my verse—to myself the more individual part of my literary fruitage—I would say that, unlike some of the fiction nothing interfered with the writer’s freedom in respect to its form and content.\(^2\)

It was not merely his training in architecture that prompted him to employ a deliberately repeated irregularity in verse. Moreover the irregular form he adopted for his verse also forcefully explains his endeavours to arrest the lack of meaningful regularity in life, as he saw it and the working of the universe. It is very significant that a greater number of poems, of this sort, come comparatively early. Hardy was among the very few poets who perceived the full implications of scientific inquiry very early and enunciated them much more vigorously, at times, than the scientists themselves.

In 1866, when Hardy was still in his twenties, with apparent conviction, he stated in the sonnet ‘Hap’ (CP, 7) that there is no God, not even a ‘vengeful’ one. ‘Crass Casualty’ which he later glossed as insensible chance seemed to control everything. Hardy must have felt emotionally repugnant because this view of life, expressed even in such an early poem, was contrary to what he must have learnt in his
childhood, surrounded by country life and beliefs. This sudden revelation that accorded no eternal destiny to man and nullified the belief of life lead by divine providence created a hiatus which Hardy unsuccessfully endeavoured to connect throughout his life. But on the positive side this contradiction created the climate into which poetry must consent to be born.

Hardy endeavoured to comprehend the cause for the timeless phenomenon of living. He found no obvious first cause and no final goal. Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* had converted the human being, traditionally regarded as a fallen angel, into a cultured ape. Hardy’s constant contemplation over the mystery of life and its immediate recurrence in the experience of birth, sex and death exposed a significant pattern which became one of the most enduring subjects of his poetry. The significance of sexual relationship as perceptible in the irresistible compulsions of natural instinct, its impact on individuals and the society were few of the issues that Hardy endeavoured to explore. He was pained to realise that physical love, as an experience, was reduced to mere sordid appetite owing to the loss of contact with patterns of living that could provide it with value. Being a man or woman, falling in love, bearing children and dying was all that seemed to really happen. Hardy tried to relate such happenings to the dynamic scheme of existence. His poems on physical love, ‘The Practical Woman’ (CP, 841), ‘The Dark Eyed Gentleman’ (CP,227), ‘Panthera’ (CP,262) among others, sometimes question the futility and anarchy governed by instincts reaching as far back as pre mythical terror and primitive mindlessness to which the world seemed regressing.
This feeling of alienation forced Hardy to think of existence as neither integrated with the cosmos nor with a sacred reality that is in harmony with the reality of the world. The decisive event that underlines the search for meaning and despair in Hardy’s poetry is the sense of loss of God. Hardy, like Nietzsche, was extremely sensitive to this loss and its far-reaching implications. In Thus Spake Zarathustra Nietzsche created his own myth of ‘Eternal Recurrence’ of man and of man’s organic relation with the cosmos:

I myself am part of these causes of the eternal recurrence. I shall return with this sun, with this earth with this eagle, with this serpent – not to a new life or a similar life or a better life.\(^3\)

This vision of cyclical recurrence or the wheel on which man is bound up with eternity and time, influenced Hardy to develop a vision that was set against the experience of spiritual meaninglessness. “All things making for death’s taking!” (CP, 111). This cyclic process, the continuation of life, is the subject of many poems by Hardy. In ‘Heredity’ he writes:

I am a family face
Flesh perishes, I live on
Projecting trait and trace
Through time to times anon
And leaping from place to place
Over oblivion.

The years-heired features that can
In curve and voice and eye
Despite the human span
Of durance - that is I;
The eternal thing in man
That heeds no call to die (CP, 407-08).

Similarly, in ‘Life and Death at Sunrise’ this recurrent cyclic pattern of life and death is beautifully depicted. The poem opens with dawn symbolised by the hills uncovering themselves from the darkness of the preceding night and mist. The poem shows a unique blend of life and death following each other just as naturally as night is followed by day:

The hills uncap their tops
Of woodland, pasture, copse,
And look on the layers of mist
At their foot that still persist:
They are like awakened sleepers on one elbow lifted,
Who gaze around to learn if things during night have shifted.

A waggon creaks up from the fog
With a laboured leisurely jog;
Then a horseman from off the hill-tip
Comes clapping down into the dip;
While woodlark, finches, sparrows, try to entune at one time,
And cocks and hens and cows and bulls take up the chime.

With a shouldered basket and flagon
A man meets the one with the wagon,
And both the men halt of long use.

“Well” the Waggoner says, “what’s the news?”
“Tis a boy this time. You’ve just met the doctor trotting back.
She’s doing well. And we think we shall call him ‘Jack’

“And what have you got covered there?”
He nods to the wagon and mare.
“ Oh a coffin for old John Thin:
We are just going to put him in.”
"- So he's gone at last. He always had a good constitution."
"- He was ninety-odd. He could call up the French Revolution" (692-93).

The two men who meet on their way are shown treading in opposite directions. One of them is carrying a newborn baby named Jack while the other man is carrying the coffin for the dead-body of John. The two opposite directions, here, symbolise life and death respectively. Both names are also significant as John and Jack may be used to signify the same person. Thus the two names suggest the replica of the same person in succession to each other as a replacement or a supplement suggesting the continuity of life.

Love between the sexes, thus becomes the manifestation of the will of the species. It is, then, interested in bringing to birth the future generation and not in the happiness of the actual couple that unites in love. The German philosopher, Schopenhauer in his essay, 'The Metaphysics of Love' maintains that:

...it is the will to live presenting itself in the whole species, which so forcibly and exclusively attracts two individuals of different sex towards each other. This will anticipates in the being, of which they shall become the parents, an objectivation of its nature corresponding to its aims.⁴

Hardy too reads in the phenomenon of love the permanent pattern of Nature where the present mankind should leave behind substitutes when they depart in death. Samuel C. Chew also expresses similar views in his book *Thomas Hardy: Poet and Novelist*: 76
The business of life is to reproduce life; existence is for the sake of existence. Nature seeking to prolong the species has given this function pre-eminently to woman. Hence woman's instinctive assertion of charm against which the intelligence of man revolts but to which his instincts succumb.  

The impersonal force, which created the environment, appears to be indifferent to the human feelings. Hardy's poems repeatedly portray such a scheme. 'The fight on the Durnover Moor' portrays a couple, initially attracted towards each other and later beguiled into the pro-creative act by the natural instinct. They decide to convert their illicit relationship into marital bliss. The man promises to marry her in three weeks time and dumb all scandal. He helps her with her luggage during her journey homewards. As they arrive at the "Grey's great Bridge" (CP, 725) they see another couple engaged in a bitter quarrel. Like the first couple they too had succumbed to the instinctive force of procreative energy, without obtaining the sanction and the social licence of marriage. But unlike the first couple they were quarrelling because the man involved did not wish to be chained for life just to appease the social conventions. He refused to marry his pregnant partner. Seeing the other woman pleading and begging on her knees the first man leaves his beloved at the bridge and intervenes in the quarrel, in support of the pleading woman. But when her lover does not return for a very long time the anxious woman at the bridge feels worried. To her utter dismay she is horrified to learn that her lover is killed in the
incident in which he intervened. People who had witnessed the scuffle between the two men tell the waiting maid:

"O you may long wait so!
Your young man's done - aye, dead!" they by and by ran and
Cried
"You shouldn't have let him go
And join that whorage, but have kept him at your side! . . .

"She'd followed him there, this man who'd won her, and over won,
So, when he set to twit her
Yours couldn't abide him-him all other fighter's shun,
For he is a practiced hitter.

"Your man moved not, and the constable came for the other;
So he,
He'll never make her his wife
Any more than yours will you, for they say that at least 'twill be
Across the water for life."

"O what has she brought about!"
I groaned; this woman met here in my self same plight;
She's put another yielding heart's poor candle out
By dogging her man to-night!

"He might never have done her his due
Of amends! But mine had bidden the bans for marrying me!
Why did we rush on this bridge; why rush to a quarrel did he
With which he had nothing to do!

But vain were bursts of blame:
We twain stood like and like, though strangers till that hour,
Foredoomed to tread on paths beneath like gaze and glower,
Bear a like blushful name.
Almost the self same day
It fell that her time and mine came on, —a lad and a lass:
The father o' mine was where the worms wrangle under the grass,
Of hers, at Botany Bay (CP, 726-27).

Both men display different responses towards the disguised act of love. Logic
would have it that either both were guilty or none. But their different reactions point
towards the ambiguity of the situation. One of the men dies, in the fight, and the other
deserts his partner. Both the women feel abandoned, not by their lovers but by some
unknown design of coincidence. It could be said that Nature ascertains their survival
as they are the instruments of Nature's will to substitute the present generation. Both
the women share similar fate. Alike many other women in Hardy's poems they too are
doomed to rear their children without their husbands. Even the children born to them
on the same day are a boy and a girl child, suggesting the continuation of Nature's
design to prolong the species through instinctive pro-creation disguised in physical
attraction towards the opposite sex. This non-rational principle governing the universe
forces Hardy to portray love primarily as the manifestation of a seemingly unjust fate
or destiny, 'Foredoomed to tread on paths', which control life. In 'The Seasons of Her
Year', Hardy draws an analogy with the phenomenon of pro-creation in nature. Birds
mate and migrate and flowers bloom at the change of season similarly, human beings
also participate in the dance of nature. At times they regret the consequences of their
passionate indulgences. This indifference of Nature is lamented by the female
personae, more prominently, as they abandoned by their male counterparts. They are
left alone to fulfil the designs of Nature, once the re-enactment of the "fervours . . . of
future consummation" (CP, 342) is accomplished. Hardy does not blame the men, for
their function as assigned by Nature culminates instantly after conception.
I
Winter is white on turf and tree,
   And birds are fled;
But summer songsters pipe to me,
   And petals spread,
For what I dreamt of secretly
   His lips have said!

II
O 'tis a fine May morn, they say,
   And blooms have blown;
But wild and wintry is my day,
   My birds make moan;
For he who vowed leaves me to pay
   Alone--alone! (CP, 143)

In an endeavour to understand this non-rational principle, Hardy repeatedly questions
the monotonous mechanical process of life and death:

"Has some Vast Imbecility,
   Mighty to build and blend,
   But impotent to tend,
Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry?

"Or come we of an Automaton
   Unconscious of our pains? . . .
   Or are we live remains
Of Godhead dying downwards, brain and eye now gone?

"Or is it that some high Plan betides,
   As yet not understood,
   Of Evil stormed by Good,
We the Forlorn Hope over which Achievement strides?" (CP, 59).

Hardy found no convincing answer. Fortunately, he did not transcend into the realm
of philosophical idealism seeking an abstract solution for a concrete and observable
reality. He was content to record what meets the eye. Hardy does not conclusively conform or discard the existence of God. He calls Him by different names as 'The imminent will', 'the prime cause', 'the prime mover', Doomster etc. One characteristic common to all above personifications of God is their relentless attitude, devoid of feeling, towards the world. In, 'Doom and she' as in numerous other poems Doom i.e. death is equated with the masculine whereas the 'She' is the creator the 'world weaver'. The former cannot feel while the later cannot see. Death i.e. 'Doom' in this poem is the 'Lord' while 'She' i.e. Life is the slave. This is understandable because Death always concurs life. Hardy presents them as 'the mighty pair' responsible for creation. 'She' i.e. 'Life' suffers endlessly but cannot see i.e., know beyond herself and Death i.e. Doom can see but cannot feel and so cannot tell good from bad or happy from sad:

I
'There dwells a mighty pair
Slow statuesque, intense-
Amid the vague immense'.
None can their chronicle declare?
Nor why they be nor whence.

II
Mother of all things made,
Matchless in artistry,
Unlit with sight is she.—
And though her ever well obeyed
Vacant of feeling he.

III
The matron mildly asks—
A throb in every word—
"Our clay made creatures, Lord."
How fare they in their mortal tasks

81
Upon Earth's boundless board?

IV
"The fate of those I bare.
Dear Lord pray turn and view,
And notify me true;
Shakings that eyelessly I dare
Maybe I would undo,

V
"Sometimes from lairs of life
Methinks I catch a groan,
Or multitudinous moan,
As though I had schemed a world of stripe
Working by touch alone."

VI
"World weaver!" he replies,
"I scan all thy domain;
But since nor joy nor pain
It lies in me to recognize,
Thy questions are vain.

VII
"World weaver! What is Grief?
And what are Right, and Wrong
And feeling, that belong
To creatures all who owe thee fief?
Why is weak worse than strong?

VIII
Unanswered, curious, meek,
She broods in sad surmise...
-Some say they have heard her sighs
On Alpine height or polar peak
When the night tempests rise (CP, 108-09).
Similarly, Hardy shows this mighty pair creating endlessly for no known reasons except automated recurrence of life:

"Meanwhile the winds and rains  
And Earth's old glooms and pains  
Are still the same, and life and Death are neighbours neigh" (CP, 59).

In yet another poem 'At a Bridal', Hardy treats the subject very clinically. The poetic personae, in this poem, refers to wedding as slavery to 'modes decree' '[t]o the Dame whence incarnation flows.' He refuses to be lured into 'false desire' which 'love designed':

When you paced forth, to await maternity  
A dream of the other offspring held my mind,  
Compounded of us twain as love designed  
Rare forms that corporate now will never be!

Should I, too, wed as slave to modes decree,  
And each thus found apart of false desire,  
A solid line, whom no high aims will fire,  
As had fired ours could ever have mingled we;

And, grieved that lives so matched should miscompose  
Each mourn the double waste; and question dare.  
To the Great Dame whence incarnation flows,  
Why those high purposed children never were:  
What will she answer? That she does not care  
If the race all such sovereign types unknows (CP, 8).

Thus Hardy treats the primary source of attraction between the male and female as the reservoir of eternal life. The truth about human life is that the sap always flows. It must not be forgotten that when Hardy's poems present the experience of love as a deception for pro-creation the attitude towards love displayed
by the poetic personae do not usually include other possible dimensions. Looking at man-woman relationship in this raw primitive natural form, Hardy felt forced to reduce the once honoured mother Goddess to a subservient position, as pro-creator of children and more children subject to the will of the species. The Bullfinches (111) portrays the mother who creates to an irreversible end. Similarly, Hardy experiences 'Discouragement':

To see mother, naturing Nature, stand  
All racked and wrung by her unfaithful lord  
Her hopes dismayed by his defiling hand  
Her passioned plans for bloom and beauty marred.

Where she would mint a perfect mould an ill;  
Where she would don divinest hues, a stain,  
Over her purposed genial hour a chill,  
Upon her charm of flawless flesh a blain:

Her loves dependent on a future's trim,  
A whole life's circumstance on hap of birth,  
A souls direction on body's whim,  
Eternal Heaven upon a day of Earth  
Is frost to flower of heroism and worth,  
And fosterer of visions ghast and grim (CP, 789).

His poetic personae depicting physical love are patterned on 'Doom and She' (CP, 108). This poem pictures a couple. The female, mother of all things, is blind whereas the male lacks feeling. It seems that ever since the formation of this earth they have been engaged in the meaningless coils of generation. They are, Hardy suggests, responsible for the continuity of the rhythm of life but not necessarily for its consequences:
None can their chronicle declare,
Nor why they be, nor whence (CP, 108).

Similarly, we find majority of his poetic personae haplessly jilted together or, helplessly wed. Hardy’s contemplation concerning the naked truth of things is so passionately intent that even refined art and beauty cannot conceal the harsh reality recorded. His men and women share in the egregious drama of life similar entanglements in the webs of circumstances. Most of them end up becoming helpless prey of desire, aspiration or human folly. They are racked and cheated by mischance, victimized by age affliction or a tender and lively charm of innocence which is nothing but mere mockery in its transitoriness. Hardy must have discovered the blindness of fate, the irony of life and the indifference of Nature much before he met them in books. His poetry is a proof to the fact that these concepts must have been brooded upon in solitude until they afflicted him. The insignificance of man thus caught in the cycles of germination and death, crawling in multitudes like caterpillars, twitched by the ‘Immanent Will’ pained him. He felt helpless in spite of his noble quest for spiritual meaning in life. He desperately longed for some divine scheme, but to his dismay, found only natural order indifferent to human hopes and beliefs. He was convinced that rigid naturalistic order persists whereas all other law; religious, theological, social, is absent. From his earliest poems to the very last he repeatedly amplifies this idea at times even through the words he put into the mouth of God:

“... My labours – logicless –
You may explain not I:
Sense – sealed I have wrought without a guess
That I evolved a consciousness
To ask for reasons why “(CP, 261).
And referring to the earth He says:

> It lost my interest from the first
> My aims therefore succeeding ill (CP, 112).

In *The Dynasts* Napoleon asks the question “Why am I here?” And the answers is

> -By laws imposed on me inexorably
> History makes use of me to weave her web.⁶

This shocking awareness of reality grieved the poet so intensely that his poetic personae gravely descended to the ludicrous extreme of advocating the discontinuation of the meaningless and unending cycles of birth. In ‘Mad Judy’ (CP, 138) the ‘insane’ female protagonist cried whenever the ‘hamlet hailed a birth’. She did not share the happiness and joys of wedding like her village folk. In stead, “she would rock and mutter, “More/comers to this stony shore” (CP, 138). In the same way, in yet another poem the poetic persona dejectedly advises the ‘Unborn child’:

> BREATHE not, hid Heart: Cease Silently,
> And though thy birth - hour beckons thee,
> Sleep the long sleep:
> The Doomsters heap
> Travails and teens around us here,
> And Time-wraiths turn our songsingings to fear (CP, 116).

The poetic persona here is concerned about the future of mankind and very realistically conveys that the world is still not good enough to welcome the new generation. At the same time Hardy was aware that Nature, that remains neutral and dispassionate regarding the condition of its creatures, only mechanically procreates. ‘The Unborn’ narrates the poetic persona’s imaginative visit to “the cave of the unborn.” The poem ends with the sorry disillusionment:
... I turned and watched them still
And they came helter skelter out
Driven forward like a rabble rout
Into the world they had so desired
By the all-imminent will (CP, 269).

Well, numerous other poems can be quoted to support the argument that in Hardy’s poems Nature deceives all creatures into procreation. But for the working of this deception other allied emotions in the prism of love reveal themselves more prominently and successfully conceal the actual intentions of Nature— to substitute the present generation. But even after this realization the disillusioned generation cannot forcefully convince their successors and thus every generation is doomed to be beguiled. ‘In Childbed’ is another poem that endeavours to reveal this truth to the next generation. The dead mother’s spirit visits her expecting daughter. Instead of feeling secure the daughter finds her mother’s advice to be strange:

“O my daughter, joyed are you
To own the weetless child you mother there;
Men may search the wild world through
You think, ‘nor find so fair another there!’

“Dear, this midnight time unwombs
Thousands just as rare and beautiful;
Thousands whom High Heaven foredooms
To be as bright, as good, as dutiful.

“Source of ecstatic hopes and fears
And innocent maternal variety,
Your fond exploit but shapes for tears
New thoroughfares of sad humanity.

“Yet as you dream, so dreamt I
When life stretched forth its morning ray to me;
Other views for by and by!... 
Such strange things did mother say to me (CP, 254).

These above citations reveal Hardy’s sense of the irreconcilable disparity
between the way things appear to be and the reality they conceal. Throughout his
poems he endeavours to record the failure of the universe to answer the mysterious
chaos of successive disillusionments in meaningless cycles of life. Hardy never
endeavoured to conclusively resolve the evident disparities and contradictions of
existence. He merely recorded them. It is difficult to read far enough in Hardy’s
poems without noticing the inherent precision of minutely detailed observations. The
uncomprehending critic may at times blame him for the accumulation of seemingly
unnecessary details in the treatment of a poem depicting a seemingly trivial subject.
What one frequently fails to notice is how often the dramatic narrations successfully
fuse the details with the larger vision. The success or failure of a poem, by Hardy, in
the contemporary context, depends largely on the reader’s realization of this fusion:

The rain smites more and more
The east wind snarls and sneezes
Through the joints of the quivering door
  The water wheezes.

The tip of each ivy-shoot
Writhes on its neighbours face.
There is some hid dread afoot
  That we cannot trace.

Is it the spirit astray?
Of the man at the house below
Whose coffin they took in today?
  We do not know (CP, 438).
This poem aims to reveal the substantive situation— the wind the rain and the writhing Ivy. The dread is inherent in the mysteries of the inexplicable, the forces of emptiness behind the actual. The poem does not pretend to explain any philosophical system or belief. Its chief concern, it seems, is to dramatise man’s inability to explain the working of Nature and his ignorance and horror that result. Man’s ignorance and helplessness to reduce the universe to a significant order are primarily revealed in his poems that analyse the physical aspect of love and its consequences.

In deconstructing the same poem the sexual imagery of the pro-creative act becomes more apparent. And equally apparent is the unawareness regarding the consequences of the act. In the first line ‘rain’ symbolizes recreation. If we then look at the direction of the wind, it flows from the east, from where the sun rises, a symbol of energy required for generation/creation. ‘The joints of the quivering door’ metaphorically suggest the door of creation—it could be visualized more clearly by the image of female anatomy. The last line of the first stanza ‘The water wheezes’ refers to the primal water conceived as the womb, the waters of Genesis over which the spirit of God brooded.

The first stanza only presents the situation or the background. It does not present any agent. In the second stanza the ‘ivy shoot’ symbolizes the couple entangled into each other as though embracing, in the act of pro-creation. The untraceable fear in the last two lines of the second stanza suggests the mystery and fear associated with love. On the other side, the use of verbs in “rain smites more and more/ and east wind snarls and sneezes” suggests violence. Hardy generally associates physical love with violence in his poems. Again the next two lines:
"Through the joint of quivering door
The water wheezes" (CP, 438).

Suggest the penetrative act of physical love. Moreover the use of verb 'writhes' in the next stanza:

"The tip of each ivy shoot
Writhes on its neighbours face" (CP, 438).

suggests the associated suffering. Thus physical love as depicted here, and in most other poems by Hardy, is not related to pleasure and passion but to violence and suffering.

The last stanza, which pictures the spirit, the body (man) and death (coffin) emphasise:

...the scientific notions of physical or sexual fecundation that turns the generative act into the act of multiplication, production or grafting. The presbyters ignore the spirit in interpreting incarnation in terms of fleshly intemperance and marital conduct.  

The mystery of creation is the fecundation of the material world by the spirit. It is a myth that tries to fuse Nature and spirit, which is destroyed alike by abstract theology as by sexual biological interpretation. Baptism transforms the rebirth rituals of primitive people as birth from maternal waters into birth from spiritual waters. The flesh is regenerated into spirit. It is the unitive process of a ritual indicated by Christ—to be born of water and of spirit. (John 3) So the last stanza, seen thus questions
whether it is a spiritual creation or a biological one. ‘Whose coffin they took in today’ suggests both the beginning of life suggested by ‘took in’ referring to the pro-creative energy and at the same time suggesting the surety of death. The poem very appropriately ends alike many other poems by Hardy, without any final assurance. ‘We do not know’.

Similarly, in various other poems, Hardy clearly displays the close association of violence with sex. His poems reveal that Hardy was intuitively aware of the phenomena that psychologists came to acknowledge in the twentieth century:

The congress of the sexes is assimilated by the impulse to hunt, to shed blood, to kill, to the encounter between a beast of prey and its victim and all distinction between the two is not infrequently lost. That it would be more accurate to speak of the sexual impulse as pervading nature with a yell of cruelty than with a hymn of love. 8

‘Panthaea’ very aptly confirms that aggression in the service of self-gratification is an essential ingredient of the paradoxes of which passion is composed. This poem also shows Hardy questioning the myth of Mary, the virgin mother. The story narrated in ‘Panthaea’ is the story of Christ and his alleged biological father. In the poem the alleged father of Christ, addressing his companion says that he was an army officer. While the company halted at Nazareth he had made love to a girl:
“Well, I was young, and hot, and readily stirred
To quick desire. ‘Twas tedious timing out
The convalescence of the soldiery;
And I beguiled the long and empty days
By blissful yieldance to her sweet allure,
Who had no arts, but what out-arted all,
The tremulous tender charm of trustfulness.
We met, and met, and under the winking stars
That passed which peoples earth – true union, yea,
To the pure eye of her simplicity.

“Meanwhile the sick found health; and we pricked on
I made her no rash promise of return,
As some do use; I was sincere in that;
I said we sundered never to meet again–
And yet I spoke untruth unknowingly! -
For meet again we did. Now, guess you aught?
The weeping mother on Calvaria
Was she I had known – albeit that time and tears
Had wasted rudely her once flowerlike form,
And her soft eyes, now swollen with sorrowing (CP, 266).

He saw the same girl after around thirty years, when he “had captained the
processions through the streets / . . . After the verdict of the governor./ . . to Calvaria
(CP, 264). “She was the mother of one of those who suffered there” (CP, 265). A
weeping mother in whom Panthaera recognized the girl loved and ditched thirty years
ago. He had not only nailed and stripped his own son but also violently pushed the
mother back with spears, along with his men. Even after recognizing her and knowing
that his own son was among the convicts sentenced to death he showed no human
feelings either towards the son or the mother.
“...I was scarce of mood to comrade her
And close the silence of so wide a time
To claim the malfunctor my son” (CP, 266).

Here the father crushes the son and the mother is tortured. Even the account of
the girl of thirty years ago in words like ‘slim’, ‘coy’ ‘as a fawn’ ‘meek and innocent’
(CP, 266) convey an image of a prey about to be attacked and conquered. On the other
hand the army officer describes himself as ‘young’ hot, and ‘readily stirred to quick
desire’ (CP, 266). The re-enactment of this sexual violence, after thirty years is
symbolized by the attack with pointed spears. This degradation of the woman and her
child through sexual instruments of power, is exploited as testimony to one’s own
would be grandeur. This ritualised cruelty repeated in numerous poems on the subject
by Hardy prominently conveys the notion of misogyny. This does not mean that
Hardy was against marriage. Hardy proposed to suggest that aggressive violence in
the pro-creative act is natural and instinctive but at the same time in itself it is an
insufficient component of love. ‘The ‘Epitaph on a Pessimist’ very nicely expresses
the attitude of men portrayed in poems depicting physical love.

“I am smith of stroke, aged sixty odd
I’ve lived without a dame
From the youth time on; and would be God
My dad had done the same” (CP, 764).

Yet another poem that portrays sex and violence is ‘The Dark Eyed Gentleman’. This poem depicts a country girl who stops to tie her ‘garter’ before she
could go on again. At this very time there comes a ‘Dark Eyed Gentleman’ who
seeing her says “what do I see / O pretty knee.” The sight of this naked knee in an
idyllic pastoral atmosphere is enough to arouse the carnal desire and the primal force.
"Twixt sunset and moonrise it was, I can mind:
Ah, 'tis easy to lose what we nevermore find! -
Of the dear stranger's home, of his name, I knew nought,
But I soon knew his nature and all that it brought.

Then bitterly
Sobbed I that he
Should ever have tied up my garter for me! (CP, 227).

This poem contains three stanzas and describes the symbolic act of tying the garter in the first. The second stanza depicts the girl's sadness due the act in the first. The restlessness and the cause of this sadness is revealed in the last stanza. When the country girl says:

... I have beside me a fine lissom lad . . .
My own dearest joy is he, comrade, and friend,
He it is who safeguards me, on him I depend;
No sorrow brings he,
And thankful I be

That his daddy once tied up my garter for me! (CP, 227).

Though the birth of a male child, here, may symbolize muscularity, he brings joy to the woman as against the man who brought sorrow and suffering. 'No sorrow brings he' is important as the male child even while substituting his father is 'a comrade and friend' a condition necessary for ideal love. The child here does not rule the woman and is not a symbol of death, fear and suffering like the father figures in poems dealing with physical passion.

The tying of the garter also symbolizes a variant of the possession fantasy. The gentleman's attention and concentration on the least personal but most inert parts of the female body coupled with the terrified excitement of the woman, as though anticipating a sadistic attack, becomes a source of excitement for her and her would
be assailant. This hostility of sexual conquest is reminiscent of the apparent violence perceptible during the mating of mammals. Violence and loving appear in a terrifying unity. It seeks gratification with the infliction of pain. It is as natural and as cruel as hunger. It arises from the instinctual element of love hidden in the inchoate fantasies of unconscious mind. Unlike Platonic love where the role of sexual impulsion remains muted:

... possession is paramount in sexual intercourse—the chaining of partner's will to one's own and therefore the reduction of his or her consciousness to a relativity of flesh alone. The urge to subjugate... prevails over the wish for pleasure as the individual seeks to assault and degrade the partner.

In such situations, libido and aggression command equal footing. Psychologists nowadays speak of aggression drives thereby emphasizing man's cruelty and murderousness towards his fellows. In all events the cauldron of instinctual drives is now seen to contain two sets of drives; lift the lid for one and the other might pour forth without rhyme or reason. Both the poems cited above aptly display this phenomenon.

In women, the counterpart of this phallocentric possession—encompassing the woman's urge to attract, entrap and control the male through conscious or unconscious fantasies of conquest, ravishment and mastery—is not absent. Hardy was both unaware of and free from the simplistic view propagated by many theorists on feminism categorizing the female gender, class as a whole, as innocent
while accusing the men, as a class of wicked oppressors. He could clearly see that either could be termed as wicked. But more importantly he saw both men and women at par capable of similar sentiments of aggression. Hardy saw that the impulses of motherhood and desire could sometimes drive a woman to desperate and unusual measures just as in 'A Practical Woman':

"O who'll get me a healthy child;-
I should prefer a son—
Seven have I had in thirteen years,
Sickly every one!

"Three mope about as feeble shapes;
Weak; white; they'll be no good.
One came deformed; an idiot next;
And two are crass as wood.

"I purpose one not only sound
In flesh, but bright in mind:
And duly for producing him
A means I've to find."

She went away. She disappeared,
Years, years. Then back she came:
In her hand a blooming boy
Mentally and in frame.

"I found a father at last who'd suit
The purpose in my head,
And used him till he'd done his job,"
Was all thereon she said (cp, 841).
In this poem the woman wanting a healthy male child wanders in search of a man to suit her purpose. Finding such a man she uses ‘him till he’d done his job.’ Thus her urge is not allied with the more refined colours possible in the prism of love. The very concept of using a man solely for the purpose of pro-creation suggests a mechanical violent act devoid of feelings and emotions. The means adopted by the woman in this poem are as cruel as the means adopted by Nature, which Hardy repeatedly condemned in his poems. ‘Her Second Husband Hears Her Story’ is more suggestive. The woman, in this poem, by narrating the queer tale of how she killed her first husband out of desperation also warns her second husband simultaneously:

“Still dear, it is incredible to me
That here, alone,
You should have sewed him up until he died,
And in this very bed. I do not see
How you should do it, seeing what might betide.”

“Well he came home one midnight, liquored deep –
Worse than I’d known –
And lay down heavily, and soundly slept:
Then desperate driven, I thought of it, to keep
Him from me when he woke. Being an adept

“With needle and thimble, as he snored, click—click
An hour I’d sewn,
Till, had he roused, he couldn’t have moved from bed,
So tightly laced in sheet and quilt and tick
He lay. And in the morning he was dead.

“Ere people came I drew the stitches out,
And thus it was shown
To be a stroke” – “It’ a strange tale!” said he.
“And this same bed?” – “Yes here it came about.”
“Well, it sounds strange – told here and now to me.
“Did you intend his death by your tight lacing?”

“O, that I cannot own.
I could not think of else what would avail
When he should wake up and attempt embracing.”

“Well, it’s cool queer tale!” (CP, 821).

‘To Carrey Clavel (CP, 227), ‘The Sweet Hussy (CP, 368) among other poems, reveal that the female strategies to entrap and control men may be different from man’s direct and rather cruder methods. In women:

... it takes a more circuitous route, wherein, as mirroring their typical coital posture, women—in subtle and not so subtle ways—would undermine the man who thinks he dominates her.¹⁰

The social dependence and vulnerability of women to masculine whims, through centuries, its impact on their psyche and the historical sense of the feminine born out of it necessitates the expression of female vindictiveness in images of herself as self abasing and self-humiliating. She may pretend to be a slave and mock the pretentious master-man. Evelyne Sullerot, a sociologist commenting on French feminine writing over the centuries writes:

There is no weightier set of chains, no more paralysing trap, than a woman, who has totally surrendered to a man... They escape their would be masters by the very excess of the dependence forced upon them, paralysing them, devouring them.¹¹
This allows the woman to debase and control the man through a caricature of masochistic slavery, which veils her more fundamental control of his emotions. She toys with his needs, satisfying her own, perpetuating for him an illusion of his supremacy. In the process she may even charge him with utter responsibility of her lot, shackling him with the ball and chain of guilty conscience. Arabella in Jude the Obscure pretends to be pregnant and forces Jude to live with her and marry her. A woman may thus become the possessor of goodwill and absolution in granting of her sexual favours, just as in The Sweet Hussy:

In his early days he was quite surprised
When she told him she was compromised
By meetings and lingerings at his whim,
And thinking not of herself but him;
While she lifted orbs aggrieved and round
That scandal should so soon abound,
(As she had raised them to nine or ten
Of antecedent nice young men)
And in remorse he thought with a sigh,
How good she is, and how bad am I! -
It was years before he understood
That she was the wicked one--he the good (CP, 368).

Such disillusionments are common in Hardy’s poems, for example, ‘At Waking’ (CP, 208), ‘The Well Beloved’ (CP, 121), ‘The Dream Flower’ (CP, 130), ‘The Mind’s Eye’ (CP, 208), ‘A Wife Comes Back’ (CP, 568), to name only a few. Beauty acts as a stimulant to man’s animal passion. It arouses instant attraction and forceful desire for physical closeness duped as love. In Hardy’s world women exercise a stronger sex appeal than men. His men are unavoidably susceptible to the mysterious lure of the opposite sex. Even a distant glimpse is enough to arouse
passionate physical desire in them! If an instance could be cited from *Jude the Obscure* to substantiate this point, Hardy writes in the novel:

The unvoiced call of woman to man, which was uttered very distinctly by Arabella's personality held Jude to his spot against his intention — almost against his will, and in a way new to his experience. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that till this moment Jude had never looked at a woman to consider her as such, but had vaguely regarded sex as being outside his life and purposes. He gazed from her eyes to her mouth, thence to her bosom, and to her full round naked arms, wet mottled with the chill of water, and firm as marble.

Several poems similarly portray protagonists haplessly swept off their feet by beauty that spurs instant desire. Thus for Hardy desire for love is generally rooted in sexual passion aroused by beauty. In his poems beauty adorns human beings and other things only briefly and capriciously. Generally, his poetic personae do not even endeavour to transcend the temporal in their quest for beauty, into the mystic communion with the absolute essence abiding above time. Hardy, it seems, perceives no possibility of such an end to his pursuit of the illusive beloved. He seems to conclude that:
Aesthetic quest is fruitless since nothing ethereal or earthly exists in the objective sense to fulfil it. Beauty is a subjective illusion endowed on the figure of the beloved by the refined and unconscious desire of the lover who discovers her to be suitable for gratification. Hence, the quest for beauty must be abandoned along with all assertive desires in order to bring about the realisation of inward serenity.¹³

Thus the hiatus between the concept of the absolute beauty and the disillusionment spurred by the immediate real prompts passionate protagonists, in Hardy, to withdraw the sudden spur of desire just before culmination. It is mainly due to this that critics have gone to the extent of labelling his poetry as the poetry of ‘Eros defeated.’ ‘Outside the Window’ portrays a lover who forgets his stick at his beloved’s house and returns to fetch it. Standing outside the window he hears ‘the girl of his choice’ arguing fiercely with her mother ‘for something said while he was there’ (CP, 394). Hearing this he feels that he has seen her soul undrape and thanks God for what he considers to be a narrow escape. He leaves the place ‘leaving his stick unclaimed’. If the stick here could symbolically substitute the phallus or the desire for physical commingling in marriage what the man quits or abstains from, by his act of leaving the place and the beloved for good, is the sexual act. In other poems also when the sexual act is possible it is not with the married partner present but with the imagined other. ‘In the Nuptial Chamber’ presents the point and is cited here in full:
“O that mastering tune!” And up in the bed
Like a lace robed phantom strings the bride;
“And why?” asks the man she had that day wed,
With a start, as the band plays on outside,
“It’s the townsfolk’s cherry compliment
Because of our marriage my innocent”
“O but you don’t know! ‘Tis the passionate air
To which my old love waltzed with me,
And I swore as we spun that none should share
My home, my kisses, till death save he!
And he dominates me and thrills me through
And it’s he I embrace while embracing you” (CP, 395).

Another poem that shares this theme is ‘In the marquee’ (CP, 835). There are a number of other poems in which this theme of Eros defeated surfaces due to the inability or the lack of courage in the protagonist to initiate. ‘A Thunderstorm in Town’ portrays a man and a woman, sitting close together ‘Snug and Warm’, (CP, 294) in a hansom cab to shelter themselves from the ‘pelting storm’ outside. But to the man’s dismay the downpour ceases and the woman springs out. The man is left with little but to regrets this missed opportunity:

“I should have kissed her if the rain
Had lasted a minute more” (CP, 294).

Similarly, the female protagonist in ‘Her confession’ (CP, 218) regrets her ‘false uneagerness’ to kiss her lover, which she delayed by divergent talk of scenery. It was only later that she realised that by her inaction she had put off ‘for ever the caress.’ We Sat at a Window’ again depicts a man and a woman gazing at the downpour with evidently nothing else to do. Their failure to seize the opportunity
provided by the situation is regretted later and that unfulfilled desire remains a missed opportunity forever.

“We were irked by the scene, by our own selves; yes
For I did not know nor did she infer.
How much there was to read and guess
By her in me, and to see and crown
By me in her.
Wasted were two souls in their prime
And great was that waste that July time.
When the rain came down” (CP, 403).

Thus this desire for physical closeness remains unsatisfied due to the ignorance or inability of the protagonist to read the situation. Physical desire finds fulfilment, in Hardy’s poetry, only through violent or accidental meeting of strangers. Otherwise, protagonists only contemplate the missed opportunities. But in either case Hardy does not blame his protagonists.

Hardy had a liberal view regarding premarital sex. He does not condemn premarital sex but calls it ‘liberal education’. In ‘The Husband’s view’ the female persona narrates her story. She has come to an unknown place. Here she meets a man who desires to marry her:

“In gentle voice and true
He asked to marry me
You only – only you
Fulfil my dream! Said he (CP, 232).

In the first line cited above the word ‘true’ suggests truthfulness not only in the proposal but also in the man’s attitude. Again the same word true may be seen in relation to the last two lines in the above citation. Seen thus it connotes that the
lover's assertion of seeing the image of his dream in the girl is true, i.e.; is not an illusion as we find in many other poems. This may be seen as an exception because love at first sight is rarely successful in Hardy's poetry. But as the months pass the lady starts feeling anxious and guilty. She is afraid that 'The untimely fruit will show' ... 'And ... that cause of flight. Hidden from her lover's eye (CP, 232) makes her restless. Fortunately the husband overhears and becomes aware that the guilt is worrying her. He declares that he has known it all the while and says:

Misfortunes are no crime ...

That accident indeed
To maids, is a useful thing; (CP, 233).

On the other hand, 'The Dead Bastard' (CP, 833), 'In the Restaurant' (CP, 396), 'The Dark Eyed Gentleman' (CP, 227), 'Julie Jane' (CP, 229) to name only a few, also portray unwed mothers. In the first poem the female protagonist regrets her lack of courage to raise her illegitimate child. But when this child is in its grave she laments her decision of disowning the child, just because the father of the said child would not marry her. But in the second poem the female protagonist seems to have taken a timely decision to amend the recurrence of a similar tragedy. For the well being of her child-to-be and to be able to live with her lover, she refuses to cheat her husband and bring the child to this world as his. Instead she proposes to flee with her lover and bear the shame. In the remaining two poems, as well, the women are not disturbed due to any moral considerations. Both of them are happy to rear their own child irrespective of the fact that their fathers did not marry them.
The views related to premarital sex scattered in various poems by Hardy can best be comprehended in 'One Ralph Blossom Soliloquies'. As in numerous other poems this poem also indicates that sex for Hardy was neither good nor bad but simply natural and normal. Instead of passing any strictures Hardy simply records his ideas on the subject in the momentary impressions that fill his volumes of verse:

“When I am in hell or some such place
A – groaning over my sorry case,
What sill those seven women say to me
Who, when I coaxed them answered, “Aye” to me?

“I did not understand your sign!”
Will be the words of Caroline;
While Jane will cry, “If I had proof of you
I should have learnt to stay aloof of you.”

“I won’t reproach: it was to be!”
Will dry murmur Cicely?
And Rosa: “I feel no hostility,
For I must own I learnt facility.”

Lizzy says: “Sharp was my regret
And sometimes it is now! But yet
I joy that through it brought notoriousness
I knew love once and all its gloriousness!”

Says Patience: “Why are we apart?
Small harm did you my poor sweet Heart!
A manchild born now tall and beautiful
Was worth the ache of days undutiful.”

And Anne cries: “O the time was fair,
So wherefore should you burn down there?
There is a deed under the sun, my love
And that was ours. What’s done is done, my love
These trumpets here in Heaven are dumb to me
With you away. Dear, come, O come to me!” (CP, 271).

Thus there is hardly any regret perceptible on account of unlawful relationship. But even here Hardy does not seem to celebrate the moment of love when it occurs. It is only a contemplated reminiscence of the past that is viewed somewhat disinterestedly from the distance of time. Again, although the soliloquy represents a masculine view, because the speaker is male, there are other poems depicting female personae in which the sexual commingling is seldom regretted, after a lapse of time. Thus as revealed from this observation it may as well be said that the feeling of guilt or immorality is temporary and wounds of lapses can be healed with the passage of time. But at the same time this fact should not be misinterpreted to wrongly convey Hardy’s permissiveness or licentiousness in love. His writings suggest that if love is natural so should be sex. He calls for compatibility between man and woman. He does not despise sex. Instead he rightly sees it as an expression of life force. It is, as portrayed by him, neither vulgar nor sacred, neither moral nor immoral, but quite natural and instinctive. He neither favours repression of sex nor pleads for a permissive license. His poems, moreover, convey his genuine feelings on the misplaced position of man in relation to Nature. Human-beings, according to Hardy, feel out of place in their relationship to nature as compared to other creatures. While dealing with such relations, his poems present a conflict amid human aspirations and natural law. His protagonists convey a sense of pain and annihilation felt by human beings in general. Hardy feels that because Nature behaves indifferently with man, man should look to his own kind for sympathy. Man and
woman should sympathise with each other in an effort to bring about rational solutions to emotional problems. One of his poems very aptly suggests:

Why be at pains that I should know
You sought not me?
Do breezes then, make features glow
So rosily?
Come the lit port is at our back
And the tumbling sea;
Elsewhere the lampless uphill track
To uncertainty!
O should not we two waifs join hands?
I am alone,
You will enrich me more than lands
By being my own
Yet though this facile moment flies,
Close is your tone
And ere to-morrows dewfall dries
I plough the unknown (CP,402).

Although sexual relations are continually incorporated as the subject of his poetry, Hardy’s poems cannot be compared with the abnormal sex obsession that floods contemporary literature. A comparison of the depiction of sex in Hardy with one of his often compared contemporaries, D. H. Lawrence, illustrates that unlike Lawrence, Hardy does not present sexual irregularities as explicitly in his poems and novels. Lawrence treats sex as a natural urge. If this natural urge is satisfied in a natural and wholesome manner, it can open the gates of supreme happiness to both man and woman. To Lawrence:
not only was sex the way woman fulfils her being and man one of his chief creative functions for which reason he always extolled marriage, but the sexual experience was also a door to new realms of consciousness, an initiation into divine mysteries, the mystery of the other world that is close beside us.\textsuperscript{14}

Hardy on the other hand never found sex capable of transcending the low primary animal desire into the higher realm of divine mysteries. He found the raw procreative purpose of sex mysterious, but he never depicted it with the potency of proximity with divinity. His poetry instead reveals a curious conflict between his subject matter and its presentation. In poems that depict sexual indulgence or infidelity in love Hardy is more concerned to reveal how physical passion wrecks the life of protagonists involved. Thus Hardy does not depict sex as the main theme of his poems. Wherever sex is depicted, it functions as the cause of the sudden upheaval in the lives of the protagonists involved. Sex in such poems substitutes fate or shares its characteristics of uncertainty. It is an agent, a trap, which is both irresistible and unavoidable. Any relationship, in Hardy’s poetry, initiated by consumption hardly ever graduates into a perfect or ideal human relationship or bond of pure love. At the same time Hardy does not make any distinction between love and sexual desire on the initial level. Initially, Hardy conceives love as deeply rooted in sex: “What concerns him most in human-beings is their response to the deep-rooted passions, above all sexual love.”\textsuperscript{15}
Hardy's men and women display an instinctive zest for existence and a will to enjoy. They seem to believe that sexual love can fulfil this natural urge for happiness. Thus sexual love, as depicted in his poems, is a magnetic attraction between man and woman, which absorbs all relationships and considerations. But the fruits of uncontrolled passion are almost always tragic.

Thus Hardy portrays love as an instinctual drive that follows the pleasure principle. The build up of sexual tension triggers, in such conditions, an immediate effort to discharge the tension with the nearest available object. It may be inferred that, Hardy sees sex as an unavoidable trap designed by Nature to ascertain procreation. Most of his poetic personae who indulge in the sexual act never evolve a fulfilling and meaningful relationship. Their desire, often ends with the release of tension and such experiences, occur without any concern for the partner's emotional need. It remains restricted to only an exercise in temporary self-gratification. Thus, sex as portrayed in his poetry, is often limited to a very personal experience that does not lend a pervading quality of love capable of sustaining good family life. In such circumstances sex becomes a submissive act to avoid conflict rather than a voluntary surrender to love. Thus it would not be an exaggeration to believe that Hardy considers sex, devoid of love, to be unworthy of higher human aspirations. Instead, Hardy wished his characters would transcend this initial spur of instinctive desire and transform this energy into love that would aim to better the human condition on earth and be more rational in its response to one's fellow human beings.
NOTES


