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?" 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." 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.

for the women he shows a more tender
solicitude than for the men, and in them, perhaps,
he takes a keener interest.

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.  

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. 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.

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.  

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 Fitzpier, 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."  

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." By her own admission,

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

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 Song 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.

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 Bonaparte — 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.  

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 unsettlingly 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.  

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* *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 Sheraton 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.  

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.  

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 wagons and corn!" she said, looking up sorrowly. "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
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". 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. She laments the consequences of her expensive education:

"I wish you had 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.\(^2\)

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. Channond. She feels dissociated from herself—“a 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)

Harley'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 senssure, 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
killed 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 untintuctured 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". 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". 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 "throbblingly 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".  

Angel is incapable of appreciating the vibrant richness of Tess.  His love is "ethereal to a fault, imaginative to impracticability".  (Tess,
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 habitue 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

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 overdosed 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

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*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 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 postscript 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.  

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 a precarious balance in their relationship, and though Lawrence is probably right that Jude and Sue never know "actual, sure footed happiness", 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- flagellating 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
0, grossly!" (Jude, p.413). Meanwhile she has endured
 Phillotson with clenched teeth and she is "quite a staid,
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 percep­
tive: ("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 -- 0 I must -- my
darling Love! It has been -- only a church
marriage -- an apparent marriage, I mean!"
(Jude, p.409)
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 reverent, 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:

The specific sequence of heroines from Bathsheba 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.\textsuperscript{54}

As the "thick cluds . . . of modern problematic consciousness falls across the horizon of Wessex",\textsuperscript{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!\textsuperscript{56} Hardy opens the doors to the existence of "a strange, dark continent that we do not explore".\textsuperscript{57} It is this small cautious advance to the edge of an area into which Lawrence boldly plunges.

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