CHAPTER-III

WOMAN AS BETRAYER

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

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

The poems considered in this chapter probe into this aspect of woman's nature, its varied manifestations; chiefly, as it manifests itself in betrayal in love. She may inspire noble emotions in man but she remains unchanged by them herself. In "The Love Letters" the woman has obviously aroused a deep and enduring love in the unfortunate young man, but the experience is certainly not mutual. She retains her distance and the moment the situation turns undesirable, she is able to snap the ties without a backward glance. In so far as the major focus of the poem is on the plight of the miserable youth, the poet seems less occupied with the culpability of the woman. Nonetheless, the silent finger points to her crime, but he refrains from passing a categorical judgement. Woman, in this poem, lays bare her selfishness, but the words of pained forgiveness uttered by the dying youth that "perhaps she rather felt them fetters..." and his ironic comment
that she was quite right to send back the letters and break off the ties showed her 'true foresight' as he was in a slow decline, are echoes of Hardy's feelings too. However bitter this acknowledgement, and fraught with pain the thin laughter of this man, this statement represents an attempt to understand her faithlessness by referring it to her tremendous instinct for survival. The man is dying, hence his love will be nothing other than 'fetters' that restrict and tie her to the past. She is unwilling to accept what appears to amount to a premature death for herself.

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

"In Her Precincts" opens with a scene of external gloom that parallels the desolation the poet feels: 'Her house looked cold from the foggy lea,/And the square of each window a dull black blur/Where showed stir.' The preponderance of monosyllables of the opening lines conveys the grip of dull, dead misery on the poet. The next few lines show the poet concluding sorrowfully, if somewhat
confidently, "Yes, her gloom within at the lack of me/Seemed matching mine at the lack of her'. The initial 'Yes' of these lines indicate that he has arrived at the conclusion even before the evidence has presented itself to him; it would not occur to him to conclude otherwise.

But closer inspection reveals to the poet that the 'black squares' of the windows are really 'squares of light', and he is shocked by the discovery that 'there was glee within'. The painful realisation is reached with a quiet irony: 'And I found that Night/The gloom of severence mine alone.' The poem thus throws light on the fact that man often believes Woman to be sincere in love, but closer examination shows that she is unaffected by such a 'severence' of love-relationship. The air of festivity in the house, which he, from a distance, surprisingly mistook for gloom, contrasts sharply with the dull, cold misery of the man. The poem not only shows the heartlessness of Woman but also compares it favourably with the total commitment that man, on the other hand, is capable of bringing to a love-relationship.

The last but one stanza of "Wessex Heights" brings out this point more clearly:

"As for one rare, fair woman, I am now but a thought of hers, I enter her mind and another thought succeeds me that she prefers; Yet my love for her in its fulness she herself did not know; Well, time cures hearts of tenderness, and now I can let her go."

"As for one rare, fair woman, I am now but a thought of hers, I enter her mind and another thought succeeds me that she prefers; Yet my love for her in its fulness she herself did not know; Well, time cures hearts of tenderness, and now I can let her go."
A woman in love, hence, does not reflect the intensity and totality of involvement of man. Thus, one may interpret the line 'Yet my love for her in its fulness she herself did not know' to mean not just her ignorance of his true state of feelings, but an inherent incapacity of Woman to understand an emotion she does know.

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

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

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

The poet is deeply dismayed by this attitude of Woman, the tone of his poems speaks of his awareness of it as a major failure of Woman, but he refrains from launching into a bitter tirade against her. His censure may be dark and grim but it is restrained, and softened even, at times, by the consciousness running through the bulk of his poetry that she is a creature of circumstances and social pressures. Hence, the poet's deeper censure in these poems is directed more towards society than towards Woman. In
the final analysis, it is more often the social mores that force the hypocrisy on them, and there are hints of the pressure of circumstances to tone down the harshness of some of the betrayals. For example, the poem examined earlier "The Dolls", makes this interesting point that the Woman is capable of remarkable consistency in love; she continues to love and remember her lost love even after her marriage elsewhere. She thus appears to be more a victim of circumstances; her loveless marriage, the overriding consciousness that all will be well if she keeps her secret under wraps, are indications of hypocrisy and lies brought on by the rigidity of social mores.

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

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

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

The mother is a far cry from the archetypal mother, hence the title's reference to her as 'A Practical Woman'. Her dilemma has to be solved - she proposes to have a child
'sound/In flesh...bright in mind. 'She duly sets about her search for a means to realise this aim. The poem ends with her having produced finally such a child, and with this bland admission from her:

'I found a father at last who'd suit
    The purpose in my head,
    And used him till he'd done his job."

This is not said in confession, for she sees no crime in it. There is no sense of guilt because she has viewed her predicament and its solution in a matter-of-fact manner; it is Woman's strong instinct for procreation and progeny, the same as that of mother Nature herself, that has been brought forward in this poem.

The poem, "Her Second Husband Hears Her Story", similarly carries a somewhat bizarre tale (Hardy has a special weakness for these oddities), about an unusual end of a marriage. The death of the lady's former spouse is narrated by her to her second husband:

'Well, he came home one midnight, liquired deep -
    Worse than I'd known -
    And lay down heavily, and soundly slept.'

During this drunken stupor, she stitches up the bedclothes around him to tightly that he finally dies. Asked the reason for her action, she blandly replies:

'I could not think of else that would avail
    When he should wake up, and attempt embracing.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

But the miles he talks of is not the physical distance
between them:

'O were it but the weather, Dear,
O were it but the miles
That summed up all our severence,
There might be room for smiles'.

In effect, the tragedy of a relationship is this complete breakdown of communication, this alienation or turning away from each other, rather than the usual 'severence' in the sense of absence, that romantic poetry traditionally has held as the cross of star-crossed lovers. The quaint, archaic and rustic flavour of the concluding lines of the poem lend his predicament a dignified poignancy:

'But that thwart thing betwixt us twain
Which nothing cleaves or clears,
Is more than distance, Dear, or rain,
And longer than the years'.

There is no move to shift the blame to either of them, just a strong undercurrent of regret running through the poem.

Another poem echoing a similar point of view is "We Sat at the Window". The rain outside patters and babbles, but the couple imprisoned indoors by it, are silent:

'Nothing to read, nothing to see
Seemed in that room for her and me...
... 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'.

The poet describes this frozen, stagnant vacuum in the relationship that the poem depicts, as totally life-
destroying: 'Wasted were two souls in their prime/And
great was the waste that July time/When the rain came
down'. In addition, "The Upbraiding", "Ten Years Since",
"She Charged Me" are poems that also speak of the same
aridity, the same seeping out of the sense of comraderie
that occurs before a relationship finally breaks.

poems which have been discussed in the last chapter, are
woven around this central theme of the Man-Woman
relationship suffering through the disloyalty and
undependability of Woman as a partner or companion. The
indication in them is that she has not done justice to her
role. While in the poems mentioned earlier, "We Sat at
the Window" and "The Division", the blame for the
breakdown of the comraderie and companionship seems to be
equally shared by both, "The Upbraiding", "Ten Years
Hence" tilt the blame towards the man. In the poem "She
Charged Me" although the lady accuses the man of
disloyalty, what the poet wishes to emphasise is that it
is in reality she who is responsible for the final
breakup: 'Her mouth was hard, and her eyes, and her face,/And her white forefinger lifted slow...'. These
deliberately set-up details serve to communicate the
reaching of the breaking point in the relationship, and
they prepare the reader well in advance for the admission
by the poet persona at the end that he "knew from the fall
of each word, and pause between, / That the curtain would
drop upon us two / Ere long in our play of slave and queen".
The blame here is certainly on Woman, she raves and rants
where a 'kiss might have closed it'. The most important
cue is so quietly inserted into the concluding line that
one could well miss it, and hence miss the whole point of
the poem. In the last line the poet ironically refers to
their doomed relationship as 'our play of slave and queen'
-- one where the man is subordinated. It is not a
partnership of equals (hence she 'charges' him); it is
thus a relationship doomed to failure. A basis of
friendship is essential before any relationship can
thrive, and possible only between equals. This naturally
leads one to consider those relationships, essentially
conjugal, that have soured because Woman has dramatically
failed to understand the precise nature of her
obligations. This point, as we have just seen, is
delicately hinted at in the poem "She Charged Me", but is
elaborately worked out in the poem "The Nettles". This
poem tells the tale of the sad visit of a father to the
dead of his estranged son. The estrangement and even the
death, it is implied, are brought about by a cruel wife
and a miserable marriage. The father, with greater wisdom
and objectivity, had found her to be a 'hard, unfeeling' 
woman whose only care was to ensure a husband. One infers -.
that it was the nettle-like, stinging cold-heartedness of the wife that finally drove the husband to his grave. Her lack of warmth for him, in life as well as in death, and the complete absence of remorse, is evident from his grave turning into an untended, unkempt wilderness of nettles. Woman here has betrayed her role as wife as a cherishing, and hence cherished, companion. This contributes to the failure of the relationship. Agressiveness in Woman mars the delicate balance necessary for a successful partnership.

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

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

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

In this poem there is just that hint of sarcasm
underlying his irony that distinguishes it from the
"Lament" where Hardy similarly speaks of Woman's love of
the fineries of life contrasting it with the absoluteness
of Death. But in this poem ("Lament") the attitude and
tone is more compassionate. It is as if he recognises the
weakness, but is able to look beyond it and so view it
with compassion. The lady in the poem is long dead. The
party is just the kind she would have loved where 'bright
hatted and gloved', she would have mingled with the
guests, enjoying every moment. The poet draws the
contrast between where she is now -- cold and lonely in
her grave, and what she lived for when alive. The
transient joys that Woman considers the centre of her life
stands paled to insignificance by the irrevocability of
Death. But he is neither condemning nor even bitter when he makes these observations about Woman and her values.

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

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

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

When her jealousy is roused, rightly or not, the devastation that it causes to the relationship is
projected with chilling reality in "She Charged Me". She accuses him about his past relationships and the 'endless pour/Of the rain on the roof and the road below', reflect both her relentless accusations as well as the feeling of being closed-in, of the suffocating tedium that the poet-persona feels. This display of wanton jealousy signals the first cracks in the relationship:

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

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

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

'Had you wept; had you but neared me with
a hazed uncertain ray,
Dewy as the face of the dawn, in your large and luminous eye.
Then would have come back all the joys the tidings had slain that day.
And a new beginning, a fresh heaven, have smoothed the things awry."

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

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

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

It is Woman's intrinsic strength that is responsible for the breakdown in "Had You Wept", then it is a certain forthrightness and honesty that comes in the way of inter-personal relationships in the poem "You Were the Sort that Men Forget". The men have not taken too
kindly to her because she practised no 'art':

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

But it is not only that she kept her sweetness from ever being 'visible' but also because she was honest to the point of rudeness tactlessness that they turned away:

'You would, by words inept let fall/Offend them all' and compound the sin by a certain obtuseness in her relationships:

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

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

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

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

That is why there is betrayal in "At the Altar Rail". The woman is just the wrong person for the farmer whose personal estimate of Woman as a creature of comforts fails him here in this specific relationship, just as they very practical woman of "The Love Letters" is precisely the type who would take the sensitive youth unawares. This is why, it is seldom that one finds him holding a categorical moral stand or clearly voicing a judgement. In "Had You
Wept", we saw that he is quick to recognise her failing as really a strength; his admiration of her for it cannot quite be clouded even by his acknowledgement that it has been the cause of the 'deep division' and the 'dark undying pain' of a failed relationship. Thus, there is such a tenderness even in his complaint. We saw a similar compassion in his recounting the period of total aridity in "The Division", although in this poem it mingles with a sense of a deeper gloom.

"The Photograph" in many ways embodies Hardy's attitude to Woman's betrayals. Although this poem does not deal with a woman who has betrayed in any specific way, yet because she is associated with a past he would rather forget (an unusual situation in Hardy), he burns her photograph. However, in this attempt at 'a casual clearance of life's arrears', he is horrified to see the image burn away; as it does so, slowly, he says

```
... I vented a cry of hurt, and averted my eyes,
The spectacle was one that I could not bear,
To my deep and sad surprise;
But, compelled to heed, I again looked furtive-wise*.  
```

This reaction of the poet, in effect, sums up his attitude to the failings of Woman: there is the same mixture of 'deep and sad surprise', the same desire to 'avert' his eyes being over-ridden by the compulsion 'to heed'.
It would be injustice to Hardy's sensitivity if we were to consider his poems only as recounts of particular experiences, personal or otherwise, without mentioning his sincere attempt to go beyond the hurt and the gloom towards a greater understanding of Woman. Thus, an over-view of the above poems reveals the reasons or the deeper causes of Woman's betrayals; sometimes it lies in the nature of the particular woman in her strengths or her weaknesses, sometimes in the social circumstances, and sometimes in forces beyond human control.

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

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

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